

Anthropology of believing

NATHALIE LUCA

RESEARCH PROFESSOR

NATIONAL CENTER OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH (CNRS)

CENTER FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH ON RELIGION (CÉSOR, CNRS/EHESS)

FRANCE

Pentecostalism and messianism in south Korea and in the west

- ▶ South Korea: the elected country for West people?
- ▶ The Unification church in Europe:
 - ▶ an attack to national symbolic boundaries?
 - ▶ A transnational cult that separated its followers from the other national citizens?
 - ▶ A church that played a role in the Americanization of societies? In their neoliberalization?
 - ▶ A Church that justified the division of North and South Korea?
 - ▶ A Church that justified the cold war?

Who were the followers of the two Messianic churches?

- ❖ Top of the social ladder
- ❖ Students of prominent universities (and particularly young women)
- ❖ Professional occupying high positions
- ❖ Entrepreneurs

Rhetoric of the messianic churches

- ▶ Conspicuous economic success => evidence of God's love
- ▶ Students => future of the nation
- ▶ Evolvement of behaviors
 - ▶ Dress code
 - ▶ Professional ambition
 - ▶ Marriage
- ▶ Following the messiah => strong accountability

How to believe that you have met the messiah?

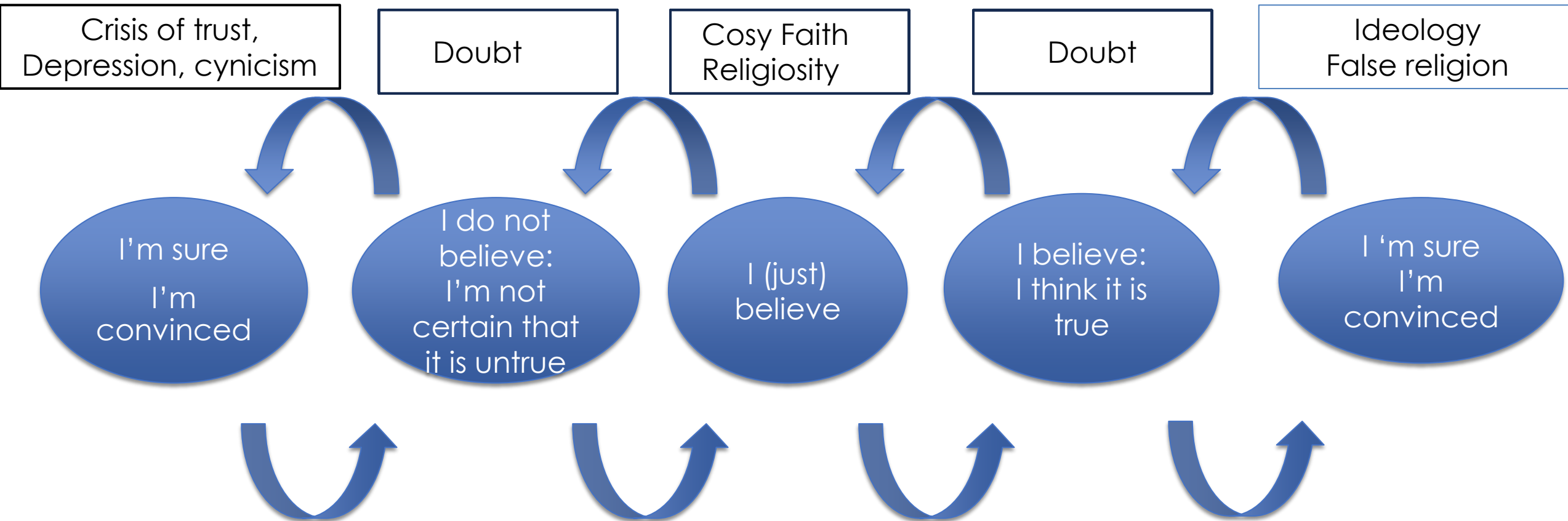
- ▶ Believing to the messiah ⇔ A very fleeting and unsteady belief
- ▶ Neophytes come to understand who is JMS by deciphering the signs given away by the followers
 - ▶ Detailed description of the “world of evil” and the “world of the good”;
 - ▶ Detailed description of the characters of these two worlds (the Devil, the Virgin, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, God...) → creation of “imago”, “mental images”
 - ▶ Identification process
- ▶ A sudden revelation, similar to falling in love at first sight
 - ▶ what are you able to do to keep the conviction that gave you, very suddenly, the sensation to live something very unique?
 - ▶ Being constantly in action without rest
 - ▶ Prozelyting

Exemplary stories to justify sex abuses

Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 256.

“It is not the continuity itself that is of value here, but the fact that **this continuity acts as a visible expression of the filiation that the individual or collective believer expressly claims** and that integrates him or her into a spiritual community assembling past, present, and future believers. **The heritage of belief fulfils the role of a legitimizing imaginary reference point.**”

The fleeting act of believing



Believing, being convinced, being manipulated

Faith – Religiosity (Simmel)

- Acknowledging a gap between saying and doing
- Acknowledging a tension between being and not being
- Recognizing differentiated temporalities
- Dismissing proof
- Cosy condition

Being convinced

- An extra-ordinary and unexpected moment (like conversion, the very moment when you begin to believe that the man you see is the Messiah)
- A moment when time is suspended
- Confusion between reality and fiction

Being manipulated - manipulating

- It is not necessary the result of a cynical and premeditated act with bad intention
- You can manipulate yourself
- It happens in case there is no time for thinking, making a pause, taking a step aside
- It happens because you surrender to the group, admitting you depend on them not to “fail” your belief
- You come to manipulate newcomers so that you glimpse in their eyes the glimmer of the convinced believer you yourself have lost
- You feel cognitive dissonance but you have already gone too far to go backwards.

Who were the followers of the Pentecostal churches?

- Bottom of the social ladder
- Disadvantaged people
- Women without qualifications

AMWAY Multilevel Marketing (MLM)

Rich DeVos:

“God is waiting patiently for you to come home, to receive His gifts and to take your place at your Creator’s beautiful table. We are creating to dream. [...]. Your dreams determine who you are and what you care about. The size of them determines the size of your soul. [...] We are loved by God and empowered by our Creator to see our dreams come true” (*Compassionate Capitalism. People Helping People Help Themselves*, Dutton, New-York City, 1993: 22-23)

Self-transformation in three steps

Observations conducted in France, South Korea and Haiti

- ▶ The way others look at us changes the way we look at ourselves (Simmel).
- ▶ The plurality of collective affiliations opens up your social vision.
- ▶ Then you can dream for yourself things that your social class can't even imagine.

These new projections help you to break away from class *habitus*, to act, to change your behaviors. Eventually, you construct a new identity. Moving up the social ladder to a higher class requires emotional energy. Religious belief and group support bring it to you. You feel stronger.

Changing your self-worth: a bet

- **Reciprocity:** You surrender to the group and the group bets on you
- **Progressive achievement of your dreams**
- **Sacrifices: a key issue:** Which sacrifices are you ready to accept in order to trade what you are today for what you would be tomorrow?
- The Pentecostal sellers are both the **object and the stake of the bet**. (The object for themselves and the stake for the group who trusts them.)

Believing: an ever-evolving system

Believing
=
Belief context
+
Belief contents
+
Belief behaviors

Exemplary stories

What story to believe?

- In what way does the story we can believe evolve depending on the context?
- What elements of the stories change, and what elements continue to be transmitted?
- To what extent do new beliefs invalidate contents that used to be relevant?
- How does a change in the context operate a change in the attitude of belief?
- Depending on the context, is the content changed in order to achieve the 'right' attitude or does the impossibility of adopting the attitude motivate a change in the content?

MLM actual evolution

MLM in the 80th	MLM today
Door to door – Home meeting	Social networks
Very demanding	Selected objectives; Selected working hours
Sacrifices	Refusal of sacrifice
No time for hobbies Frustrated life	Priority given to hobbies and family – Refusal of frustration
Dreams and projections for a better future	Anxiogenic context
	Response to “artist criticism” (Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello)

Believing behaviors

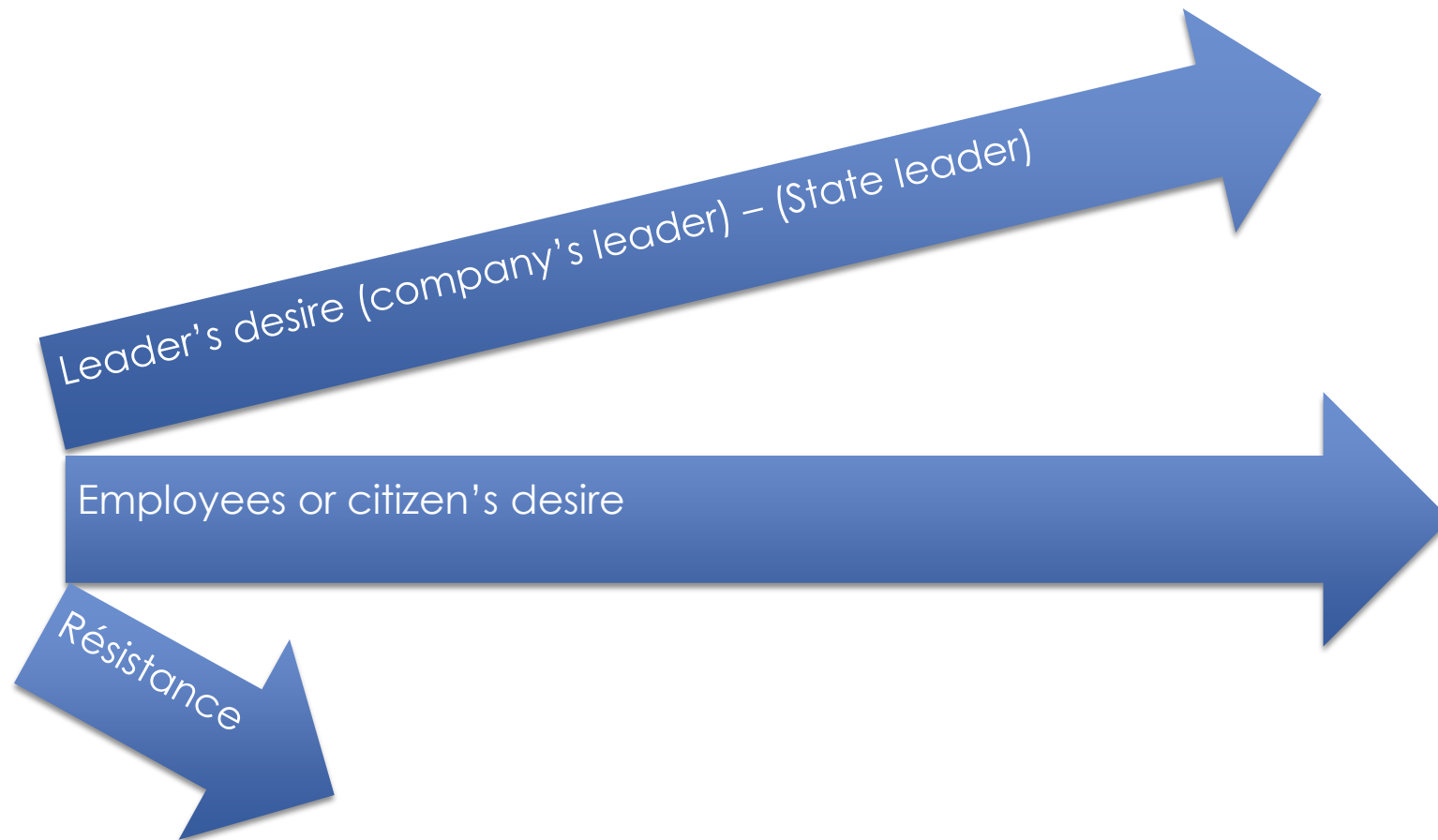
- ▶ **Trusting:** Surrendering to the group.
- ▶ **Acting:** : Following the advice and applying the method of the group
- ▶ **Admiring:** Considering someone as a role model provides the emotional energy to progress

a widespread distrust leads to paralyzing doubt.

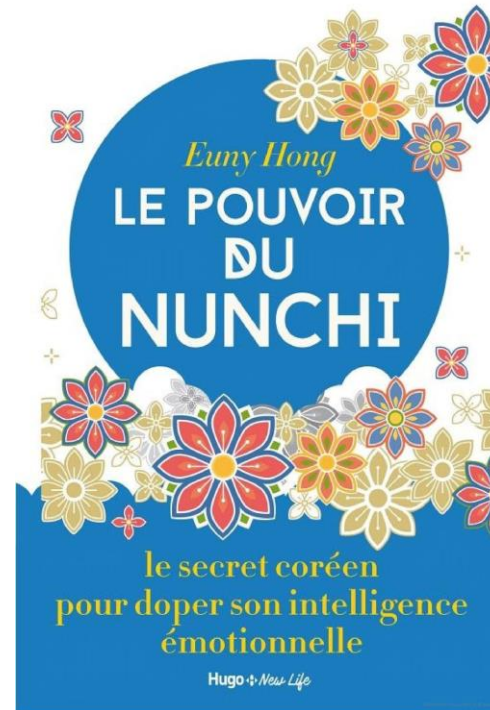
Religion doesn't have the monopoly on faith

- ▶ Believing is fundamental to self and social betterment
- ▶ Believing is not a religious act. It is a survival instinct.
- ▶ Believing is intimately linked to the need to trust others.
- ▶ One has no choice but to trust. Modernity, which imposes a “tunnel vision” (Paul Seabright), has reinforced this.
- ▶ Believing is an in-between time between now and later

Alignment of desires (Frédéric Lordon)



The nunch'i transnational destiny



THANK YOU