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L'actualité des pays du Sud, comme celle du Nord, confirme chaque jour que le facteur religieux ne cesse de bousculer les grilles de lecture politique et économique, tout en occupant une place essentielle dans l'espace public et sur la scène internationale. Prolongeant la mémoire d'une histoire missionnaire qui éclaire le présent des sociétés actuelles, la collection *Religions contemporaines* veut donner plus de visibilité aux diverses recherches de sciences sociales qui portent sur les dynamiques religieuses du monde contemporain.

La renaissance des cultes traditionnels au cœur de la modernité urbaine, autant que les réveils religieux de l'islam ou du christianisme, de même que les échanges religieux transnationaux ont contribué à faire émerger une situation inédite de relation contemporaine entre toutes les formes de religiosité.

Chrétiens africains en Europe
Prophétismes, pentecôtismes & politique des nations

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Kongo and Lisbon

The dialectics of 'centre' and 'periphery'
in the Kimbanguist Church

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As a prophetic, grass-root religious movement, Kimbanguism was initiated by a Mukongo Baptist catechist and prophet, Simon Kimbangu (1887-1951) when he performed a first miracle on 6 April 1921 in his native village of N’kamba, then but a tiny hamlet in the south of Belgium Congo. Because in colonial and immediately postcolonial times it was thoroughly studied by scholars such as George Balandier (1955), Wyatt MacGaffey (1983), or Susan Asch (1983), Kimbanguism is often used by scholars of African religion as the paradigmatic example among the thousands of religious movements that were born in what Balandier characterized as “the colonial situation”. Today, much more than a religious movement, the Kimbanguist Church is a thriving institution

1. Kimbanguism present itself as being the ultimate realization of a prophetic chain initiated in the ancient Kingdom of Congo in the seventeenth century, if not before. The first recorded Christian-oriented prophetic activity in the region of Kongo dates back to 1632, in the figure of Francisco Kassola (or Cassola), followed in 1704 by the prophetess Macuta or Matuta, also called Fumaria or Apollonia. Among all these prophetic figures, the most widely well-known and relevant to Kimbanguists (who assert she announced Kimbangu) was Kimpa Vita or Dona Beatrice, whose activities spanned between 1704 and 1706.

2. Balandier (1955, 1967); for a thorough review of prophetic movements see Barrett (1966); for Kimbanguism in colonial context, see Mélice (2010). After two long decades of an almost total lack of publications following the seminal works of MacGaffey and Asch just mentioned, the literature on Kimbanguism (and its diasporas) by social scientists has experienced, with the birth of the new millennium, a fresh rejuvenation.
with a worldwide dimension, whose numbers are difficult to establish, but are no doubt around the figures of several millions.

Kimbanguists live mostly in the three countries in which the movement expanded in colonial times, i.e., the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo and Angola, but there are Kimbanguists parishes in several other countries in Africa (Burundi, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Gabon, Kenya, Rwanda, Madagascar, Nigeria, Central African Republic, Senegal, and Zambia), Europe (Germany, England, Belgium, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland), America (United States, Canada, Brazil), Australia and China. When asked about the number of followers, until a few years ago members of the Church would always indicate the figure of 17 millions. Today most Kimbanguists admit that this figure may be inaccurate. We have been told that a new census is currently under preparation.

Kimbanguism offers a good example that transnational religions must be studied using an approach that allows us to knit together what happens in Africa and what happens in the diaspora. Using this dual analysis, in this article we discuss some links between the diaspora and the “centre,” with the particular objective to show how the diaspora feeds back and reinforces the centre in Africa.

In today’s spiritual landscape of Africa, Kimbanguism is in sharp contrast with other African understandings of Christianity, most notably that of Neo-Pentecostal Churches that are experiencing a boom in Africa and in African studies (Meyer 1998; Fancello 2006; Kalu 2008; Marshall 2009). Much like these churches, Kimbanguism operates under the general understanding that we are living in the “age of the Spirit,” but the relationship between humans and the Holy Spirit is radically different to that of Pentecostalism. For Kimbanguists, the Holy Spirit (the Paraclet promised by Jesus to his followers, as recorded in the Gospel of St John) was first incarnated in Simon Kimbangu, and subsequently reincarnated twice: first in Kimbangu’s youngest son Joseph Diangienda (1918-1992), and later in Simon Kimbangu Kiangani (b. 1951), the oldest of Kimbangu’s grandchildren, who is today the Spiritual Leader of the Church, being based in the Holy City of N’kamba-Nouvelle Jerusalem (see Mélise, 2009a).

The identification between Simon Kimbangu and the Holy Spirit is very old; it seems that it could be as old as 1921, and can certainly be traced in colonial documentation (e.g. Raymaekers 1971: 35). In the 1950s Kimbanguist catechist texts stated that Kimbangu “lived with God since the beginning” and identified him with the Paraclet promised by Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John (Sinda 1972: 145-146). Because of the inclusion of the Kimbanguist Church in the World Council of Churches in 1969, which obliged them to downplay the identification between Kimbangu and the Holy Spirit, Kimbanguists developed what Asch (1983: 290) called a dual discourse: while officially they would not make the explicit identification between Kimbangu and the Holy Spirit, at a popular level the identification was still valid (Wainwright 1971; Droogers 1980; Molyneux 1990).

The official identification of the Holy Spirit with Kimbangu re-emerged openly again in the 1990s, taking advantage of the change of name of the Church in 1989: the Church, which up to that time had been called “Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu” became the “Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through his Special Envoy Simon Kimbangu.” The Kikongo concept of ngunza (“prophet”) was found inadequate to refer to Kimbangu and replaced by that of ntumua (“special envoy”), and as such he was identified with the Paraclet promised by Jesus. At the time, it seems, there was even the project of naming it “Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by the Holy Spirit Simon Kimbangu,” but this denomination was not approved by the then Spiritual Leader Joseph Diangienda. Finally, this identification became official and fully assumed in August 2001, following the funeral of Salomon Dialungana (the last of Kimbangu’s children to pass away) and the transfer of office from him onto Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, the oldest grandson of Kimbangu. On 22 August 2001, the new Spiritual Leader openly proclaimed in N’kamba, in front of tens of thousands of followers: “Go tell the world that Simon Kimbangu is the Holy Spirit.” Ever since then, Kimbanguists are very proud to acknowledge their belief that Kimbangu is the Holy Spirit, no matter the difficulties this may create for them inside the World Council of Churches (see Mélise 2009a).

The historical consciousness in Kimbanguism is explicitly based on continuity and reassessment of historical events, including a

3. Interview of Anne Mélise with Lunitadila, then General Secretary of the Church, 1997.
reassessment of the meaning of "Africaness." This could also be interpreted as a contrast with Neo-Pentecostal churches, often based on explicit "breaks" with the past, as has been argued by several scholars (Meyer 1998, Marshall 2009). However, this contrast is more heuristic than real, as both Neo-Pentecostal and Prophetic movements, no matter what their theology explicitly states, are breaking and bridging between past and present (and, indeed, future) in complex and entangled ways. In many ways, some of which will be analysed in this article, Kimbanguism can be interpreted as offering a reversal or a correction of a wrong and problematic understanding of Christianity brought to Central Africa by White intruders since the day of the early Portuguese in the fifteenth century. Historical awareness and knowledge of past events (both Biblical events and those related to Kongo history) are for Kimbanguists very important. Ever since Simon Kimbangu prophetically announced in 1921 that "Blacks shall be Whites and Whites shall be Blacks" (maybe his most well-known prophecy the topic of reversal and correction has been a prominent one in Kimbanguist theology and eschatology.

The establishment of the Kingdom of God, identified with a return to pure origins (and therefore to an image of an uncorrupted Africa), is not just a question of "waiting": it also requires a certain amount of corrective human action. The most important of these actions took place in 1992. That year, the then Spiritual Leader of the Church (Joseph Diangienda) instructed Kimbanguists all over the world to perform a solemn ceremony of "Pardon for the Sin of Adam and Eve." The idea underneath the ceremony was that since Adam and Eve had been Africans (something Kimbanguists know both by revelation and by the recent discoveries of paleo-anthropology), it was up to Africans to ask God to forgive the original sin. This forgiveness, which God granted, meant the victory over the devil and paved the way towards the installation of the Kingdom of God on earth (Mélie 2001).

4. The topic of temporal continuity and rupture is a major concern in the current anthropology of Christianity. Robbins (2007), Engkelke (2004, 2010), and André Mary (2008) distance themselves from strict "rupturist" views. Although the contrast, and even competition, between Kimbanguism and Neo-Pentecostalism is explicit and often stressed by our Kimbanguist interlocutors (especially those living in Africa), we must take into account that the two religious cultures coexist (and have coexisted for a long time) and that osmoses between them are more than likely to occur.

This, in turn, increased the interest of Kimbanguists in their African roots and in the spiritual and material consolidation of N'kamba, the place where everything (humanity as well as Kimbanguism) started and where everything will finish. We could analyze the Kimbanguist doctrine as a form of intellectual bricolage ("tinkering") in the sense put forth by Lévi-Strauss (1962) and later developed, in the context of African Christianity, by André Mary, in which an origin otherwise irrecoverable is always reactivated and a fallen authenticity constantly rediscovered. As French philosopher François Lyotard suggested, "Eschatology demands archaeology. This circle, which is also the hermeneutic circle, characterizes historicity as the modern imaginary of time" (Lyotard 1993: 91; our translation). It is also within this eschatological and hermeneutical circle, as we shall see, that the relationship between the centre (N'kamba) and the periphery (Portugal and the diaspora in general) must be studied today.

The Kimbanguist Frontier

Despite its diasporic dispersion, therefore, Kimbanguism remains (and in many ways becomes more and more) attached to the African continent, and to N'kamba in particular. In fact, it would be very difficult to separate Kimbanguism from the history of the Bakongo people and region where it was born. There is in the Church an undoubtedly universalistic discourse (it is a Christian Church and it is perceived by its followers as the hope for the entire humanity, not only for individuals of a particular ethnic group), but there is also

5. In a series of articles and debates with other colleagues (see Hervieu-Léger, 2009), André Mary has given a new thrust to the discussion on bricolage in the making of religious cultures, started not only by Lévi-Strauss (1962) but also, most directly linked to religion, by Roger Bastide (1970). Mary (2000, 2001, 2005a) has developed a paradigm of bricolage and has shown how this concept must be distinguished from other concepts such as hybridity or métissage. Since Kimbanguist reinterpretations of external religious elements are explicitly pre-constrained by the genealogical schema, their current theology, even it might look as a capricious "mixture" to external observers (bringing together Fatima, Jesus, Mama Mwili, Simon Kimbangu's family, Kongo history, etc), would be, in the strict sense, an instance of bricolage and certainly not of a post-modernbris-collage. For a further analysis of the concept of bricolage in Lévi-Strauss and Mary see Mélie (2009b).
of equilibrium on which universal harmony lies. Joseph Diangienda, who led the Church from 1958 to 1992, had prophesied: “Everything starts from the three countries.” The current Spiritual Leader, Simon Kimbangu Kianganzi, keeps saying that “these three countries must be united.” This triadic model is illuminated by the Kongo proverb matatu makukwa malamb’e kongo, which refers to the three legs of the traditional cooking pot used by the Bakongo, a symbol that expresses how balance is achieved through the use of the three legs. The triad is also referred to as a body whose head would be Angola, its belly the Democratic Republic of Congo and its legs the Republic of Congo. As illustrated in Figure 8, for instance, three empty seats, theoretically to be occupied by the three Presidents of Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo (the three countries referred to as the “three Kongos”), are present in all big ceremonies in the temple of N’kamba, reminding the importance of the imaginary “three Kongos” for the Church and, thus, of the persistence of a pre-colonial unified territory in their geographical representations and in their eschatological hopes of recreation. Together with these three seats, another huge symbol of this founding triad in N’kamba is the Mintinu house (also known as “the Residence of Kings”), a three-story huge house built in 1987. Diangienda had it built so that the Church could one day host the presidents of the three countries (each one living in a separate floor). The Church generally summons three Kimbanguists from, respectively, these three countries to perform the prayers at important events. This needs to keep the “three Kongos” united, which has an essentially eschatological dimension, shows the ethnic base of the universal harmony and, thus, the tension between centripetal ethnizizing discourses and centrifugal universal ones discussed in this paper.

We would like to insist that in order to understand Kimbanguist eschatology, political theology, and the way the Church today connects itself with pronouncements made by Simon Kimbangu, one should very carefully analyse the persistence of cultural roots in the Church and the theological and political symbolism Kimbanguists give to pervasive notions such as that of the “Three Kongos” so important in their liturgy, symbolism and eschatological pronouncements. The two trends (a centripetal “ethnicist” one and a centrifugal “universalist” one) happen simultaneously, and they must therefore be taken into

account simultaneously. Nina Glick-Schiller and her collaborators (Glick-Schiller et al. 2006) tell us we must go “beyond the ethnic lens” when studying African migrant groups and churches, a point similar to that argued by Gerrie Ter Haar (1998). No doubt this strategy may be fruitful at times, but in our opinion different lenses must be used for different levels of analysis. Rather than throwing away a particular lens, a scientist must leave the lens at hand, as it may be needed at any expected point.

“Ethnicity” is in any case a misleading analytical category to use in this context because many Western social thinkers tend to consider only the exclusivist aspect of ethnicity. Yet in African modes of thought ethnicity can also be an encompassing category; thus, for instance, the Bagas of West Africa use the concept of wubaka (lit. “Baga person”) sometimes to refer to people born in the specific region where these farmers inhabit, but sometimes to refer to human beings in general, irrespective of where they live and even of what colour their skins are (Sarró 2005). As some anthropologist have suggested (Fardon 1987), before establishing what someone means by using an ethnic category (be it Wubaka or Mukongo) we should try to grasp what that category means “from the native point of view,” what ontologies and cosmologies it is based upon. We should restrain ourselves of accusing the Kimbangquist of being “ethnivist” when they are tapping the Kongo cultural reservoir to explain the roots and meanings of their Church. As anthropologists, what we ought to be doing instead would be to try and grasp what they mean by “Kongo” and “Mukongo” and how these – and many other – concepts define a theological and eschatological field in their religious imagination.

Rather than “ethnicity,” therefore, we would like to invoke another analytical category often used in Africanist scholarship to discuss the reproduction of social groups: that of “frontier” (an encompassing notion, not to be confused with that of “border”) as put for by, first, Jack Goody (1977) and, later but most famously, by Igor Kopytoff (1987). According to these authors, in traditional African political culture, social groups are not so much closed in “boundaries” but opened up towards unexplored “frontiers.” For Jack Goody, these frontiers are in a constant “ebb-and-flow”: sometimes incorporating, sometimes excluding neighbouring groups. Using Frederick Turner’s notion of “frontier” (Turner 1921), Igor Kopytoff has elaborated a complex model to explain the reproduction of African societies. For an established society, with a political centre and an undomesticated periphery (the “frontier” in American parlance), the periphery has the potential to reproduce the setting of the origin (good hunting, new land for either agriculture or herding, new places where to start a village, etc.). From time to time some individuals from the centre are centrifugally thrown away to the frontier, structurally excluded from their own society (because of fissions of lineages, accusations of witchcraft, lack of resources, etc.), and they create a new polity, more or less similar to that of the centre where they came from, in this new setting: they are “frontiersmen” in the American sense of the word. In his very influential book, Kopytoff and his followers offer several examples of how African societies are reproduced in their frontiers. More recently, but still following Kopytoff’s model, Wilson Trajano-Filho (2009) has gone a step forward and has showed a very interesting double phenomenon. Where there is no unexplored periphery to domesticate (as is the case in Cape Verde islands, bounded by the sea) people are thrown away not to the territorial frontier but to diasporic destinies (in this case, Europe and the U.S.) where, much as any other frontiersmen all over the world, they tend to reproduce their original societies, but with strong limitations imposed by their Euro-American hosts (who do not let them reproduce Cape Verdian communities but rather force them to “integrate” into mainstream society). The diaspora does then not reproduce Cape Verdian communities centrifugally, towards new diasporas, but centripetally, towards the centre. The original communities in the islands, where migrants came from, become reinforced and – as Trajano-Filho shows very well – retreaditionalized thanks to the money and to the cultural activities organized in the villages by the migrants living abroad, who engage in quasi-Potlatch festivals and competitions in their origin villages.

This transformation of the original “centre” into a new frontier to be explored and “re-civilized” by its own diaspora, that Trajano-Filho explores in Cape Verde, is similar to what we find among the Kimbangquist Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo and its diasporas. We observe in Kimbanguism an ebb-and-flow movement similar to the one described by Goody to describe the fluctuations of the Mamprusi frontiers in Northern Ghana (Goody 1977) and a feedback of diasporas over centre similar to that described by Trajano-Filho in
Cape Verdean communities. Over the last decades, Kimbanguism has been spreading centrifugally to the world. As said before, today we find Kimbanguist parishes in several European and American countries, in Australia and in China too. Yet, this centrifugal moment seems to have come to a halt and even started to reverse. Kimbanguists insist that their Church is “the hope of the world” and that in the future the entire world will be Kimbanguist. Yet, missionary discourses and practices seem to be less present in their discourse, practices and eschatological beliefs than a worry about the centre, about the city of N’kamba, which they are trying by all means to reinforce and legitimate. In sharp contrast to the centrifugalities of diasporas, member of the Church are now being instructed to adopt a more centripetal ethos: to look towards N’kamba, to construct N’kamba, to go as often as they can to N’kamba, and to spiritually and economically prepare for a (real or eschatological) future in which all Kimbanguists will be living in N’kamba. This tension between centrifugal and centripetal tendencies was very visible one year and a half ago, as Kimbanguists in Europe started to prepare Christmas, a religious festivity they celebrate every year on 25 May.

Portugal: from margin to centre

On 25 May 2009, Simon Kimbangu Kiangani (born in 1951), grandson of the prophet Simon Kimbangu and Spiritual Chief of the Kimbanguist Church since 2001, was expected in Lisbon. His arrival from N’kamba, the Holy City of Kimbanguism, was announced to the entire Kimbanguist community of Europe. On 17 May, the Sunday before, one of the authors of this paper attended the Kimbanguist service in a parish of Paris. A theologian from the University Simon Kimbangu of Kinshasa was there and announced that ten people from The Democratic Republic of Congo, ten people from The Republic of Congo, and ten people from Angola (the “Three Kongos,” as it is normally said within the Church) had been selected to accompany Simon Kimbangu Kiangani in his first travel ever to Europe.

A few months before that, in January 2009, Simon Kimbangu Kiangani hold a conversation on the phone with the Pastors of the Kimbanguist Church of Lisbon. In this conversation he agreed to be there on 25 May, but corrected: “it is not Simon Kimbangu who is coming to Lisbon; it is the Kongo that is coming to Lisbon,” meaning - among other things - that he could not come on his own, but had to come with a delegation consisting of some thirty people from “the three Kongos,” a very powerful concept within the Church, as has been previously argued.

Why was Simon Kimbangu Kiangani expected in Lisbon? This needs some background. The Kimbanguist community in Lisbon is a tiny group, composed of some 50-60 individuals, most of whom live in poor neighborhoods of the Metropolitan Area of Greater Lisbon. They all have their origins in either Northern Angola or Southern Democratic Republic of Congo, although some young members have been born in Portugal. The oldest members are in their late forties or early fifties, and many of them were born in Congo-Kinshasa because their parents were fleeing the war in Angola. They keep very strong links with other Kimbanguist communities in Europe and in Africa, particularly Congo-Kinshasa and Angóa. It is a poor community, and today many men are out of work, while women keep on working (mainly on house cleaning). Despite many of them being unemployed and being a poor community in general, Kimbanguists are in a privileged situation vis-à-vis other Kimbanguist communities in Europe because, unlike many others who have to rent their praying place, they obtained from the town council their own church, situated in the small neighborhood of Quinta da Fonte, an often problematic and very poor neighborhood in the Metropolitan Area of Greater Lisbon where their church is located and where many of them also live.

In September 2008 Kimbanguists became well known to Portuguese public because they intervened in many peacemaking activities after the eruption of a violent and racial conflict in Quinta da Fonte, originally drug-related but which led to an explicit ethnic violence between

7. Up until 1996 the Kimbanguists were living in the even poorer shantytown of Prior Velho (in the municipality of Loures), which was demolished in 1996, when the construction of the new bridge over the river Tagus started. Then they were reallocated in Quinta da Fonte, in a housing project expressly built for this reallocation programme. In the negotiations with the Council of Loures the Kimbanguists managed to present themselves as a religious community (which they were, but with no temple of their own in Prior Velho) and they obtained their own praying space, together with some apartments in which to live. Strictly speaking the space is not theirs, as it belongs to the Council, but they do not have to pay any rent for it, or share it with anybody else.
Ciganos (as Roma citizens are called in Portugal) and West Africans (mostly from Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde). Because they acted as mediators in such a complex and violent race-and-drugs related conflict, in October 2008 the local Government invited the Kimbanguist Church to join in a pilot programme, put forth by the Ministry of the Interior, called the "Local Contract of Security" (a contract signed by the State on the one hand and local partners on the other; the latter included associations, schools, some Christian Churches, a Muslim community and local councils). Once they entered into this contract partnership, the Kimbanguists were invited to organize several events to promote good neighborhood. Among other events, they told the authorities they would like to celebrate a Christmas party on 25 May 2009. According to the Kimbanguists, Jesus birth did not take place on 25 December, but rather on 25 May, which is the birthday of Salomon Dialungana Kiangani, the second son of Kimbangu, identified with Jesus Christ.

The belief in Christ's incarnation in the person of Salomon Dialungana was reactivated in 1998 when Dialungana himself, upon celebrating his birthday, started to sing: "Christmas, Christmas." The excitement was such that a general assembly of the Church met in April 1999 and decided to permanently alter the date of Christmas from December 25 to May 25. In 1998, a book was published arguing that the Christian calendar has been severely corrupted and that the historical Jesus had also been born on 25 of May (Kambonako Dimbote 1998). Kimbanguists report that in April 2000 (10 or 13 April, depending on the version), Dialungana said: "If someone asks you who the Christ the world has long been looking for is, tell them it is me. I am back. You can now announce it to the world."

The belief that Salomon Dialungana (Simon Kimbangu's second son, who was the Spiritual Leader of the Church from 1992 to his death in 2001) was a reincarnation of Jesus Christ was in fact much older; one of the authors of this paper (Mélice) was familiar with it since 1996, and it is probably older than that, since it was already insinuated in a Kimbanguist hymn known since 1989 and entitled "Christ in N'kamba." But the mystery of the apparition of the Virgin Mary in Fatima has always been very important for this belief, and therefore its proclamation in Portugal, where the apparition took place in 1917, has been very important to establish it as dogma of the Church. Kimbanguists claim that one of the mysteries declared by Our Lady of Fatima in 1917 and kept secret by the Vatican was that Jesus Christ had been born "in the North of Angola" (Salomon Dialungana had just been born on 25 May 1916 in N'kamba, which is just on the other side of the border with Angola).

The Government accepted the proposal (although they also asked the Kimbanguists to organize the usual Christmas party in December, which they did) and they let the Kimbanguists celebrate Christmas on the 25 May. They even promised they would secure logistical (and to a small degree, financial) help for the organization, which they did. At first, a very beautiful cottage was selected to be allocated for Simon Kimbangu Kiangiani and his delegation during their visit to Lisbon, but eventually that possibility faded away (as the cottage belonged to the district of Odivelas, and Odivelas was not a partner of the Local Contract of Security). It was then agreed that he would be staying at a Hotel, covered by the local administration of Loures (the area to which Quinta da Fonte belongs).

We mention the cottage and the problems linked to it to testify how serious everybody was about the visit and its preparation. Already in December 2008 news started to spread throughout Europe that the Kimbanguists of Lisbon were to celebrate a big Christmas ceremony on 25 May 2009, and that Simon Kimbangu Kiangiani himself was going to be there too. For several months we could feel the excitement mounting among our Kimbanguist friends in Lisbon, Brussels, and in other European capitals we visited in that period. The Kimbanguists of Lisbon had prepared everything, but at the very last minute the Church cancelled the proposed trip and neither Simon Kimbangu Kiangiani nor anybody else from N'kamba came to Lisbon. This, however, did not deter a huge number of Kimbanguists from all over Europe from coming to Lisbon and gather with other Kimbanguists. Many came because they thought Simon Kimbangu Kiangiani would be here, others came even if they knew he would not be in Lisbon, but

8 See Dossier: Le Mystère de Fatima, s.l.n.d.; "Les véritables secrets...", s.l.n.d. The document was collected by one of the authors (Mélice) in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1996. An anterior book written by a Tokoist (Melo 2001) also claims that the secret of Fatima was that Jesus was African (for this and other cases of "African Jesus", see Mary 2008: 13, 24). It is difficult to know whether Melo had been influenced by Kimbanguist notions, but borrowings and cross-overs between Kimbanguism and Tokoism, two movements with very close histories, are not uncommon (cf. Sarró and Blanes, 2009).
they had already organized their travel arrangements and they knew that in any case, with or without Simon Kimbangu Kianganji, there would be a huge concentration of Kimbanguists in Lisbon. When, on Friday 22, they heard that Simon Kimbangu Kianganji was not going to be present in Lisbon, some people from other European parishes felt discouraged to travel and thought about canceling their participation, but the Spiritual Leader himself instructed all European Kimbanguists in no uncertain terms to go and celebrate Christmas in Lisbon, even if he was not going to be there in person.

Why did Simon Kimbangu Kianganji not travel to Lisbon? Explanations differed. Some people told us that he (or members of his delegation) had not been able to get a visa in Kinshasa to enter Portugal. Others told us he did not want to abandon the city of N’Kamba in these days of internal crisis of the Church when the Church in Africa was strongly divided along two wings with very different understandings on chieftainship: those who were truthful to Simon Kimbangu Kianganji and those who were not. The crisis we are referring to, not dissimilar to other crises around genealogies of charisma in other African churches, has to do with the division among Kimbangu’s grandchildren that erupted upon the passing away of the last surviving son of the founder, Salomon Dialungana, on 16 August 2001. At first, a “family pact” among the 26 grandchildren of Kimbangu accorded that they would all rule the Church together, with Simon Kimbangu Kianganji being the head of the group (the official successor), and the rest his chefs spirituels adjoints. However, when the successor proclaimed, as part of some famous resolutions announced in October 2002, that “the Church has only one Spiritual Leader and Legal Representative, His Eminence Simon Kimbangu Kianganji” and abolished the figure of the chef spirituel adjoint (on the bases, it seems, that some of them were abusing their positions), many of his cousins saw it as a betrayal of the “family pact” and left the Church. Since then, the official Church, with headquarters in N’Kamba, is nicknamed “3 = 1” (a formula that symbolizes the belief in the triple incarnation of the Holy Spirit in Simon Kimbangu, Joseph Diangienda and Simon Kimbangu Kianganji), while those who left (based in several, decentralized headquarters around the world) called themselves the “26 = 1”, symbolizing that it is the entire patrilineage of Kimbangu (i.e., Simon Kimbangu, his three sons, and his 26 grandchildren) who incarnates the Holy Spirit.

Others told us the Portuguese government was unable to guarantee a security protocol for him. Others told us that he was too busy in N’Kamba. Probably the truth was a combination of these (and other) factors, but the anti-climax that his absence might have produced was in fact minimal. Firstly because there were so many Kimbanguists together that the excitement was good enough in itself, even without the physical presence of the leader. As someone told us: “the important thing is that he is here with us in spirit.” Secondly, because he sent his classificatory sister (Marie Mwilu Diangienda, daughter of Joseph Diangienda) to represent him. Because she is a direct descendant of Simon Kimbangu, Kimbanguists regard her as someone strongly charismatic and many profited of her presence to obtain her blessing or spiritual healing, which she gave in the form of prayers and by spreading holy water from N’Kamba on to her devotees.

Memories of the slave trade

The Christmas celebration took place in a huge sport facility in Loures (Greater Lisbon) on the 24 and 25 May, and despite Simon Kimbangu Kianganji’s absence, it gathered more than 2,000 Kimbanguists from all over Europe (only one of them came from Africa, however, despite the promises one week before). Two days before, on Saturday 23, the entire Kimbanguist community celebrated an enormous fanfare march in Lisbon, which started in the central Praça do Rossio and ended in Praça do Comércio, by the river Tagus. On 25 May, Christmas day, Marie Mwilu Diangienda made a long discourse (in Lingala) in which she solemnly announced, in the name of Simon Kimbangu Kianganji, two new dogmas of the Kimbanguist Church:

9. For the crisis, cf. Sarró, Blanes & Viegas (2007); Sarró & Blanes (2009). The division between the centralizing tendency around Simon Kimbangu Kianganji and the centrifugal, independent tendencies around some of his cousins strongly resembles the crisis analyzed by Mary in the Celestial Church of Christ, divided along similar tendencies towards centripetal leadership and centrifugal ‘rebel’ pastors. (Mary, 2005b: 164).

1° That Salomon Dialungana Kianganji (Simon Kimbangu’s second son and father of Simon Kimbangu Kianganji) is Jesus Christ born
in Africa ("Dieu est noir et Jésus Christ est Africain" she said, in French). 2)

That Our Lady of Fatima (who, many Catholics believe, appeared to three small children in Portugal in 1917 and who is one of the biggest symbols of Portuguese Catholicism) was in fact Mama Marie Mwilu (Kimbangu's wife) a female figure that is gaining an increasing prominence in the Church, and for whom 2009 was a jubilee year (she died on 27 April 1959, eight years after her husband). Again, the identification between the two figures (Mama Mwilu Marie and the Virgin Mary) was not new. One of us (Mélice) has been coming across it since 1996, and it is logical to think that if Mama Mwilu is the mother of Dialungana and Dialungana is Jesus Christ, then Mama Mwilu must the mother of Jesus Christ. Yet the solemnity of the proclamation, the place where it was proclaimed (a strongly "Marian" country) and the fact that it was proclaimed in Simon Kimbangu Kiangan's name, all these together made the pronouncement sound like a unique historical moment.

When Marie Mwilu Diangienda pronounced these statements the entire community shouted enthusiastically, and then one of the Portuguese pastors told the public: "stop saying it is your opinion that Dialungana is Jesus Christ or that Our Lady of Fatima is Mama Mwilu; it is no longer your opinion, it is the opinion of the Kimbanguist Church". This was interesting, because in fact we had been hearing these identifications (Dialungana = Jesus Christ; Our Lady of Fatima = Mama Mwilu) since several years ago. But so far they had just been "opinions." Now, from 25 May 2009, they were officially "dogmas" of the Church, solemnly proclaimed in Lisbon in Kimbangu's name.

Together with these statements, she also claimed that Portugal had been chosen as the first country to be visited by Simon Kimbangu Kiangan in person (even if the visit had not happened) because Portugal had played a very important role in the history of, we quote her, "the Kongo with k" (le Kongo avec k). This role was double: on the one hand, Portuguese agents had been instrumental in the murder of Kimpa Vita, the prophetess who was burned alive in 1706 and who has today become a very important symbol for Kongo (with K) ethnic and historical consciousness. On the other hand, Portuguese were (or so she claimed) the first people to buy slaves in the Kongo, exporting them from the coast of Africa to the very Praça do Comércio in Lisbon where the community had been playing music and marching for hours just two days before. It was in Praça do Comércio, she told, that slaves were sold in the past (Praça do Comércio means "Trade square"). A few weeks after the event, a film about the march in Lisbon posted in Youtube announced in French that the march had taken place in the "Praça do comércio des esclaves." 11

It is worthwhile noting that these pronouncements were made in presence of the Minister of the Interior and the Governor of Lisbon (and some other local authorities), who came, rather unexpectedly, to the meeting place on May 25, as a personal visit to thank the Kimbanguists their participation in the Local Security Contract and to present their honors to Marie Mwilu Diangienda and, through her, to Simon Kimbangu Kiangan. It was a non-official visit of a socialist

10. The entire event we are commenting here has to be understood in contrast (and as a response) to the first visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Africa, which had occurred only three months earlier, in February 2010. The formula pronounced by Marie Mwilu Diangienda, in fact, goes back to a pronouncement that, according to many Kimbanguists, pope John Paul II had made in a visit to Kenya in 1980, where he would have declared (or so people told us), precisely in the same words, that "God is Black and Jesus Christ is African," the phrase she was just reproducing in French. According to some of our interviewees, the deeper meaning of the statement pronounced by the pope would have remained confined into the Vatican and covered by a veil of secrecy. The belief in the blackness of God is not something Kimbanguists insist on very often, but it is consistent with many other beliefs, especially the belief according to which Charles Kisolokele (Kimbangu's first son) was God the Father made human, just as his younger brother Salomon Dialungana was God the Son (Jesus Christ) and the third son, Joseph Diangienda, was God the Holy Spirit. Taken together, the three sons are thus a manifestation of the holy trinity.

11. The event has reached beyond Kimbanguists. In April 2010, almost a year later, one of us (Sarró) met an archivist working at the University of Wageningen (in The Netherlands). The man was from the Democratic Republic of Congo but he was not a Kimbanguist (although he declared his admiration for the historical Simon Kimbangu and his anti-colonial struggle). When Sarró told him he came from Portugal and that he was working on Kimbanguism, the man asked him whether he knew that the Kimbanguists of Europe had met in Portugal a year before, to perform a big march in the place in Lisbon where Congolese slaves had been sold in the past. He had heard about it through other Congolese friends, and had looked it up in YouTube too.
minister and a socialist governor to a religious cult. To the despair of Kimbanguists, the Portuguese press was not present to record the visit of the Minister and the Governor, precisely because they had been very careful not to notify any journalist of their intended, non-official visit. The visit of these politicians to the religious meeting can be (and has been) interpreted in many different ways by observers (Kimbanguists or not). But it was no doubt a matter of pride for the Church, as it is very rare for politicians to visit migrant cults (fig. 9).

A Kimbanguist historian we interviewed in Lisbon told us: "Portugal has been chosen as the first place [for Simon Kimbangu Kiangani to visit] because it has an "umbilical cord" connection with Kongo, because of the history of Kimpa Vita." Kimpa Vita was the Kongo prophetess who was sentenced to death in 1706, a sentence which can be interpreted as the culmination of a chain of wrongs done by Westerners since Portuguese established contact with the Kings of Kongo two centuries prior to her death. The "umbilical cord" metaphor may be difficult to grasp here, but it remains clear that Portugal, no matter how marginal it may be today both for Europeans and for Africans, plays a central role in Kongo geographical and mythical imagination. In fact the word "Portugal" lies, according to several interviewees, in the etymology of the Kikongo word Mputu, a fuzzy geographical category which refers to both Europe and the land of the Whites in general, whose cosmological meaning had been explored by anthropologist Wyatt MacGaffey, who asserted that even in colonial days Mputu was still used to refer not only to Europe or America, but also to "the land of the dead" (MacGaffey 1972, 1992).

Even if Simon Kimbangu Kiangani did not arrive to Lisbon this time, one could interpret his proposed visit (and that of "Kongo") as an effort at rewriting, or at last correcting, history, giving new significations to emblematic dates, events and places. Firstly, the Kimbanguists are correcting Christmas' day, from 25 December to 25 May. Secondly, they correct divine characters, from Our Lady of Fatima to Mama Mwilu. Thirdly, they correct human flow between Congo and Portugal, from the days of slave trade, when the Europeans left Portugal to introduce a false Christianity into the Kongo Kingdom, to today, when the Kimbanguists (and, to some extent Simon Kimbangu Kiangani) come to Europe to remind Europeans the true spirit of the Christian message (at roughly the same time the pope goes to Africa). Fourthly, they correct perceptions of Jesus himself and of his entangled genealogical relationship to African roots. Jesus Christ is both the son of Simon Kimbangu (in the person of Salomon Dialungana Kiangani), and the father of Simon Kimbangu (Salomon Dialungana Kiangani was the father of Simon Kimbangu Kiangani). All these announcements are part of a much greater revelation of hidden things (the word "Kimbangu," according to Kimbanguists, means "the revealer of hidden things") that Kimbanguism is slowly achieving (sometimes - so we are told - with a fierce opposition from established Christian Churches) as part of the establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth. "One day," a Kimbanguist told us immediately after the Christmas celebration, on May 26, "Kimbanguists will write the third part of the Bible: the deeds of Simon Kimbangu. It would be impossible to write them all, so we will have to be very selective, but you can be sure that what has happened in Lisbon and the things Mama Diangienda has announced to the world here will certainly be part of the book." And he added, with a certain sadness and rage: "What she has said is very important. It is only because this is Portugal that no journalist came to listen to her and record what she said. In what developed country would a Minister of the Interior go somewhere and no journalists would be following him?"

The announcements of Lisbon were also one way to use the Kimbanguist Diaspora and the Western world (starting with the "liminal" place of Mputu/Portugal) to reinforce in Africa (particularly in the two Republics of Congo and in Angola), the structure and legitimacy of the Church at a time of crisis. This religious "extraversion," to use Bayart's apt notion (Bayart 2000) contrasts with the journey that the Roman Catholic pope Benedict XVI made to Angola only two months before the visit of Papa Simon Kimbangu to Europe, a journey that was severely criticized by some Kimbanguists, among other things because the pope did not ask for pardon for the humiliations the Catholic Church has made to Africans over centuries, and most especially because he did say nothing about Kimpa Vita's inquisitorial death in 1706. In fact, the Pope did not even visit Mbanza Kongo, the city where she was burned and which was the capital of the Kingdom of Kongo, a kingdom of which the Kimbanguist Church can, in many ways, be seen as a continuation.
The doctrine of the exemplary margin

"God always chooses those in the weakest position," told us a Kimbanguist pastor in Lisbon. In fact Kimbanguists have we could describe as a “theology of the margins,” and they often compare in their sermons and conversations the marginal situation of Nazareth or Bethlehem vis-à-vis the Roman Empire to that of N’kamba (where Kimbangu was born in 1887) vis-à-vis colonial Belgium. The spiritual regeneration of both Rome and Belgium came from marginal places, much as today (according to some interviewees) the regeneration of Europe will come from a marginal place (Quinta da Fonte) of a marginal European country.

While they are not active proselytisers and do not often use “reverse mission” arguments, Kimbanguists in general understand that Europe contains marginalized people in need of a new spirituality that they think they can provide, such as many of the inhabitants of the rather marginal neighbourhood they occupy in Lisbon. As anthropologists know since the days of Victor Turner and Mary Douglas, margins have also a strong potential for renewal and regeneration, a potential Kimbanguists use in their discourse and in their practise in order to conceptualize their agency in the world and to place themselves at the centre of a new understanding of history and geography.

The case study of Portugal shows us, almost paradigmatically, the tension between centripetality and centrifugality in Kimbanguist discourses and practices. The events discussed in this paper have taken place in the Kimbanguist diaspora, but on the whole they have reinforced the notion that the entire Church depends very strongly on the centre in N’kamba. They have showed us the power of the margins to empower the centre. Kimbanguists have found in Lisbon a social setting that, in many ways, reminds them of the conditions of origin of the Church in colonial Congo and later in colonial Angola: marginalized communities, social problems, health problems (Kimbanguists do a lot of prayer for sick people, including emotionally and spiritually distressed neighbours irrespective of their ethnic or religious background) and a general sense of “crisis” reinforced today by the general economic crisis that is beating migrant communities very badly (as said above, most Kimbanguists men in Lisbon, who until recently were working in construction, are currently unemployed). They also found in Lisbon a general sense of forced social “disaggregation,” especially in the late 1990s, because their original praying place in the area of Prior Velho was demolished in 1996 (see footnote 7) and negotiations had to be made with the local council so as to have it reconstructed in the new neighbourhood of Quinta da Fonte. In oral narratives and archival material, it often emerges that prior to the dismantling of their houses in Prior Velho, the Church had a strong sense of unity, of kintuadi (as Kikongo-speakers say),

The events commented upon in this paper have also reinforced an idea that is crucial to Kimbanguist ethos: that of “example.” Unlike other religious groups that spread through active, sometimes aggressive, proselytizing techniques, Kimbanguists are very careful about the way they approach other peoples with other beliefs. Even the most fundamentalist Kimbanguists, convinced as they may be that the truth is with them, will be very respectful of other people’s beliefs and will let someone attend their Church, even many times, without demanding conversion. Being a Kimbanguist is very hard. Kimbanguists have a strict code of behaviour, easily perceivable in the body attitude and in their calm outlook towards the world. Their hope is that by acting in their particular way other people will be interested in them. They dislike the notion of “mission” because of its colonial connotations, even if they are sure that their role is, eventually, to convert the entire world (“Kimbanguisme: espoir du monde, Église universelle” is their slogan). But this conversion has to be produced “bottom up” and not imposed “up to bottom.” People have to observe them, analyse them and convince themselves that there is something special among Kimbanguists.

The events in Portugal have shown Kimbanguists in Europe that this mode of action is fruitful. By simply “being there” and being good

12. Kintuadi or Kintwadi is the name that the Kimbanguist movement took on from 1952-53 till 1959, when it was forbidden but clandestinely led by Joseph Diangienda. The Kikongo word kintwadi can be translated as “union,” “association,” “covenant” or “working together” and transmits a strong sense of what anthropologists would refer to as communitas.
neighbours, the Kimbanguits in Portugal have been invited to join in the Local Security Contract referred above and by performing a successful Christmas day they have shown their fellow Kimbanguits in other European capitals that Portugal is an example to follow. If Clifford Geertz (1980) showed the importance of “exemplary centre” for religious life, we can add that, in many occasions at least, having “exemplary peripheries” are equally important. The material discussed in this article shows us that the importance of analyzing the dialectics, and mutual reinforcements, between centre and periphery. While Simon Kimbangu Kiangiani’s absence in Lisbon can be interpreted as a way to remind his followers that counts is N’kamba, the entire event also shows us that in today’s world, N’kamba also depends on having a tight control over its well-behaved periphery.

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