Peter Lambertz

12 Of Ancestors and Others: Cultural Resonance from Japan among Spiritualists in Kinshasa

> I identify with Meishū Sama's teachings as an African because from my birth onwards people have always told me that the dead are not dead.[1]

The quotation summarizes the recurrent theme during a weekly teaching session at the *Johrei Centre* of the Congolese branch of the Japanese new religion Sekai Kyūseikyō (SKK/Church of World Messianity) in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Japan's tradition of ancestor veneration has been maintained and also transformed by Japan's countless new religions (*Shin Shūkyō*), which have been multiplying their global reach ever since the 1950s. Among *Messianiques* in Kinshasa, as Jérôme stressed during his teaching session, the core teaching by SKK's founder Meishū Sama concerning the crucial spiritual role of ancestors resonates strongly with the spiritual wisdom many local practitioners deem themselves to have inherited from their own "African" forefathers.

But in the remainder of his lecture-like teaching session, Jérôme did not just emphasize the powerful cultural resonance between Congo and Japan. He also underscored the violence and injustice that the Christian pastors of the countless sensationalist born-again charismatic churches inflict on Africa's ancestors when inciting their followers to demonize and cut all ties with them, perceiving them as forces that obstruct the liberation of the born-again subject in her/his often newly achieved but highly unpredictable urban habitat. In times of the "Pentecostal revolution",[2] which has been propagating for decades a regime of personhood built around the autonomous Christian subject, who should aim for independence from ancestral ties, such "African" and potentially "Afro-centric" wisdom – "the dead are not dead" is the name of a famous Afro-centric poem by Birago Diop – is indeed a position that is not easily celebrated by everyone.

1 "J'identifie avec les enseignements de Meishū Sama en tant qu'Africain parce que dès *ma* naissance les gens m'ont toujours dit que les morts ne sont pas mort." (Teaching session by Jérôme Bosoku at the Church of World Messianity, Kinshasa, July 2010).

2 R. Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110690101-012

In Africa's cities the seldom studied non-Christian "spiritual movements" (emic term) such as SKK can only be understood if their "centrifugal" mimetic outward orientation is complemented by the "centripetal" incentive to generate symbolic capital, embodied difference and critique within the local socio-religious space. Spiritual movements such as SKK on the one hand express a claim to membership in a "new global society"[3] and on the other allow for the generation and embodiment of aesthetic difference within the local sphere.[4] The concept of "resonance" enables us to combine both these tendencies in a stereoscopic, symmetric way.

To understand how transcultural resonance from Japan lends the Congolese practitioners of Japanese spirituality in Kinshasa considerable confidence and pride vis-à-vis their Pentecostal local others, this chapter will proceed in three steps. After a first part that contextualizes Kinshasa's spiritual movements, a description of the *Messianiques*' "ancestor worship" will illuminate the relevance of the idea of "resonance", with the role and portability of names appearing as one of its amplified key features. A third part will present the ways in which these cases of cultural resonance are locally conceptualized in the context of Congo's and Kinshasa's post-colonial particularity. It will become apparent that the resonance from Japan is locally crafted with a view to strengthening local understandings of Africa and African identity, which inadvertently repeats a historical pattern of the Japanese experience with Western orientalism.

Spiritual Movements in Kinshasa

Kinshasa, the capital of the DRC, has between 10 and 12 million inhabitants and has become known for its proud and pumping popular culture of extravagance, exaggeration, and aesthetic intensity. Beer, music and dance, the Holy Spirit, prayer and deliverance; laughter, debate and argument: Kinois (the city's inhabitants) have a liking for amplification and distortion, for distraction from both the hardship and the monotony of an often-limiting present. The constant overdrive of sensory stimulation and the simultaneous inflation and "overheating" of meaning in this city built of words[5] have become a way of life. The

3 J.G. Ferguson, "Of Mimicry and Membership: Africans and the New World Society", *Cultural Anthropology* 17 (2002) 4, pp. 551–569.

4 P. Lambertz, *Seekers and Things: Spiritual Movements and Aesthetic Difference in Kinshasa*, New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2018.

5 F. De Boeck and Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City*, Ghent and Amsterdam: Ludion, 2004, p. 12; F. De Boeck, "La ville de Kinshasa, une architecture du verbe", *Esprit* 12 (2006), pp. 79–105.

offer presented by the city's uncountable born-again churches (also called Pentecostal Charismatic Churches, or PCC), which have come to dominate the city's religious landscape, of perpetual renewal through daily charismatic, embodied prayer, is lived by many as an urgent reshuffling of one's cards of chance in the daily hope for a miracle.

Unlike the various local forms and expressions of Islam and Christianity in Africa, which have been studied by scholars of religion in Africa for a long time, an alternate current of people and movements, which has existed for some decades and is currently on the rise in Africa's multiple urban worlds, has received insufficient attention. Neither Islamic nor Christian, but rather feeding into the spectrum of new religious movements (though this term tends to obscure the intricate local continuities with longstanding traditions), followers of "spiritual movements" (an emic term) are generally critical of PCC. Kinshasa hosts a whole scene, a "milieu"[6] indeed of people and movements, who call themselves "seekers" and "spiritualists". Spiritual movements[7] include Eckankar, the Brahma Kumaris Spiritual University, the Association of the Supreme Master Ching Hai, CERVA (Centre de Recherche sur les Valeurs Africains), AMORC (Rosicrucianism), the Grail Movement, but also a number of Japanese new religions such as Sukyō Mahikari, the Mokichi Okada Association International (MOA), and two other branches of Sekai Kyūseikyō: the *Église Messianique Mondiale* (EMM) and the *Temple Messianique Art de Johrei* (TMAJ), the latter being a local-cum-transnational schismatic offshoot dating from 2012.[8]

The EMM movement was founded by Mokichi Okada 岡田茂吉 (1882–1955), also called Meishū Sama ("Lord of Light", 明主様), in Japan in 1935 and started going global in the 1950s. In Japan, and also elsewhere, it has known a number of schisms, creating different organizational networks with various transnational trajectories. This explains why in Congo there are four movements of Japanese inspiration today that propagate the practice of channelling *divine healing light* from Japan. Their successive arrivals in Kinshasa since the 1970s were encouraged each time by a local schism that necessitated the connection with yet another internationally available branch. EMM was imported to Congo in 2001 from Luanda (the capital of Angola), where it had been introduced ten

6 C. Campbell, "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularisation", in: *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, vol. 5, London: SCM Press, 1972, pp. 119–136.

7 Rosalind Hackett has first drawn attention to these movements, calling them "spiritual science movements". See R. Hackett, "The Spiritual Sciences in Africa", *Religion Today* 3 (1986) 2, pp. 8–11.

8 For more on the last two movements, see Lambertz, *Seekers and Things*, pp. 35–68.

years earlier by Afro-Brazilian missionaries from Brazil. Clearly, there is a religious South-South connectivity at work beyond the realm of Pentecostalism.

In the DRC, the movement had about 2500 regular followers in 2014, mainly in the urban centres. In 2012 I witnessed a local schism in Kinshasa, which gave birth to the *Temple Messianique Art de Johrei*. If in the 1980s spiritual movements were generally attractive to the Zairian political and neo-bourgeois elite, EMM and TMAJ stood out on account of their attempt to popularize and democratize the movements' messages by reaching out to Kinshasa's large popular class. This explains why their working language is Lingala and not French.

Spiritual movements emphatically distinguish themselves from the born-again churches, mainly by referring to their own very open and outspoken use of religious materiality, including holy calligraphies, flowers used as spiritual thermometers, and amulets that act as receivers of divine, invisible light (*mwinda ya Nzambe*, "God's light" / "divine light") from Japan: this light is channelled in a healing ritual called "Johrei" ("purification of the spirit", 浄霊), in order to burn impurities that people have accumulated in their spiritual bodies because of sins and toxins.

It is important to stress the electric cosmology[9] that spiritual movements propagate. In the early 1900s the writings of nineteenth-century US-American New Thought spiritualists were circulating in Japan, where they influenced members of the Ōmoto movement, including the founder of the new religion Seichō-no-Ie 生長の家, Masahara Taniguchi 谷口雅春 (1893–1985), and Sekai Kyūseikyō's founder Mokichi Okada. The passion for Mesmer's magnetic theory resonated strongly across the Pacific, to such an extent that Taniguchi and Fenwicke Holmes, one of New Thought's key representatives in the USA, even published a monograph together. Jointly reflecting on the power of thought, they write:

> The whole universe is a living organism and so, though unseen, the network of what may be called the cosmic nerve tissue spreads everywhere, so that when a man wants something, that desire is transmitted to the organ whose function it is to gratify it. This is what we call in Seichono-Iye [*sic*] the "Boundless Supply" or "Everything granted at will".[10]

9 H. Behrend, "Electricity, Spirit Mediums, and the Media of Spirits", in: L. Jäger, E. Linz, and I. Schneider (eds.), *Media, Culture, and Mediality: New Insights into the Current State of Research*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2010, pp. 187–200.

10 F.L. Holmes and T. Masaharu, *The Science of Faith: How to Make Yourself Believe*, Tokyo: Nippon Kyobun-sha, 1962, p. 210, quoted in: R.T. Carpenter and W.C. Roof, "The Transplanting of Seicho-no-ie from Japan to Brazil: Moving beyond the Ethnic Enclave", *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 10 (1995) 1, pp. 41–54, at 47.

Given that all mind and all matter are connected as if in a neuro-electrical network, nothing happens randomly, as thoughts, words and other things invisible have a mechanical impact on the course of affairs.

Kinshasa's seekers strongly believe in a world that is governed by such spiritual laws. Unaware of the deeper historical entanglements with mesmerism, they passionately identify cultural resonances between Japanese spirituality and what they see as the wisdom of their "African" forefathers. The *law of attraction*, for instance, according to which *Le hazard n'existe pas* – things do not occur randomly – was crucial to nineteenth-century spiritualists and is widely recognized in Kinshasa too. In a somewhat Aristotelian critique of the overarching focus on *Nzambe akosala* ("God will act") among local Pentecostalists (one spiritualist explained to me that he was an outspoken Marxist), the world, albeit composed of quite a lot of "invisible" (but precisely not immaterial) processes, is perceived as reacting to a "scientific" causality of action and reaction.

This feeds into, picks up, transforms, and deescalates the widespread parlance about invisible processes and *mystique* machinations that are at work in the city today, often as a result of the Pentecostal fear-mongering that widens the pastors' clientele. Thus, teaching sessions are organized about the spiritual origins of accidents and deaths (the reason why certain crossroads are collectively cleaned), which, as in other parts of Africa, have long been known to have spiritual origins. Spiritual movements propagate and encourage a seemingly "scientific" imagination that explicates the causalities at work between mind and matter. Such reasoned pondering is attractive, if not exciting, to the inhabitants of the *ville-spectacle* that is Kinshasa. It entails a soothing effect, offering those who strive to deal with this totally unreliable, unpredictable, and somewhat disorderly urban universe, an intellectualist promise to explain, predict, and enable them to come to terms with their own lives.[11]

A powerful ambiguity, however, is maintained: while to some spiritualists this scientific character demystifies the invisible workings of words, thoughts, and political affairs, to others it is the proof for a superior form of magic. It should not be forgotten that in Kinshasa science and scientific specialization are commonly integrated into the local cosmological continuum of invisible forces at work and their understanding and manipulation by specialists.[12]

11 R. Horton, "African Conversion", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 41 (1971) 2, pp. 87–108.

12 See H.G. West, *Ethnographic Sorcery*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Science, however, be it "spiritual" or "natural", is at the service of, and beneficial to, society, as can be seen from the local depiction of *sorcellerie ya baMindele* ("the sorcery of the Whites") as science associated with progress, while *sorcellerie ya baAfricains* is understood to serve mostly evil ends.

Generating Resonance: Japanese "Ancestor Worship" in Kinshasa

On Resonance

Media anthropologists have used the concept of resonance to indicate the perceived affinities and the effects of appropriation in instances of transnationally circulating and mediated cultural materials. In his work on Nigerian audiences of Bollywood movies, Brian Larkin asks "why one media form – Indian film – has resonance in the very different cultural environment of northern Nigeria".[13] He points to "resonant images" that generate "cultural as well as individual resonance".[14] Not without analogical reference to the acoustic physicality of sound, Flagg Miller has studied the "moral resonance" that the vibrant audio-recording industry in southern Yemen generates as the foundation of political activism.[15] In his work on the cultural flows that exist between Asia and Africa in Ghanaian Hinduism and their local dynamics, Albert Wuaku suggests the concept of "repertoires of resonance".[16] Although his use of the concept reveals its rich analytical potential, none of the above scholars has pointed to the materiality upon which resonance depends.

Whilst resonance responds to impetus and soundbites from afar because of a perceived sympathetic affinity, it depends on vibrating materials and is therefore always a local phenomenon that is locally produced. Distant though the original sound impetus may be, resonance necessitates a material body (*Resonanzkörper*), which lends it a particular local texture and expression, which usually alters the

13 B. Larkin, "Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers: Media and the Creation of Parallel Modernities", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 67 (1997) 3, pp. 406–440, at 434.

14 Ibid., p. 428.

15 F. Miller, *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media. Audiocassette Poetry and Culture in Yemen* (Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs, vol. 38), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.

16 A.K. Wuaku, *Hindu Gods in West Africa: Ghanaian Devotees of Shiva and Krishna*, Leiden: Brill, 2013.

input that has caused it, either by muting, amplifying, or distorting it. This, in turn, emphasizes the importance of locally authorized sensitivities.[17] The study of transnationally circulating cultural materials can benefit from the notion of resonance, because it allows us to integrate both globalizing, "centrifugal" dynamics and localizing, "centripetal" ones. This makes it possible to grasp both deterritorializing and reterritorializing dynamics without losing sight of local actors and the materials and things their practices depend upon, resulting in the agency they share as human and non-human actors. Moreover, resonances encourage us to scrutinize local settings for potential instances of amplification and/or distortion, as the case of Japanese ancestor worship in Kinshasa shows.

The perceived resonance between "Japanese" and "African" cultural materials is not just an implicit occurrence, but also an explicit theme of debate and discussion among *Messianiques*. Japan being popularly known as a destination for Congolese bands (see Zaiko Langa Langa's epic album *Nippon Banzai. Au Japon* of the year 1986) and for the Kimono cult of the most exquisite "Japonnais" among adepts of the extravagant SAPE movement, several *Messianiques* also claim that Lingala and Japanese are "quite similar languages", mainly because of certain terms such as "Kasai" existing in both languages. On a weekly basis both EMM and TMAJ organize teaching sessions (Li.: *mateya*; Fr.: *enseignement*) at their headquarters and various *Points de Johrei* across the city, where local *responsables* explain the various teachings of their founder Meishū Sama (Mokichi Okada) to the followers (*bandimi*). These sessions are held in Lingala and are important moments of appropriation and translation of what is understood to be "from Japan". A pragmatic spiritual use of plants/flowers (*fololo*), the "power of words" (*nguya ya liloba*), the role of spirits and our human soul after death, the origins of illness and of evil of all sorts, as well as, of course, the importance of ancestors (*bakoko*) for the well-being of the living, are recurring and popular topics.[18]

17 J. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, London: Bloomsbury, 2004.

18 Although the resonance Congo's *Messianiques* perceive between Japan and their own culture is indeed multifarious, here I am chiefly concerned with ancestors and their worship. For the spiritual use of Ikebana flower arrangements and the "transcultural reassurance" that arises from the Japanese theory of the power of words, see Lambertz, *Seekers and Things*, pp. 95–123, pp. 195–224.

Japanese "Ancestor Worship" in Kinshasa

The interpretation of misfortune as the result of unhappy influential ancestors is historically grounded both in Africa and in Japan. In Japan, it was especially common in the economically troubled first decade following the Second World War: "The teaching that ancestor worship would relieve people from distress was persuasive: however, after rapid economic development took place and the living conditions of the people improved markedly, the notion of suffering ancestors lost its appeal".[19] In Kinshasa, both ancestors and their Christian counterpart, the Holy Spirit, continue to be an important intellectual and embodied means to counter misfortune and come to terms with the uncertainties of a highly volatile present.

Each Wednesday morning and on the first Sunday morning of the month, "prayers for the uplifting of ancestral souls" (*prière pour l'élévation des âmes des ancêtres*) are held in the different units of the EMM and TMAJ movements. Among *Messianiques* these prayer sessions are commonly referred to as *culte des ancêtres* ("ancestor worship"). The catalogue of offerings differs from the ritual sacrifice to the ancestors of a chicken and palm wine, which several older *Messianiques* (EMM's and TMAJ's followers) remember from their childhood in the village. In EMM food offerings are consistent with the Japanese model and include merely rice, salt, and a glass of water. TMAJ, on the other hand, has enhanced the minimalist Japanese-style offerings of water, salt, and rice offered in EMM by an extensive list of local edibles, which are installed one after the other in front of the *Goshintai* 御神体 calligraphy: first, the set of little Japanese pots with rice, salt, and water, followed by an impressive fish from the Congo River (*mbisi ya mayi*), which is prepared for the offering by tying its head and tail together with a string and stuffing a salad leaf into its mouth, whereupon it is placed on a bed of salad with tomato slices around it. This is followed by a big basket of fruit, a bundle of *pondou* (cassava leaves), a *pain carré* (square bread), a tray of aubergines and a green cabbage, a basket full of sweets, biscuits, and lollipops, and finally two baskets: one with envelopes of money and another with a pile of ancestor lists.

Every Wednesday morning and every first Sunday of the month, followers are requested to bring ancestor lists (Fr. *listes/formulaires des ancêtres*, Li. *mikanda/formulaires ya bakoko*) on which they have inscribed the names of as

19 K. Morioka, "Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan: Continuity and Change", in: G.A. DeVos and T. Sofue (eds.), *Religion and Family in East Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 211.

many "ancestors" as possible (usually not more than forty or forty-five, because the pre-edited forms do not have more lines). For each ancestor, some information about the *degré de parenté* (kinship relation) is requested, and at the end of each list the total number of inscribed ancestors is indicated.

The kind of kinship relations invoked in these lists is at first sight somewhat surprising. Striking is, for instance, the overwhelming presence of "ancestors" who are not older than or are at least of the same generation as the list's author him-/herself. What is more, an impressive number of extra-kin "ancestors" appear on the lists, such as friends, neighbours, neighbours' children, and even former heads of the Congolese/Zairian state. At first sight, these results go against scholarly expectation, which intuitively connects something called *culte des ancêtres* (ancestor worship) with lineage. The inclusion of non-family members is surprising, since the structural-functionalist credo on ancestor worship in Africa established by Meyer Fortes[20] and Jack Goody[21] contends that it is a rule that ancestors are *at least* members of one's lineage. The inclusion of non-kin members and historic personalities departs even from Kopytoff's finding[22] about the equivocality of ancestors and elders.

From a "Japanese" point of view, the arbitrary inclusion of departed non-kin members is less surprising, because in Japan a transformation of the notion of *ancestor* has been witnessed in accelerated fashion since the end of the Second World War. The signifier of the "ancestor" concept has remained intact, but the signified has been adapted to rapid urbanization and intense industrialization in the first half of the twentieth century, which accompanied a thorough weakening of the large-scale family household (Jap. *ie* 家). As a result, "Japan's notion of ancestrality has undergone a change from a unilineal view which includes distant ancestors beyond even indirect experiences [. . .] to a concept which limits ancestors to close kin within the range of direct experience, but extends bilaterally".[23] The question who is one's ancestor was no longer a structural given, but had gradually become a matter of personal choice, regardless of lineage, generation, and gender.

The "worshipping" practitioner thus transformed from being *subjected to* custom and lineage obligations into the *subject of* his/her own moral authority,

20 M. Fortes, "Some Reflections on Ancestor Worship", in: M. Fortes and G. Dieterlen (eds.), *African Systems of Thought*, London/New York: Oxford University Press, 1965, pp. 122–142.

21 J. Goody, *Death, Property and the Ancestors: A Study of the Mortuary Customs of the LoDagaa of West Africa*, Paolo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1962.

22 I. Kopytoff, "Ancestors as elders", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 41 (1971) 2, pp. 129–142.

23 Morioka, "Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan", p. 206.

who himself/herself chooses those he/she wishes to remember.[24] Morioka sees this as a "privatization" of ancestor worship.[25] As we can see from *Messianiques'* lists in Kinshasa, this arbitrary, much more personalized than collective, way of conceiving of who is one's "ancestor", which remains the persistently and proudly utilized emic term, appears to correspond very well to the sensitivities and needs of Kinois today. Japan's New Religions, in particular Reiyūkai, were largely responsible for "democratizing" ancestor rites by transferring them from Buddhist priests in temples to lay persons.[26] This innovation resonates with the needs of Congo's urbanites: *Messianiques* thus break with the African tradition that stipulated that the ancestral rite was a privilege for the living elder of a lineage.

The Matter of Names

Messianiques are encouraged by their ministers to make an effort to find out the names of their great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers in both their paternal and maternal lineages. They do this by asking their parents or kin, in order to be able to list as many ancestral souls as possible. An example is a list that mentions fourteen *arrière-grands-pères* (great-grandfathers) and eight *arrière-grands-mères* (great-grandmothers).

I had visited Régine (41) several days in a row, after joining ministers Faustin and José for a *nettoyage maison* at her new place in the neighbourhood of Yolo, where she had moved with her two children only recently. Régine had just returned from her job when I arrived in the afternoon. She works as a clerk at the national aviation agency (RVA). She excused herself and let me sit on the sofa in front of the television she had turned on for me, probably to keep me busy, or perhaps to distract me while she composed her ancestor list. She instructed her younger sister, who lived with her, to keep the children out of the room for a while, then went to her room and returned with a photocopy of an empty list. She sat down, closed her eyes and seemingly pronounced a prayer. Then she started filling in names, fairly swiftly I thought, but always with her eyes closing

24 R. Smith, *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan*, Paolo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1974, p. 183.

25 K. Morioka, "The Appearance of 'Ancestor Religion' in Modern Japan", *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 4 (1977) 2/3, pp. 183–212, at 207.

26 H. Hardacre, *Lay Buddhism in Contemporary Japan: Reiyūkai Kyodan*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984; S. Shimazono, *From Salvation to Spirituality: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan*, Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2012.

during little interruptions, before filling in the next line. "You have to do it properly, with true concentration and an open heart; you have to offer them your love. Otherwise it will not work", she explained to me later. When the list was filled in up to number 45, she stopped.

Régine had not conducted any special enquiry to find out the names of people she did not know, except for the sisters of her mother, who died before she was born. As for the rest:

> I know the name of my father, of his father, of my mother and her parents. For the others, often we had funerals at our home, and also three [colleagues] of our office have died, so I put them [on the list]. [. . .] I have also put my friends from the institute who have already died, and then the Presidents of the Republic. The paper is at home now, but as soon as I find [some money for] an *offrande* [donation], I will pray and, the next day I will deposit this. This is how God saves these souls, these ancestors".[27]

That money too is given to ancestors at first sight resembles the emphasis on money donations in Pentecostal churches, where, just like in mainline churches, *mabonza* (alms) are given. Similar to the gifting of money in African Pentecostalism,[28] the underlying logic is not one of charity, but of sacrifice, which is meant to activate and catalyse a cycle of reciprocity. Among *Messianiques* this takes a particular form in the practice of *Sorei Saishi* 祖霊祭祀, understood to be a master hotline to a particular ancestor, who, in return for a 10 USD donation, receives a special spiritual elevation treatment. The ritual is performed by registering the ancestor in a ledger reserved for Sorei Saishi, whose details are then communicated by e-mail to the headquarters in Guarapiranga (Sao Paolo, Brazil). About a week later, a confirmation e-mail is sent back to the *Messianique*, which in Kinshasa is usually printed and handed to him/her by the secretary of the Church. Bernard (47), who hosts a *Point de Johrei* of TMAJ on his compound in the poorer neighbourhood of Kingabwa and relies on the 30 USD of rent from the TMAJ "church" for a living, explained to me that this "more up-to-date, Japanese" way of praying to the ancestors was what makes *Messianiques'* spirituality so powerful.

In a teaching session, *offrandes* (donations) to one's ancestors were explained to me as *la face matérielle de la gratitude*, the "material side of gratitude". This emphasis on gratitude is important also for the moment of creating the ancestor list. *Gratitude* vis-à-vis others, including the dead, implies an ideal

27 Régine, Yolo, June 2013.

28 P. Hasu, "World Bank and Heavenly Bank in Poverty and Prosperity: The Case of Tanzanian Faith Gospel", *Review of African Political Economy* 33 (2006) 110, pp. 679–692; O. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

of self-positioning and self-awareness and can therefore be seen as a mental attempt to repair and restore reciprocity with the dead, whom especially PCCs tend either to demonize or to place in a symbolic quarantine, because they hinder the psycho-genealogical liberation of the "born-again" subject.[29]

As Régine had shown me, the same is true for the moment of creating these lists, which have to be handwritten and composed with a "sentiment" of inner peace, love, and gratitude. The act of writing is carried out as a meditative self-centring. While it is difficult to verify this for every *Messianique*, in Régine's case the very moment of writing down an ancestor's name was lived as generating an intimate tie with the respective ancestor. "It is a prayer, really" explained Régine, which necessitates its proper ritual time-space. Other *Messianiques* confided to me that they often repeat a standard set of names on a weekly basis, including their grandparents' and Mobutu's name, for instance. Many keep a model sheet in their homes – a mnemonic device, indeed archive, containing the names they do not know by heart. But the actual list has to be written down by hand every week.

Bernard takes the whole day to compile his list, waiting for *inspiration* (emic term) to come and reveal to him which another ancestor he has not yet added to his list. For several years he has been beginning his list with the name of his deceased mother and her sister, who were twins, chiefly because of his daughter's and his second wife's apparent infertility. "I have had a lot of experiences", he explains, "because both have had several children after that".[30] As a result of the *culte des ancêtres* he learned to practise at EMM and later TMAJ, his mother frequently appears in dreams, at times revealing to him the premonition of future events. Thus, he knew that his daughter would score 57 per cent in her state exam before the results were announced. The choice of ancestors to appear first on the list depends on the problem his prayer is meant to resolve. If he is facing a financial crisis (Li. *mpiaka*), he chooses his uncle, who was a successful businessman. For fertility and health his mother remains the main addressee.

That a name is more than an abstract symbol, code, or representation but has the performative and iconic ability to actually embody the person to whom it belongs – like a sonic icon, the acoustic version of a Byzantine sacred painting that *is* its representation and does not merely symbolize it, just like a mantra that ritually performs its meaning – can best be grasped if one imagines putting down on a list, or uttering, the name of one's deceased child. The name makes a person's spirit something portable, comparable to a picture or a statue.

29 See Lambertz, *Seekers and Things*, pp. 227–230.
30 Bernard, Kingabwa, September 2018.

As Nancy Munn has shown, it enables the person to expand herself in space and time, and thus to generate fame.[31]

The weekly filling in of EMM/TMAJ's ancestors on forms by individual *Messianiques* can thus be compared to a commemorative "throwing" (Li. *kobwaka*) of deceased persons who are close to the *Messianique* concerned. This concept refers to the public shouting of names by what are called *atalakus* ("criers", "attractors of attention"), an important constituent of a Congolese orchestra. Names are "thrown" both during concerts and on records.[32] While the *atalaku*'s role is to attract and socially weave the music and the band into the wider audience by means of names as iconic contact points, *Messianiques* do the same within their own selected community of spirit kin. In both cases, this has the obvious laudatory purpose of enticing sponsors and protectors, living ones in the case of the *atalakus* and dead ones in that of *Messianiques*.

The iconic nature of the name also explains the prominence of other name-based practices, such as the *ndoyi* (namesake). The namesake phenomenon is significant and respected in Kinshasa, and can be seen as an appellative birthmark. Like ancestors, birthmarks are called *koko* in Lingala. People who carry the same name inevitably have a homologous connection and therefore something in common. The name is their spiritual connection point. In Kinshasa's Pentecostal circles it is common for departed namesakes, especially if they qualify as *bakoko*, to possess a descendant, an occurrence known as a *malédiction de nom* (cursing by name).

The notion that a name sign, be it spoken/aural or written/visual, may act as a spiritual channel, a medium, between two signified persons carrying it, dead or alive, can furthermore be seen in the ways in which *Messianiques* handle their lists. Bernard, for instance, enhances the possibility of his mother and other ancestors appearing in his dreams by placing the list underneath his pillow the night before it is enshrined. At the end of the actual *culte des ancêtres* event, all lists are systematically burned in order to undo the material mediation at work in the paper and the ancestral names it carries. This act was explained to me as "freeing" the ancestors from the paper, which had been enshrined at the

31 N. Munn, *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in Massim Exchange*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1986.

32 See B.W. White, "Modernity's Trickster: 'Dipping' and 'Throwing' in Congolese Popular Dance Music", in: J. Conteh-Morgan and T. Olaniyan (eds.), *African Drama and Performance* (Research in African Literatures: African Expressive Cultures), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, pp. 198–218; L. Tsambu Bulu, "Luttes symboliques et enjeu de domination sur l'Espace de la Musique populaire à Kinshasa: Critique praxéologique des sociabilités de la scène musicale kinoise (1990–2010)", PhD thesis, University of Kinshasa, 2012.

altar (*autel*) so as to uplift the ancestor concerned. In this process, the lists become "sacred objects", which, as is known from sacred trash in other contexts, require appropriate disposal. "One cannot just place them in the trash bin, what impression will the ancestors have if, after praying to them, we place them in the trash bin?"[33] Irene Stengs denotes the precarious matter she calls "sacred waste" as "material residues and surpluses that cannot be disposed of as just garbage (or rubble), but neither can be kept or left alone".[34]

The writing of name lists, locally understood to be "the Japanese way of praying to the ancestors", resonates well with local semiotic ideologies[35] regarding names and their potential. Whether the lists are perceived merely as a resonance or indeed as being similar in their Congolese and Japanese realities, and to what extent amplification or even distortion occurs, is of lesser importance to local practitioners. In Kinois' understanding the resonance is loud and clear.

Transnational Reverse Orientalism

That the perceived connivance between Japanese spirituality and African spiritual wisdom was not just discursive positioning and rhetorical debate and opinionating became clear to me when two older members of TMAJ, who had grown up in Kasai and been living in one of Kinshasa's poorer suburbs, Kingasani, invited me to join them on a visit to their traditional healer (*nganga*), who lived near Mangengenge and had the power to both heal and harm, and whom they would regularly meet for health-related counselling. Before reaching his compound, which was recognizable as enclosed with a number of plants, one of my two *Messianique* guides instructed me on no account to touch anything the *nganga* might give or offer me. During the meeting, he even made sure I was sitting out of reach of the *nganga*, to whom the scene appeared to offer great amusement. Though some of EMM's ministers stress that their faith is the purely positive counterpart to the negative "African habit" of *kosimba nkisi* ("touching magical charms"), many *Messianiques* see the Japanese and African

33 Bernard, Kingabwa, September 2018.

34 I. Stengs, "In Conversation: Sacred Waste", *Material Religion* 10 (2014) 2, pp. 235–238, at 235.

35 W. Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (The Anthropology of Christianity, vol. 1), Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

spiritual registers as strongly resonating with each other. For my two guides, there was a direct continuity between the two.

While in Pentecostal circles the spatial entity of cultural reference is habitually the United States, Brazil, Nigeria, etc., *Messianiques* are more concerned with "Africa" as the cultural spatial reference. Jérôme's statement mentioned at the beginning of this chapter was the recurrent message of a teaching session on the role of ancestors at the *Point de Johrei* on Avenue Lufulwabo (Kinshasa) in July 2010. Having been a Protestant pastor before he in the 1980s became a leading *Messianique* intellectual, he repeatedly stressed the importance of what *Messianiques* refer to as the *culte des ancêtres* (ancestor worship), thus outspokenly recycling the orientalizing concept of "ancestor worship" from what V.Y. Mudimbe has called the "colonial library".[36] Christian missionaries had soon legitimized their "civilizing" endeavours by lumping together under the umbrella of "African Traditional Religion" various elements that appeared "magical" and "superstitious" to them. Scholars such as Paul Landau have shown how this label captured what was in reality mainly a product of leading questions posed in Christian and Muslim discourse about the Other.[37] Especially Protestant missions presented African Traditional Religion as the work of Satan,[38] thus laying the ground for today's diabolization by neo-Pentecostal pastors, who use the same discursive repertoire to demonize anything seemingly "traditional" involving secrecy, ritual, and/or religious materiality.[39]

Although syncretism became, after World War II, a kind of trademark of the globalizing Sekai Kyūseikyō, *Messianiques* in Kinshasa practise Sekai Kyūseikyō with an awareness that it is a Japanese religion, which has reached their country in order to validate and resurrect the power and cultural pride of their own ancestors. The concept of *reverse orientalism* was developed by Faure to describe efforts of the Kyoto School and the New Kyoto School in Japan to counter the orientalizing essentializations of (Zen) Buddhism and

36 V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

37 P. Landau, "'Religion' and Christian conversion in African History", *The Journal of Religious History* 23 (1999) 1, pp. 8–30.

38 B. Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and modernity among the Ewe in Ghana*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999; M. Kalulambi Pongo, "Christianisme et image de l'Autre en Afrique belge: Les categories de langages dans les strategies de denomination", *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 33 (1993) 130, pp. 275–293.

39 R. Hackett, "Discourses of Demonization in Africa and Beyond", *Diogenes* 50 (2003) 3, pp. 61–75.

Eastern philosophy by Western scholars.[40] The aim was to turn their external depictions into a positive facet of Japan's own uniqueness. According to Borup, the constitution of Zen Buddhism in Japan cannot be understood without taking into account the cultural pride it has made possible.[41] Utilizing Edward Said's canonical conceptualization of "Orientalism", the concept of *reverse orientalism* refers to how "the oriental", which is the object of orientalizing clichés, may strategically utilize the same clichés and cultural materials to its own advantage. In other words, the stereotypes and depictions on which orientalist accounts rest are converted into assets of cultural pride and a means of staging one's own uniqueness.

Just like *Messianiques*, also the followers of Eckankar re/produce spiritual wisdom as a reaction to the "orientalizing" denigration of African spirituality by Catholic missionaries, following the same pattern of reverse orientalism as EMM's and TMAJ's ancestor worship. There has been substantial feedback from colonial and missionary anthropology and their culturalizing discourse into the populations that once were the "objects" of these studies. Therefore it is difficult to estimate whether such culturalizing knowledge about death and the ancestors, for instance, reflects people's true convictions, on the one hand, or whether it is rather performed to generate one's own being "African" or "Bantu" as a cultural resource of identification within the pluralistic landscape of the city. No "autochthonizing" project today excludes the globalizing scale of reflexive feedback, which EMM and TMAJ exemplify so well, in that they enlighten their African followers on how to handle and re/produce their own heritage with imported strategies, tactics, and theories from afar. No doubt the challenge lies precisely in the globalizing mobility of those materials that facilitate such cross-reflexive cultural productions of urban subjectivity.

EMM's and TMAJ's explicit use of the *culte* concept strategically recycles the French concept of worship, as it was used in the "colonial library" of classical anthropology and missionary knowledge production, feeding it back into contemporary religious popular culture. Seemingly inspired by Japan's unique cultural history, EMM's/TMAJ's reverse orientalism is indeed an attempt at symbolic retaliation against perceived subjugation under Christian missionary hegemony ever since missionary activity started. This tendency also exists among

40 B. Faure, "The Kyoto School and Reverse Orientalism", in: C.W. Fu and S. Heine (eds.), *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, pp. 245–282.

41 J. Borup, "Zen and the Art of Inverting Orientalism: Buddhism, Religious Studies and Interrelated Networks", in: P. Antes, A.W. Geertz, and R.R. Warne (eds.), *New Approaches to the Study of Religion*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004.

followers of other spiritual movements. Concerning the law of karma and reincarnation, for instance, a member of Eckankar explained to me that his forefathers had known very well that children who died at an early age were often returning ancestors, who had come to pay a debt: "Our ancestors knew (a lot of things), but there has been a major disruption somewhere, by the Catholic fathers. [. . .] Our ancestors knew all this! But they have been disturbed by colonization".[42]

Conclusion

In Japan, rapid transformation and contrasting modes of social life and organization were mitigated, brokered, and managed by countless new religions, their engagement with the popular spheres of society, and their eclectic and variegated reshuffling of foreign and pre-existing cultural materials. Like other transnationally engaged Japanese new religions, Sekai Kyūseikyō has travelled and indeed "globalized" itself, with more than just a set stock of cultural décor and ritual paraphernalia. Implicitly, as an unrecognized and unknown stowaway, Japan's deeper historical experience is on board as well. To *Messianiques* in Kinshasa, Japan's way of transforming its own cultural inheritance so as to embrace, support, and encourage the novel conditions of urbanity with concomitant pressure to individualize the person, appears to be a promising and soothing alternative to the Pentecostal rhetoric of rupture that largely places the ancestors in quarantine.

This allows people to produce their "own" heritage and tradition with a smile of superiority and difference. By presenting their "ancestor worship" as part of their local "African" heritage, *Messianiques* unknowingly re/produce strategic "reverse orientalism". While in Japan this led to the construction of the invented tradition of Zen-Buddhism as an icon of Japaneseness, *Messianiques* practice of "ancestor worship" in Congo is seen as strengthening their identification as "Africans".

This chapter has focused upon the practice of Japanese "ancestor worship" in two different Congolese branches/offshoots of the Sekai Kyūseikyō movement. In Kinshasa, Japanese new religions are lived by a great number of their practitioners primarily as a response to the Protestant discourse of demonization that is propagated by the *Églises de réveil* (churches of awakening). Various *Messianiques*, as well as adepts of Eckankar, have explained to me how

42 Kingabwa, 14 April 2013.

important dreams are as channels of spiritual communication, adding that Meishū Sama, to whom dreams were likewise of utmost importance, confirmed in his teachings what they had first learned from their elders in the African village they grew up in. The same holds true for the power of words, which Meishū Sama theorizes in his writings,[43] and which is literally celebrated as an amplified resonance offering cultural reassurance. The distortion of the Japanese *culte des ancêtres* by TMAJ through the integration of Congolese food donations further attests to this.

Sekai Kyūseikyō's messianism as a globalizing movement offers people the hope of being lifted out of their spatial containers and being enabled to participate in a more global community of cosmopolitans, similar in a way to the prospect of the Pentecostal Holy Spirit. This fits James Ferguson's argument about mimetic movements being expressions of "claim[s] to membership in a 'new global society'".[44] However, to understand the attraction of spiritual movements like EMM and TMAJ in urban Africa, we have to consider not only their "centrifugal" prospect for membership in a more cosmopolitan world society but also their "centripetal" potential to thereby generate locally – within their particular urban worlds – a considerable amount of symbolic capital and difference. The concept of resonance, with its emphasis on instances of local amplification and distortion, has allowed us to integrate these two perspectives upon the transnational religious spaces in African cities today.

43 Lambertz, *Seekers and Things*, pp. 195–224.

44 Ferguson, "Of Mimicry and Membership", pp. 551–569.