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Public Theology for the Postmigrant Society

"Det började röra sig!"

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I have been thinking a lot about my retirement lately.[1] Perhaps this is neither the most common nor the most commendable way to kick off a lecture supposed to signal that I am starting to work at Lund University, but I have been thinking about my retirement for a reason. The reason is Malmö – in the future.

Malmö can be seen as a test-case for changes that are about to take place in many cities across Europe. By 2050, the population will have reached 500,000. It is likely that this population will be confronted with increasing inequality as the city shifts from "diversity" (where a distinction between majority and minorities can be drawn) to "superdiversity" (where a distinction between majority and minorities cannot be drawn).[2] Statistics show that today about 50 percent of Malmö's population do not have a migration background and about 50 percent of Malmö's population do have a migration background.[3] Yet among the under-15-year-olds, the ratio is 65 percent

1 This article is a shortened version of my inaugural lecture "'Det började röra sig!' Public Theology for the Postmigrant Society", delivered at Lund University, 12 September 2024. Throughout, all translations from German, Norwegian, and Swedish are my own, unless noted otherwise.

2 The concept of superdiversity was coined by Steven Vertovec, "Super-Diversity and Its Implications", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 6 (2007), 1024–1054. In the conversation about the concept, Maurice Crul has made the case for superdiversity as the characterization of a situation beyond the minority/majority distinction. See Maurice Crul, Jens Schneider, & Frans Lelie, *Super-Diversity: A New Perspective on Integration*, Amsterdam: VU University Press 2013.

3 See the summary of Malmö in the research on "Becoming a Minority" led by Crul:

to 35 percent. When they will have grown up – I leave it to you to wonder whether I am following a realistic retirement plan – the distinction between the majority who did not migrate to Sweden and the minority who did migrate to Sweden will stop making sense. Malmö as a whole will have a migration background.

Maurice Crul, a sociologist who has been studying the shift from diversity to superdiversity across Europe, has taken Malmö as one of his cases.[4] Crul suggests that this shift has consequences for the concept of integration. The assumption today is that integration is the process through which a minority integrates into a majority. But as the statistics show, there will be no such process in Malmö because the city will have no majority. Integration will be a task for people with and for people without a migration background. Both will have to integrate into a society that will look radically different and radically diverse: superdiverse.[5]

Crul's argument connects to scholarship on the postmigrant society.[6] Scholars such as Naika Foroutan have theorized "postmigration" for the study of society. Foroutan points to "the postmigrant society" as a "promise of plural democracy".[7] She stresses that if migration is the new normal, then the binary between people with and people without a migration background becomes blurred. Normatively, Foroutan suggests that the postmigrant society is about the "negotiation and renegotiation of equality as a central promise of modern democracies, which refer to plurality and parity as principles".[8] It "poses the fundamental question of how we can get beyond the social dividing line of migration, if we want to live together in societies that are becoming more and more plural".[9]

Whatever else one can say about the shift from diversity to superdiversity that Malmö signals, one statement makes immediate sense: "Det började röra sig!" I have borrowed it (including the exclamation mark) form the

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https://bamproject.eu/, accessed 12 October 2024. A person with a "migration background" was born outside Sweden or has a parent who was born outside Sweden.

4 See Maurice Crul & Frans Lelie, *The New Minority: People Without a Migration Background in the Superdiverse City*, Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2023.

5 Crul & Lelie, *The New Minority*, 16–18.

6 Central to this scholarship is Regina Römhild's critique of "migrantology", scholarship on migration that misses the construction of migrantness by concentrating on migrants only. See Römhild, "Beyond the Bounds of the Ethnic: For Postmigrant Cultural and Social Research", *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 9, no. 2 (2017), 69–75. For a succinct summary of the debate, see Anne Ring Petersen, *Postmigration, Transculturality and the Transversal Politics of Art*, London: Routledge, 2024, 31–62.

7 Naika Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft: Ein Versprechen der pluralen Demokratie*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2019.

8 Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft*, 13–14.

9 Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft*, 18–19.

scholar who introduced the study of Global Christianity at Lund. The statement is tricky to translate. "Att röra sig" is about something that is stirring something up. What is striking about the stirring is that it is its own subject: the stirring makes the stirring. As a translation, I would suggest: "Things were starting to move."

I have been thinking about my retirement because I am wondering what students at Lund need to know to navigate postmigrant public squares such as Malmö where things are starting to move. What could they have learnt about religion? What should they have learnt about religion? And how might I have helped in their learning before I retire? In this lecture, I aim to answer these questions by arguing for a coalitional and comparative public theology that allows the study of Global Christianity to analyze and assess the practices of living together in superdiverse societies. I move from Malmö in the past to Malmö in the present, before I go back to the future to point to the potential that theology holds for the postmigrant public square.

"Things Were Starting to Move": The Past

Gustaf Lindeberg (1887–1961) introduced the study of Global Christianity at Lund. In *A Century in the Service of Mission*: *The Lund Mission Society 1845–1945*, Lindeberg offers a historical account of the Lund Mission Society that sheds light on the origins and the organization of the field.[10] The Society was founded to fund a new institute at which missiology would be taught to missionaries. Lindeberg was a surprising choice for a teacher. He had not been a missionary himself, neither inside nor outside Sweden.[11]

Detailing the history of the Lund Mission Society, Lindeberg describes missiology in Europe during its heyday. You have to read a little bit between the lines to notice how he reflects on the connections between what is going on inside and outside Europe. "Det började röra sig!" captures how different national and international currents came together in a constellation that enabled the creation of the Lund Mission Society.[12] You can feel Lindeberg's excitement.

Lindeberg's Malmö clarifies what the constellation looked like. During Lindeberg's life, the Kockums shipyard in Malmö developed into one of the largest shipyards in the world. Malmö was booming.[13] It was a city on a map of the world which revolved around a Christian center. Malmö was in

10 Gustaf Lindeberg, *Ett sekel i missionens tjänst: Lunds Missionssällskap 1845–1945*, Lund: Gleerup, 1945.

11 See Magnus Lundberg, "Gustaf Lindeberg och missionsstudiet vid Lunds Universitet", *Swedish Missiological Themes* 86, no. 3 (1998), 357–368.

12 Lindeberg, *Ett sekel i missionens tjänst,* 8.

13 See Tessa Anderson, "Malmö: A City in Transition", *Cities* 39 (2014), 10–20, 11.

the center. Accordingly, Lindeberg assumes that mission is the movement of Christianity from the middle to the margins: inside Sweden, missionizing Indigenous populations locally, and outside Sweden, missionizing Indigenous populations globally.[14] Lindeberg's account of the Lund Mission Society presents mission as the movement of Christianity from the middle to the margins.

Anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing coined the concept of "friction" to capture how globalization plays out in concrete contexts. "Cultures", she argues, "are continually co-produced in the interactions I call 'friction'".[15] Countering abstract accounts of globalization that assume that the processes connecting more and more people in more and more places are smooth – frictionless movement of capital, frictionless movement of commodities, and frictionless movement of currencies – the concept of friction allows for ethnographic explorations that examine "the engagement and encounter through which global trajectories take shape" in the first place.[16] Friction is what happens when the global and the local connect. Lindeberg has no concept of friction, but his account of the Lund Mission Society shows a friction.

Lindeberg's story is not a success story.[17] The new institute that the Lund Mission Society was meant to fund had not formed by the time he retired. Lindeberg was never appointed professor. After his retirement, the worst that a theologian from Lund could imagine happened: theologians from Uppsala came to teach Global Christianity here![18]

Eventually, however, the Lund Mission Society endowed a professorship. In the 1990s, Aasulv Lande (1937–2019) was appointed as the first professor of "Missionsvetenskap med Ekumenik" at Lund. He cites from the minutes of a meeting of the Faculty of Theology on 11 May 1995 that laid out the role and responsibilities of the chair.[19] The professor ought to conduct "research on mission past and present […] also in view of the interpretations of Christianity that are actualized in the encounter between Christianity and

14 Lindeberg, *Ett sekel i missionens tjänst,* 25–38. For comments on what he calls "lappmissionen", see Lindeberg, *Ett sekel i missionens tjänst,* 7.

15 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, 4.

16 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Frictions", *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization*, vol. 2, ed. George Ritzer, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, 707–709, 707.

17 Lindeberg, *Ett sekel i missionens tjänst,* 50–67, 87–100.

18 See Aasulv Lande & Magnus Lundberg, "Missionsvetenskap med ekumenik", *Theologicum i Lund: undervisning och forskning i tusen år*, eds. Birger Olsson, Göran Bexell, & Göran Gustafsson, Lund: Arcus, 2001, 150–155.

19 Aasulv Lande, "Det doble misjonsbegrep", *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 71, no. 1 (1995), 1–11, 1.

other religions". Research about "the forms of expression of the ecumenical movement" is added a sentence after. Accordingly, the professorship is named "Missiology with Ecumenical Studies".

The professorship would have suited Lindeberg. Yet Lande points out that the study of Global Christianity cannot be the same after the turn from the colonial to the postcolonial approach to missiology. Lande introduces a "two-dimensional concept of mission" to capture how this turn changes the field. One dimension of the study of Global Christianity is descriptive. Here, mission is studied historically. The other dimension of the study of Global Christianity is prescriptive. Here, mission is studied systematically. According to Lande, the normativity that is ingrained in systematic theology is necessary for the study of mission to critique colonialism. Without a normative anchor, the scholar of Global Christianity can characterize but cannot criticize colonialism in the name of God. Since Lindeberg had no normative anchor, Lande stresses, his missiology functioned as a defense of mission with "colonialism" and "cultural imperialism".[20]

By contrast, Lande conceptualizes mission as *missio Dei*: God is the subject rather than the object of mission, so that mission can take place with or without churches.[21] Lande pioneers the extension of ecumenism from intra- to inter-religious dialogue that has gained traction across the study of Global Christianity ever since.[22] Drawing on theologies of liberation, he declares: "In my normative starting point, the Trinitarian God is the radical innovator… I want to emphasize God who creatively renews in a historical process".[23] "Renewal" emerges as a core category for Lande. It enables him to identify the agency of both the missionaries and the missionized in the process of mission.[24]

Lande's concentration on renewal corresponds to the friction between the local and the global during the 1990s. Lande's Malmö was going through a tough time, coping with the loss of employment across the city that came with the closure of the shipyard.[25] Whereas income inequality had been very low in Sweden, it was starting to rise towards the end of the 1990s. The

20 Lande, "Det doble misjonsbegrep", 2, with reference to Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

21 Lande, "Det doble misjonsbegrep", 5.

22 See David Kerr, "Mission and Ecumenical Studies at Lund University", *Swedish Missiological Themes* 94, no. 4 (2006), 493–501, 494.

23 Lande, "Det doble misjonsbegrep", 7.

24 See Magnus Lundberg, "Aasulv Lande and Missiology", *Swedish Missiological Themes* 92, no. 3 (2004), 313–318.

25 See Malmö stadsbyggnadskontor, *Översiktsplan för Malmö 1990*, Malmö 1990.

employment gap between people with and people without migration background that characterizes the country today opened in the 1990s.[26]

Sweden's response to these changes fits the social, cultural, and political trends that are captured with the concept of "neoliberalism".[27] "Renewal" is in the air across the globe, materialized in the building of the Öresund bridge.[28] Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" takes the collapse of the Soviet Union as evidence for a renewal of the world through neoliberal capitalism where "all societies […] end their ideological pretensions of representing […] higher forms of human society" than the United States.[29] Instead of the "First World" in the West, the "Second World" in the East, and the "Third World" forgotten somewhere in-between, the world is assumed to become *one*. However, when Lande argues that "it is important to uncover the relationship of mission to colonialist patterns in the Third World", he appears to be cautioning that the end of history might not be as equalizing as it is assumed to be.[30] The study of Global Christianity is critical of one-world ideas and ideologies.

After Lande, David Kerr (1945–2008) takes up the professorship. With a specialization in Islam, he shapes a "comparative missiology" which sees Islam through the eyes of Christianity and Christianity through the eyes of Islam.[31] Kerr shows how Christians missionized Muslims and how Muslims missionized Christians.[32] After 9/11, the map of the world changes again. A new division is drawn between "the West" and "the Rest".[33] The very idea of a comparative missiology counters this division. Kerr established collaborations with Muslim faith-based organizations in Malmö, challenging how the division plays out in the concrete context of the city.[34]

In a lecture delivered soon after his arrival at Lund, Kerr makes the case that "Missionsvetenskap med Ekumenik" could be translated to "World

26 See Lena Schröder, "From Problematic Objects to Resourceful Subjects: An Overview of Immigrant-Native Labour Market Gaps from a Policy Perspective", *Swedish Economic Policy Review* 14 (2007), 7–31.

27 See Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017; *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2019.

28 Anderson, "Malmö: A City in Transition", 17–18.

29 Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?", *The National Interest* 16 (1989), 1–18, 13.

30 Lande, "Det doble misjonsbegrep", 5.

31 Kerr, "Mission and Ecumenical Studies", 499.

32 See David Kerr, "Islamic Da 'wa and Christian Mission: Towards a Comparative Analysis", *International Review of Mission* 89, no. 353 (2000), 147–267.

33 See Ulrich Schmiedel, *Terror und Theologie: Der religionstheoretische Diskurs der 9/11-Dekade*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021, 85–130.

34 Kerr, "Mission and Ecumenical Studies", 497–498.

Christianity and Interreligious Relations".[35] Through this creative translation, Kerr connects Lund to changes in the field. Across countries and continents, "missiology" is being re-labelled in a way that points to the global character of Christianity as a "polycentric" religion that cannot be captured by the dynamics between Christian middle and non-Christian margins that comes with the concept of mission.[36] The new label unlocks the discipline. Kerr sees a dialectic at work here: the understanding of mission has changed the character of Global Christianity in the past and the character of Global Christianity has changed the understanding of mission in the present. This dialectic materializes on his office door where one could read "World Christianity and Interreligious Relations" *and* "Missionsvetenskap med Ekumenik". Kerr had not asked for the double designation, but when he discovered it on his door, he declared: "I was puzzled and pleased."[37]

I am not sure what the sign on Mika Vähäkangas' door said. Vähäkangas took the professorship after Kerr. His work escapes the "West" versus "Rest" paradigm by complicating both sides: "the West" and "the Rest" are not as univocal as assumed.[38] Vähäkangas shifts from the singular Christianity to the plural Christianities. His contextual[39] theology clarifies a core characteristic that has run through Global Christianity at Lund at least since Lande: Global Christianity is a way of doing systematic theology that weaves together descriptive and prescriptive perspectives. This clarification allows Vähäkangas to take the friction between the local and the global seriously. Christianities across the globe influence each other. Systematic theologians, then, need to come out of their Eurocentric echo chamber. Vähäkangas puts it perhaps more pithily: the study of Global Christianity bursts "the theologian's reality bubble".[40]

The approaches to the study of Global Christianity that are outlined after Lande take place in a friction between the local and the global that charac-

35 See David Kerr, "World Christianity and Inter-Religious Relations: Missionsvetenskap med Ekumenik", *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 82, no. 2 (2006), 74–85.

36 Klaus Koschorke has pointed to the polycentricity of Global Christianity. See the introduction to the special issue on Koschorke's "Munich School of World Christianity" by David D. Daniels, "A Note on the 'Munich School of World Christianity'", *Journal of World Christianity* 6, no. 1 (2016), 1–3.

37 Kerr, "World Christianity", 74.

38 See Mika Vähäkangas, *Context, Plurality, and Truth: Theology in World Christianities*, Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2020.

39 See Mika Vähäkangas, "Modelling Contextualization in Theology", *Swedish Missiological Themes* 98, no. 3 (2010), 279–306.

40 Mika Vähäkangas, "World Christianity as Post-Colonialising of Theology", *Contextual Theology*, eds. Sigurd Bergmann & Mika Vähäkangas, London: Routledge, 2021, 221–237, 224.

terizes the Malmö most of you know.[41] Across Sweden, income inequality has been increasing.[42] Sweden abolished taxes, such as the wealth tax, in the 2000s. There is evidence that these cuts intensify the increasing inequality.[43] In Malmö, inequality is very visible.[44] It is one of the most segregated cities in the country where ethnic, economic, and educational segregations overlap.[45]

Altogether, then, the study of Global Christianity at Lund has been shaped by frictions between the local and the global. Globalization emerges through frictions. The study of Global Christianity at Lund could be summed up as a critique of what Marcella Althaus Reid has called "theme park theologies".[46] Scholars of Global Christianity run the risk of presenting how Christianity works in this or that context without allowing these presentations to have any impact on themselves. Such a way of studying Global Christianity is interesting but inconsequential – like a visit to a theme park. At Lund, however, the study of global Christianity has been concerned with the consequences that frictions between the global and the local have for the way scholars analyze, assess, and act in the public square. In the postmigrant public square, these consequences are perhaps more important and more intense than ever.

"Things Were Starting to Move": The Present

Today, Malmö is shaped by a new friction between the local and the global – the superdiverse postmigrant society. Seen as a case for controversies stirred up by (super)diversity, the city makes headlines. In the 2000s, Malmö featured in a U.S. Fox News' series on "Eurabia". The city was explored as an example of the conspiracy that "Islamization" is taking place in Europe, aided and abetted by European elites.[47] The rise in crime that has

41 See Malmö stadsbyggnadskontor, *Översiktsplan för Malmö 2000*, Malmö 2000.

42 See Finanspolitiska rådet, *Economic Inequality in Sweden: An Overview of Facts and Future Challenges*, Stockholm 2024.

43 See Daneil Waldenström, "Inheritance and Wealth Taxation in Sweden", *ifo DICE Report* 16, no. 2 (2018), 8–12.

44 See Roger Andersson & Lina Heldman, "Economic Decline and Residential Segregation: A Swedish Study with Focus on Malmö", *Urban Geography* 37, no. 5 (2016), 748–768.

45 See Tapio Salonen, Martin Grander, & Markus Rasmusson, *Segregation och segmentering i Malmö*, Malmö 2019.

46 Marcella María Althaus-Reid, "Gustavo Gutiérrez Goes to Disneyland: Theme Park Theologies and the Diaspora of the Discourse of the Popular Theologian in Liberation Theology", *Interpreting Beyond Borders*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 36–58.

47 See Anderson, "Malmö: A City in Transition", 12. For the centrality of the Eurabia conspiracy to the far right, see Hannah Strømmen, *The Bibles of the Far Right,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2024.

brought Malmö into national and international news is also attributed to Muslims and migrants, displaying how the "securitization of Islam" and the "securitization of immigration" go hand in hand.[48]

Crul suggests that cities such as Malmö are in "a crucial transition phase during which tensions in society may increase".[49] Descriptively, Malmö marks the "tipping point" that comes with the shift from diversity to superdiversity.[50] Prescriptively, Malmö marks the "trigger point" that comes with the shift from diversity to superdiversity.[51] Coupled with the necessity to adapt to anthropogenic climate change,[52] the shift sparks debates. For example, it took Swedish politicians less than ten years to go from being proud of not closing Sweden's borders to being proud of closing Sweden's borders – so much so that, apparently, Sweden has net zero immigration this year.[53]

Crul argues that during the time of transition, it "is not enough for people to just leave each other in peace to live and let live".[54] The "practice of living together" is at stake.[55] Crul's team has collected lots of these practices. Here is one case from Malmö:

> This happened a while ago, when I had just moved in here. I was pushing my son in his buggy; he was very young. We walked past the square. […][T]here were some youngsters playing with fireworks. So I said something like: "Hey, can you please not do that because of my little son?" And maybe two or three days later, I bumped into them again.[56]

Crul tells us very little about this case. It took place in a neighborhood of Malmö that is superdiverse, so perhaps Rosengård. The man who tells the scene represents what Crul calls "the new minority". Crul offers no information about religion, but statistically it is likely that the scene features an encounter that transcends either religious/non-religious boundaries (a

48 See Jocelyne Cesari, *Why the West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracies*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

49 Crul & Lelie, *The New Minority*, 15.

50 Crul & Lelie, *The New Minority*, 15.

51 Steffen Mau, Thomas Lux, & Linus Westheuser, *Triggerpunkte: Konsens und Konflikt in der Gegenwartsgesellschaft*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2023.

52 See Malmö stadsbyggnadskontor, *Översiktsplan för Malmö 2023*, Malmö 2023.

53 See Miranda Byrant, "From 'open hearts' to closed borders: behind Sweden's negative net immigration figures", *The Guardian*, 19 August 2024.

54 Crul & Lelie, *The New Minority*, 17.

55 Crul & Lelie, *The New Minority*, 17.

56 Crul & Lelie, *The New Minority*, 119.

post-Christian man encountering Muslim youth) or religious boundaries (a Christian man encountering Muslim youth). When they meet again:

> [O]ne of the boys said something like: "Oh, that's him, the one who talked to us yesterday." And that really got me thinking. Because it was not: "He shouted at us" or "He is an annoying old man", but "He talked to us". […] They were more struck by the fact that I had spoken to them than that I had told them to stop what they were doing. And yes, I think that a lot of people say nothing, and then they go home and get a stomach ulcer because they are so full of fear… And they are angry instead of just having a conversation.

This case clarifies that practices of living together in the postmigrant society are mundane rather than miraculous. They take work, but it is "micro-labor" rather than "macro-labor".[57] In a way, the mundanity of these practices is the point. The study of Global Christianity has always been interested in encounters between people from different backgrounds. However, after the shift from diversity to superdiversity, the competences that are required to navigate these encounters turn from a specialist skill (in the Malmö of the past, a competence only for students of Global Christianity) to a survival skill (in the Malmö of the potential future, a competence not only for students of Global Christianity).[58] Malmö today is at the turning point.

The study of Global Christianity, then, needs to be configured in a way that allows scholars to analyze practices of living together critically and to assess practices of living together constructively in order to enable creative action in the superdiverse postmigrant public square. The task is not as simple as it sounds. The practices of living together defy the habits that have shaped scholarship on religion for a long time, not only at Lund.

First, the habit of *denominational defense* needs to be countered. Theologians are particularly prone to denominational defense. Regardless of whether scholarship on religion is organized confessionally or non-confessionally as in Sweden, a student of theology learns first and foremost about their own religion. Christian theology is Christian theology because it is done by Christians. Of course, there is awareness of the plurality of religions

57 See Josje Schut & Ismintha Waldring, "Micro Labour, Ambivalence and Discomfort: How People Without a Migration Background Strategically Engage with Difference in a Majority-Minority Neighbourhood", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 49, no. 8 (2023), 2034–2051.

58 Accordingly, the "global" in the study of Global Christianity points more to methodology than geography. See Martha Frederiks & Dorottya Nagy (eds.), *World Christianity: Methodological Considerations*, Leiden: Brill, 2020.

also among Christian theologians who have channeled it into the theology of religions. However, both the classical and the comparative approach to the theology of religions often operate with a clean and clear-cut concept of religion where what is Christian cannot be non-Christian and what is non-Christian cannot be Christian.[59] This concept has come under a lot of pressure, historically and hermeneutically.

Sociologist Lori Beaman has taken up Tsing's concept of "contaminated diversity" to call for a reconceptualization of religion.[60] Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* is a fascinating ethnography of the global economy of matsutake mushrooms.[61] To Tsing, contamination is a metaphor for interactions that change the actors. Moving the metaphor into scholarship on religion, Beaman emphasizes that religions have interacted throughout history. They have been contaminated by each other. There can be neither "Christianity" without "other religions" nor "other religions" without "Christianity".[62] There is no conviviality without contamination.

Returning to the scene in Rosengård, it would be reasonable to claim that the man's secularity has been shaped by encounters like the one with the Muslim boys as much as the Muslim boys' Islam has been shaped by the encounters like the one with the secular man.[63] The point of my critique of the habit of denominational defense is not that scholars of religion should become experts of "religion in general".[64] Rather, my point is that scholars cannot continue to conceptualize "religion" and "non-religion" as clean and closed communitarian circuits that may or may not clash with each other. The encounters are crucial.[65]

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59 See Marianne Moyaert, *Christian Imaginations of the Religious Other: A History of Religionization*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2024, 4.

60 Lori G. Beaman, *Deep Equality in an Era of Religious Diversity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 12–13, 58–59, 84–85, 194–198.

61 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

62 As Werner G. Jeanrond, "Toward an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love", *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, eds. Catherine Cornille & Christopher Conway, Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2010, 44–60, 58, already argued: "a hermeneutics of religion committed solely to the […] development of one particular tradition will not be equipped to uncover the actual handling of others and otherness in its own process of identity construction".

63 For the debate about diversity and definitions of Islam in Islamic Studies, see Oliver Scharbrodt, "'Neither of the East nor of the West': Crossing and Dwelling in Islamic Studies", *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 100, no. 3 (2024), 271–287.

64 Atalia Omer, *Decolonizing Religion and Peacebuilding*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2023, 5, 156, 263.

65 See again Jeanrond, "Toward an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love", 51–52: a "hermeneutics of love is not interested in either a universalist hermeneutical approach or a relativist hermeneutical approach to human communication… Rather a hermeneutics of love

Furthermore, the habit of *disciplinary defense* needs to be countered. The disciplinary differentiation that takes theology (in contrast to religious studies) to approach religion from the insiders' perspective and religious studies (in contrast to theology) to approach religion from the outsiders' perspective makes little sense when exploring practices of living together. Given that the scholars' lives take place amidst the turn from diversity to superdiversity, they are likely to be insiders and outsiders to these practices at the same time.

Imagine the exchange in Rosengård had taken a turn towards religion. The boys could have insisted that the fireworks they were playing with feature in an Islamic feast. They might not have gotten very far, but their insistence would have turned the fireworks from a non-religious into a religious object. Then the man could have countered that the fireworks impede the secularity of the public square. I admit that my speculations are a bit far-fetched, but they show that the definition and delineation of what counts as "religious" and what counts as "non-religious" is itself socially, culturally, and politically constructed.[66] The very category of religion is made and unmade in practices of living together. Studying these practices in a way that assumes that insiders' perspectives and outsiders' perspectives are incommensurable means that scholars are guaranteed to miss what is going on.

If scholars accept that insiders' and outsiders' approaches can come together, but then delineate the disciplines by arguing that theological research approaches religion only prescriptively, while non-theological research approaches religion only descriptively, scholarship is back in disciplinary defense.[67] Countering this habit, Lande's argument that the normativity inherent in systematic theology is crucial to missiology applies. Religious studies without theology can characterize practices of living together but without criticizing them (Lande's descriptive missiology). Theology without religious studies can criticize practices of living together but without characterizing them (Lande's prescriptive missiology). What is needed, then, is description and prescription at the same time.

Atalia Omer's critique of what she calls "harmony business" makes this case.[68] Omer studied how religion features in peacebuilding practices across the globe. She shows that there is no shortage of peacebuilders that pres-

is interested in the dynamics of encounter".

66 See Jayne Svenungsson, "The Return of Religion or the End of Religion? On the Need to Rethink Religion as a Category of Social and Political Life", *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 46, no. 7 (2020), 785–809.

67 See Thomas A. Lewis, "On the Role of Normativity in Religious Studies", *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert A. Orsi, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 168–185.

68 Omer, *Decolonizing Religion and Peacebuilding*, 1–2.

ent religion as the cause of conflict. When this presentation of religion is presumed, diversity between religions is seen as the problem and dialogue between religions is seen as the solution to the problem. Omer's critique is that the harmony business that creates and cashes in on this presumption ignores all the causes for conflict that might have nothing to do with religion, such as inequalities that follow from colonialist patterns of trade and thought across the globe. In the harmony business, dialogue is pacifying rather than provoking people to tackle the conflicts that are caused by such inequalities.[69]

Turning to Malmö, Omer's critique allows scholars to criticize initiatives that insist on inter-religious diversity as the problem and inter-religious dialogue as the solution to the problem without accounting for the increasing inequalities that result in the overlapping segregations in terms of ethnicity, economics, and education across the city. My point is not that religion cannot cause conflicts. My point is that initiatives that isolate religion as a cause for conflict run the risk of camouflaging what is going on. Normativity, then, is necessary to interpret the practices of living together that run through such initiatives. As a scholar of religion, Omer showcases how the definition of normativity as the dividing line between disciplines is neither essential nor expedient.[70]

Finally, the habit of *assuming that religion is private rather than public* needs to be countered. Swedes often self-describe as secular. But sociologists have analyzed the role of religion in Scandinavia as "complex": secularization and de-secularization occur simultaneously.[71] In fact, secularity is a category that is shaped in this simultaneity. Political theorist Anders Berg-Sørensen labels the Lutheran legacies in Scandinavian politics "Lutheran secularism".[72] The label highlights that secularism is not neutral.[73]

Lutheran secularism produces what the European Islamophobia Report problematizes as the "shrinking public space for Muslim civil society

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69 Omer, *Decolonizing Religion and Peacebuilding*, 245–281.

70 Atalia Omer, "Can a Critic be a Caretaker too? Religion, Conflict, and Conflict Transformation", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 2 (2011), 459–496.

71 See Inger Furseth (ed.), *Religious Complexity in the Public Square: Comparing Nordic Countries*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

72 Anders Berg-Sørensen, "The Politics of Lutheran Secularism: Reiterating Secularism in the Wake of the Cartoon Crisis", *Religion in the 21st Century*, eds. Lisbet Christoffersen et al., Aldershot: Routledge, 2010, 207–214. For a theological twist on the conversation about secularity in Scandinavia, see Bengt Kristensson Uggla, *Katedralens hemlighet: sekularisering och religiös övertygelse*, Göteborg: Bokförlaget Korpen, 2024.

73 See Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003; Marian Burchardt, Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, & Matthias Middell (eds.), *Multiple Secularities Beyond the West*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015.

organizations" in Sweden.[74] Emin Poljarević, Anna Ardin, and Mattias Irving explain how attacks against Muslims cause self-censorship, how self-censorship curtails Muslims' ability to act in the public square, and how the curtailment of Muslims' ability to act in the public square in turn causes more attacks against Muslims. The example of "the Christian Democratic Party leader" who "called for police to shoot more 'Islamists'" following rallies and riots against a series of Qur'an burnings is a case in point.[75]

Historically, the Church of Sweden has shaped the public square with its differential distribution of privilege and power. Today, this differential distribution is a challenge to the Church. *A Single Bread – A Single Humanity: Joint Parish Instructions 2021–2025* of the Church of Sweden in Malmö exemplify how the Church grapples with shifting from a majority to a minority position. These subtle but significant *Instructions* suggest that "constant collaboration between different stakeholders is the key".[76] But collaboration is tricky: on the one hand, the Church is a provider of the public spaces in which people from different backgrounds meet; on the other hand, the Church is a player in the public spaces in which people from different backgrounds meet. This is a tightrope indeed.

Returning to Rosengård once more, imagine what would happen if the scene in Malmö had included the man harassing the boys because of their Muslimness or their perceived Muslimness.[77] Could they have found a spokesperson in the Church? Or – if the roles were reversed – could and should the Church of Sweden speak out against crimes committed by Muslim youth, knowing that it cements the differential distribution of power and privilege in the public square? These questions clarify that any theology that is interested in the practices of living together is *public* theology. The scenarios I have played through suggest that the task for public theology today is not so much to inject, but to interpret theologies in the public square.[78] Theologies are there. The task is to analyze them critically and assess them constructively in view of creative action.

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74 Emin Poljarević, Anna Ardin, & Mattias Irving, "Islamophobia in Sweden: National Report 2021", *European Islamophobia Report 2021*, eds. Enes Bayrakli & Farid Hafez, Istanbul 2022, 573–598.

75 Poljarević, Ardin, & Irving, "Islamophobia in Sweden: National Report 2021", 585.

76 Church of Sweden, *A Single Bread – A Single Humanity: Joint Parish Instructions 2021–2025*, Malmö 2021, 4.

77 For a discussion of Islamophobia as a racism that targets Muslimness or perceived Muslimness, see Hannah Strømmen & Ulrich Schmiedel, *The Claim to Christianity: Responding to the Far Right*, London: SCM Press, 2020, 15–37. See also Farid Hafez, "Schools of Thought in Islamophobia Studies", *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 4, no. 2 (2018), 210–225.

78 See Ulrich Schmiedel, "'Take Up Your Cross': Public Theology between Populism and Pluralism in the Postmigrant Context", *International Journal of Public Theology* 13, no. 2 (2019), 140–162.

Altogether, then, continuing the study of Global Christianity at Lund today means coming to terms with the friction between the local and the global signaled by cities such as Malmö. Acknowledging that religious and non-religious ways of life have contaminated each other throughout history, the analytic approach shifts.[79] The question is not: "Why do people come together across differences?" This question presumes purity as the norm and plurality as the deviation from the norm, a deviation that then needs to be explained. Instead, the question is: "Why do people *not* come together across differences?" In order to ask and answer this question, the study of Global Christianity has to go beyond purity – contaminated rather than clean, allowing for things that are starting to move.

"Things Were Starting to Move": The Potential of Theology

To summarize, I have presented the study of Global Christianity as a field that revolves around frictions between the local and the global. You might have gained the impression that all crucial contributions to the field have come from Lund. I am not the one to correct this impression! Instead, I would like to propose that approaching the study of Global Christianity through what I call coalitional and comparative public theology is a way of continuing what has been going on at Lund for the new friction of the postmigrant society.[80] By "coalitional", I mean practices that blur the boundaries between religions, and between religion and non-religion. Coalitional theology is lived theology in the streets. By "comparative", I mean reflection on the practices that blur the boundaries between religions, and between religion and non-religion. Comparative theology is learnt theology in the seminar rooms. If the study of Global Christianity is a public theology that works coalitioanlly and comparatively – as I have argued throughout this lecture – it brings together what happens in the streets and what happens in the seminar rooms in a hermeneutical spiral. In this spiral, the critical analysis and the constructive assessment of practices of living together can come together to enable creative action in the superdiverse postmigrant public square.

Although I have made my case now, I would like to return to one concept that I have taken for granted throughout before I close: theology. If theology comes up at all in the scholarship on superdiversity, it comes up as a problem rather than a solution to a problem. But I would like to reflect on theology in the sense of thinking and talking about God as crucial to the epistemological and ethical challenges that characterize postmigrant

79 Beaman, *Deep Equality in an Era of Religious Diversity*, 180–202.

80 For the combination of coalitional and comparative theology in the public square, see Schmiedel, *Terror und Theologie*, 365–398.

public squares. To return to Foroutan, the postmigrant society "poses the fundamental question of how we can get beyond the social dividing line of migration, if we want to live together in societies that are becoming more and more plural".[81] Theology can help to ask and to answer this question.

Dorothee Sölle has inspired the coalitional and comparative theology that I have introduced to you.[82] She conceptualizes theology as a hermeneutics of experiences of transcendence. This hermeneutics interprets the public square as the space where truth is meant to come true.[83] She calls on Karl Marx' critique of religion to capture the experiences she has in mind: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature. The heart of a heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions, it is the opium of the people."[84] Sölle suggests that the sigh of the oppressed creature is not a plea for immanence but a plea for transcendence. The sigh transcends what is towards what is not. Sölle calls theologians to reflect on the sigh but cautions that it is a tricky calling.[85] Theologians need to reflect on the sigh in a way that un-closes rather than closes the situation. The key to the tricky calling of theology is that the transcendence that is experienced and expressed in the sigh is not a propositional but a performative category. The sigh is not describing something but doing something.[86] According to Sölle, the sigh suggests that the world is more than it is. The sigh opens up the imagination to worlds that could be or should be.[87] Theology is imaginative in as much as it is not about what is but about what is not.

Sölle's hermeneutics of sighs is not as strange as it seems. She gets the sigh from Marx. Arguably, Marx gets it from Paul, the Apostle. In Paul's Letter to the Romans (8:18–26), the sigh comes up in a way that – at least in Martin Luther's translation – connects to almost all the terms that Marx cites. Paul presents creation and creatures as suffering. Because creation as a

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81 Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft*, 18–19.

82 For my take on Sölle, see Schmiedel, *Terror und Theologie*, 305–364.

83 Sölle, *Politische Theologie: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Rudolf Bultmann*, Berlin: Kreuz Verlag, 1971, 73.

84 Sölle, "Der Wunsch ganz zu sein: Gedanken zur neuen Religiosität", *Religionsgespräche: Zur gesellschaftlichen Rolle der Religion*, ed. Hans Eckehard Bahr, Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1975, 146–161, 147, with reference to Karl Marx, "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie", *Werke*, vol. 1, Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, Berlin: Dietz, 1983, 379–391, 378.

85 For a systematic account of theology as a hermeneutics of experiences of transcendence, see Jörg Lauster, *Religion als Lebensdeutung: Theologische Hermeneutik heute*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005.

86 See Matthias Petzoldt, "Wahrheit als Begegnung", *Christsein angefragt: Fundamentaltheologische Beiträge*, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998, 25–40.

87 Dorothee Sölle, *Phantasie und Gehorsam: Überlegungen zu einer künftigen christlichen Ethik*, Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1968.

whole is characterized by suffering, the creatures are incapable of imagining a creation without suffering. All there is, is sighing at the mismatch between what is and what is not. There is the sighing (συστενάζει) of creation (8:22). There is the sighing (στενάζομεν) of the creatures (8:23) who are children of God. And then there is the sighing of God's spirit which takes up these sighs in what Luther translates as "unaussprechliches Seufzen" (στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις), a sighing that cannot be put into words (8:26). Paul, then, makes a case for negative rather than positive theology.[88]

In his "Lecture about the Letter to the Romans", Luther pushes Paul's conclusions. If the "Word of God" – Luther's favorite formula – is not describing something but doing something, then theology must be careful not to capture what the word does. The outcome is paradoxical: a theology that captures God's word with words cannot communicate it, while a theology that communicates God's word cannot capture it with words.[89]

This paradox is at the core of Sölle's hermeneutics of sighs. Crucially, she suggests that the sigh – a figure for the apophatic, that what cannot be said rather than that what can be said – cuts across religions.[90] Her suggestion has been confirmed by scholars of Islam who have studied apophaticism during the Middle Ages. According to Aydogan Kars, there were "trans-religious networks" that learnt how to un-say rather than say God from each other.[91] Apophaticism, then, exemplifies the co-contamination in the history of religion that I analyzed above. In a way, apophaticism makes the case for Beaman's "contaminated diversity" that shifts the analytic approach from asking "Why do people come together across difference?" to asking "Why do people *not* come together across difference?" Looking at the history of apophaticism through this lens, purity rather than plurality is what needs to be explained.

A footnote (which is itself a reference to a footnote) in Kars' analysis can help with the explanation.[92] The footnote suggests that the heyday of Abrahamic apophaticism ended in 1492, at least symbolically. For the study of

88 For Paul's mysticism, see – still – Albert Schweitzer, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1930. I prefer the term apophaticism because mysticism is often associated with hierarchy. Bernhard McGinn, "Mysticism and the Reformation: A Brief Survey", *Acta Theologica* 35, no. 2 (2015), 50–65, 2, refers to "new mysticism" to stress that the mysticism that reformers like Luther drew on was "democratic in the sense that its authors addressed all believers".

89 Martin Luther, "Römerbriefvorlesung", *WA* 56. For Luther's mysticism, see Volker Leppin, *Die fremde Reformation: Luthers mystische Wurzeln*, München: C.H.Beck, 2016.

90 Dorothee Sölle, *Mystik und Widerstand: Du "stilles Geschrei"*, Piper Verlag, 1999.

91 Aydogan Kars, *Unsaying God: Negative Theology in Medieval Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, 7.

92 Kars, *Unsaying God*, 6, n.6, points to Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 221, n.15.

Global Christianity, 1492 is a suggestive date. Inside Europe, it marks the fight against Christianity's Islamic enemies. Outside Europe, it marks the fight against Christianity's Indigenous enemies. 1492 is the moment Europe becomes Christian and the moment Europe becomes colonial through its "discovery" of the "new world". It is in the friction between the local and the global around 1492 that the categories of race and religion as they are known today are beginning to emerge.[93]

As a consequence, Sylvia Wynter, one of the key figures of Black studies, has suggested that the world as we know it starts in 1492.[94] The idea that this world needs to end is common in Black studies and in Black street movements, such as Black Lives Matter, as Thomas Lynch and Vincent Lloyd point out.[95] Saskia Sassen's account of the world as shaped by economic and ecological logics of expulsion confirms the call for the end of this world.[96] Sassen points to a "massive loss of habitat" around the world that forces people to flee their homes, resulting in unprecedented numbers of survival migrants.[97] "Expulsion", she proposes, "is even more brutal than targeting: these men and women and children do not count at all, they are not in the picture."[98]

Can a return to the apophatic help in imagining the end of the world as we know it and in imagining what could come after the end of the world as we know it? Sölle seems to suggest something like that in her hermeneutics of the sigh.

> All the tentative attempts to rearticulate "religion" today remain unintelligible without the central concept of experience. Perhaps it would be better to speak of experience as a conceptual symbol because these attempts lack a precise psychological or sociopsychological definition which would allow for an operationalization of the concept. This lack

93 See Anya Topolski, "The Race-Religion Constellation: A European Contribution to the Critical Philosophy of Race", *Critical Philosophy of Race* 6, no. 1 (2018), 58–81.

94 See the classic Sylvia Wynter, "1492: A New World View", *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, eds. Vera Lawrence Hyatt & Rex Nettleford, Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995, 5–57. See also Thomas Lynch, "A Political Theology for the World That Ends", *Worlds Ending: Ending Worlds*, eds. Jenny Stümer & Michael Dunn, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024, 21–36.

95 See Vincent Lloyd, *Black Dignity: The Struggle against Domination*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022. Behind this notion of the end of the world is Frank B. Wilderson III's account of afropessimism. See Wilderson, *Afropessimism*, New York: Liveright, 2020.

96 Saskia Sassen, *Expulsion: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.

97 Saskia Sassen, "A Massive Loss of Habitat: New Drivers for Migration", *Sociology of Development* 2, no. 2 (2016), 204–233.

98 Saskia Sassen, "At the systemic edge", *Cultural Dynamics* 27, no. 1 (2015), 173–181, 178.

> is necessary because a definition would contradict what is said, sensed or searched here. Experience constitutes itself against the empiricism of normality.[99]

A sigh remains a sigh. Because the lack that is experienced and expressed in the sigh of the oppressed creature cannot be filled without missing what it is about, Sölle locates her theology after "the death of God".[100] If apophaticism is taken seriously, the difference between theism and atheism loses its significance. As Lynch argues: "theism and atheism are boring answers to bad questions".[101] For Sölle, neither theism nor atheism are conditions for the sigh of the oppressed creature. Theists can sigh at the state of the world. Atheists can sigh at the state of the world. And both theistic and atheistic sighs transcend what is, without being able to say what is not or not yet. Accordingly, Sölle points out that the condition for working towards a better world is the sigh. The sigh has a force that cannot be captured in categories and concepts so that it keeps the configuration of the world open.[102]

Drawing on Sölle, it makes sense to insist that apophaticism – a theology that un-says rather than says God – is crucial to superdiverse societies. Foroutan has proposed that the postmigrant public square "poses the fundamental question of how we can get beyond the social dividing line of migration, if we want to live together in societies that are becoming more and more plural".[103] In the apophatic imagination, dividing lines cannot be drawn with reference to God. On the contrary, the transcendence in the sigh of the oppressed creature crosses these lines epistemologically and ethically. And it does so because it entails a thinking and talking about God that refuses to be content with the world as it is.

Sölle is perhaps a bit naïve when she suggests that theology – thinking and talking about the transcendence of the sigh – is what brings people together. Her suggestion comes close to the title of a book by Islamic scholar Navid Kermani in which he explains religion to his child: *Everybody, from wherever they are, may come one step closer*.[104]

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99 Sölle, "Der Wunsch ganz zu sein", 153.

100 Dorothee Sölle, *Stellvertretung: Ein Kapitel Theologie nach dem "Tode Gottes"*, Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1982.

101 Thomas Lynch, "Transcendental Materialism as a Theoretical Orientation in the Study of Religion", *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 29, vol. 2 (2017), 133–154, 135.

102 See also Carlota McAllister & Valentina Napolitano, "Political Theology/Theopolitics: The Thresholds and Vulnerabilities of Sovereignty", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 50 (2021), 109–124.

103 Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft*, 18–19.

104 Navid Kermani, *Jeder soll von da, wo er ist, einen Schritt näher kommen: Fragen nach Gott*, München 2022.

Perhaps the lecture that I am about to finish has also been a bit naïve. But looking at Malmö at the time of my retirement, I wonder whether a theology for cynics would be even more naïve than the coalitional and comparative public theology I have advocated for. The postmigrant public square needs people who address increasing inequalities because they dare to dream that the world could be a better place. If I found out at the time of my retirement that some of the students I taught were among these people, I would be very grateful.

SUMMARY

This article argues for a coalitional and comparative public theology as a new approach to the study of Global Christianity. This theology analyzes and assesses practices of living together in postmigrant societies. The article takes the shift from diverse migrant societies to superdiverse postmigrant societies that shapes many cities across Europe as a point of departure to scrutinize the role of religion in superdiverse practices of living together. Surveying the history of the study of Global Christianity at Lund, the article probes the potential that apophaticism holds for the epistemological and ethical challenges that confront postmigrant public squares. What is at stake in these public squares is how society can get beyond the social dividing line of migration. Through a coalitional and comparative public theology, the study of Global Christianity can make significant contributions to precisely this social, cultural, and political transformation.