

When and Where Peoples Join

The slave ship announced the re-creation of the world beyond the eyes and ears of much of the world.”¹ Human cargo ships. The haunting pictures transfix our inner gaze. In his account, Willie James Jennings helps us imagine the “re-creation” that transpired in that horrendous displacement of African lives. He interprets the brutal separation, migration and resettlement of human beings and what happens when peoples join across borders. The degree of violence will differ across the diaspora, but some of the same elements recombine to create a new world.

The world Christian movement has straddled these disruptive forces of Western power, as Dwight Baker’s review of Graber’s new book reminds us. He shows how the missionary was complicit in the abuses and paradoxes of an American colonization that engulfed the Native American (p. 44). Missionary pioneers had to navigate the policies of nation-states that sought to integrate, subjugate, or eradicate indigenous peoples. You can’t tell the real story of Wycliffe Bible Translators without understanding these political dynamics in Mexico and Peru (p. 50).

Western advance appears to be one long story of assimilation: less powerful peoples surrendering and acculturating to Western civilization. Modern systems arrived and lifted local lives out of their traditional situations, whether the people wanted to leave their world or not. Today, diaspora populations are everywhere, their cultures and traditions either melting and melding into those of a host nation, or becoming more tightly held, creating new enclaves.

But there’s another alternative, a middle option, which is becoming ever more familiar: the transnational experience. Transnationals can live their lives across borders, transcend the confines of their new situation. They can stretch their connections back into the old country as well as forward into new networks. The revolution in social media allows the transnational an immediate proximity across the globe. Some see rising transnationalism as *the* strategic opportunity in our day for reaching once distant peoples with the gospel.²

Our authors weave together three elements intrinsic to the transnational experience: family, faith and language. Dye and Zachariah team up again to explore the nature of the transnational *family* (p. 3). How can we minister to families who remain embedded in their now distant families and traditions, even as they acculturate to a new host culture?

Editorial *continued on p. 2*

The views expressed in **IJFM** are those of the various authors and not necessarily those of the journal’s editors, the International Society for Frontier Missiology, or the society’s executive committee.

Editor

Brad Gill

Consulting Editors

Rick Brown, Rory Clark, Darrell Dorr,
Gavriel Gefen, Herbert Hoefler,
R. W. Lewis, H. L. Richard

Copy Editing and Layout

Elizabeth Gill, Marjorie Clark

Secretary

Lois Carey

Publisher

Frontier Mission Fellowship

2019 ISFM Executive Committee

Len Barlotti, Larry Caldwell, Dave Datema,
Darrell Dorr, Brad Gill, Steve Hawthorne,
David Lewis, R. W. Lewis, Greg Parsons

Web Site

www.ijfm.org

Editorial Correspondence

1605 E Elizabeth Street
Pasadena, CA 91104
(734) 765-0368, editors@ijfm.org

Subscriptions

One year (four issues) \$18.00
Two years (eight issues) \$34.00
Three years (twelve issues) \$48.00
Single copies \$5.00, multiple copies \$4.00 ea.
Payment must be enclosed with orders.
Please supply us with current address and
change of address when necessary.

Send all subscription correspondence to:

IJFM

1605 E Elizabeth St #1032
Pasadena, CA 91104
Tel: (626) 398-2249
Fax: (626) 398-2263
Email: subscriptions@ijfm.org

IJFM (ISSN #2161-3354) was established in 1984 by the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, an outgrowth of the student-level meeting of Edinburgh '80.

COPYRIGHT ©2019 International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions.

PRINTED in the USA

As for religious *faith*, we offer an excerpt from the new edition of John Walton's *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (p. 42) Modern transnationalism may be deeper and more layered,³ but Father Abraham's experience is still relevant. Too often anthropology ignores the way faith provides resilience, the same resilience we see in this ancient migrant. Walton categorizes ancient religious experience as "State religion" and "family religion," and it's the latter that travels well. Indeed, domestic religion can adapt, assimilate, reform and survive when crossing borders.

I'm reminded of a prominent Muslim-American in our city who brags that his community is generating a unique socio-religious category, which he calls "Sushi" (when a Sunni Muslim marries a Shia Muslim). Is this innovation just another symptom of transnationalism, which constructs new categories when crossing borders? Is the religious ecology from the old country evaporating, only to now emerge as one big neo-Muslim identity?⁴ Maybe. But Colin Bearup's look at the global diffusion of Sufism among Muslims should give pause to any premature conclusions or postmodern

presumption (p. 11). Bearup describes part of the Sufi "religion-scape" that's extending through families dedicated to their own religious denomination and its institutions. Historically, orthodox Muslims have disparaged this mystical type of Islam as heterodox, illegitimate, at the low end of the Islamic totem pole. And yet this marginalized religious expression seems to resonate with Muslims in modern day Britain. Sunny Hong reminds us that Jesus prioritized this type of out-group in his Jewish society (p. 35).

A third element, *language*, weaves itself into diaspora narratives. James Langteau and his colleagues have described the linguistic complexity in their therapeutic approach to the displaced Shan and Karen peoples in Thailand (p. 19). Their case study helps us picture the levels of discourse and identity which often determine the choice of language. In her response (p. 30), Bauer argues that what language people choose to use has consequences for the movement of the gospel. We're glad to situate this debate in Asia, where 60% of the world's displaced peoples are presently located.

Those of us in frontier missiology tend to focus on the movement of the gospel from one people to the next. Our bias can lead us to overlook the complexity of frontiers where peoples "join": "where worlds overlap and in the overlap are altered irrevocably, hybridized, and cross-pollinated."⁵ It's on these borders that a new category is emerging, that of the transnational; we trust these articles pinpoint some vital elements in that re-creation of the world.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination* (Yale University Press, 2010), 175.

² Jared Looney, "Transnationalism: New Pathways for Mission," <http://missiojournal.com/issues/md-8-1/authors/md-8-1-looney>.

³ Ted Lewellen, *The Anthropology of Globalization* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey), 152.

⁴ See Oliver Roy's treatment of Euro-Islam in *Globalized Islam* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 117–143.

⁵ Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 159–161.

The **IJFM** is published in the name of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, a fellowship of younger leaders committed to the purposes of the twin consultations of Edinburgh 1980: The World Consultation on Frontier Missions and the International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions. As an expression of the ongoing concerns of Edinburgh 1980, the **IJFM** seeks to:

- ☞ promote intergenerational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders;
- ☞ cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology;
- ☞ highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions;
- ☞ encourage multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies;
- ☞ foster spiritual devotion as well as intellectual growth; and
- ☞ advocate "A Church for Every People."

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go, yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and boundaries which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." (Acts 26:18)

Subscribers and other readers of the **IJFM** (due to ongoing promotion) come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mission professors, field missionaries, young adult mission mobilizers, college librarians, mission executives, and mission researchers all look to the **IJFM** for the latest thinking in frontier missiology.