Frédérique Louveau

13 Japanese Spiritualities in Africa: From a Transnational Space to the Creation of a Local Lifestyle

In the capitals of West Africa, Senegalese, Ivorians, Beninese, or Congolese *kumite*, waiting for the beginning of *tsukinamisai* this Sunday, "*do okiyome*" in the *daidōjō* while others are reading the *goseigen* to "raise" their *sōnen*.[1] This sentence, strewn with words in Japanese from the theology of a "new new religion" (*shin shinshūkyō*) transplanted from Japan to West Africa, Sukyō Mahikari 崇教真光, is common in the mouths of its African initiates. Founded in 1959 on the Japanese archipelago by a former officer of the imperial army, Sukyō Mahikari is one of those spiritualities from Japan which have succeeded in gaining a foothold on African soil: the Tenrikyō 天理教 Church[2] in Congo-Brazzaville, Sekai Kyūsai kyō 世界救世教, Temple messianique Art de Johrei,[3] and Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan 世界真光文明教団[4] in Congo-Kinshasa, Soka Gakkai International in Ivory Coast, as well as other spiritualities formed in more diffuse networks, such as *reiki* 霊気, which have succeeded in Senegal. While some of these Japanese churches are derived from Buddhism, Sukyō Mahikari is distinguished by its

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1 *Kumite* 組み手: initiates; *okiyome* お清め: ritual of purification; *daidōjō* 大道場: place of worship; *tsukinamisai* 月次祭: monthly ceremony of thanks to the god Su 主の大御神様; *goseigen* 御聖言: sacred book of the group; *sōnen* 想念: "deep thought", is the object of the spiritual work of followers who aim to make their thought and behaviour conform to the theological teachings of the group.

2 See J.F. Mayer, "Tenrikyo au Congo-Brazzaville: l'inculturation d'une nouvelle religion venue du Japon", https://www.religion.info/2017/10/13/congo-brazzaville-inculturation-tenrikyo/ (accessed 15 June 2019).

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

4 Sukyō Mahikari's founder, after adhering to several Japanese "new religions", from which he borrowed a certain number of theological elements, founded Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan (Church of the World True-Light Civilization), which split into two groups upon his death in 1974. Following a dispute, the courts granted the right of succession to a member of the founder's staff in preference to his adopted daughter. The former prolonged the destiny of this religion, whose name he retained, while the latter carried with her a large part of the adepts and founded a new branch that she named Sukyō Mahikari. It is this branch that is the subject of my research, because it is the one that has established itself with the most success in various African countries, where it has today 32 *dōjōs*, whilst Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan is present in only a few African countries.

allegiance to the Shinto tradition. These Japanese religions implanted in Africa share a transnational dimension that structures them and a sociological peculiarity, that of converting Africans to whom religious authority is entrusted. *Reiki*[5] is an exception in the sense that it has found an echo among European migrants in Africa.[6]

Sukyō Mahikari started to spread outside Japan in the 1960s in accordance with the desire of its founder to "conquer" Paris, the only city he saw in his only missionary vision overseas. Mahikari was then transported by expatriates, businessmen, and migrants, who took it to many countries on all continents, including Africa, especially south of the Sahara. Following the advent of independence, charismatic heads of state carrying a strong ideology were eventually obliged to submit to structural adjustment policies and liberalization of the economy. These local situations in several countries of West Africa weakened large sections of the population, especially civil servants. In the process of expanding beyond Japan, Sukyō Mahikari did not give rise to isolated and fragmented missionary enterprises of the charismatic and syncretic type. On the contrary, it has put in place, on a world scale, a pyramid-like transnational structure – giving it the vernacular name of "Organization" – making it possible to prevent local reinterpretations and counteract any tendency to split off. *Reiki,* by contrast, is not configured around a spiritual centrality, but in rather loose networks, formed by individual "masters" and their disciples in accordance with the migrations of these people.

In the context of religious transnationalization, little research has been devoted to Asian religion in Africa. Early research on religious transnationalization in Africa was devoted to the analysis of the networks of Christianity (especially in its Pentecostal form) and Islam, showing that these religions adapt to an increasingly dense "religious market" resulting from the "fragmentation of religious authority" by developing strategies through an aggressive proselytism.[7] As Colonomos has observed,

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5 Reiki is a technique developed in Japan by Mikao Usui (1865–1926). The kanjis "rei" and "ki" mean "spirit" and "energy". Among the collectives that wanted to standardize this practice, the French Federation of Traditional Reiki, for example, has fixed this definition: "energy of the spirit". Reiki, as conceived by its founder, consists of a technique based on the imposition of the hands of a practitioner on the body of a person to heal its sufferings through the development of its inner resources.

6 Ethnographic field data produced in November 2018 in Saint-Louis, Senegal, from my ongoing research.

7 L. Fourchard, A. Mary, and R. Otayek (eds.), *Entreprises religieuses transnationales en Afrique de l'ouest*, Paris: Karthala, 2005.

> The notion of transnational networks aims by definition to identify flexible and informal modes of relationship that bypass the institutions of nation-states by taking advantage of the resources and logistical support of multinational organizations, but without becoming structured as supranational institutions.[8]

Other analyses devoted to African prophetic movements and Pentecostalism, Latin-American and Afro-Brazilian religions, and religions marked by a strong African identity, show that they "go beyond all social, local and national boundaries"; as André Mary and Stefania Capone argue, the transnational "defines any activity initiated and conducted by non-institutional actors, be they organized groups or individuals, transcending the borders of nation-states without erasing them".[9] They highlight the main features of religious transnationalization, which makes sense only within a re-globalization "and especially an inverted globalization (north-south, centre-periphery)[10] compared to the major religions of imperialist nation-states; we are witnessing the creation of polycentric networks, independent of major strategies of institutions"; the formation of a new spiritual geography of the world; different phases, including the globalizing circulation of the meaning that is produced and its necessary relocation, which led Robertson[11] to develop the concept of "glocalization". If African religions, in the course of transnationalization, overthrow the orientation of globalization, the same goes for Japanese religions, as Clarke's book shows.[12] Other research has emphasized the role played by migration in religious transnationalization,[13] pointing out that "deterritorialization processes are rarely successive reterritorialization, thanks also to the parallel production of discourses on the origins that make it possible to 're-anchor' what has been

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8 A. Colonomos (ed.), *Sociologie des réseaux transnationaux. Communautés, entreprises et individus: lien social et système international*, Paris: L'Harmattan 1995, cited in A. Mary and L. Fourchard, "Introduction. Réveils religieux et nations missionnaires", in: Fourchard et al., *Entreprises religieuses*, p. 18.

9 S. Capone and A. Mary, "Les translogiques d'une globalization religieuse à l'envers", in: K. Argyriadis et al. (eds.), *Religions transnationales des Suds: Afrique, Europe, Amérique*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012, pp. 28–29.

10 Ibid.

11 R. Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity", in: M. Featherstone, S. Lash, and R. Robertson (eds.), *Global Modernities*, London: Sage, 1995, pp. 25–44.

12 P.B. Clarke (ed.), *Japanese New Religions in Global Perspective*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000.

13 S. Bava and S. Capone, "Religions transnationales et migrations: regards croisés sur un champ en mouvement", *Autrepart* 56 (2010) 4, pp. 3–16.

'deterritorialized' in new spaces, real or symbolic".[14] The notion of "local" is therefore unavoidable in the transnational dimension. My approach favours the study of the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of Sukyō Mahikari in Africa. Deleuze and Guattari created the concept of deterritorialization[15] with reference to the political, the social and even the scientific world "This is [. . .] a twofold movement where reterritorialization reassigns the territorialized space, and in this case the deterritorialization was simply one of the moments of reallocation of the territory."[16] If Mahikari can be compared to Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Cuban religions in many respects,[17] this should not obscure the fact that it does not have the same historical and cultural roots: the creation of the transnational Mahikari space took place in accordance with a local appropriation of the story of the origins, which is new to the followers. In other words, unlike Afro-Brazilian cults, it is not a religion carried by forced migration and therefore does not focus upon the same quest for Africa on the part of its initiates. For its part, *reiki* is a technique of well-being that recreates a transnational community through local affinities.

This chapter deals with the creation in Senegal of a local space based on a new lifestyle through a transnational religious organization from Japan. From ethnographic data from surveys conducted between 2001 and 2018 in the *dōjōs* of Mahikari, I will analyse the local dynamics of Mahikari in an articulation of global to local. I will highlight what Mahikari's presence, bearing characteristics derived from Japanese culture and Shinto religion, reveals in contemporary African societies. I will also briefly discuss the practice of *Reiki*, a healing and well-being technique originating in Japan, in order to emphasize the institutional aspect of religious transnationalization. Here too the "clients" seek a therapeutic solution and find themselves in a spiritual universe, but *Reiki* is explicitly a healing technique, whereas Mahikari is defined above all as a spiritual group, refusing to be classified as a healing group.

I will consider the way in which the pyramidal structure of Mahikari, piloted from Japan, articulates with local concerns of the Senegalese adepts, leading them

14 S. Capone, "A propos des notions de globalisation et transnationalisation", *Civilisations* 51 (2004) 1/2, pp. 9–22.

15 G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: L'Anti-Oedipe*, Paris: Minuit, 1991.

16 G. Elbaz (ed.), *Diasporas protéiformes*, Saint-Denis: Presses de l'Université des Antilles et de la Guyane, 2010, p. 145.

17 S. Capone and K. Argyriadis, "Adaptations et réappropriations dans la religion des orisha: La relocalisation des religions afro-américaines en question", in: Capone and Argyriadis (eds.), *La religion des orisha: un champ social transnational en pleine recomposition*, Paris: Hermann, 2011, pp. 9–44.

to develop a specific "lifestyle". My analysis is on three different scales: 1) the transnational dimension of the spiritual organization with its theological and liturgical foundations, 2) the individual dimension of Mahikari, which provides its African followers with a "personal power" to participate in the development of their country while fabricating an imaginary of development, and 3) the relation to politics and the state. We will first examine the creation of a transnational spiritual space between Japan and Africa, then the local creation of a lifestyle and finally the ethics of politics.

Creation of a Transnational Spiritual Space between Japan and Africa

The Franco-African Spiritual Space: Circulation of Practices

Sukyō Mahikari was founded in Japan in 1959 by Yoshikazu Okada 岡田良一, an imperial army officer from a samurai family, who later renamed himself Sukuinushisama 救い主様. During a coma caused by a fall from his horse he is said to have received "revelations" from the Su God, who ordered him to mobilize people to restore heaven on earth and form the Civilization of Yoko 陽光文明. This was to be composed of individuals selected according to their purity. Thus, Mahikari gathers "initiates" (*kumite* 組み手) endowed with a sacred medallion (*omitama* 御み霊) allowing them to carry out the ritual of purification (*okiyome* お清め), which is said to eliminate the "spiritual impurities" (*toxins*) lodged in bodies and souls. These impurities are the result of a person's sins as well as sins passed on by ancestors and accumulated through the principle of reincarnation.

Sukyō Mahikari's spiritual teachings are strongly inspired by Shinto, even though they contain references to Buddhism, Christianity, and Judaism.[18] Indeed, as if the founder had planned from the outset the transnationalization of his

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[18] L. Hurbon, "De la Bible à la parole. Oralité et écriture dans les sectes", *Cahiers de littérature orale* 21 (1987), pp. 115–130; B.J. McVeigh, Gratitude, Obedience, and Humility of Heart: The Cultural Construction of Belief in a Japanese New Religion, Unpublished PhD thesis, Princeton University, 1991; C. Cornille, "Jesus in Japan: Christian Syncretism in Mahikari", in: P. Clarke and J. Sommers (eds.), *Japanese New Religions in the West*, Sandgate: Curzon Press, 1994, pp. 89–103; P. Knecht, "The Crux of the Cross. Mahikari's Core Symbol", *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22 (1995) 3–4, pp. 321–341; F. Louveau, *Un prophétisme japonais en Afrique de l'Ouest. Anthropologie religieuse de Sukyo Mahikari (Bénin, Côte d'Ivoire, Sénégal, France)*, Paris: Karthala, 2012.

"sacred art", in his book of revelations (*goseigen*) he asks "all the initiates of the world" to worship at the shrine of Izumo, the one where his mother is said to have prayed to be granted a child. The teachings and rituals are observed identically in all countries of implantation, which leads to a structural and spiritual homogenization. Thus, what we find is not syncretism, but rather the adoption of Mahikari's system of meaning by all the world's followers and without major reinterpretation.

This feature contributes to creating a unique geographical space, especially between Europe and Africa, which converge in one of five existing "regional delegations", along with Asia, North America, Latin America, and Australia. Thus, the links established by Mahikari between Europe and Africa, francophone Africa in particular, revive historical links among the countries created at the time of French colonization. However, in 2009, Ivory Coast inaugurated a larger structure called *Oya dōjō* 親道場, which connects it directly with Japan, whereas it had to pass through France beforehand. This structural reconfiguration has been inherent to the internal development of Mahikari, but it also reflects the process of reconfiguration of Franco-African relations dating from the French colonization of this country, which has experienced an important political and identity crisis since the 1990s, peaking in 2001. The fact remains that in this space all followers are initiated in the same embodied practices underpinned by the same liturgy.

As mentioned above, the founder Sukuinushisama had only one missionary vision: that of implanting Mahikari, from the day after its creation in 1960, in Paris. Implantation in Africa developed from Paris thanks to the southward migration of a few Europeans. During its early years in Paris, Mahikari found followers especially among members of the Asian diaspora, who practised their spirituality in the Japanese restaurants that were emerging there. Soon French people became interested, and a more formalized structure was created in 1971. Among these French people was one initiated woman who followed her husband, a Lebanese man, to Ivory Coast, where he set up a soap factory. She was the principal actor in the establishment of Sukyō Mahikari in Ivory Coast in 1974. Although intending to spend only a year there, in the end she remained for 36 years, serving as the head of the religious organization, which met with astounding success. The Ivorian structure became the hub of all of Africa. In that same year of 1974, a Beninese businessman initiated in Ivory Coast moved to Senegal, where he assembled a group that officially institutionalized Mahikari in 1982 after practising it at home. Since then, followers have rented a house in Dakar, constituting the first "centre of practice". After a few years, the *dōjō*'s success was sufficient to make it the main structure of Senegal, the *jundōjō* of Dakar.

Senegal has a very large majority of Muslims. Islamization took place here during the conquest of northern Senegal by the Almoravids in the eleventh century. This Islam comes from the Sufi branch and is composed of brotherhoods,

the Tijanniyya and Mouridiyya being the two largest. Christianism appeared in the fifteenth century with the arrival of the first Europeans and is stronger in the South of the country. As the Muslim brotherhoods regulate the "religious field",[19] spiritual groups like Mahikari can only integrate into it if they adopt certain strategies.[20] On the other hand, for individualized practices such as *Reiki*, in which the dual relationship between master and client is central, insertion into the spiritual and religious landscape is more a matter of tolerance, ignorance or indifference. While Mahikari, if perceived as a religious institution, risks the wrath of both Catholic and Muslim groups, *Reiki* is very little known. The latter follows the migration of masters able to settle in different countries for a given time, or who initiate lineage successors on the ground. Practised most often in a personal space, it does not have the same visibility as Mahikari, which is registered as a "non-profit association" at the Ministry of the Interior.

In its pyramidal organization, Mahikari has built a network to connect the world. In order to exist, small local groups resulting from gatherings of followers must obtain authorization from the global headquarters in Japan. Established in Takayama, in the Prefecture of Gifu, the Headquarters (*maison-mère*) represents the spiritual and administrative head of all structures throughout the world. The headquarters communicates directly with five major structures called "regional delegations", high offices operating as administrative and spiritual entities and gathering pertinent information. Within these delegations, "leaders" and *doshi* 導士 ("missionaries") of the religious movement circulate to bring specific lessons to the *dōjōs* or to support activities, some of which cannot take place without the leaders' training. "Missionaries" are travelling staff; they circulate from *dōjō* to *dōjō* all over the world, sometimes staying only a few months, strengthening the links between the head of the institution and these branches. They are assigned to a local *dōjō* for a mission of limited duration to ensure that followers respect the original liturgy to the letter. They also "translate" the teachings to fit a given cultural context, in order to encourage membership in challenging environments. The movement of insiders also includes that of persons who migrate or travel with families or for professional reasons and are attached to an on-site *dōjō*.

The social background of the followers of Mahikari has identical characteristics in different countries, which in fact creates a homogenous transnational social community. Mahikari recruits Africans in West African cities who maintain

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19 P. Bourdieu, "Genèse et structure du champ religieux", *Revue française de sociologie* 12 (1971) 3, pp. 295–334.

20 F. Louveau, "Un mouvement religieux japonais au cœur de la pluralisation religieuse africaine: Sukyo Mahikari au Bénin, en Côte d'Ivoire et au Sénégal", *Politique africaine* 123 (2011) 3, pp. 73–93.

their religion of origin, whether Christian or Muslim. Followers are middle-class or even higher. They are mostly civil servants, especially teachers and hospital staff, as well as some elite persons. It is a minority and elitist movement that aims to maintain its "distinction" as a special part of the Senegalese religious landscape. Although it is a minority movement, it is not a marginal one: it shares the same symbolic stakes as other religions, including Protestant churches that have become visible since the 1990s. Throughout the country Mahikari is considered a "sect", a derogatory term that, in Europe, denies any spiritual value and, in Africa, serves to denounce witchcraft practices. The two continents join together to describe Mahikari as a satanic group. Lacking Mahikari's institutional visibility, *Reiki* does not provoke the same denunciations or violence.

Practices between Spirituality and Healing: A Transnational Symbolic Logic

Although Mahikari does not adapt to the local context, it does reconfigure the religious landscape. Indeed, among the Japanese religions that have most successfully travelled to the West, such as Soka Gakkai, the International Zen Association, and Tenrikyo,[21] Mahikari has the peculiarity of having found its niche in the religious landscape of West African countries, including that of healing for the urban middle classes. In developing countries, religion is one of the possible remedies in the case of illness. Thus, the Senegalese population consults the marabouts of Islam or Pentecostal and Evangelical Protestant churches just as they would doctors in a hospital. Mahikari is part of these therapeutic remedies and attracts members from the same social niche as do religious movements of the American New Age. The same is true for *Reiki*: "clients" seek a therapeutic solution and find themselves in a spiritual universe.

The first reason why followers adhere to Mahikari is to find a remedy for their illness even if the practice is primarily spiritual.[22] The leaders are working hard to transform the image of Sukyō Mahikari among African people who see it as a "healing group". Mahikari's explicit goal is to purify human beings in order to form the "Civilization of Yōkō", which will inhabit the paradise that

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21 L. Hourmant, "Les nouveaux mouvements religieux japonais en France entre laïcisation et euphémisation du sacré", *Social Compass* 42 (1995) 2, pp. 147–276.

22 See C. Cornille, "Le dilemme du recours thérapeutique dans une nouvelle religion japonaise", in: F. Lautman and J. Maître (eds.), *Gestions religieuses de la santé*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993, pp. 237–246; F. Louveau, *Un prophétisme japonais en Afrique de l'Ouest. Anthropologie religieuse de Sukyo Mahikari (Bénin, Côte d'Ivoire, Sénégal, France)*, Paris: Karthala, 2012.

will come to earth after the Baptism of Fire 火の洗礼. Note that this aspect of the teachings places it in the category of New Age religious movements. The followers' spiritual activities are focused upon their own purification, so that they may be among the chosen. They are also turned towards purification of the environment, to make possible the advent of paradise. Purification consists of the elimination of spiritual impurities called "toxins" through the *okiyome* ritual, which transmits between two partners the Light of the Su God by the palm of the hand to different places on the body. The Light of the Su God is transmitted at the same time to the environment by way of public spaces, nature, animals, objects, food, etc. This purification by the Light of an individual and the environment conditions the advent of paradise. *Okiyome* is therefore the central ritual of Sukyō Mahikari. It is the followers' main weapon to eliminate spiritual impurities they see as the cause of life's diseases and disorders.

For Mahikari, these impurities are present in the human body for three reasons: 1) the inevitable hardening process of the components of the universe, 2) the ingestion of dyes and toxic products, and 3) negative thoughts (*bad sōnen*). These three principles govern the adepts' view of the world, since the three main causes of the production of impurities concern: 1) the individual's integration into an uncontrollable universal mechanism, 2) modern society, and 3) one's relationship to others. These three principles are easily adopted by the followers in each country and are the key to understanding Africans' shift towards adopting this system of meaning, especially since they are articulated within the logic of witchcraft.

Indeed, according to Mahikari, these spiritual impurities block the proper functioning of the body by accumulating there and thus causing diseases. Diseases are considered the result of an imbalance of the body. This view is very close to the principles of folk medicine as well as to the theory of the mechanical body, which states that the body is balanced around the circulation of moods and that diseases are caused by bad moods that must be eliminated, for example by bleeding. It applies in Africa as well as in the West. These spiritual impurities have two parallel consequences: they are responsible for more or less serious illnesses and they prevent spiritual elevation. Through *okiyome*, the individual can thus rise spiritually and improve his health.

It is for this last benefit that the followers learn Mahikari: they seek a cure for an unexplained illness. This unexplained character of the disease is associated with witchcraft. In other words, after consulting the marabouts, the doctor and the hospital, some Africans go to the *dōjōs* of Mahikari, hoping to be healed. Thus, the processes of healing and of spiritual elevation are closely related. They depend on both the removal of impurities by *okiyome* and the adoption of a new ethic to prevent spiritual impurities from occurring again. Thus, it is

advisable to be benevolent towards one's neighbour, not to create conflicts, to have no bad thoughts and not to incur the wrath of others. The adoption of this new ethic is at the centre of the followers' spiritual work. And the best way to test the quality of the *sōnen*, that is to say, the deep thought, is to train by means of those around you. Relationships with others are scrutinized. For example, a work-out consists of smiling all day, whatever happens, to observe what happens to one's interlocutors. Are they still angry? Do they change their behaviour? Do they become calm?

This experiment is also carried out on plants. Thus, insiders have always grown plants or leafy vegetables to test the effectiveness of light and their *sōnen*. If the plants wither or die in contact with an initiate, it is because the person's level of impurity is high and his or her deep thought is bad. By contrast, as long as the plant remains beautiful and thrives, everything is fine! This explains why the practice of maintaining a garden, *yōkōnoen* 陽光の園, is systematic in the *dōjōs* of Mahikari, even in arid African areas. The garden has a contemplative aim and accompanies spiritual work. The influence of Buddhist meditation and Japanese gardens can be seen here as a medium for meditation. Thus, in all places of worship the followers try to arrange gardens according to their abilities. While in some cases it is only flowers that are cultivated to adorn the altar of the Su God, in others the followers have set up vegetable gardens in the hope of achieving food self-sufficiency. In addition, the initiates train in organic farming, as fertilizers are understood to produce spiritual impurities in the body that the Light cannot entirely eliminate. Finally, the garden has an educational role in raising young people's awareness about ecology.

This global institutional network homogenizes a space in which followers feel they belong to a universal community going beyond local religious quarrels concentrated around theological debates and proselyte competitions. Membership leads, in turn, to a local process of individualization and to a commitment to one's nation.

From Self-Awareness to the Local Creation of a Lifestyle

Support for the Individualization of African Followers

Augustine's example is representative of the way in which Senegalese followers localize the symbolic logic of healing proposed by Mahikari in a process of

individualization.[23] The initiates are led to reflect on their own lives and act on them to build a lifestyle in the light of the teachings. Augustine's illness allows her to focus on herself. Her illness becomes an event whose inner workings must be discovered. Her own illness becomes significant. Also, an analysis of oneself results from taking into account one's personal past, translated through Mahikari's grid of reading: "I came back (to the *dōjō*). And there, I had awareness. I realized that I had had abortions. Yes. Because in the family, there are people who make fetishes, witchcraft, to kill babies. The spirits took my babies." The Teachings say: "When you stop a pregnancy, you stop a process of life. So, in the eyes of God, we killed. If a person makes this big mistake, every time she comes before God, she will have to make up for that mistake."[24] The initially sick person finds an explanation for the harm he has undergone. Its cause is of a spiritual nature related to behaviour inappropriate to the will of the Su God, rather than an infection. Correcting the behaviour and adopting a consistent lifestyle should allow him to regain his health.

The disease leads individuals to conceive of their place in the universe, projecting them into a transnational community. Thus, Augustine explains her current evils as the consequences of actions carried out in the past. In addition, she discovers her place in the universe. Indeed, she finds a place in the ancestral family order, since she learns that she is carrying in her impurities produced by the bad actions of her own ancestors. Moreover, she realizes that her existence is linked to a world she did not know, that of spirits and invisible forces. Adherence to Mahikari therefore involves the followers in an expansion of their space-time. Their individuality is reconnected to an earlier past, a present and a future that put them in touch with elements that go beyond national borders. Through the experience of "manifestations of minds", under the influence of the Light, these characters of the past are manifested through the initiates' body to signify the meaning of their present diseases and misfortunes, anchored locally but deterritorialized. For example, in the *dōjō* of Dakar, a Senegalese follower told me how one day, during a session of *okiyome*, a samurai spoke through him: "I got up and made gestures like a samurai, even though I have never been to Japan. I didn't even know it. I made gestures like in karate, as if I had a huge sword in my hands."[25] Individuals belong to a

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23 Augustine (pseudonym, as for other followers) is a Senegalese woman living in Dakar, Muslim, 39 years old, not married.

24 Interview with the Senegalese leader of the *dōjō* of Dakar, 8 August 2014, Dakar. The leader is a Senegalese Muslim, around 40 years old, married.

25 Interview with Malick, a Mahikari initiate at the *dōjō* of Dakar, 30 July 2006, Dakar. Malick is a Senegalese 40-year-old Muslim, married, a businessman.

deterritorialized transnational spiritual community even though they strongly territorialize Mahikari's practices.

The initiates say that they realize their body must be read as a melting pot of memory. It accumulates the consequences of any action, and none is innocuous: "The problems are due to the present time. We must try not to make mistakes and the present moment is the sum of all we have done more than what our ancestors did. And all that is the result of our life in the present moment."[26] The followers therefore discover that their body contains spiritual impurities which are the reason for their present misfortunes. The teachings of Mahikari reveal to them the means by which they can avoid generating spiritual impurities and thus polluting themselves further:

> [To] harmonize their vibrations with the divine vibrations, it is necessary to have the three virtues of the *yokoshi* (initiated): *kansha* (thanks and the request for forgiveness), *sunao* (adaptability to all the circumstances that God organizes), *geza* (humility of the heart) [. . .]. As soon as you enter the *dōjō*'s door, you're in training, you are learning the three virtues.[27]

Moreover, "we must overcome the two feelings that bother us all the time even when we practice: *ga* (egocentrism) and *manshin* (pride)."[28] On this basis, the follower begins self-observation and works to improve his behaviour: "I have changed a lot since I started. Before, when there was something wrong, I got upset right away. Now, I smile, I thank God and everything is in order."[29] Thus, the initiates become masters of themselves and of their behaviour and participate in some way in their own destiny by controlling their actions, thus gaining power over the course of their own lives.

This work on oneself is part of a search for perfection:

> We should look at the good qualities in others. When someone goes beyond us, we talk about them, especially here in Senegal. They say, did you see how he walks? We criticize him. One should look at the good qualities of others and make them one's own. If you have ten friends, you take a quality from each of them and you try to acquire them; that gives you ten new qualities.[30]

The path to perfection has the ultimate goal of achieving the degree of purity that will allow followers to step out of the wheel of reincarnations and become divine

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26 Interview with the Senegalese leader of the *dōjō* of Dakar, 12 August 2014, Dakar.

27 Interview with the Senegalese leader of the *dōjō* of Dakar, 8 August 2014, Dakar.

28 Interview with the Senegalese leader of the *dōjō* of Dakar, 8 August 2014, Dakar.

29 Interview with Boubacar Diop, a follower of Mahikari at the *dōjō* of Dakar, 22 August 2014, Dakar. Boubacar was a Belgian man (today deceased) living in Senegal, around 50 years old, ambassador of Belgium, converted to Islam, married.

30 Interview with the Senegalese leader of the *dōjō* of Dakar, 8 August 2014, Dakar.

beings. Thus, the initiates make a constant effort in order to divinize themselves. Thanks to Mahikari's teachings and the work that followers strive to do on their own, they reinvest their bodies, become aware of their active individuality, find self-esteem and rebuild an "ego" by putting in order the constituent elements on the one hand, and selecting and integrating the best components on the other.

A "Personal Ability" upon Act on the World

This effort of self-improvement would not have the same meaning if it were not associated with the transmission of the light by the palm of the hand (*okiyome*). Through the ceremony of initiation to the "sacred art" initiates receive a medallion, *omitama*, which is a link between God and Man that alone grants the power of purification. Through *omitama*, everything is purified: human beings, food, animals, houses, cars, nature. Collective purifications are organized to cleanse the surroundings of a city or the apartment of an initiate going through a difficult ordeal, for example. Many stories relate the "experiments" that adepts live through in the practice of their "art", stories that are often used as objective evidence against the scepticism of their interlocutors. The initiates, by wearing this medallion and cultivating behaviour in accordance with the Teachings, thus discover a real power that differentiates them from others: "God gave us this power, this art to help others. People must think to themselves that these people are different, they are not like the others."[31] This power is used for an exclusively altruistic purpose, since the initiates have the mission to prepare humanity for the advent of the Great Purification of the twenty-first century that will be fatal to those who are not ready. Thus, their individual body is revalorized, put in order, and transcended in order to be able to become a power to help others.

This power is associated with an awareness of one's personal spirituality and a need to emancipate oneself from the institutional tutelage of religions by dispensing with any kind of clergy. Aïssatou, who belongs to the Muslim brotherhood named Tijaniyya,[32] explains that the marabouts

> are not good, because they are intermediaries between humans and God. People entrust everything to the marabouts. They are relying on them. They are completely disempowered, while they should get closer to God.

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31 Interview with the Senegalese leader of the *dōjō* of Dakar, 12 August 2014, Dakar.
32 Aïssatou is a Senegalese woman, 37 years old, not married. Her father has great responsibilities within the Tijaniyya brotherhood.

Mahikari aims to teach the initiates to become independent, to take responsibility and to establish a direct link with the Su God. Also, such an initiate will say that in Mahikari, "We understand that we become our own marabout."[33] The individual takes all his strength here. He can be alone before God and has the power to act.

Similarly, the practice of Mahikari gives followers the power to appropriate their own national history through the imagination of places via the prism of the teachings. During a car trip to the reforestation camp (*shurenkai* 修練会) in the vicinity of the city of Saint-Louis, Moussa[34] became a road hog, nearly causing an accident several times. Adja explains his dangerous behaviour in terms of the intervention of the spirit world of the slave trade era:

> He (the driver) was disturbed by spirits who did not want us to go to Saint-Louis. The spirit world in this town is very oppressive. This is to be expected, given what happened there. Saint-Louis was a place of slavery. This was an important point for the slave trade. There are plenty of spirits of spite, lots of them. It is not a welcoming city. We feel in the atmosphere that there is something. The spirit world is very oppressive. That's why. Whenever a *yokoshi* wants to go to Saint-Louis, it's quite a problem.[35]

Every event has a cause and finds its place in a local historical context. The adepts can participate, thanks to their power of purification, in a repairing of local historical events in which they take full part, since they are related to the ancestors who directly experienced these events. We can say that they still live past history, their national history. Thus, they reclaim and assume the consequences of key events in African history.

Building of the Nation and the Relationship with the State

Design of a Triple Nation

The followers are part of a transnational community but are fully rooted in the local and commit themselves to improving the living conditions of their fellow

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33 Interview with Mustapha, an initiate of the *dōjō* of Dakar, 10 August 2014, Dakar. Mustapha is Senegalese, around 40 years old, Muslim, married, a civil servant.

34 Moussa is Senegalese, around 30 years old, Muslim, not married, a civil servant.

35 Interview with Adja, an initiate of the *dōjō* of Dakar, 10 August 2016, Dakar. Adja is Senegalese, 21 years old, a schoolgirl, not married.

citizens. Like African Pentecostalism and the Afro-Brazilian cults[36] that convey an imaginary of the Nation oriented to their origins, initiates of Mahikari, being on the spot, concretize this imaginary of restoration of the Nation by indulging in criticism of the public action local, and launching a citizen action guided by the teachings. For them, the weak State abandons its citizens, even though it would have the means to contribute to the country's development if its leaders did not monopolize public resources. Criticizing leaders' corruption and the weakness of the State, the followers seek to address the problem on their own level, even if they say they are apolitical. First, they work towards the moralization of the State through work on themselves, enabling them to become examples for society and leaders. Thus, by appropriating and integrating the ethics and values of the Japanese religious movement for themselves, they hope to influence others to adopt healthier and more moral behaviour. This ethics boils down to three concepts: *sunao* 素直, *kansha* 感謝, *geza* 下座 (submission, recognition, humility). Without frenzied proselytism, without preaching, without any demonstration of strength except for the passive one of the transmission of the Light, the adepts apply these precepts to define new relationships with others. In this way, relationships within society will only be improved by way of a virtuous "snowball effect" at the level of citizens as well as leaders. Proselytism is also strongly oriented towards this audience. Criticism of the State is accompanied by a critique of its European heritage, and the followers replace the model of European development by one that combines imaginations of Asia, Africa, and Europe. This marriage between the three continents represents for the adepts the optimal road to development. Asia, and in particular Japan, is seen as having managed to reconcile both modernity and spirituality, whereas Europeans are said to have given up spirituality for a life of material goods, and Africans are thought to have abandoned the material in favour of fetishes.[37]

Rehabilitation of the National Environment

The followers participate in the cleansing of the public space. Through these activities they implement a development model based on selected qualities of the

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36 Capone and Argyriadis, "Adaptations et réappropriations dans la religion des orisha", pp. 9–44.

37 This logic was also that of Ivorian prophets, notably the prophet Harris, who, a century ago, passed through numerous villages in order to burn the fetishes and convert the populations. See J.P. Dozon, *La cause des prophètes: Politique et religion en Afrique contemporaine, suivi de La leçon des prophètes par Marc Augé*, Paris: Seuil, 1995.

three continents. Spiritual impurities that attract sorcerers also attract vengeful spirits and discontented ancestors at crossroads, which could cause accidents. The followers purify public spaces with the Light in order to chase away spirits. But also, they physically clean the streets of waste in order to palliate the failures of the State regarding the sanitation of its spaces and collective resources.

In the same vein, the followers engage in reforestation in order to protect and restore the environment. In Senegal, Mahikari operates on the same level as NGOs, carrying out reforestation in the Great Pan-African project of the Great Green Wall. In addition to their day-to-day activities, they occasionally participate in larger-scale undertakings called *shurenkai*-gatherings of many young people working for the common good. Mahikari specializes in environmental protection work. The growth of environmental awareness in Europe since the 1990s is reflected in Africa, and the globalization of Mahikari's teachings is leading to a homogenization of practices. In the beginning, Mahikari's followers engaged in amateur reforestation, saying they had identified a village or neighbourhood that they felt needed greenery. The youngsters deployed to plant trees at locations chosen according to their own criteria during the day with the idea that such planting could only be beneficial. But at night, the inhabitants of the neighbourhood came to uproot the plants, annihilating the work provided by the young people. Today, however, Mahikari is recognized as an official actor in the construction of the Great Green Wall, a major pan-African project to combat desertification, and receives awards of excellence from African heads of state.

In the same concern to rehabilitate the local natural environment, the followers of the Dakar *dōjō* were entrusted by the city with a parcel of land in the Hann forest park, located about five kilometres north of the city centre:

> Seeing the activity of the young people, the director said, my goodness, I would like to give you a plot; it is the botanical square, and you will take care of it. This is Sukyō Mahikari, you will make it your business and I would like the botanical square to be revived, because it has existed throughout time and now it has fallen into neglect. There are labels with the scientific names of the trees to be placed at the foot of each tree and we will put the trees back in place. It was agreed upon and the result corresponded exactly to what was proposed.[38]

This is the third year in a row that Mahikari followers have been working every month on the development of this plot, and the results are remarkable:

> So, at first, the garden was abandoned; really, it had fallen completely. [. . .] And then, the park became green. [. . .] Even if it is not as beautiful as a park in Europe, it is quite different from Dakar. Then we worked on the greenery, we renewed the tags, and

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38 Interview with the leader of Mahikari's *dōjō* of Dakar, 14 July 2015, Dakar.

afterwards we re-painted all that needed to be painted. We got rid of piles of garbage. We tidied up, and then the botanical square had become a dense forest. We pruned. We removed everything. Now it is well pruned and there will be a closely followed maintenance program.[39]

Thus, Mahikari allows humans to become aware of their power over nature and the development of their own environment or even their country.

Other reforestation activities include the replanting of trees in nature reserves. For example, Mahikari has reached an agreement with the director of Gumble Nature Park, which buys the cuttings that the adherents replant. But the idea is even more ambitious, since the leader involves the villagers in these activities in order to teach them notions of conservation. Thus, when the guardianship disappears, the inhabitants will become autonomous masters of nature: "The goal is to sensitize the villagers to reforestation. They participate now. They learn and then we let them do it alone. The goal is to take charge of their environment. Mahikari gives the impetus. It's a motor, in a way. Then they must be able to fend for themselves." Thus, Mahikari, as an actor for development, sensitizes and trains young adults in the country to protect and restore nature as a contribution to local development. This programme aims to revitalize Africa in the eyes of young people, in order to make them lose the desire to migrate. Their investment in the environment and local development is a way to help anchor local insiders.

Conclusion

The ethnography of Mahikari allows us to think of the process of transnationalization as containing a simultaneous double movement: a deterritorialization and a reterritorialization. In other words, the initiates belong to a transnational spiritual community controlled by the pyramidal structure of the Organization. The practices and liturgies are the same all over the world, and regular transnational spiritual meetings (monthly ceremonies of thanks to Su God, the birthday of the founder, etc.) connect African adherents with the whole world, something that is reinforced by a team of missionaries circulating in local groups to homogenize the practices. This institutional arrangement leads to the creation of a homogeneous spiritual space between Africa and Asia.

At the same time, the transnational spiritual experience is conditioned by the fact that, for local initiates to adhere, the "reading grid" must be meaningful to them. What we call "reading grid" is the framework of the spiritual

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39 Interview with the leader of the *dōjō* of Dakar, 6 May 2001, Dakar.

teachings of Mahikari shared by each initiate. In other words, it is the simplest form of the system of thought of Mahikari, a diffuse form so light that it can be applied in all cultural contexts and can lead to an understanding of both global and local situations. This transnational grid has a dual dynamic. First, it enables an analysis of Senegalese concerns both at the level of disease and at that of the need to individualize in a society where Senegalese experience permanent pressure (from their family, entourage, and religious authorities). The initiates then find in Mahikari a force, a power, allowing them to free themselves from their spiritual chains, or at least to take a step back. As we have seen, Mahikari speaks in particular to public servants and office-holders. Then, the Mahikari "reading grid" brings meaning to the experience of local initiates while operating an extension of their usual space-time by connecting them to both ancestors from African worlds and aspects from other nations, often from distant ages. The individual dimension is then widened between a past, a present, and a future transcending the temporal limits of life on this earth, and also transcending national borders.

The appropriation of Mahikari's system of meaning in Africa gives rise to the creation of a new development model that challenges the old European model and supports active participation in the development of African countries. This involves building individuals' capabilities by protecting them from witchcraft and social ills that are experienced as obstacles to development, and by training them to reconcile development and spirituality, a capability which they imagine to be the secret of power of Asia. Thus, Mahikari plunges the initiates into a space between Africa and Asia in which their existential, social, political, and environmental stakes have become significant thanks to the same system of meaning as one finds in Japan.