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“It’s like my blood, like my oxygen” – Life in a Kimbanguist community in Stockholm

Author: Marco Tenti
Supervisor: Judith Narrowe
Examiner:
External Examiner:
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Abstract:

The aim of this work is to discuss the religious life of the Kimbanguist community in Stockholm; more specifically, it analyses the ways in which religion (in particular Kimbanguism) allows the members of a small religious community, originated by migration, to maintain sense of belonging and to give meaning to their experiences. In order to do this, I focus on the concept of community to define the ways in which a group of people, embedded in a much wider social field, can be defined with this analytical term: community emerges as a social group whose members share a specific inventory of symbols; symbols include representations and narratives, but also practices, artifacts and images. I focus on religions as tools that allow not only to build sense of community, but also to give meaning to believers’ life and experiences: religions in particular play a central role both in structuring daily life and in interpreting extraordinary events, such as migration and the passages through the different stages of life. The Kimbanguist community in Stockholm is not considered only in its local dimension, but also the transnational connection to the main church in Democratic Republic of Congo: the two main dimensions of this connection are represented by the economic contribution provided by believers to finance the church’s project and, on the other hand, the travels to Congo and to the city of N’Kamba, that the members do.

Keywords: Kimbanguism – Community – Religion – Transnationalism - Ritual
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Marco Tenti
1. Introduction

The church of Jesus Christ on Earth according to His Special envoy Simon Kimbangu (Église de Jésus Christ sur la terre par son envoyé spécial Simon Kimbangu), or Kimbanguist church, has a long story: its founder, Simon Kimbangu, began his preaching in 1921 in N’Kamba, a small village in the region of Bas-Congo, during the Belgian colonization. He was arrested and his followers persecuted, the church was put outlaw until 1959. In that year, the church was recognized as a legal institution by the Belgian authority, and it began his history as an official institution. From that time, an original theology has been developed among grassroots believers, it has become widespread among Kimbanguist believers, and it is partially acknowledged by the church now: this theology represents Kimbangu as an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, and his successors as reincarnations.

While many of the narratives and the assertions of the believers show a universalistic tendency, many of the tropes that characterize these narratives, the history of the church and its very organization seem to be located in a specific geographical and cultural context, the western part of Democratic Republic of Congo, the northern part of Angola and Congo-Brazzaville. Still, the presence of Kimbanguist communities is widespread around the World, and especially in Europe.

The aim of the present work is to discuss the ways in which a sense of community, belonging and a worldview are shaped, maintained and modified by the members of the members of the Kimbanguist church in Stockholm.

The question that rises now is: how do these people deal with their belonging to the church? How do they maintain their sense of community, if they do at all? There is no necessary link between the experience of migration and the maintenance of a diasporic identity, or with ties to the home-country. One could expect that in Sweden, sunken in a complex social structure, where the relegation of religion to the private sphere is much stronger, where most people completely ignore the existence of the church, a believer would have lost his militant attitude. But this was not the case: the people I talked to, and spent time with, were anything but atomized individuals: they are still strong in their faith, notwithstanding the number of social relations external to the church in which they are embedded. As this work argues, the main tool through which the Kimbanguist community in Stockholm maintains its boundary is through the share of symbols: rituals, behaviours, moral norms, narratives that the believers recognize and to which they participate together. I discuss religion in particular as a tool for humans, a tool to give order and meaning to individual and collective experience, to orient behaviour, time and space.
The problem is not only of maintenance: religion in this context interacts with the experience of migration and, as a tool to orient human actions and to give meaning, it faces the challenge of including, in the geography of believers, the country of arrival, as well as to keep and recreate the sense of belonging to the homeland. How do Kimbanguists in Stockholm deal with this? Which kind of ties do they have with the central Kimbanguist church in Democratic republic of Congo? Furthermore, are there any transnational connections that link the different communities of Kimbanguist around the world together?

As far as this research goes, a strong transnational tie emerged, both in economic and cultural terms. The two are strongly interconnected, as the donations, which constitute the main financial resource of the church, are spent in projects and activities to improve and enlarge N’Kamba, a city which is central in Kimbanguist geography and eschatology. Travels to the city and, more in general, to Congo, assume an important role as well into the experience of the believers, especially of the young people who were born in Sweden. These travels, on one side, are times where the difference between them and people actually living in Congo is felt stronger; on the other, the time spent in N’Kamba represents the quintessential experience of Kimbanguism, as it is a chance to meet people from all around the world, to share experience and expectations. This is the chance to live fully and to feel at the highest intensity the belonging to the church and the reality of its message.

On the other hand, how do members of the community relate to Sweden? How and why did they get here? How does their faith affect their social relations, if at all? The migration projects and trajectories that emerged during the research are not strongly interrelated with the church. A logic of opportunities and needs emerges when the believers try to reconstruct and explain their movements: migration was motivated by economic necessities and had no particular link with membership of the church, the travel to Sweden was an opportunity for the believers for practical reasons, but they did not have contacts in the new country or specific reasons to choose Sweden. The establishment of a community and a church here, on the other hand, was determined by the achievement of Swedish citizenship. Religion emerges again as a tool to interpret this process: while the dynamic of migration may appear chaotic, the reason behind it is found thanks to the church’s narratives, with the prophecies made by Kimbangu that announced the spread of Kimbanguism around the world.

At the same time, the attitude of believers toward the rest of Swedish society appears quite open: discussing with persons who were born here, the experience of post-school activities organized by Swedish church emerged as a beautiful memory, which was not experienced with any kind of resistance on the side of parents. More in general, belonging to the church does not prevent for
interacting and maintaining relations with persons outside the church: these connections represent also another occasion to spread the knowledge about the church around the World.

In a wider perspective, the practices of a small community of symbols, performed in a global city like Stockholm, present implications both on a theoretical and a practical/political level. Theoretically, they raise questions about cultural production and circulation: how do communities maintain their boundaries in a context of intensified social interaction and cultural exchange? How does the intensification of contacts contribute to shape identifications, intended as dynamic and never definitive assumptions of a specific identity in a given context? What tools allow for the circulation of cultural manufactures and the conservation of connections between people and institutions in different countries?

Practically, the theme of coexistence can be enriched and better articulated thanks to the theoretical and empirical contents discussed in this work: how do different religions, moral codes, public practices coexist in the same urban space? And in the same subject? Why, in this case, a strong commitment to a specific identification, to a specific institution does not implicate a negative attitude toward the outsiders, but in different context this negativity emerges? What can we learn about migration projects and patterns? And what about the role of religions in the individual experience?

My hope is to provide fruitful insights about all this in the following pages.

1.1 Objective and research questions

Objective

The objective of this thesis is to analyse and interpret the symbolic strategies that allow the Kimbanguist community in Stockholm to define itself and the ritual practices through which the belonging to the community is performed and expressed, as well as the religious tropes that inform those practices, both on a local and a transnational level: the main ritual examined will be the mass, which takes place every Sunday in the church of ***1, close to Stockholm.

Research questions

This analysis focuses on the ritual and practices of the community which are performed daily and its transnational dimension as well as on the transnational dimension of the church. Many elements and activities of the mass are related to this dimension, which entails both a cultural and an economic dimension: it is cultural because it is related to a specific religious geography which orients

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1 The name of the church has been censored in order to preserve the privacy of the community
movements of people and it is economic because it moves back resources to the home country. This distinction is particularly blurred, because the same geography that orients movements of people, orients also the movements of economic resources. The aim is also to analyse how the membership to the church is related to migration and Sweden: since the religious geography of Kimbanguism is clearly related to Congo and to the life of Simon Kimbangu, it is relevant to investigate what it means to be Kimbanguist in a completely different context and the degree of openness of the community. How is Sweden included in this religious geography?

The research is articulated around three main questions:

1. What makes of the members of the Kimbanguist church in Stockholm a community?
2. Which role does Kimbanguism play in shaping their everyday life?
3. What is their relationship with the Kimbanguist Church in Democratic Republic of Congo? And how is their religious life affected by migration?

1.2 Structure of the thesis

This work is articulated into five chapters.

Chapter 1 provides the objective and questions of the thesis, as well as an overview of the structure of the work.

Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature on Kimbanguist church and the explanation of the theoretical framework and of the methodology applied to gather data used to support this work’s thesis and to answer its questions. The necessity of an entire chapter to methodology originates from the particular fieldwork that was conducted by the author, which leaded to both important limitations and possibilities. Theoretical framework provides analyses to better understand and frame the data of the work.

Chapter 3 provides an account about Kimbanguist Church: it will discuss the figure and the life of Simon Kimbangu, in order to highlight continuities and differences between the content of his preaching and beliefs and teachings of the contemporary church. Discussing the life of Kimbangu is relevant also because, as already said, events and places of his life orient the organization of time and space by the church.

Chapter 4 analyses the main practices through which members of the community perform their Kimbanguism-ness: it will focus on the mass as the main Kimbanguist ritual, in which both Kimbanguist worldview and belonging are empathized. The chapter tackles also the ways in which religion influences the daily lives of believers through narratives, ideas, practices and artifacts. I tried
also to focus on the transnational relationship that is built with Congo and the city of N’Kamba, both during the ritual and outside of it, thanks to the cultural and economic practices of the believers, such as financial support for the projects of the church and annual travels to the city, but also through the constant use of images and videos of the city.

Chapter 5 provides the conclusions of the work. It will resume the data exposed in the previous pages as well as the interpretations and theories that were used to make those data intelligible.

2. State of research, methodology and theoretical framework

2.1 State of research

In recent years, the sociologist Aurelien Mokoko-Gampiot has written the most comprehensive work about contemporary Kimbanguism: his book, *An African understanding of the bible* (Mokoko-Gampiot, 2017), is an attempt to present the theological basis of the Kimbanguist church and to discuss the Kimbanguist identity. The author identifies different sources that Kimbanguist theologies draws on and a general sense of Kimbanguism as a process of reconstruction of a black (and negative) identity into a religious (and positive) identity: parts of his conclusions will be discussed in the present work, because, even if they do not perfectly match the data that has been gathered, they partly echo the words of the Kimbanguists in Stockholm.

Gampiot’s wrote other relevant contributions: an article by him (Mokoko-Gampiot, 2014) retraces the recent developments of the Kimbanguist church and the fractures that have characterized it. In particular, the problem of the succession after the death of Dialungana, Simon Kimbangu’s last son to be alive and the contrast between a popular form of Kimbanguism and a reformist form, with the former imposing itself over the church’s institutions and official doctrine only in the new millennium. The history of this contrast can be traced also through the works of Marie-Louise Martin and Susan Asch: the first (Martin, 1975) is a study on Kimbangu and the church, conducted in a theological perspective (Martin was a Kimbanguist herself) and emphasize the reformist version as the true Kimbanguism, while the second (Asch, 1983) gives a better account about the existence of different theological tendencies inside the church, emphasizing the distinction between popular forms of Kimbanguism and the theologians formed in the Kimbanguist divinity school, which was founded by Martin. A chapter in a collective book (Mokoko-Gampiot, 2011) reflects over Kimbanguism and migration: the chapter is short, and it is split between a more historical part, where it describes the birth of the International Kimbanguist circle (CIK), born to coordinate Kimbanguist students in Europe and an analysis of the way through which Kimbanguist communities in Europe organizes themselves. It is worth to mention that, even if the methodology used by the author is partially
overlapped with the one of the present work, since it is based on interviews, the perspective is quite different since Gampiot do not deepen the knowledge of a specific ethnographic context, but provides general reflections about migration and Kimbanguism.

Fractures internal to the church, its internal complexity and a methodology based on interviews and observation constitute also the basis of an article by Alice Melice (Melice, 2006). The author’s focus is posed on the methodological characteristics of a multi-situated research that had as its own fields both Kimbanguism in Belgium and in Democratic republic of Congo, but Melice discusses also about the dissidents internal to the church. She does not pay particular attention to the dynamics internal to a specific group, but she highlights the role played by different media in connecting and shaping Kimbanguism all over the world, but also in granting to Kimbanguists in different part of the world a more relevant role and an increased visibility, whether they are dissidents or not; at the same time she refers to theoretical concepts, like ethno-scape, that will be considered also in the present work.

More historical information about Kimbanguism can be found in the work of Balandier, Sociology of Black Africa (Balandier, 1970). In this work, Balandier traces the birth of a movement around the figure of Simon Kimbangu, tries to explain the sources of his charisma and the reasons that led to the success of his preaching, as well as the history of resistance (but also of fragmentation) by the movement once that Kimbangu had been arrested. According to Balandier, Kimbangu was able to recall different cultural codes in order to gain legitimation: he had been educated by missionaries and was himself a catechist but at the same time his public figure and the symbols he bore, like the stick, were related with Bakongo concepts of royalty. After the imprisonment, the movement was fragmented and many different ideologies and theologies were asserted by different groups: it was only after the legalization and recognition of the church by the colonial state (and later the independent Congo) that an official institution could be established. A long article by Mackay (Mackay, 1987) focuses on the same time period, stressing the relevance of the contacts between Kimbanguist movement and the Baptist missionary society, as well as the influence of previous Kongo culture.

A more general analysis of African Initiated Churches has been provided by Anderson (2001): his theory is that what has happened in Africa during the twentieth century is comparable to the Reformation of the 16th century in Europe. According to Anderson, African Christianity has developed a set of unique features that make it a unique in Christian World, even if it presents a huge internal variation which he describes with the use of a typological classification. Thus, he distinguishes, among the churches that were born during this period, three groups. The first, called Ethiopian churches, were usually born from conflicts about the access to administrative and political
power, denied to local population by European missionaries, but they didn’t distinguish much themselves for what concerns theology and ritual practices. The second one is composed by the Prophetic/Healing churches (among which Anderson lists the Kimbanguist church): these churches are characterized by a strong emphasis on the leader’s spiritual power (usually conceived as a manifestation of the holy spirit), which can include miraculous healing and the prediction of future and are generally more tolerant and open about traditional African practices and concerns, like witchcraft, ancestors or polygamy than other churches are. They often put a great emphasis on Bible and the Old Testament and have a literal approach to the text, respecting taboos which are sanctioned by it. Members of these churches usually dress in uniform. The third group identified by Anderson is composed by the Pentecostal churches, which are characterized by the great emphasis that they put on the role of the Holy spirit, the charismatic style of preaching and the aversion against local tradition and beliefs: these churches are growing quickly and they have become the more characteristic of the African Christian landscape, influencing all the other churches on the continent, including the one established in Europe, like the Catholic one. One characteristic of the African Reformation which is particularly important to highlight is the tendency of these churches to focus more on the practice that on theology, preferring ortho-praxis over orthodoxy. This fact, combined with the growth of the influence of Pentecostalism, may explain the transformation described by Mokoko-Gampiot.

2.2 Methodology

The aim of this paragraph is to illustrate the methodology implied to gather the data that constitute the basis of the present work and to justify the choices of specific methods. Main data consist mainly of semi-structured recorded interviews, integrated with unstructured conversation and a limited quantity of observation and attendance of the weekly mass. The last paragraph reflects on the limits of the work, including the positioning of the researcher, the problem of language and of time.

Semi-structured interviews

The main source of data for the present work is provided by a series of recorded interviews conducted by the author as the interviewer and including members of the community as interviewees. A total of four interviews has been conducted, including approximately half of the people who attend the Kimbanguist mass in ***. Interviews include a data card2, including information about the time spent in Sweden, the job and the age, useful to organize them in thematic ways and to frame the words of the interviewee. Themes of the interviews were various, including descriptions of the ceremonies that

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2 An appendix including the questions used as a basis for the interviews and the data card is attached to the present work, see Appendix A
I had attended, general questions about Kimbanguist faith or life trajectories that had brought the interviewee to Sweden. The interplay between the migration to Sweden and the belonging to a church that is strictly related to a specific geographic horizon was one of my main interests.

The decision to use interviews as the main method has many reasons. A first set of motivations is related to the background and, thus, to the limits of the author: having an education background primarily as a student of cultural anthropology, the theoretical as well as practical experience and proficiency with more quantitative methodologies are limited. Analysis of big quantities of data and large-scale phenomena is out of our reach, and thus we decided to rely on a narrower perspective, exploiting highly qualitative data to analyse a small-scale phenomenon.

Interviews present also many upsides as sources for this specific topic: the scale of the research is quite small, since Kimbanguist people in Stockholm are roughly a dozen. This fact makes the choice of a qualitative method profitable, since it is possible to conduct in-depth interviews with a considerable percentage of the members of the community. Another positive aspect of the use of interviews concerns the themes analysed: since the aim of this work is researching on the sense of community and belonging, the personal experience and the self-representation of people, having direct communication with the people who are members of the community, seeing how they, in their own words, define their faith and their identity is a precious source of information which is hardly matched by other methodologies.

According to the anthropologist Martina Giuffrè (Giuffrè Zingari, 2010, pp. 128-138), interview possess four unique characteristics as a source: it is unpredictable both for both the parties involved, as it requires and stimulate reflexivity in the interviewer as well in the interviewee. The latter is challenged to reconsider his positioning in his social network and his society, while the former, rather than exercising a choice about his informants, is chosen by them and have to face unexpected relations and topics. Interview is also a positioned source, as it involves the identities of the researcher and the interviewee: researcher is framed by the interviewee in a role, a cultural representation that is understandable for him. They both interpret each other position and intentions: the person who is interviewed may try to guess what the interviewer wants to know and what his intentions are. This leads to the third characteristic of this source: it inevitably involves misunderstandings that shape the interview. These misunderstandings are fruitful though, because they are themselves objects of analysis which reveal cultural schemes and repertoires. At the same time, it should be noted that interviews always involve power relations that should not be underestimated. The last characteristic of the interview is its revitalizing effect: interviews awaken memories that awaken more memories and stories. These chains of memories form spaces where the construction of narratives about memory
happens: in this sense, interviews are a moment where data are not only revealed, but also, to a certain extent, created.

The use of semi-structured interviews, in particular, was helpful. A semi-structured interview is a space where communication can flow more freely if compared with more formal interviews: it presents a fixed setlist of questions that functions as a compass to drive the conversation, but there is freedom, both for interviewer and interviewee, to shift the focus of the discussion toward new topics that are valued relevant, new questions can be added and other are avoided if the interviewer repute that they may interrupt a more meaningful flow of stories. If the interviewee gets carried away by his narration to direction which are not helpful to the research, or if he tries to impose his own agenda to the conversation, the setlist helps to bring the interview back to the original trail. To sum up, semi-structured interviews combine effectively academic rigor and serendipity.

Interviews with members of the Kimbanguist community in Stockholm were conducted in the church of ***, after the weekly mass, at the interviewee’s house or via Skype. They were conducted in the presence of the interviewee, the interviewer and, when needed, a translator, who was another member of the community. The problems which arise from the intervention of a translator are going to be discussed in a dedicated paragraph, but now I want to mention the relevance, in order to conduct fruitful interviews, of a comfortable environment where the interviewee can be free to express herself/himself.

The presence of parts of the interviews and quotations in the thesis has been discussed with the interviewees: they have been informed of which parts of their interviews have been included and possible operations of anonymization have been concorded with them. Explicit consent about the data treatment has been asked via written or oral consent.

**Observation and informal conversation**

Another source of information used in the present research is represented by informal conversations with members of the community and the attendance to the mass on different occasions. It was a sort of limited version of participant observation, performed for a considerably shorter time: the lack of linguistic and cultural proficiency, as well as the limited amount of time spent with members of the community do not allow for greater claims, but, even if limited, the observation of important activities, as the mass, and of time spent together constitute a profitable integration of the semi-structured interviews.

First, these activities constituted the basis to prepare the more formalized data gathering: as it will be discussed, the mass represents the most important and repeated ritual activity for the community and
thus to witness the performance has been fruitful both to organize questions to ask and to understand
the logic and the organization of the ritual itself, at least to a certain extent. Second, observation
constitute a good practice to confront the self-representation of an individual and the actual social
interactions, in two different ways: on the one side, observation of actions without knowing the
relevance and meanings that social actors give them can produce distortion of what is actually
happening\(^3\), but, on the other side, to use only self-representation of the social actors may lead to
idealized representations and to the confusion between official ideologies touted by states and
institutions as actual social reality.

The mass usually takes place on Sunday and start around eleven o’clock, and it is usually followed
by a small refreshment in one of the rooms. The whole activity can last until six or seven p.m. and,
on some occasions, people moved to the house of the pastor.

**Limits of the methodology**

Three main sets of limits shape the research and have already been mentioned: language, time and
positioning.

The limit of language concerns the inability of the researcher to speak a language that could work as
a medium with the members of the community. Most of the interviewees, while able to speak different
languages, are not proficient in English and the interviewer is not proficient in language as Swedish
or Lingala. This fact had two main consequences: during the mass and the interviews, the presence
of a translator was necessary and, in other situations, it was not possible for the researcher to
understand conversations between members of the community and any linguistic information was
mediated by a third person. The presence of an interpreter during an interview partially alters the
communicational context of it: it doesn’t allow the creation of a situation of intimacy between the
interviewer and the interviewee and the flow of information between them is mediated by the
intentions and actions of the third party. The same could be said of observation and participation to
the mass, which was conducted for the most part in Lingala. As Geertz would put it (Geertz, 1973),
anthropology becomes the act of interpreting interpretations of other interpretations of social life, and
this limit must be stressed clearly. On the other hand, the interpreter was always a member of the
community, thus we assume that his degree of familiarity with the cultural repertoire of the
interviewees was high. Plus, as both the interpreter and the interviewees were part of the same small

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\(^3\) In this sense, interviews are a way to provide both thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of social practice, including thus
the cultural meanings that are part of those actions and the internal differentiation that is stressed by Cohen, since any
actor can give a different “description” of the same actions (Cohen, 2001), but observation is necessary to properly
understand which are the practices and how the meanings are “performed”.

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group, they were bounded by ties of kinship and friendship, they have known each other for most of their life: the presence of the interpreter in this sense didn’t affect the routine nor the everydayness of the interviewees. In any case, even if the knowledge provided by this work is heavily mediated by these limitations, we reputed that a limited source of knowledge is still better than the complete lack of it: since the members of the community were proactive in the participation to the research, we proceeded with it.

While the language was the most immediate problem in carrying out the research, another relevant external condition which contributed to shape it is the researcher’s positioning. To be positioned is an unavoidable characteristic of the fieldwork when it involves direct contacts with communities and social groups which are object of a research. It is the direct consequence of the social interaction between the researcher and people he spends time with: as a human being, the researcher cannot pose himself out of the field, because his activities involve his physical presence, at the same time that he sees he is also seen and this fact triggers reactions in the social actors, who, according to their cultural repertoire and their life experiences, interpret the researcher and give meanings to his actions. The first level of potentially meaningful characteristics that determines the outcomes of this kind of research is naturally the appearance of the researcher: age, gender and skin colour are the first traits that can be noticed by social actors, and can activate specific representations and practices in them, leading to a greater or smaller degree of openness to discuss specific topics and potentially modifying their attitudes: for example, in many contexts, it would be harder for a male researcher to discuss sexual habits with women, while, on the contrary, it would be hard for a female researcher to access a male-exclusive secret society. Another set of characteristics is represented by social characteristic: belonging to a specific social class, job of researcher or student, the degree of education are all factors that can emerge during informal conversations and contribute to shape the representation of the research and the researcher that people have and, thus, to influence their attitude toward them. Positioning does not involve only the researcher, but also social actors themselves: as we have already discussed, when they are involved in research or in an interview, people have their own interpretations of what is going on and their personal agenda, they want to discuss certain topics, they are more open about specific themes while really close on others. For example, in the present case the interviewees were much more interested in discussing topics related to Kimbanguist church rather than the experience of migration in Sweden and this fact contributed to shape the research, at least to some extent.

Both this fact and the problem of language could have been overcome by prolonging the time spent for the research: especially the problem of positioning and the (at least perceived) reluctance or lack
of interest to discuss specific topics may have been surpassed with an intensification of contacts and interactions with the people of the Kimbanguist community in Stockholm, attending the mass more often and conducting a greater number of interviews. This has not been done mainly for practical reasons: I was not resident in Stockholm during the time of the research and meetings had to face both the community’s necessities and mine. Financial resources, on the other hand, were limited.

I discussed the limitations of the research because, rather than erasing the results of the research, they contribute to shape and understand the results: more than errors, they are a compass to suggest possible ways to further develop the research.

2.3 Theoretical framework

The aim of this paragraph is to provide a theoretical framework to analyse the data.

Four main themes form the theoretical framework of the present work. The first is the concept of community. Anthony P. Cohen’s definition of community (Cohen, 2001), that will be helpful to frame the members of Kimbanguist Church in Stockholm as a symbolic community in a wider social context; the second, closely related to the first, is the definition of religion: in order to provide an analytically fruitful definition, I will rely on Tweed’s concept of religion as a confluences of organic-cultural flows (Tweed, 2006). The aim is to provide a dynamic representation of religious communities, able to account for historical dynamicity and internal differentiation, without reifying them as static and homogenic objects.

The third is Appadurai’s concept of ethnoscapes (Appadurai, 1996), which are used to describe cultural flows in the context of globalization: references will be made in particular to two of these landscapes, concerning the movement of people and images. The third reference is transnationalism: the concept is already implied in the precedent references, as it implies the relationship between a social actor and more than a national/cultural context.

As for the methods, choices concerning theory were made by me and were determined by my position. I share Tweed’s epistemological reflection about theory: starting from the etymology of the word, he defines theories as “positioned representations of a changing terrain by an itinerant cartographer” (Tweed, 2006: 13). This implies that the theorizing subject is never abstract, but he is always embodied, located in a specific time and place and that he can approach reality only through socially educated senses; it also means that theories and theorists are embedded in power relations that are often not clear to researchers and authors. If theories are positioned, then they have blind spots: this work lacks a discussion of the internal dynamics of power which characterizes a religious community.
and a transnational institution like the Kimbanguist church. Bonfanti identifies two main approaches that characterize scholarly literature about migration and religion: one is based on the interpretation of religion as a system of symbols, which is to say in a cultural and “intellectual perspective”, while the second is concerned with power relations and the social and political dimensions of cultural production (Bonfanti, 2022:170-171). While I repute both these approaches fruitful and necessary, my experience on the field brought me to rely more on the first one: this choice was favoured by the field research, by the shortness of the time spent with the Kimbanguist community, by the limited dimension of the community and by the interests of its members to discuss specific themes with me, but also by a (to a certain extent, free) choice to focus on aspects like rituals, beliefs and religious practices.

While visiting the members of Kimbanguist, while talking with them, the necessity to deepen my knowledge about those aspects grew: the mass was performed by the pastor with a strong emotional charge and other members were strongly involved as well, when they were singing, praying or marching. I was not expecting to see such a strong commitment to the church: a theory based on social competition between different groups was sufficient to interpret most of my previous direct experiences related to religion, but it wasn’t enough to make account for what I was seeing. I was not ready to hear the pride in the voice of mama⁴ M., a woman able to speak several language, but who was nonetheless trying to talk to me in English so that I could understand, while she was showing me images and videos of N’Kamba, the new Jerusalem, place of birth of Simon Kimbangu: “Our money made this”, she said, to highlight the efforts of all Kimbanguists in the world to build the city, their power to transform reality which was independent from external help (Europe or other churches). This attachment to a far place, this passion during a weekly event as the mass, the omnipresence of their faith in every moment of life directed my interest to the symbolic worlds of these persons. This theoretical framework is part of my attempt not to essentialize them, which is to say, to represent them as a single entity, labelled as “the Kimbanguists”, of which they as persons represent nothing more than a particular manifestation: I use different interviews and different voices also in order to highlight internal differences of the community and particularities of the single believers.

The concepts of community and religion

Cohen defines a community as a group of people who share a common inventory of symbols. This definition has two main implications:

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⁴ As I was told by the members of the community, “mama” and “papa” are title used by Kimbanguists to show reverence and respect one another.
a. It shifts the focus from social structure to culture, when it comes to define a group. Cohen is concerned to explain why and how the communities keep existing in an increasingly interconnected world, where the existence of small, corporate groups, isolated from the others, is virtually impossible. Cohen contests that such type of society has ever existed, since the idea of small, isolated communities is more a theoretical myth than an empirical observation. It is true, though, that the degree of interconnection has raised since the industrial revolution and especially after the Second World War and the great technological innovations in transports and communications, thus not leading to the disappearance of communities, but to a higher degree of interaction between people with different cultural backgrounds which are now involved in the same social system (Hannerz, 1992) and share the same spaces, especially in big post-industrial cities. Cohen’s conceptualization allows us to see such places not as deprived of culture and inhabited by atomized individuals, but as spaces where many possible contact zones (Clifford, 1997), where different cultural repertoires interact, exist.

Subjects cannot be considered bearers of a singular cultural tradition, but as nodes where many cultural inventories meet, depending on the specific position occupied inside the social structure and on their social network. We can put the focus on collective inventories or on individual ones: we can imagine different social networks, which connect different people through one or more cultural repertoires, or different cultural repertories which are connected through one or more persons. Two persons may not share any social link except than the participation to the same ceremony on a holy day and feel part of the same community, or share a big part of their cultural background, but consider each other as part of different communities. A third possibility is that two individuals may share little of their cultural inventories but may be part of the same social network. Hannerz (2001) quotes Zygmunt Bauman’s metaphor of the habitat to discuss this phenomenon, defining cultural habitat as the ability of a single to interact with a part of the symbolic repertoires which are present in a wider environment: habitats can grow or become smaller, they are inhabited by actors that are able to interact with it in different ways and extract from it different symbolic and material resources. In other words, social actors are able to perform a wide and multi-layered series of identifications. Glick Schiller and Levitt proposed the concept of social field, as

“a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed. Social fields are multi-dimensional, encompassing structured interactions of differing forms, depth, and breadth that are differentiated in social theory by the terms organization, institution, and social movement” (Glick Schiller, Levitt, 2004: 9).
This position does not imply that people are irreducibly flexible when it comes to culture: it aims to de-naturalize the link between a subject and a single culture, which is supposed to be a close and internally coherent system, like primordialist views assume, but it does not deny that cultural flows or inventories play a central role in defining one’s experience and representation of the world.

Cultural primordialism can be defined, following Clifford Geertz (1973, 259-260), as the emotional dimension that characterizes the attachment to specific collective identity (divided by Geertz in kinship, race, religion, region, language and custom). It is important to note that primordialism is not referred to these collective markers, but to the feelings that these culturally imagined bonds are able to evoke into people. According to such view, identity is to be found “inside” the subject or the community, in one’s past experiences, personal beliefs and sense of belonging. An opposite view of identity is given by Thomas Hylland Eriksen: his definition of ethnicity (Eriksen, 1993), that we can extend to other kind of collective identifications, is based on an interactionist assumption (see also Barth, 1969): in accordance with Cohen, he defines ethnicity not as empirical cultural difference, but as a cultural system of classification, implied in a context of contact and social interaction, based on different cultural markers. According to Eriksen, this classification is used primarily as a symbolic resource in social competition for resources, prestige and political power. Identifications in this perspective cannot be defined as something which is inside the individual or the community per se, but it emerges in situation of contact and interaction. Primordialism fails to explain this dynamicity of identity (and cultural changes more in general), which is not stable and tend to be shaped by external factors and situations: the same actors may recall different identifications, based on different cultural markers, depending on the situation (Bauman, 2001: 87-102). What is important to state is that community’s identity is not a datum, but it emerges through a symbolic work of boundary’s construction, which is used to delimitate who is member of the community and who is not. At the same time, as Eriksen recognize, instrumentalist approaches seem unable to explain the degree of commitment and identification that certain identities are able to arouse.

Religions, in particular, orient believers not only in relation to others, but also in a wider spatial and temporal sense: they give meaning to religious’ experience, they explain the dynamic and direction of history as well as the origin and structure of the world. They prescribe correct and incorrect actions and behaviors, what is mandatory and what is forbidden, thus structuring individuals’ sensitivity and attitude, their worldview. Tweed interprets religions as “confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries” (Tweed, 2006: 54). The definition is affine to the processes that we are trying to highlight: while religions are described in terms of process, history and practice and not of substance
(Tweed stresses the role of aquatic metaphors against more static ones), the role that these processes play both in terms of maintenance (making home) and enlargement (crossing) of community boundaries. According to him, religions are cultural flows which are constrained but not determined by biological limitations, mainly the human nervous system: these include cognitive systems related to space and time perceptions. Religions provide tropes (rituals, metaphors, narratives and stories, images, artifacts) which, combined with these limitations, originate different chronotopes, which Tweeds define as spatial-temporal representations that orient the relations between the believer and the world. The four main chronotopes identified are: body, home, homeland and universe. In chapter 4, we are going to discuss the ways in which these chronotopes orient representations and practices of the Kimbanguists in Stockholm. We can hypothesize that elements like biography, as well as institutions, social networks and security play an important role in structuring the cores of these complexes of identities: for example, we can distinguish between connections that involve individuals in ordinary daily activities and connections that engage individuals in a private or public institution (Glick Schiller, Levitt, 2004: 13), like a family or a church. In such cases, ties with the legal and cultural systems represented by such institutions are going to be stronger: there are symbols that are more resilient than others.

b. It gives relevance to the internal differentiation of communities

According to Cohen, one of the myths about pre-industrial small communities is that they were internally undifferentiated. Most of anthropology has shared the same view about the community that where object of his study in the first half of the twentieth century. This homogenic representations were determined also by another epistemological assumption: posing the focus on structure rather than of culture and symbols leaded the anthropologists to face what Cohen calls the “public face” of a community. Public face is the way through which members of a community represent such community in front of people external to it. It is a simplified representation of the community: it hides internal differences, hierarchies and inequalities as well as different interpretations of the same symbols. This operation is similar to what Eriksen (1993) calls stereotyping: according to him, stereotypes are a precious cognitive resource, because they allow to give an intelligible order to the complexity of reality and to define clear boundaries. To quote Cohen’s word: “When a group of people engages with some other, it has to simplify its message down to a form and generality with which each of the members can identify their personal interests” (Cohen, 1985:34). Internal differentiation is a problem for community’s members as well, who uses different strategies to avoid the explicit assertion of difference, among which Cohen identifies deceit, lies but also the
reconstitution of traditions through the creolization of external influences. According to him, the aim is always to maintain and reinforce the symbolic boundaries.

Definition of symbol is important to understand the internal differentiation. Cohen gives an incredibly wide definition of symbol: it is not something that represents a meaning, but rather something that is used to create meanings by a community’s members. In Cohen’s words:

“Yet, the foregoing argument has suggested that what is actually held in common is not very substantial, being form rather than content. Content differs widely among members. It follows, therefore, that insofar as community provides the context for culture, a different conception of it is required. We propose that rather than thinking of community as an integrating mechanism, it should be regarded instead as an aggregating device.” (Cohen, 1985: 20)

People inside the same community do not share the same interpretations of their shared symbolic inventory, but they share the same symbols: cultural inventories can be seen as the sum of these different interpretation and the correlated symbols, which are their objective referents. Symbols can be anything (images, stories, practices or even simple metaphors), at the condition that they can mark a difference between community and non-community: a specific way of dressing, a gesture, a secret and shared knowledge, but also shared practices and behaviours. Their relevance as symbols comes also from this ability to demarcate, but this demarcation, rather than being expressed in intellectual terms, is performed (consciously or unconsciously) through material actions, like abstaining from eating specific foods or wearing uniforms.

According to Cohen, rituals are the ideal situation where the unity of the community and symbolic boundaries can be asserted in the strongest way. Notwithstanding the theoretical frame that we use to understand a ritual, a common trait is that they heighten “people’s awareness of and sensitivity to their community” (Cohen, 1985:50). Whether it is through the marking of the community’s characteristics or through symbolic inversion to show the undesirability of a different world, ritual is an occasion both to communicate and express the relations of the community with the external world and inside the community itself. Focus is posed explicitly on communities which are not structurally separated by others: in this specific situation rituals assume an even greater role in maintaining and reasserting the community’s distinctiveness. This is specifically the case of the Kimbanguist community in Stockholm: a small group of persons which are scattered in a big European capital, integrated in the economic structure of the city and without any possibility to modify the space around them in order to express their sense of belonging, which find in the mass and other symbols and behaviours the resources to renovate its consciousness.
Ethno-scapes, diaspora and transnationalism

What has been discussed in the previous paragraph is coherent with the reflections of Ulf Hannerz and Arjun Appadurai. We discussed of the coexistence, inside the same geographical space of different communities and the participation of the same subject in different social networks and cultural niches (habitats). Most of people are involved in a variety of social context and bonds where their self-representation and identity cannot be fully expressed or understood by other social actors, where the set of symbols which can be shared has a reduced degree of complexity: these simplified sets could be described as the meta-culture of modernity (Hannerz, 2001), a group of practices, representations and objects that are shared, to a different degree, all over the world and are linked to the spread of the industrial revolution, of the western concept of state, of the technology of mass media and fast transports. According to Hannerz, these factors characterize all the World, since they were spread during the European colonization. This idea can be refined thanks to the concept of “ideoscape”, theorized by Appadurai (Appadurai, 1996) to describe how even these representations change from place to place and are localized, they have to match with other, more specific cultural schemes, but what matters here is that people from different places share at least partially a set of symbols in the sense of Cohen, thus they do not necessarily share the same meanings. The other side of the coin is that, corresponding to a meta-culture of modernity, we find also a meta-culture of diversity, which for Hannerz corresponds to an increased sensitivity and consciousness of the relativity of one’s cultural schemes: it becomes possible to communicate about one’s ideas, representations, tastes as one among many different possibilities. People can describe their own ideas and habits in such terms as “In my culture we do X” or “In our culture things work in this way”: to summarize, culture and representations about culture have entered the public debate and have become common knowledge: while some members of the community appear not concerned with such descriptions, second generation members often articulated their answers around these concepts.

This phenomenon does not only impact representations, but also the practice and agency of social actors: in Appadurai’s terms, people are less bounded to a specific tradition and have access to more means to orient their actions. He tries to enlarge Benedict Anderson’s idea of imagined communities to describe the role played by imagination in shaping imagined worlds, complex representations of reality that orient the actions and desires of social actors, according to him, images, tales, movies and other media (media-scape) contribute to create these worlds, which are highly differentiated for different individuals depending on their access and their use of different streams of media.
It is worth noting that these cultural flows are not located in a single place, but they cross multiple territories: it is not possible to find a simple identification between a specific place and a collective identity, as well as it is impossible to theorize a linear reproduction of the relationship between these two elements. Relationship between local and global has grown in complexity: places are now arena where different actors confront and negotiate their ambitions and expectations while identities are scattered across different states and continents and individuals can access many different representations to imagine possible actions and possible meanings. Appadurai defines the complexity of locality with the term ethno-scape, a landscape which include all the different social actors as well as the imagined worlds that drive their actions and movements and contribute to structure their agency. For example, shrines, temples and churches can be visited by a variety of social actors, including believers, scholars and tourists, among the others; each of these actors possesses a social and cultural background which is unique to a certain degree.

New possibilities offered by modern transports and media also allow the conservation of group identities even in a context of migration: according to Appadurai, the contemporary condition of migrants is different from what used to be because new tools are available to maintain links wit one’s homeland. In this sense, he calls diasporas the condition of living abroad but maintaining a sense of identification thanks to these kinds of contacts: movies, tv shows, books, images, songs and news can reach virtually any place of the globe, thus allowing to conserve connections and identifications whether in past centuries migration tended to coincide with a loss of identity and a final homogenization in the long term. Diasporas can assume a more imaginative dimension, for example when its members consider as their homeland a state that never existed, but it does not have to be an only imagined community: when individuals are embedded in social networks that cuts through national borders and continent and maintain regular contacts with their homeland, they live in a transnational dimension.

An appreciable theoretical discussion about transnationalism was provided by Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt. The authors try to demarcate transnationalism from other similar concepts to construct it as a new field of research. According to them, to talk about transnationalism three conditions must be matched:

\[ a. \text{ the process involves a significant proportion of persons in the relevant universe (in this case, immigrants and their home country counter-parts) } \]
\[ b. \text{ the activities of interest are not fleeting or exceptional, but possess certain stability and resilience over time; } \]
They stress in particular the relevance of consistency: to describe something as transnational, it must be an activity that occupies a relevant role in the life of the participants and it must be carried out on a regular basis, as part of a routine. In this sense, transnational practices are different from occasional sending back of money or from visits to the home country on an irregular basis as they assume a preeminent role in the life of migrants. After this general definition, three main types are identified to describe transnational activities: economic activities, political activities and socio-cultural activities, a wider category in which the authors include all the activities related with the maintenance of an identity. All these activities involve the mobilization by a social actor of networks which are spread in different countries and can be as well divided between a transnationalism from below, when this actor is an individual who organizes his own activities, and a transnationalism from above, when the actor is an institution (a state, a company or a church, for example) which possesses a greater agency and power. It is suggested that the actions of singular actors are the best spot to understand the transnational dynamics: both small individual activities and state initiatives are articulated through the actions of single social actors, through whose perspectives is possible to reconstruct the activities of wider social networks and statal policies. In particular, the authors suggest an approach based on interviews as a useful source to gather this kind information: we will discuss in the next paragraph how this tool was used in the present research. Now we focus on the theoretical implications of this definition: the main issue that it brings to us is that, as the data will show, there is not a specific activity that directly link Kimbanguist community in Stockholm to Democratic republic of Congo, at least in the sense that is given to the term by Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt. We could consider collecting of money to send back to finance church’s projects one of these activities, but still, it does not involve a direct connection of single members with the homeland, or the travels that many of them organize to Congo, but these travels are not ordinary events, even if they tend to happen at least one time per year. Maybe we could define them as a routine displaced in a longer time unit, but the authors do not provide a formal definition of routine, nor a unit of time to establish what a routine is. What is important to stress, though, is that, even if there are not daily transnational activities, Congo and, in particular, the city of N’Kamba represent a constant presence in the day of the Kimbanguist people in Stockholm. We are going to discuss this fact with greater detail later, but now this mention is useful to introduce the concept of media-scape, also coined by Appadurai, to describe the flows of images, including in this group movies, pictures, songs and any other type of medium, that originate due to the existence of diasporic communities and the technological innovations of the last part of the 20th century. Diasporas, in particular, create the conditions for the development of new markets, new
requests for specific, culturally connoted content: movements of people and the imaginaries that these people possess generate thus new flows of images, produced in different locations, that contribute to the maintenance of a specific sense of identity and belonging to a specific community. It does not mean necessarily that people in a diasporic situation actually are part of the same community, but, as Appadurai states, they feel part of the same community and represent themselves as part of these community in their imagined worlds. These flows, even if they maybe do not constitute a transnational connection in the sense proposed by Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, can be seen as part of a transnational imaginary, that is important in people’s self-representations. Images, films, songs, YouTube live broadcasts and many different modes of transmitting information contribute to the maintenance of the boundaries that identify a community.

3. From Simon Kimbangu to Kimbanguist church

The aim of this chapter is to discuss Kimbanguist church and its characteristics, both in diachronic and synchronically perspective. First, we are going to explore the birth of Kimbanguist church as a movement, founded in the Belgian Congo during the twenties by Simon Kimbangu, a former catechist of a local Baptist mission, highlighting in particular the reasons that led to its success and its cultural characteristics. Second, a discussion of contemporary Kimbanguist church’s theology will be provided: Kimbanguism has faced many transformations in recent years, its theological basis has been heavily changed, posing the church in a situation of conflict with other members of the World council of churches. I inserted this short introduction to the history and main theological beliefs of the church in order to make clearer and easier to understand for the reader the cultural practices that characterize the community in Stockholm, since the Kimbanguist church not particularly notorious in Europe.

3.1 Simon Kimbangu, the prophet: the birth of Kimbanguist movement

The context of Belgian Congo

Since the 1870s, King Leopold II had financed a series of geographical expeditions in central Africa (Steed, Sundkler, 2000), whose objective was to achieve a better knowledge of Central Africa’s territory and to produce charters and maps of the region. This was the prelude to the claim of these lands: first, the king sent again an expedition leaded by Stanley, in order to sign treaties with local authorities and kings; then, he could push other European leaders to recognize his control over a large part of central Africa, including the region of Katanga (Van Reybrouck, 2016: 81). The reasons of
this enterprise were numerous: the King wished a colonial empire in order to gain prestige and he was able to exploit rivalries and fears of the bigger European powers; at the same time, he could secure public opinion’s support stressing his intent to fight the slave trade leaded by Arabo-Swahili merchants (Steed, Sundkler, 2000: 282) and to spread Christianity: these facts ensured to him the Christian World’s backing (Ivi, pp. 286). Freedom for missionary action of every confession was also one of the themes of the Conference (Ivi: 283).

The Congo Free State, that was born from these actions, was not a colonial territory: it was a private possession of King Leopold II and this meant that the King had to finance every of its activities. This fact had two major consequences: the first was that the state’s administration and its army had to be as lean as possible; thus, there were no services offered to local population, while the actual control of the territory was achieved mainly by cooperation with former lords of war (Macola, 2021: 85-90). These lords of war were later included in the police/military force of the state, the Force Publique, and here we have the second consequence: Congo Free state was financed by private capital and thus it had to be remunerative. The problem was that there were no monetary economy and state could not impose any direct taxation: this fact lead to a great expense for the king, which found a solution only in the final years of his private colony. This solution was rubber (Steed, Sundkler, pp. 283-286): after the invention of the vulcanization process, it had become a highly requested product and the state started to impose payment in rubber to the local population. Force Publique used tremendous violence and brutal coercive methods in case of missing payment (Ibid.). The Congo Free State ceased to exist when this violence was shown in Europe by a group of protestant missionaries (Macola, 202: 93-96), but it had already established a relationship of exploitation, fear and hatred with the local population, which would have lasted till the end of the colonial period. What is important here is that since this period a hierarchy was established and it was based on the differences between superior Belgians and inferior natives: the most evident trait that distinguished the two groups was skin color.

As we said, the presence of missions in Congo had been a theme since the Berlin Conference: it was meant to be a free “competition” between confessions trying to evangelize the population, but in fact Leopold was hostile to the presence of non-Belgian and protestant missionaries because he saw them as foreign agents acting in the interest of other powers. It is not hard to see that missionaries did not share the same agenda of the State (Cooper, Stoler, 1997): when they were aware, they criticized inhuman actions of Force Publique, while they were bringing on their interests by creating schools and missions, trying to spread the Good News.

The initial assumption of the missionaries was that only children were a good target for conversion, while adults were considered unredeemable (Steed, Sundkler, 2000: 295). According to Sundkler and
Steed (Ivi: 298), this changed with the development of infrastructures, especially with the evangelic work among the workers of the railways: now the missionaries tried to establish themselves into the villages and among the population. The same authors stress the relevance of migration and social crisis as causes for conversion: for example, evangelization was strong among the Luba (Ivi: 310), which were facing social crisis since the beginning of 19th century, due to the slave trades (Macola, 2021: 45). These factors, especially the crisis, were destined to be important also for the success of Simon Kimbangu’s predications.

A special role was played by Baptist missionaries: as protestants, translating the Bible in local languages was one of their main concerns (Steed, Sundkler, 2000: 306) and thus they were interested in larger communities, because that could justify a complete translation. Their action was focused on individual behavior and access to the Bible and it was from these small groups of local converted that most of the spread of Christianity in Congo came (Ivi: 307). However, too much independence was considered a risk:

> From that dangerous practice of Bible study no good would come - only unwanted questioning and ambition in the African masses. Such a danger must be eradicated. (Ivi:770)

Baptists then created a set of catechetical rules to guide these people (Ibid.), but the role of indigenous catechists remained. Baptism was the starting point for Simon Kimbangu, who was himself educated as a Christian and a catechist.

**Simon Kimbangu and his movement**

Even if today’s Kimbanguists believe that Simon Kimbangu was born on the ninth of December 1887, it’s a common idea between many scholars that he was born in 1889. His parents were Bakongo who lived in Nkamba, in the south-west of the Congo Free state (Mokoko-Gampiot, 2017: 62); he lost his mother when he was still a child and was raised by his aunt, Kizembo. Kizembo played an important role in allowing him to receive a Baptist education: she was acquainted with the missionaries of the Ngombo Lutete Mission, which she met and helped on many occasions according to Kimbanguists’ tales (Ivi: 68-69). She played the role of intermediary and granted her nephew the access to the Mission school. Kimbangu became a catechist for the Baptists and he was close to get the pastoral status, but failed the final examination: according to Balandier, this shock was one of the reasons that promoted his vocation (Ivi, 62), making his detachment by the church easier. According to Kimbanguist tradition, the first miracle made by Kimbangu was in 1921: going to a near village where a market was taking place, he stopped middle way and healed a young woman close to death.
The Kimbanguist oral tradition, as shaped by his son and successor, Diangienda, portrays Kimbangu as yielding to the urge of Christ as he stepped into the young woman's cabin [...]. On his knees, he made a short prayer and, taking the sick woman by the hand, said, “Nkiantondo [the name of the woman], in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, be healed and rise.” (Ivi: 63-64)

It was not the first time he heard a call by Jesus: the first time had been in 1918, but he resisted it because he felt he wasn’t able to accomplish it. Because of this resistance, he had failed in every attempt to find job.

After the acceptance of the call by Christ and the first miracle, many people came in search for him, asking him for healing: he was able to help the blinds, paralyzed and even dead people (Ivi: 64). When the voices which affirmed his ability to resurrect the dead spread, more people went to Nkamba to meet Kimbangu: even some non-Christian were present among them (Ivi: 65); they were coming also from French Congo and Angola: we will discuss in the next chapter the reasons for this success. Here we only need to highlight that the speeches pronounced by Kimbangu on many occasions were charged with a strong critic against the colonial power.

According to Mokoko-Gampiot, Kimbangu’s popularity triggered three different reactions from three distinct groups (Ivi: 70-74): the first was the group of Africa, which, as we have seen, had a quite positive response to Kimbangu’s speeches. The second group was composed by the missionaries: in this case we must distinguish between the Catholic missionaries, who were harshly critical against the newborn movement from the beginning, while the initial reaction of the protestants was positive, because Kimbangu was a Baptist and had success also among the non-converted. But this appreciation was short-lived: again, missionaries didn’t like an indigenous to take too much initiative and they feared the original interpretations of Christian texts. Also, missionaries didn’t recognize the miracles executed by Kimbangu. The third group was composed by the colonial authorities: they were the latest group to react to him, but also the most powerful. Kimbangu was charged with troublemaking, advertising false miracles and he was accused of organizing an uprising against the State and, thus, he was arrested and condemned to death and spent the rest of his life in jail in Elisabethville, where he died in 1951(Ivi: 75). This fact, instead of weakening the movement, strengthened it: a few years after the death of its founder, the Kimbanguist Church was recognized by the colonial government (Ivi: 76).

The symbolic power of Simon Kimbangu

Now we are in the position to analyse the symbolic means that Kimbangu used. It is very interesting to see how he interwove elements both from Christianity and Kongo traditions: by doing this, he was
able to use religion to criticize the colonial regime, overturning the Belgians’ strategy, in which religion was seen as a tool to control local population.

Two main elements formed his symbolic repertoire: biblical stories and the staff. He uses the authority given by these sources both to affirm a new morality and to criticize the colonial regime (Ivi: 66).

Being able to rely on a background as a catechist, Kimbangu had a widespread knowledge of the Bible. We must remember that he had no intention to create a new church: one of his main interests was in fact to erase part of the traditional customs and beliefs of his people (Ibid.). He asserted the necessity to respect the Ten Commandments and he recommended mutual love between the people. He preached against witchcraft, but also against traditions as drums, nkisi and polygyny and he forbade nudity. He also asserted that the source of his power was Christ and that people had read the Bible and to accept the new religion not as a white product, but as an eternal truth (ibid.). He used to read the Bible during his speeches, telling the stories contained in it and showing the images to the crowd (Ibid.). We shall discuss this practical use of the Bible below. The tales that he used the most were the defeat of Goliath by David and the Exodus (Ivi: 64): especially this last one was used as a metaphor for the condition of the Congolese people, seen as the Jews in Egypt, enslaved by the Pharaoh, who represented the Belgian colonialists. We can see here how political and religious field were not distinct in his speeches, because the biblical stories were used to explain the actual situation of the people: Kimbangu preached for the liberation of black people, the equal treatment of blacks and white and prophesied that one day “the White man shall become black and the Black man shall become white” (Ivi: 66). We will see how the dynamic of interlinking Bible stories and episodes of Kimbangu’s life has remained as a practice in contemporary Kimbanguism.

Two explanations are now required: to put it simple, why and how did Kimbangu’s ideas have such a strong impact?

The first question was partially answered already: during the previous decades and centuries Congo had seen the collapse of a social order and the birth of a much more violent one, first the domination of warlords and the Belgian Free State. Belgian colonization, even if it had lowered the level of violence, built an unequal society based on the inferiority of indigenous population. Missionaries were part of this system: they were trying to provide a new worldview and a frame to understand what was going on, but their image was connected to colonialism. Social crisis can be a strong catalyst for cultural and religious transformation and this is especially true for migrants and refugees (Steed, Sundkler, 2000: 311). The impact of Kimbangu’s speeches was helped by the fact that he was perceived as distant from the colonial system:
For Pierre Bourdieu, revisiting Max Weber’s theories on religion, a prophet is a figure who is characteristic of times of crisis and dissensus among the believers, the established clergy, and the official religion, and whose role is to offer the people an understanding of the world that meets their needs, giving new meaning to the present and future life. Simon Kimbangu, just like his predecessors Kimpa Vita/Dona Beatriz and William Wadé Harris, found all the conditions required to mobilize his compatriots into a prophetic movement. (Mokoko_Gampiot, 2017: 65)

We can see here some echoes of Robin Horton’s theory (Horton, 1971): religion may be considered as a tool of explanation. Changes in social conditions are a threat to the existing explanatory system, which has to adapt to maintain its sense and its use. As we already argued, Belgian Congo had seen many upheavals and thus the situation was favorable for the spread of new beliefs. The position of Kimbangu granted an access to the Christian beliefs which was not mediated by the white colonialists and missionaries, who were perceived as a threat.

The second answer is about the ability of Kimbangu to manipulate and use symbols and material culture: we can’t focus only on religion as an explanatory system, but we must also look at the material and ritual implications of it, as well as political (Comaroff, 1991). During his speeches, Kimbangu used two main tools: the Bible and a staff. About the first, it’s relevant to state that he didn’t only uses the stories, but he also had an assistant who used to show images representing the stories of the Bible. The staff was even more important because it was linked to two different traditions: called mvuala in Kikongo, it was one of the symbols of royalty and one of the sources of leader’s spiritual and material power; also, it was involved in initiation rites (Mokoko-Gampiot. 2017: 67).

This also shows the importance of hybridism: religions are not separated entities, they are complex connections between beliefs, practices and organizations and thus interactions between these elements must be studied carefully in order to understand social and cultural dynamics of religion. Mixing the symbol of Kikongo power with allusion to the figure of Moses, Kimbangu was able to gain the attention of both converted and local religion’s believers. As Balandier put it “In a more or less complementary sense, the ‘staff’ indicates that Simon Kimbangou was both King and Prophet” (Ivi. 67-68).

3.2 Simon Kimbangu, the Holy Spirit: Kimbanguist church and Kimbanguist theology

From movement to church
Kimbangu was arrested almost immediately after the beginning of his preaching and spent the rest of his life in prison, but the movement that he had inspired never stopped its growth. During the colonial period the movement was organized by Kimbangu’s wife, Marie Muilu, and later by their children, Kisolokele, Dialungana and Diagienda. Coordination of the movement was not easy, as it was persecuted by Belgian regime: some groups separated themselves and assumed a more political ideology, but the integrity of the movement was not at risk. The movement received institutional legitimacy from the colonial state shortly before the independence of Congo: it was the year 1959, and Kimbanguist church was born.

Since the beginning, the role of leader was inherited by Kimbangu’s youngest son, Diangienda, as Marie Muilu had passed away in the same year of the Church’s official recognition. Under his leadership, Kimbanguist church grew enormously (the church claims to have over 17 million members, while more cautious scholars talk of at least five or six (Ivi: 9)) and became the largest African initiated church. The church became also part of the World Council of Churches, first church founded in Africa to achieve such result, and one of the two official religions of Congo Republic, along with Catholicism.

Diangienda was a charismatic leader and was recognized with the ability to perform miraculous healings and other special abilities, formerly attributed to his father like ubiquity or mediumship: he used to report conversations between him and his father. Healing still plays an important role in defining the leader’s charisma: according to Gampiot (Ivi: pp. 159), Kimbanguist leader’s special ability to heal differs from the contemporary Pentecostalist churches, as it does not involve mass healing or special emphasis in the action of healing. It is a public action, but usually it is not performed to attire the attention of people gathered around the leader: it is a quiet and fast performance, after which the ill person is completely healed. The special ability to heal is a prerogative of the spiritual leader5, but both Diangienda and the actual leader Simon Kimbangu Kiangani stated on different occasions that the true power lies in faith, God and the Holy spirit. Water of N’Kamba, a river that springs in the homonymous city, plays an important role in these acts of healing. Diangienda also initiated the process of formalization of the Kimbanguist theology, producing a huge quantity of oral sermons and commentaries in many different languages, which were recorded and contributed to shape the Kimbanguist interpretation of Bible, as well as writing a book which describes the history of the church.

5 Kimbangu himself revealed his divine nature by performing miraculous healing on a woman.
The church is established in N’Kamba, once the village where Kimbangu was born and now considered the New Jerusalem. The city is central in Kimbanguist eschatological theory, as well in its practical organization: many economic and urbanistic projects are carried out in the city thanks to the support of Kimbanguist diaspora and travels to the city are as frequent as possible. The city contains the residence of the spiritual leader, a temple, a huge building where celebrations for important festivities are organised and a mausoleum where the bodies of Simon Kimbangu and his three sons are conserved.

The actual leader of the church is Simon Kimbangu Kiangani: he is the eldest son of Dialungana and his election to the role of unique spiritual leader was not uncontested. Initially, he was appointed as new legal representant of the church in a private family reunion, reunion which did not include the Church’s hierarchies (Mokoko-Gampiot, 2014: 9): this fact didn’t exclude his twenty-five cousins from the role of spiritual leader but left them as deputy spiritual leaders. A year later, though, Kiangani and Kimbanguist clergy organized a general assembly, from which other family members were excluded and where 63 resolutions were ratified, legitimizing the position of Simon Kimbangu Kiangani and degrading the other nephews to simple advisors of the spiritual leader.

From prophet to Holy spirit: developments in Kimbanguist theology

Kimbanguist church became a member of the World council of churches in 1969: it was the first African initiated church to be admitted to the council but, more than fifty years later, it was also the first church to be excluded from the council in 2021 (Vähäkangas, 2021: 146). What happened?

Since the beginning of the new millennium, many changes have occurred in church’s attitude toward popular beliefs and practices. Susan Asch identified a break between two different ways of being Kimbanguist in her work of 1983: describing the history of the church since its birth, she described the existence of an official Kimbanguism, the doctrines taught by the Kimbanguist Divinity School in Kinshasa, where Kimbangu is presented as a messenger of God and Jesus, a prophet and a saint, but still a human being. Trinity school forms theologists, but these theologists are not the only pastors of the church: other are chosen under the suggestion of local Kimbanguist communities and appointed by the church’s hierarchies and the spiritual leader. They, and the believers who form their communities, are representatives of what Asch calls the “Kimbanguism of Kimbanguists”, a different set of beliefs which includes reincarnation.

Beliefs about reincarnation involve Kimbangu and his descendants: in this perspective, which is widespread among Kimbanguist believers, Simon Kimbangu is not seen as a simple prophet or a saint, but as an actual incarnation of the Holy Spirit:
“It would take a long time to describe papa Simon Kimbangu: he's so much, on different layers. Papa Simon Kimbangu is someone... not someone, he is the [reincarnation of the holy spirit], the holy spirit reincarnated in his body. He has come to save the world and to save the people. Especially the black people, who was in difficulty under colonization and slavery. He also came with the Gospel, with a message from Jesus Christ... because Jesus said to his disciples, you can read this in the bible: it is John, 16. He said that he would send a helper, that is the holy spirit. He was gonna be for eternity and the world would not know him, but the people that are with him would know that he's Him, that is Papa Simon Kimbangu.”

The nature of Simon Kimbangu was never contested during my fieldwork: all the interviewees expressed concordant views about this. The last quote also shows the work of interpretation that Kimbanguists do in order to the Bible as a source: in the next chapter we will see many ways in which the ordinary life of Kimbanguists in Sweden is shape by practices, whose legitimation is found in the Holy Book; other sources of authority concerning religion are Diangienda’s speeches and the sacred hymns which are considered to be direct revelations sent by God.

The same concordance characterized the descriptions of the sons of Kimbangu, Kisolokele, Dialungana and Diangienda: they, as a triad, represent the reincarnations of the three forms of God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and they recreate the trinity. This link between the Christian trinity and Kimbangu’s sons is marked also through the calendar: the anniversary of papa Diangienda’s death, the sixth of April, is considered one of the most important celebrations for the members of church, and interviews confirmed this. Diangienda, who was the first to inherit the role of church’s leader, could claim a strong affinity with his father, since they occupied the same slot in the trinitarian structure and he was considered the reincarnation of his father. This belief led also to the establishment of a new date to celebrate Christmas, as papa Dialungana, the second son of Kimbangu and new reincarnation of Jesus, was born on May 25th. It should be noted that, while the belief is rarely present in official documents, it is virtually hegemonic:

“Today, it is clear that the strategy to keep the Kimbanguist official doctrine close to mainline Protestantism has backfired, and instead of the Protestant French official doctrine turning into the daily oral lived doctrine of the believers, the opposite has been taking place. This process is not yet complete in the sense that there is not yet any Catechism overtly containing the doctrine of the Holy Spirit’s incarnation in Simon Kimbangu. However, at the moment it seems that this teaching has become hegemonic, and it is difficult to hear it challenged from within the church. Additionally, the latest Catechism implies the incarnation of the Holy Spirit as Simon Kimbangu by referring to him as the consoler promised by Jesus, and by pointing out

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6 Interview with R., 05/05/23
Besides the belief in reincarnation, Mokoko-Gampiot identifies another relevant trope that characterize Kimbanguist church: the reconstruction and renovation of a Black Identity. He draws on Diangienda’s speeches to define Kimbanguism as a double identity, ethnic and religious (Mokoko-Gampiot, 2017: 196-227). Blackness and witchcraft constitute the negative pole: humanity is thought of as the progeny of Adam and Eve, original humans who were themselves black and who committed the original sin, witchcraft. The consequence was that black people were oppressed in history, while white people were blessed by God and were able to develop science and technology. Kimbanguism, on the other hand, represent the positive pole: it is the process through which blacks emancipate from their oppression and suffering and get their minds free from the sense of inferiority. In this opposition of races, whites are seen in three distinct ways: as already stated, they are considered to be blessed by God, but, on the other hands, they are considered younger relatives (thus occupying a position of subordination) and divorced by God. This does not mean that the church as an institution or its members as individuals have a racist attitude: it means rather that a metaphysic of race is applied notwithstanding the appearance. A white person who converts to Kimbanguism in considered to be black “inside”. “It is essentially Blackness”, Mokoko-Gampiot concludes, “that is the raison d’être of the Kimbanguist religion” (Ivi: 217). I have reported this conclusion because it differs at least partially from my observations: while narratives and tropes discussed by some of the interviewees include the idea that Kimbangu freed black people from oppression (as I will argue in the next chapter, the sense of renovation permeates the historical perspective of the persons I interviewed), asserting that blackness is the centre of Kimbanguist church seems an exaggeration. On one hand, the same migration to Sweden and the existence of a Kimbanguist church in Sweden were elaborated in the interviews as part of the church’s mission to broaden the knowledge about Simon Kimbangu around the world. On the other, I think that Kimbanguism, as well as every other religious or cultural phenomenon, involves much more than a simple identitarian claim: while defining a sense of identity is part of what the members of the community do with religion, it is not its only purpose. As already discussed in the previous chapter, social actors are constantly embedded in different social networks to which they express some kind of belonging, and religions are dynamic inventories of narratives, rituals, objects and practices, mediated and managed by institutions, which shape the relations of believers not only with other humans, but also with God(s), the universe, as well as with their own body, kins and home. Discussing the figure of Simon Kimbangu, A. clearly stated a universalistic vision of Kimbanguism, saying:
“He's the one that says that all people are going to be together. It doesn't matter who you are, because there's a lot of people, also in Congo, and they sometimes talk badly, like: “Kimbanguism is only for Congolese people or for African people”. That's not true: papa Simon Kimbangu came for everyone, because God made all of us. We put differences in the World because we put differences in ourselves, because we say: “OK, that person has this colour of his skin or this religion”, but we are the ones that put differences in ourselves. To, you know, to not be together. God did not make us to dislike one another because someone is from that tribe or that country, it's the man himself that that made the differences that we live with today”.7

Another example of this difference is the story of Jacob and Esau. Mokoko-Gampion reports that it is interpreted as a sign of the blessing given by God to the whites (Ivi: 205). During a mass in ***, the pastor read the same passages from the Bible and gave a different interpretation: the laziness of Esau was considered a behavior to avoid. The preaching involved also the psalm 132 and the oath of David to God, to avoid resting until the completion of the Lord’s house. The red thread of the speech was the exaltation of hard work, volition and perseverance, virtues that the believers have to cultivate in spite of Esau’s negligence. Another possible interpretation, given during the same ceremony, was the condemnation of conflicts between brothers, a metaphor of contemporary wars in central Africa and in the rest of the world. It is important to state, once more, that my comprehension of the mass’ preachings was mediated by a translation, thus it is possible that the lack of references to race is motivated by this limit. It is also possible that the cause was my appearance, since I am not black. I still find useful to highlight this discrepancy with Gampion’s account, also because, as we will discuss in the next chapter, hard work as a concept plays an important role in defining Kimbanguism in Sweden.

4. Kimbanguism performed

The aim of this last chapter is to analyse the ways in which the members of the Kimbanguist church in Stockholm manage to maintain the boundaries of their community and express their sense of the world.

The Kimbanguist community in Stockholm is composed by approximately fifteen persons, who live in the surroundings of the city. Most of them are now Swedish citizens, whether because they are born in Sweden or because they managed to get citizenship. All the interviewees have a regular job.

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7 Interview with A., 04/05/22
The building that they use to gather and perform the mass on Sunday is a Swedish church in ***, a small town close to Stockholm. In other words, there is no clear spatial separation between the members of the Kimbanguist church and the rest of the society of which they are part: what does allow them (and us with them) to consider themselves a community?

The thesis that we are sustaining is that this community maintains itself because it is a community of shared symbols: practices, rites, beliefs and stories. These symbols allow the creation and the maintenance of a symbolic border, which permits the believers to represent themselves as a community, as well as to give sense and direction to their experience (religion as a compass and a clock, to use Tweed’s metaphor). Members of the church in Sweden are embedded in rhythms, practices and necessities which do not allow the same degree of daily participation that is possible in the cities of Democratic Republic of Congo: it is impossible for them to organise daily sessions of collective prayers or masses, both because the church is far and the members are scattered in different zones and because they are not the owners of the church. The experience of living abroad shapes their religiousness, and it makes even more relevant collective practices: rituals, in this perspective, are key sites where the boundaries are built and maintained, and where believes are shared and asserted.

The main ritual taken into account is the weekly mass, performed on Sunday: it was the day of most of the meetings with the members of the community, it was directly observed and it was widely discussed during the interviews. While providing a description of the ritual, I try to highlight salient tropes and ideas that inform the worldview of the believers: work ethic and the ability to actively participate into the church’s projects and initiatives emerges as one of the main themes; the commemoration of Marie Muilu, wife of Simon Kimbangu, was also a chance to discuss the model of femininity.

At the same time, I focus on daily practices and behaviours, when informed by religious views, in an attempt to understand and describe, how the relationship between believers and the world is mediated by Kimbanguism: how to handle one’s body (prohibitions about food, clothing and practices), but also a specific orientation toward space and time. Where are we going? And where are we from? Kimbanguism beliefs provide a model to understand reality, to represent history and a specific religious geography. N’Kamba is the very centre of this model: on a temporal perspective, it is considered both the place where humanity was born and where it will eventually be reunited with God; on a geographical one, it is the object of the church’s efforts, as most of the projects involve the city and its surroundings; in the experience of the community’s members, especially of second generations, N’Kamba is a place where the faith is felt stronger and where ordinary social and cultural differences are transcended toward a sense of oneness of the different Kimbanguists.
I will draw extensively on the words of the interviewees, in order both to highlight similarities and show subjectivity and individuality of different persons, and to avoid an essentialist representation.

4.1 A Kimbanguist ritual: the mass

As we discussed in theoretical framework, in a context of globalization, diasporas and cultural complexity, we can’t imagine communities as isolated objects: members of the Kimbanguist community in Stockholm live scattered in a wider social context, that sees them involved for a considerable amount of time in relationships that are not linked to the church. This fact was acknowledged by many the interviewees as a relevant difference that characterize their religious experience, if compared to what usually happens in Democratic republic of Congo:

“A: [...] In Congo, they have the evening and the morning prayers, so it's basically the same. Morning prayers are at 6:00, there is preaching for 30 minute and then the prayers and stuff. They keep it short because people go to work usually after that. And then in the evening prayer is around 4:00-4:30 I think it starts and then it's also a short preaching and then. Prayer.

Interviewer (I): OK, so usually in Congo this happens every day, right?

A: Yes, in Congo and N’Kamba it's every day from Monday to Saturday and on Sunday it’s the mass.

I: I see. Of course, here is a bit more complicated...

A: Yes, it's complicated with renting the place and stuff, so we only have one evening prayer during the week.”

“K/T": For example, for us here in Sweden, since we are renting or borrowing this place and we also have our evening prayers on Wednesdays. It’s different like in Congo, where the church is from, they have it every day because the church is ours. But here, since we are only borrowing, renting, we only do it on Wednesday and Wednesdays is like a short version of the mass. It's like an evening prayer. We read the Bible as usual, but we don't have a quire and that part in the evening service, and we also use the time after church to rehearse some songs with flute and with the quire.”

“I: [...] On which other occasions you, members of the church, meet for any kind of activities during the week, outside the mass?"
R: “I would say it's not as much as it is in Kinshasa, in Congo and in Africa because there is... most of the work is there, there are more and more people there so it's easier to have organizations, like repetitions and things like that...”

The parallels with the usual practices that characterize the Church in Congo are recurrent: in Democratic Republic of Congo, especially in the capital, Kinshasa, and of course in the city of N’Kamba it is possible for Kimbanguist communities to organize the urban space and the daily routines of the believers, at least to a greater degree than in Sweden, since the church possesses the building for rituals and believers are more numerous and gathered in smaller distances. The church that the community is renting from the Swedish Church in ***, while not extremely far, does not allow for such a continuous frequentation, both because of the different routines of the Kimbanguists living in Stockholm and because of the regular activities that involve the building; for some of the members, the very possibility of attending the church regularly on Sunday is prevented by the fact that they do not live in the Swedish capital.

Attending the church and the Sunday’s mass, in such context, plays an important, not only as a religious prescription, but as an occasion to reassert shared narratives, values and ideas: in a word, to reassert the boundary of the community, one’s belonging and one’s worldview. At least that’s how R. put it, in different moments of our conversation:

“R: [...] and you always hear something that you are gonna take with you in life, to the next week, something to believe, a strong belief”.

“R: For me, personally, is always things that you can take in your daily life, how to be strong in the commandments of the lord. We are young people, it's not very common for young people to listen to the commandments of the lord.”

“R: It is very important for me, because it is something that is in my everyday life, it is a big part in my everyday life. Without the church it's hard for me to practice my belief. The role of the church is to stay connected with you creator, God himself, so the importance... it's hard to have the words... Belonging to this church is really important, staying connected with God himself. Without church I don't have any place to... yes, I can pray at home, but it is different when you have a church that you belong to, where you can pray. That is the important part”,

R. highlighted the importance of the church as a collective activity, where individual beliefs, good behaviours and connection with God are mutually reinforced; these words echoes the analysis of

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11 Interview with R.
12 Not all the members possess a car for example: during one of my visits, one of the women that were present was helped by the other members to organize her travel back home with public transports.
13 Interview with R.
rituals provided by Clifford Geertz (Geertz, 1973:112): rituals are occasions where “dispositions” (specific ways to behave and feel, aspirations and values), induced and praised by religious systems (in this case, R. mentions the commandments), meet the “general conception about the order of existence”, and so religions gain their naturalized and obvious appearance and the ordinary experience is comprehended as but a fraction of reality. These changes only last for a period of time, since the complexity of reality soon starts to weaken this state of harmony between things, feelings and representations: this is the reason because rituals need to be repeated over time, to reinforce this naturalization, as well as the boundary of the community. The mass, repeated every Sunday, is the main tool for these purposes.

**Structure of the mass**

But how does a Kimbanguist mass work? And is it different in Stockholm from it is in N’Kamba? The interviewees all agreed on this point: the mass represents for them an element of continuity, that unites all Kimbanguist communities in Africa as well as abroad. Asking about the mass, I was told that “[…]it doesn't matter where in the World [you are] … If I maybe go to a Kimbanguist mass in, for example in France, I will always recognize it because it's the same everywhere you go. We have a structure […]”14. Similar claims were made also by other interviewees15. This structure is quite explicit in the discourses of the Kimbanguist people in Stockholm, who provided similar descriptions when asked: I will rely on their explanations, since their own descriptions matched my observation and considerations16.

The church of *** is a huge square block of concrete built on three floors which contains many rooms, including a kitchen and recreative spaces at the ground level. At the top, there is a small room with a blackboard, a desk and, across the room, many chairs. During my visits, people gathered in order to assist the mass ranged between eight and twelve, including the pastor and his assistant, whose role has been compared to a deacon. The mass usually started between 10:00 and 11:00, lasting two and a half hour; the social part, however, can last even longer and arrive to 4:00 p.m.

The pastor recalls the attention of the believers, in order to mark the beginning of the ceremony. The mass is divided into two main parts, which can be labelled as a service part and a social part. The first

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14 Interview with A.
15 For example: “So, if you go in a Kimbanguist church in, for example, France or Belgium, the program is going to be all the same”. Interview with K.
16 The form of the service is almost perfectly self-evident: the notes that I took during the first mass I attended already highlighted it, even if, of course, most of the meanings were lost. I quote from my notes: “the ceremony has a cyclical ongoing: the preacher has chosen some readings that he wants to comment with the believers. The spaces between the readings are filled up by songs, flute plays and prayers. The cycle is repeated three times”.

part of the mass, which is the part of preaching, is always introduced by a song, called Nsilu a Nzambi\(^\text{17}\). The song was sung at every mass I have attended, and it was indicated as a constant in every Kimbanguist mass:

\[
\text{“A: […] the song that we sing always in the beginning and it's always the same in every Kimbanguist church that you go to. So, the song we always start with says Nsilu a Nzambi […]”}\(^\text{18}\)
\]

\[
\text{“R: There's always one song, Nsilu a Nzambi, the song we start with. That started, I think, in 2001. Every church's gathering start with that song […]”}\(^\text{19}\)
\]

Following the song (which is, or should be, always sung by a woman) there is a sequence three “cycles”, each of which includes one reading, songs, exhibitions of the flutists (fluki) and prayers. In the middle between the second and third cycle, a session of prayers is performed by three of the believers and, after that, there is makabuo/mikailu\(^\text{20}\), a collection of small offerings, gathered by the pastor and the deacon. After the third reading, the pastor starts his preaching, discussing the topic and tracing the red thread that unites the different parts. This first part of the mass is concluded by another prayer and a song.

### STRUCTURE OF THE MASS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First part: Service</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening song:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nsilu a Nzambi</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 1

After this first part, which is characterized by a formal attitude of all the persons involved, by the use of holy “tools”, such as the Bible and the hymns, and a “frontal” relation between the pastor and the believers, there is a second part, which was defined a “social” part by my hosts: almost a reversal of the previous one, this moment is characterized by a much more joyful and relaxed attitude, formalities and hierarchies leave space for greetings and conversations. The social part can be as well divided in two parts: the first, where one of the members, usually the deacon, gives announcements and news

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\(^{17}\) The song and an English translation can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ij_8SndoagI8

\(^{18}\) Interview with A.

\(^{19}\) Interview with R.

\(^{20}\) The two words were used in two different interviews to describe the same part, the small offering in the middle of the service
about the church, the projects that it is financing but also about the community. It is the chance for greeting newcomers and, if someone has important news to share, this is the time to do so. After this, there is nsinsani: a speaker is turned on, playing a brass band music, while the believers march together; meanwhile, they start to put on a small basket more donations, a greater amount than the previous. Before discussing the reasons of the marching and the differences between the two offerings’ moments, makabuo and nsinsani, we discuss the other parts of the mass, now that its structure and flow are a bit clearer. One suggestion can already be made perhaps: while the first part of the mass seems to be focused on the relationship with God, with correct behaviour and beliefs, the second part, on the contrary, emphasizes the relationship with people, other members of the community and, more in general, with the church.

### STRUCTURE OF THE MASS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second part: Social part</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greetings, announcements, conversation</td>
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Tab. 2

**Singing is like praying two times: the hymns during the mass**

Songs: the role in the mass, introduction, the words of the interviewees on the songs, the songs are sent by God, theological source, the meaning of the song: we are chosen by God; the use of internet, the pre-semantic impact of music

“*K/T: We always start with one song and it's always a woman that do the first prayer”*\(^{21}\)

“A: [The pastor] always asks for one song in the beginning and then one woman starts with a prayer”\(^{22}\)

“R: In Sweden, in every Kimbanguist gathering, we always follow a structure: we start with a song, often a woman prays the first prayer”\(^{23}\)

These words by the members of the community, said while discussing the structure of the mass, already highlight important features of Kimbanguist songs: in all the passages quoted, it is visible a

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\(^{21}\) Interview with K.  
\(^{22}\) Interview with A.  
\(^{23}\) Interview with R.
shift, or an equivalence made between singing and praying. Prayer and song are interchangeable words, because, as they explained, singing represents an even more elevated form of praying:

“A: [...] And we Kimbanguists also say, there is a saying in Kimbanguist church: It says [...] that to sing is to pray two times over. So, when you sing, you're singing a message to God, it is like praying two times over.”

“R: That is a very important part in the Kimbanguist church: we always say that singing is like praying for a second time. When you sing the songs of the Lord, you are praying for God with the things you say.”

Mokoko-Gamppiot cites hymns as one of the three sources of Kimbanguist church’s theology, together with the Bible and the preachings of papa Diangienda Kuntima (Mokoko-Gamppiot: 83-121). Hymns play a major role into shaping the believers’ representations and worldview, but they also contain shared moral norms, suggesting the practical behaviour to maintain (Mokoko-Gamppiot: 120). Even more important, they differ from the Bible and Diangienda’s preachings because they are an open repertoire, a constantly updated and dynamic source that allows for a greater flexibility in terms of interpreting reality and suggesting correct practices.

Hymns gain their legitimacy from their origin. As a matter of fact, they are not simple songs for Kimbanguists: they are divine hymns inspired by God. It is God that sends the songs to the believers, or, as Mokoko-Gamppiot reports, even to non-believers (Mokoko-Gamppiot, 2017: 103). All the members interviewed by me shared this opinion:

“R: [...] All songs are not written, they come down for people, God places them in the head of special people. They are "guest-songs", they come from the Lord. We don't write them like famous artists in the World, like Michael Jackson maybe, who sits in his studio and writes. It is not like that for us and that's why the songs we sing are very important, because they come directly from the Lord. God also tells things that are coming, they are prophetic lyrics.”

“A: [...] I would say that it's how we believe we get messages from God. Some people, you know, like when we [read] about, for example, Daniel in the Bible, he was very wise or Joseph that, his siblings sold him to Egypt, and he got his [strength]. You know, the thing that God gave him was how to interpret dreams. But songs (1) are a way for God to communicate with his people (2) It's a way to give messages to people. And, also, songs...”

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24 Interview with A.
25 Interview with R.
26 Ibid.
are a way to give prophecies to people. About what is going to happen or what has happened”.

I discussed the topic with K., a man who usually serves as a deacon during the mass in Stockholm. In particular, I was interested in understanding the process of recognition, the way in which a song, proposed by someone, is acknowledged as a true message from God by the church. He told me this:

“K/T: [...] The songs that we get in common in Kimbanguist Church are inspired. So, they are not [songs] that someone's just sits and write. The way we get songs in the church is that someone gets inspired from God. He hears a voice, so he can be anywhere, maybe at work. He can be in the shower; he can be walking on the road, and he hears a voice. It's usually a voice like a quire, it is singing. So [...] if God has inspired me to hear the voice of the song, I can hear a song in a completely different language, I can hear a song in a language that I don't even know. So, in Kimbanguist church, people get songs in languages that they don't, they don't even know. [...] So, when you get inspired the procedure is usually [this]: when you get a song, you get inspired and you go to your local church; you will talk to them and say: “I've been inspired and this is the song that I heard” and you sing it. And then, in the church we learn the song and then we start to sing it [...]

I: Are people always sure that songs are inspired by God?

K/T: The answer to the question is yes, we know that [songs] are inspired by God, because [of] how it works. If we sit in a room like we do now, we are three persons and you speak English for example: you can get inspired and ear a song in French, but you don't speak French, so you will hear a song from the angels that are singing to you. But me and him, we're not gonna hear anything. You are going to be the one that's inspired in that moment and we're going to see that someone is... something is happening to you, that you are getting inspired and you're listening to the song. When you are finished, when the song has finished, you are going to keep the song, you're going to remember the song even if you don't speak French. So, when you get the song, immediately you can start to write it down. So, that's how we know that it's inspired, because it's an event that only the person will hear.”

Molyneux, elaborating a typology of Kimbanguist hymns, reported a more complex and centralized process (Molyneux, 1990: 156-161): the person who believe to have been inspired must turn to the Bureau des Chants Kimbanguistes, an organization internal to the church whose scope is precisely to gather inspired hymns and to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic songs, where the hymn

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27 Interview with A.
28 Interview with K.
will be listened and judged through a series of steps, the first of which sees the inspired person singing the hymn to the director of the Bureau. After this first selection, a deeper analysis of the hymn is carried out by the Bureau Technique and here a deeper analysis is conducted: the person sings the song many times, so that the tune can be transcribed and the quality of music and text judged. After this process, which as many other bureaucratic procedures is strongly based on the correspondence between the expected and actual behaviour of the examined person (since the song is of divine inspiration, the person should not look hesitant or anxious), the hymn passes through composition and transposition, and it is finally recognized as an official hymn by the church.

As the same author notes though (Molyneux, 1990: 162), this official procedure does not prevent the use and spread of more hymns, and at the time of his research there was no official classification of the hymns. Many of the hymns that are used, on the other hand, never passed through the official registration mechanism (Molyneux, 1990: 159). This fact, I believe, highlights both the changes that characterized Kimbanguist theology during the twentieth century and the resistance that is, or at least was, opposed by Kimbanguist grassroot communities against attempts by the clergy to impose an official doctrine, especially if we consider the outcomes of Molyneux’s analysis: according to him, in most of the hymns Kimbangu does not appear identified as or associated with the Holy Spirit, but with Jesus. He recalls the interpretation of Sundkler (Molyneux, 1990: 170), that labelled the attitude of African initiated churches toward their prophets as icons of Christ, able to mimic is power and spread his Word, but ultimately depending on Him for their recognition. In short, while they are able to perform miracles, they are not the same with God and act only as His icons, showing similar powers to Jesus Christ. At the same time, he does not deny that, talking with members of the church, the association between Simon Kimbangu and the Holy Spirit is a constant. As for ***, the divine nature of Simon Kimbangu was asserted in all the interviews and in every other occasion. It is interesting to note, though, that, while discussing the topic, parallels with Jesus were common as well: Simon Kimbangu made miracles, like Jesus and in an even greater way than him.

“K/T: [...] we read in the Bible that Jesus Christ did a lot of miracles: he resurrected the dead and he healed the sick. During the time that papa Simon Kimbangu was in N’Kamba, he did more than that: there were masses of people that came to N’Kamba to be cured and people that was dead, they came back to life. And also, when they imprisoned papa Simon Kimbangu in Lubumbashi for 30 years, people were still seeing papa Simon Kimbangu”.29

“R: He also came with the Gospel, with a message from Jesus Christ... because Jesus said to his disciples, you can read this in the bible: it is John, 16. He said that he would send a

29 Ibid.
helper, that is the holy spirit. He was gonna be for eternity and the world would not know him, but the people that are with him would know that he's Him, that is Papa Simon Kimbangu. Papa Simon Kimbangu always said that he's just a messenger, he was sent from Jesus Christ. That's why the church is named Jesus Christ's church on Earth by his (in French) special envoy”.

These can be seen as traces of different theologies, of contested interpretations that, even if not accepted universally, influence each other: notwithstanding the recognition of Simon Kimbangu as the Holy spirit, the official name of the church and the explanations that are given (Papa Simon Kimbangu always said that he is just a messenger) highlights an alternative interpretation, that has been for a long time the official doctrine of the church, while the belief in the incarnation of the Holy Spirit only recently found official recognition from the church, at the cost of its exclusion for the World Council of Churches.

To conclude, songs are communications with God, that allow to know his will, as well as future and past events, but also to rejoice, to express grit and sorrow. For now, I only suggest that hymns, as well as the other sources, contribute to shape a specific chronology and geography, useful to map reality, to orient action and to give meaning.

At the same time, songs are a way to think of one’s position in this map, and to express the belonging to a wider group. I take as an example the song that introduces the beginning of the mass, Nsilu a Nzambi. Here is the text:

“*The promise that God made me since childhood
Is to build up the work of the Messenger of God*” (x 2)

“*Let us do the work of God in truth
In truth, in truth
Let us do the work of God in truth
In truth, in truth
So the whole world will witness our salvation*” (x 2) (Refrain)

“So the whole world will witness our salvation” (x 2) (Refrain)

“My hope is in the living God and not in the human being

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30 Interview with R.
Neither in any other creature of this world” (x 2)

Refrain

“Oh beloved, similar to myself,

Do you know the place that will be for you?” (x 2)

Refrain”

The song states the belonging of the singers to a wider community, the chosen by God in order to complete His work, to construct the New Jerusalem. The group thus is in possess of an objective, a sacred goal that others, external to the group, are going to witness. A higher scope that gives meaning to one’s experience and a difference that distinguish the group, that mark a boundary, which in manifested in the recognition of and competence with recurrent symbols, like the sacred hymns. A distinction that is marked also in the ways in which specific practices and precepts are described. As Molyneux notes (Molyneux, 1990: 164), the hymns are oral compositions of communal use and thus, given the role that they play during the mass (they introduce the service and follow every reading), they are one of the main means through which members of the Kimbanguist communities can assert their sense of participation: most of them contain not first singular person expressions, but rather statements of common aspirations, desires: “Ritual finds part of its meaning in its communal participation. By their singing, Kimbanguists declare: "We participate, therefore we are” (Ibid.). As A. put it, while talking about the opening song:

“A: It's like something that God has put in you to fulfil it, because God has chosen you to build this church on earth. And that song is very powerful because it's a reassuring song. [...] I would say you feel special when you sing it because you feel like... I'm here because I have a meaning, there is a meaning why I am here and there's a meaning why you are here. We are here for one purpose and God has chosen [us], he chose us even before we were in our mother's belly”.

The mass as a lecture: the preaching

As already said, the mass starts after the first song: it is composed of three readings from the Bible, which are going to be discussed and explained by the pastor at the end. The preaching represents the sum and the teaching of the mass, it is the centre of the first part of the ceremony, as it aims to inspire and motivate the people in staying strong in their belief, as R. put it: it is a chance to discuss biblical narratives and episodes of the life of Kimbangu, of his wife and his children, in order to draw more

31 Interview with A.
general norms and values that Kimbanguists must respect and follow. The preaching, in other words, is a lesson, a chance to remind to the members of the community who they are and why. It draws its legitimacy both in a commonly recognized and respected repertoire of narratives (Bible, episodes in the life of Simon Kimbangu and songs), as well as on the power of these narratives in orienting the believers in the world.

The first two readings are always chosen from the same sources: the first one is always one of the psalms, while the second is always a reading of the ten commandments. Questions about the reasons for these choices were short, but clear: psalms are classified as songs, it is acknowledged that they were originally thought to be sung and not read, thus they follow *Nsilu a Nzambi* as an introduction to what will be the topic of the preaching. The commandments, on the other hand, represent a guide given by God to His people in order to follow him:

“K/T: We read the 10 commandments [...] because, as we read in the Bible, when the Israelis left in Egypt, God gave them the 10 commandments to know how to follow him, and since we are also following God, we also have to be reminded of the 10 commandments.”

The third reading is drawn more freely, consisting in one or two chapters from the Old or New Testament. After all the readings, the pastor starts his preaching: he sums up the topics that have been discussed in what he rode and he traces a red thread in order to draw a moral, a teaching, which is the very centre of the whole preaching. It is an important moment to remember, contextualize and thus to strengthen the beliefs and the norms, As R. puts it:

“R: For me, personally, [my favourite themes are] always things that you can take in your daily life, how to be strong in the commandments of the lord [...]. Thats one of my favourites, it's always one of the themes that I like, it gives me strong belief to continue the journey of following the commandments of the lord, I would say.”

In this sense, the religious calendar plays a major role in determining the topic of the mass, which is otherwise decided by the pastor. One of the masses I was able to attend took place on the 10th of April, which is the anniversary of Marie Muilu, Simon Kimbangu’s wife: it was a chance to reassert her relevance as the wife and mother of the Holy Spirit and to offer a gender model of femininity, which became also a topic in our conversations after the mass. The same can be said about the ceremony held in honor of Kisolokele, Kimbangu’s first son, on the anniversary of his death: the pastor reevoked the intransigence which characterized Kisolokele, his strength in keeping the rules. The constancy in

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32 Interview with K.
33 Interview with R.
one’s own work was also one of the themes drawn from the already mentioned tale of Jacob and Esau: the laziness, the lack of effort by Esau were what made possible for Jacob to win his place as firstborn. Commitment, effort and perseverance were almost always present in the discourses and dialogue with the members of the community and the preachings are a chance to renovate and reassert such dispositions, as shared values that, through the public assertion, gain a much greater strength. In this sense, I share Garbin’s analysis, which state that, inside public and collective religious rituals tend narrations about an ideal social order are created and spread, communicating to the members of the community as well as to the outsiders (Garbin, 2012: 429)

**Connection with God: music and prayers**

Kisolokele, was a member of the fluki, the Kimbanguist group of flutists, a group originated by his father Simon Kimbangu, who was himself a flute player, as I was told during one of the interviews. Fluki is the only Kimbanguist music group present in Stockholm and it includes four members. As already said, the flow of the service is marked by the intervention of the group, as every reading from the Bible is followed by prayers/songs and music. The fact that there is only one band, and the small dimension of the Kimbanguist community in Stockholm, does not allow public exhibitions like the ones discussed by Garbin (2012): according to him, the involvement of Faki (Kimbanguist fanfare) in London’s “New Year’s Day Parade” was both a public assertion of a migrants and second generations’ identity in the public sphere, the post-colonial realization of the prophecies of Simon Kimbangu and Diangienda (Ivi: 438), who had announced the spread of Kimbanguism all around the world thanks to the believers and the construction of a sacred frame in a secular urban landscape (Ivi: 418). Most of these dimensions are lost during the mass, an event that, while public and open to anybody, does not possess such visibility. Music, nonetheless, united with songs, preaching and prayers, in the context of the mass contributes to the maintenance and reassertion of the boundary, to strengthen the identification in the community. At the same time, prayers, whether singed of said, and music are tools that allow the Kimbanguist believers (and not only) to feel a connection with God. As Garbin notes, “prayers connect the faithful with the unbounded horizon of the divine while, at the same time, providing a religious ‘orientation’ and mapping a temporary space of practice and devotion” (Ivi: 434). Prayers are said in Lingala or Swedish, depending on the language with which the believer feels more comfortable; some of them were said in English when I was present.

But it is not only the content of these musical elements that I want to highlight: the enchanting effect of the music is central for its efficacy. Following Alfred Gell’s ideas on the technology of enchantment (Gell, 1992), I see Kimbanguist songs and hymns as “techniques” of enchantment. According to Gell, when dealing with objects, we must not look exclusive either to the semantic aspect of them or to
their objective, material properties. To understand the effects that objects are able to evoke we must look at the processes through which they are produced (Gell, 1992: 49-51): the carves that characterize Trobriand’s canoes are not efficient only because of their design, which is able to arouse unwitting reactions, but because of the spiritual agency (in this case, magic) that, according to the observers, participated in the realization of the carving and that emanates from those design (Ivi: 46).

In a similar way, we must consider the process of revelation that the members of the community attribute to hymns and music, when we try to understand their effects on the believers during the mass. Singing a song or playing a melody are reenactments of divine assertions, whose power is highlighted even more when we consider the training and exercise that are necessary. This is also why these parts are so important in making the connection with God to feel so real and actual.

At the same time, I would not underestimate the objective effects and the material properties of sound in this process, since music and songs had an effect not only on the believers who share ideas about the origin of the song, but also on me, an external observer. Gell suggests that the power of artistic manuacts is symbolic, that these objects are surrounded by a halo which is generated by the resistance that they offer, a resistance that is intellectual (ivi: 47-49): it is “the difficulty I have in mentally encompassing their coming-into-being as objects in the world accessible to me by a technical process which, since it transcends my understanding, I am forced to construe as magical” (Ivi: 49). Understanding if the effects that Kimbanguist hymns and music arouse in a non-believer who attends the mass is to attribute to his cultural background or to the effects of these sounds on his cognitive system, and to which degree, is out of possibilities of this work, but this encounter between people and unknown cultural artifacts remain significant: I was touched by the songs as well, notwithstanding my ignorance both of the language and the origin of the songs, and notwithstanding the fact that I am not a believer. Artifacts, such as songs, are able to influence humans even when they are culturally “incompetent”, such as myself.

**Makabuo and nsinsani: symbolic and material participation to the building of the New Jerusalem**

While the connection with God is expressed through music and hymns, the same songs often contain assertion about the desirable social order and the correct behaviour of a Kimbanguist, together with the preaching. Also, the sense of belonging to a community permeate these parts of the service. This participation in a wider community and a greater goal is expressed also through the very body of the members: when they attend the mass, almost every Kimbanguists wear a specific uniform (there are two, one for men and one for women), which is coloured in white and green. The significance of these colours, and the meanings associated with them, are going to be discussed in the next chapter, where
we discuss how the members hold and manifest the worldview that is expressed during the mass. Now we only suggest that these clothes, united with the fact that the believers take off their shoes and that women cover their hairs when inside the church, and the solemn attitude that characterize them, contribute to form a specific sacred frame, separated from the ordinary life, where boundaries and belonging are reasserted. This observation is reinforced by the prohibition of any economic activity on Sunday:

"M/T: We Kimbanguists don't buy or sell anything on Sundays. She specifically said that the rule about buying or selling anything on a Sunday is connected to the ten commandments actually that say that the seventh day is the day you have to give your whole heart to the Lord and it means for us that you cannot participate in any kind of social activities other than church basically, so you cannot sell or buy or do any kind of activity like that but you can, of course, buy ticket when you are going to Church, you can buy fuel and stuff like that" 34

The most relevant parts of the mass, in this sense, are the two offerings, makabuo and nsinsani. The first thing to note is that there are two different times for offering, and the action is performed in rather different ways. Makabuo happens during the service, between the second and the third preaching, after the prayers. While all the members are kneeling and praying their personal prayers, the pastor or the deacon pass around with a basket, where the believers put a small offering. On the contrary, during nsinsani, the basket is put on a chair and people are free to add as much as they want. Nsinsani also happens in the second part of the mass, the social part (see Tab. 2): the tone is much different, solemnity leaves spaces for joy, music, talking and marching, after the announcements. Why is there a repetition then? Even if the topic was not raised by interviewees, they were ready to provide an explanation, that the reader may already have guessed:

"A: So I would say: makabuo is more like a small offering [...]. When we have makabuo, [them] the pastor prays after: What the pastor says in the in the prayer after Makabuo [usually is]: “God, please, think about all the people that put their hand and gave a small part of their salary, a small part of their hard-earned money”. Because, for example in Congo where people don't have a lot, makabuo is a way for someone that maybe don't have much to put a little bit of money, small money”. 35

"R: Mikailu is for the project also, but it's more like the symbol of the things you have done in the six days of working. Nsinsani is more, is to faster grow the projects in church, because

34 Interview with M., 16/04/22
35 Interview with A.
Papa Simon said "we have to build N’Kamba, we have to build the church, it has to go faster, so when it goes faster, when we do nsinsani, we are closer to the promised land".36

So makabuo in an integral part of the service, it is an act that allow everyone to contribute to the projects of the church, its power is not merely economic, but it is rather symbolic: it allows the person to testify his or her efforts to help. Again, hard work ethic emerges as the north in the community’s moral compass. The solemn atmosphere, the prayers that introduce and close the donation and the context of the service work to make the one who give as part of a bigger reality, of a community, of a project: it doesn’t matter if his work doesn’t allow him to give more, as far as he performs this symbolic donation.

Nsinsani, on the other hand, is made after the service part is concluded: the sacred frame is partially removed, as the believers become more relaxed and start to greet each other and to talk. After the conclusion of the service, the deacon welcomes the newcomers and starts to resume the recent events of the week: in particular, he exposes the developments that were made with the church’s projects. This is the moment where the transnational aspect of the mass is more evident: a group of Swedish citizens reunites and listen about the financing of a church whose main activities are all situated in Congo, they want to know how long it will be before the fishing ship that will help to feed people in the Bas Congo region is ready, or about the houses that are built in N’Kamba, or the farm that is being built. It is after these announcements that music is turned on and, listening to faki’s music, they all march, rejoice and add more money in the basket. There are no rules, no one is forced to give more, but the members are usually enthusiastic to do so: offers are welcomed with collective cheers, applauses and praises, that often lead to a mimicking attitude of other believers, who themselves add new donations.

While makabuo is a symbol of belonging and of one’s efforts, nsinsani is an actual gathering of funds in order to finance actual projects. We should consider also that this distinction is pertinent, but not perfect: while makabuo’s offers, no matter how small, are still going to finance the church, also donating during nsinsani require a certain degree of symbolism, a certain spirit. As R. notes, a great contribution during nsinsani does not substitute the other rules and the moral code as it does not show the individual commitment per se:

"R. When we give money, it is about commitment, it is about your belief. In the Bible it is said: there were a poor woman and a wealthy man in the Temple. They were in the temple: the man gave a lot of money and the poor woman just gave the money she had. But Jesus

36 Interview with R.
said that the woman was the most righteous because she gave everything she had and the rich man just gave for showing himself. The important, for us Kimbanguists, is to give the things we have, not just to show off. You have to give with a pure heart, a pure mind, not just to show off. You must not be forced to give your money, because you "have to". That's not good, that's not money that God will accept. It is not accepted in God's mind to give with force. You have to give with pure heart, that is the most important”.

Nsinsani and makabuo reveal thus a double role: on the one side, they are material and symbolic tools to connect with a wider, transnational and divine reality, as these offerings are used to build up the Holy City, while, on the other, they are chances to reassert belonging to a community, to respect a shared moral code and to assert a specific identification.

Nsinsani is not only a moment of participation in the church’s projects: it is also a time of common rejoice, which is expressed through music and marching. Rejoice that, nonetheless, is still coded and performed in accordance with a specific moral code: for Kimbanguist people, dance is forbidden. It is not the only rule that characterize believers’ life outside the mass: once that the public ritual is over, religious tropes, renovated through the public assertion, keep shaping the experience of Kimbanguists.

4.2 Kimbanguism outside the mass: orienting time and space

We argued that the public ritual is a chance for believers to reassert their faith and their identity: most of the religious experience, on the other hand, is not limited to the formal meetings and organized events. Religion has to be found in believers’ experiences and worldview, of which the ritual constitutes a quintessential manifestation, but also only of the many possible. I want to draw again from Tweed’s theory of religions to discuss the ways in which Kimbanguism mediates the relations between the members of the community and different layers of the world: in this paragraph in particular, I discuss the ways in which these layers are inhabited, oriented by religious tropes, focusing in particular on the relations between believers and the body, the homeland and the world. I argue that the members of the community are deeply influenced, in the relation with their body, by the embodiment of conceptions and practices of purity and correct behaviour and that these embodied practices are also a way to symbolically assert and maintain the community’s boundary; I also argue that they find in religious and postcolonial narratives the resources to think of Congo, and their historical and geographical perspective are articulated around N’Kamba, as a centre of Kimbanguist geography and teleology.

37 Ibid.
The body: purity, discipline and distinction

I want to start from a detail of the mass that has not been explained in detail yet: the clothing. When attending the service, as already mentioned, the believers wear particular uniforms, different for men and women:

“M/T: So in the church we have specific groups of clothing for men and women, women dress in a skirt or robe. A woman also has to cover her head; a man wears pants and a top and, she also insisted, that different clothing cannot be worn, a man cannot wear women's clothing and the opposite and that's also, you can say, a clothing code that we have in the Church.”

The colour, on the other hand, are the same, and they have a specific meaning:

“M/T: So she's explaining the meaning of our clothes, we wear white and green, the white represents purity and the green represents hope, so for us, Kimbanguist people, we show with our clothing that firstly we are Kimbanguist, that's the thing that differentiates us from other people, because if you see someone, even in Congo, going around wearing the green, they know that that person is Kimbanguist, he or she is probably under our Church, that is our way to show the world with our clothing […].”

These explanations already highlight two points that are relevant when discussing the relation between Kimbanguist believers in Stockholm and the body: they highlight one of the main tropes that shape this relation (purity), and they highlight the distinctiveness that is correlated with them.

According to Tweed (2006: 99), religions provide both figurative language and practices to think and “use” the body, practices that can include control over the senses and different kinds of prohibition. Members of the church in Stockholm talk abundantly about prohibitions and rules, which are numerous: a motto, which is central for them, says “Bolingo, Mibeko, Misala”, which is translated with “Love, commandments and work”. I leave momentarily out love and work, and focus on commandments, highlighting not only the biblical ten commandments, but also a greater number of rules and prohibitions which characterize the believers’ life. For them, it is forbidden to eat pork, to smoke, to drink alcohol; it is prohibited to attend clubs, to sleep or shower naked and to dance.

Such prohibitions find their justification in two main reasons: on the one side, they can be traced back to Bible or to the teachings of Diangienda, on the other, such practices are associated with the ideas of sin and impurity. In particular, while discussing dance, K. proposed both the possible explanations:

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38 Interview with M.
39 Ibid.
“K/T: He said that for us there are different reasons why we don't dance and unfortunately the biggest part is because dancing has brought a lot of bad things. For example, in the Bible we read about how John the Baptist died and if you know the story in the Bible is: the King's daughter; she danced a in front of an audience. She danced and then the king said: "since you danced so good, you can have whatever you want". And she said: “if you offer me whatever I want, I want John the Baptist’s head on a plate”. And that's how they killed him, basically because she danced in front of the king. [Another reason] is because in the church we preach about purity and to follow God’s preaching. And with dancing a lot of thoughts come because we are human and sometimes when people dance it brings or build ideas in the mind that are not appropriate. So that's why we want to keep that [away] from the church.”

On the one side, a biblical episode, while, on the other, the idea of dance as something that is inappropriate: the same link between prohibition and impurity may appears obvious also for what concerns nudity and night clubs. When it comes to food, the process may appear more obscure: while it is easy to find biblical passages that forbid the consumption of certain animals, an evident connection lacks between such consumption and an inappropriate behaviour. I suggest that, rather than looking for material properties from which the status of impurity may derive, we should follow Mary Douglas and her theory of classification: according to her (Douglas: 69-84), a materialistic analysis of dietary prohibition, while not completely useless per se, fails to explain the maintenance and spread of similar rules. Harris, for example, calls for environmental reasons and convenience to explain the prohibition of pigs’ herding by the Israelites, but he does not add anything about the maintenance of a similar practice in modern societies (Koensler, Meloni, 2019: 18-24). Douglas, on the contrary, explicitly proposes a cultural explanation: according to her, the prohibition does not rise either from ecologic or hygienic reasons, but it comes from a contradiction in a symbolic system of classification (Douglas, 1993: 76-77). The dirt is a byproduct of the process of ordering reality: no cultural system of classification is able to order the world in a perfect taxonomy (Remotti, 2010: 304-308) and exceptions may face different treatments, from sacralization to prohibition. Pork, for example, does not fit in the categorical scheme proposed by Leviticus and thus it is forbidden (Douglas, 1993: 101). Also, she states the centrality of concepts like integrity, non-hybridism, perfection in order to conform to God, who possesses all these attributes (ivi: 95-99). It could be said

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40 Interview with K.
41 Douglas reports the example of the pangolin, among the Lele, an animal that crosses the borders of the cultural categories of humans and animals: the pangolin is an animal that behaves as a human and is thus the object of a cult. Pigs in the Leviticus face a opposite process, as their exceptionality leads them to be prohibited.
that a proper use of the body, whether concerning what is inserted in it or how it used and showed (or hidden), leads to this conformation to the divinity.

It should be noted that similar schemes, rather than being explicit empirical data, often correspond to the author’s understanding, an attempt to systematically expose data that are much less formal and coherent in the ways in which they are discussed by social actors. These schemes, rather than simple mental schemes, are deeply embodied in practice, learned by imitation and almost never made explicit; it is their salience, the fact that they are commonly performed by other members of the community: “We do not imitate “models”, but the actions of others” (Bourdieu, 2003: 233). It is mostly through this process of imitation, and the explicit statements of simple rules, that more complex symbolic schemes, morals and attitudes, that contribute to shape and inform the habitus and sensibility of believers, circulate and reproduce themselves. Purity is never defined, not in an analytical way at least: the symbolic scheme emerges from all the prohibitions, rules, narratives and practices (exceeding any explicit set of rules, including Bible and leader’s speeches) defining a specific ideal behaviour, that, among other things, involves correct alimentation as well as a correct sexual behaviour, clothing, and so on. It is in this way that religious tropes are spread and orient the believers.

It is through simple elements that, for example, specific gender model emerges: the importance of non-mixing clothes for men and clothes for women, two identities that must remain separated also through external marks, like clothing. This separation does not prevent explicit assertions of equality between men and women:

“K/T: [...] When we’re reading the Bible, they don’t really acknowledge the women. So, for us in the Kimbanguist church and especially papa Simon Kimbangu, he wanted us to understand that the woman and man, they are the same because they’re the same, the same soul that is in me, it's in you. It doesn't matter if you're a woman or a man, a man or woman. Yeah, and [Papa K.] also said that we have pastors that are women, and we have pastors that are man, we have people in the quires that female or male. So, in the church we are all the same. It doesn't matter if you are a woman and a man.”

The existence of separated models remains nonetheless acknowledged:

“A: Kimbanguist church, even if it's a church where men and women are equal, and a woman can do what the man does and vice versa... But I would say that in Kimbanguist church is also we have our roles as well.”

42 Interview with K.
43 Interview with A.
The members of the community in Stockholm do not face only negative prescriptions: there are also actions that they deem mandatory. They have to pray different times during the day, they must obey to government and pay taxes: the explicit commandment to pay taxes was explained by R. with an episode from Simon Kimbangu’s life, since “when they accused papa Simon Kimbangu in tribunal, they said that he had said to people not to pay taxes. He said: "That is not right, I always said to obey the government and to pay taxes”44.

As already discussed in the analysis of the mass, work plays an important role in the identification as Kimbanguist. R. was particularly clear in stating the relevance of participation to economic projects of the church:

R: A faith without work is not a faith I would say. A lot of people say that they are Christians, but they don't go to church, they don't practice anything. So it's really hard... It's like you say that you are a football player, but you don't train, and you don't play any match. I can't see you are a football player. It's like that I would say. It's very important that you work, that you do the things you are told, that God has sent you to do. [...] You have to work, not only for your private life, you go to your work, make money, but also the work of God is very important. 45

Work in his words becomes a metaphor of faith, as it describes the attitude of a good believer, who is strong and consistent in his commitment to the work of God. Love, on the other hand, appears as something that is not so different:

R: I would say love is very important for me, because if you don't have love, it is very very hard to make it work, for everything. Like, to build the church, to send your money... Because if you don't have love for one other you don't have trust in another. If I have trust in you Marco, I have a love for you. Not in a relationship sense, but we have a love because I trust you, because when I send money to you, you are going to do the work, you are going to buy seeds, stones, you are gonna build the house, or the project that we have.”46

Love is expressed in terms of trust and participation to a common project, a project of the church. It is central to the level that even the idea of moving to Congo is conditioned by the possibilities of work:

44 Interview with R.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
“R: It is also your private life, I can’t travel back to Congo if I don’t have any work, any money: I’ be just useless for the church... Not useless, but I don’t fulfill my promises to do the work of the lord if I can’t take care of myself.”

Work and participation to church’s projects become thus recurrent metaphors in his words, also while describing other experiences, such as the relations inside a family:

R: […] If you don’t humble yourself it’s hard to understand God. To humble yourself, that’s why Jesus likes children because small children are very humble, they can... If you say to them “Can you go and buy milk at the shop?” they will go and do that. But it’s hard to do this with a grown man, he would say "you can do it yourself", he would not be humble enough to be sent. So that is, Humbleness is really really important. For example, when the pastor says: "we have to this project, we have to send money". He tells me: "You have to take care of this money, you have to send it back to Congo", you have to be humble and accept to do the work.”

Relation between father and son, between pastor and believer, is defined in terms of obedience and trust: humbleness is to accept that the work has to be done, to accept it willingly and to participate with enthusiasm. These discourses strongly highlight the role of the church, in particular its economic activities aimed to build N’Kamba and to improve the living conditions in Congo, is shaping the sense of belonging that we discussed in the previous chapter.

Another important aspect that A. highlighted is the proactive attitude that the believer is supposed to have, both in his understanding of the faith and in the preaching to others:

“A: A Kimbanguist have to participate and be active. And you know, try to evolve as a Christian, as a Kimbanguist, always try to learn the Bible, to get better at understanding the Bible. Kimbanguists are like ambassadors, so they have to show people that they live around or people like your friends, you have to tell them about your beliefs and about your church because one thing that our spiritual leader papa Simon Kimbangu [Kiangani] always says is that Kimbanguism is like a lamp. When you put the lamp on the table, it shines up the room, but if someone hides and doesn’t tell the world about Kimbanguism, [if you don’t] tell your neighbours or your friends about Kimbanguism that: “yes, I’m a Kimbanguism”. [That person] is like someone that puts the light down under the table hide the light. We are ambassadors because with our words we are also spreading awareness about papa Simon Kimbangu. But if you don’t speak about it, how are people going to know?

Ibid. It is interesting to note that similar motivations were brought also by A.: “[...] ... For me with my work, for example I don’t see the same opportunities for me like workwise. Maybe in the future those work opportunities will come in Congo, but right now I feel those opportunities don’t exist firstly.” Interview with A.

Ibid.
We say that Kimbanguists are preachers like you don't have to be a real preacher, but you are a preacher because you preach his words, you preach about him, his principles.\textsuperscript{49}

The emphasis put on the role of preaching is interesting, since the church in Sweden does not organize any activity of evangelization: as noted in other Kimbanguist communities abroad (Garbin, 2012: 437), instead of explicit proselyting actions, members of the community in Stockholm try to attract the attentions of non-Kimbanguists via their moral excellence, which matches with the centrality of the notion of purity discussed above. Another relevant aspect is the focus on personal initiative and development through knowledge, an idea that is going to come back also when discussing the relationship with homeland.

Both R. and A. were born in Sweden and developed their belonging with the church in a context of diaspora. Interviews with older generations of migrants revealed other possible functions on prohibited and prescribed behaviours, a difference that brings us back to Cohen and the symbolic marking of the community’s boundary: specific rules, objects and clothes also mark and communicate the difference of a group compared to others. Coming back from where we started, we look again to the clothes and to another of their roles:

“M/T: So she's explaining the meaning of our clothes, we wear white and green, the white represents purity and the green represents hope, so for us, Kimbanguist people, we show with our clothing that firstly we are Kimbanguist, that's the thing that differentiates us from other people, because if you see someone, even in Congo, going around wearing the green, they know that that person is Kimbanguist, he or she is probably under our Church, that is our way to show the world with our clothing [...]”\textsuperscript{50}

To eat in a certain way, to dress in a certain way, to respect determined rules means to perform a specific identification, means showing and asserting, to oneself as to others, belonging to a community.

\textbf{Homeland: revolution and appropriation in religious past}

Religions do not provide orientation only to body and daily practices: they also contribute to shape specific ways to think and experience a link with a specific geographic region, which Tweed calls homeland (Tweed, 2006: 110). Whether the idea that such bound between a religious community and a specific place is universal and characterize every religion and every community is questionable, I find the concept useful to describe the geography that orient the Kimbanguist people in Stockholm.

\textsuperscript{49} Interview with A.
\textsuperscript{50} Interview with M.
We discuss the link between religion, time and space: now in particular I analyse the representations of Congo: the role of Kimbanguism in shaping a postcolonial perspective on the country’s history is taken into account, as well as appropriation that is made of previous prophetic figures, such as Kimpa Vita.

Kimbanguism acts as a powerful lens to narrate and understand history. The life of Kimbangu already demarcate a specific place as a homeland: the village of N’Kamba and the Belgian Congo, today’s Democratic republic of Congo. It is in this kind of narratives that elements similar to what Mokoko-Gamipiot defined as the reconstruction of a black identity (Mokoko-Gamipiot, 2017: 196-228) emerge. The advent of Kimbangu marks a shift in African and Congolese history:

“R: Papa Simon Kimbangu is [...] the holy spirit reincarnated in his body. He has come to save the world and to save the people. Especially the black people, who was in difficulty under colonization and slavery.”

In the narrations of the believers, Kimbangu came and rescued African population from a desperate situation, in which it was posed by colonizers. The terms of the domination are always referred to religion: colonialists came and dominated because they had the Bible, they brought Jesus to Africa, where he had been forgotten.

“R: When he was around, he started to do his mission when he was 23, in 1921, the 6/04, but already before Jesus Christ came down to begin his mission, he was sent down for this work, to save the black people that was under colonization [...] I would say, the most important thing was that: he showed, he started to revolutionize, to change the way of thinking of the black people, because the black people were oppressed [...] We thought that God had left us, that God didn't remember us; if God exists, how can he leave us like this, how can he leave us in this pain, in this tragedy, in this colonization... So, when papa Simon Kimbangu came, the first thing that he said was "I have been sent by Jesus Christ to save you."

As we have seen, the scheme of narration is not always clear: it is not clear if the oblivion of God came before or because of colonization, but a clear link is established between such forgetfulness and the intervention of Simon Kimbangu.

The relevance of Kimbangu’s direct intervention is echoed by the indirect ones, that had come first: on many occasions the interviewees referred to a pre-existent Kongo Kingdom and to the use that was made there of the name Kimbangu. It is interesting to note that the Kongo identification to which

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51 Interview with R.
52 Ibid.
we are referring is much more political than ethnic: differently from the emergence of a Kongo ethnic group due to the colonial politics of tribalization (and the subsequent political initiatives that have characterized Democratic republic of Congo after independence) (MacGaffey, 2016: 161-165), the reference to a state that united Angola and the two contemporary republics of Congo includes the whole population of contemporary Democratic Republic of Congo, not only Kikongo-speakers; in fact, the main languages of the believers in Stockholm are Lingala and Swedish. The emphasis posed on a pre-existent great kingdom resembles a more generalized attitude of the believers, that strongly stress the equity between Africa and the rest of the World: as churches in Europe are deemed to be economically independent, so Kimbanguists emphasize the economic independence of the church; as big states were present in other continents, so it is important to acknowledge the existence of similar political entities in Africa. In particular in A.’s discourse, the lack of recognition given to past African history appears as a continuation of colonial domination, to which a possible remedy is constituted by research:

“A: There's a lot of writings by the people who came to Congo for the first time in in the 1600s, they always describe [...] people [in this way]: “they were not wearing clothes, they were barbaric. They have no structure; they barely had any societies. They only lived with their own tribes [...]”. But that is not true, because African civilization was built by different kingdoms, that had their structures. The Congoense Kingdom was mainly Angola, Congo-Kinshasa and Congo-Brazzaville: that was one Kingdom. Then there were different kingdoms, the kingdom of Benin that is modern day Nigeria. We have different types of kingdoms, and they had their societies and their structures. There's a lot of things in history that are written wrong to make it look like that when [the colonizers] came to African countries, they came basically to help them, to bring structure to their society. But it's written wrong. They came and erase everything. They started to write, and they put everything upside down. We know that the conference in Berlin where in Europe during the 19th century, when they started to write how the different countries in Africa were going to be, they started to write it on the board and that's how the countries are written on the map today. But that's not how the countries were before. Where all the documents that shows how the countries were structured before? Where are the original maps? It's very important to do research.”

Research emerges once again as a central topic in her view of the world. It should be noted that oral sources leave unclear many aspects of the history of Kongo Kingdom. The only written sources are dated to the start of Portuguese colonial project (Mokoko-Gampiot, 2017: 20-30); part of such project

53 Interview with A.
was represented by the evangelical missions that catholic church started in the region and that were partially successful, as the king of Kongo tried to gain the support of the Portugal and converted to Catholicism.

It is during that time, between the end of the 17th and the begin of the 18th century that a reaction was triggered from local population in the form of the Antonian movement, leaded by Kimpa Vita (Ivi: 44-52), a figure that is still remembered and appropriated by Kimbanguists. She was a member of the military aristocracy of the kingdom, the daughter of army’s general, and she started a religious movement which aimed to appropriate Christianity, to perform a Congolization of religion (Ivi: 47), by asserting that the main figures of the Bible, like Jesus and Mary, were born in Africa, by performing healings and miracles, by being pregnant while chaste. It was not only a religious movement, as it aimed to criticize and expel the Portuguese presence and to rebuild the kingdom: the final result that Kimpa Vita was burnt alive by missionaries, but the memory of these events remains vivid even nowadays. How is this historical figure appropriated by the members of the community? She represents a point of contact between postcolonial and religious narratives: the memory of the persecution suffered by Kimpa Vita confirms the postcolonial perspective on colonialism, as the terrible murder is remembered; at the same time, the reason behind it is thought to be her knowledge about the existence of Simon Kimbangu and his nature of Holy spirit, which allowed her to perform miraculous healings by just pronouncing his name. Her final act, for the believers, was to announce the advent of Kimbangu:

“K/T: Before Simon Kimbangu was born in the 17th century, there was a woman called Kimpa Vita. She was born in today's Angola because, in that time, Congo was a [monarchy]. When the Portuguese came to Angola in the [17th century] mama Kimpa Vita was there. The Portuguese killed her with her child on her back: why did they kill her? Because during that time, this is like way back, during that time when some something bad happened or like a child died for example accidentally or in childbirth, for example, they usually put the child on a table or on the floor and they always invoke Kimbangu, they said: “Kimbangu, please bring this child back”. So, the word Kimbangu existed long before papa Simon Kimbangu was born, so Kimbangu was the word they used to invoke the spirit of someone to come back if someone died. Mama Kimpa Vita used to do that. When something happened, she said Kimbangu and when a child was dead, he came back to life. And the Portuguese saw this, and they saw her as a big representative during that time. So that's why they killed her. Before they burned her to death, she said: “You're going to kill me, but Kimbangu is going to be born in north of Angola”, which is in Congo-Kinshasa So when
they killed her people that were surrounding, they saw a white pigeon flying over, [directed] to the North, so to Congo-Kinshasa.”

In the words of A., the idea of equity comes again, as the actions of Kimpa show once more that Black people possess an equal knowledge of God:

“A: So when Mama Kimpa Vita, in 1768, when she was killed in Angola by the Portuguese, when they burned her with her child, she said, she’s used the word Kimbangu and said “Kimbangu will come and preach the real word of God. Because you have come to our country, our continent, to preach about God, but we knew God before you came”. We know who God is, but we were like people that has forgotten our roots, forgotten our beliefs because of the events that happened in the continent. History was raised. There is a lot of history that was lost from precolonial times.”

Outside of these narratives, religion mediates also the relation between the members of the community and the current states, as the first rule, reported by all the interviewees, is to respect the statal authority. This should not be considered the only possible attitude toward politics that Kimbanguists manifest, though: as Garbin notes, in Kimbanguist diasporic communities a debate between political activist parties and supporters of an apolitical orientation. I limit myself to the observation that all the interviewees asserted the commandment of loyalty, since practical observations of behaviours related to the state were not possible and the interviewees did not discuss the topic in other ways.

The world

I follow again Tweed’s model to state that religions do not only shape individual behaviour or a bond with a specific region and its history, but they contribute also to shape wider ideas about the world, both spatially and temporally (Tweed, 2006: 113-122). They produce geographies and cosmographies to explain the structure of human and non-human world, and cosmogonies and teleologies to explain how the world came to be in the way it is now, and where it is going. At the centre of each of these coordinates we find N’Kamba, the new Jerusalem: while the world is usually described in laic terms, it is undoubtable that the order that is given to it, the ways in which believers orient it is related to the city in many different ways.

N’Kamba draws its importance from the life of Kimbangu: it was a small village of no particular relevance during colonial time, but the Holy Spirit decided to manifest Himself there. This is relevant

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54 Interview with K.
55 Interview with A.
because, as we have seen, Kimbangu’s actions, in the believers’ perspective, mark a turning point into history: they started to revolutionize the conscience of people, as well as their living conditions. N’Kamba is called the New Jerusalem as it is the place where God manifested Himself again:

“M/T: [...] Jesus was crucified, why was he crucified? He was crucified because they didn’t believe in him, it was a very few people that believed in him but most people didn’t believe in his words and he was the son of God, so that is why they crucified him so that is why we read also in the Bible that [...] God is going to remove the power that's inside that city and move it to a place and people that is forgotten, it's going to be moved to people that nobody cares about and he's gonna live among people that no one cares about, so that is what, that is what N’kamba symbolises, it symbolizes a new beginning and a new way to God to show himself on Earth and through his people and so that is what is the answer to that”\textsuperscript{56}

Believers are involved in the construction of this city both physically and through the donations that they do during the Sunday’s mass. The life of Kimbangu orients these projects as well: it influences the choice of the sites where a farm or houses are going to be built, for example. These sites are also important as places to visit during the pilgrimages to the city:

“A: There are different sites in N’Kamba and around N’Kamba that shows [are related to] different events [of Kimbangu’s life]. We have one place in N’Kamba, that is the place where papa Simon Kimbangu used to heal people when people came. This is where people gathered. This is the place where papa Simon Kimbangu lived with his three sons and his wife, mama Muilu. This is the place where papa Simon Kimbangu stood when the Belgian militaries came and arrested him. This is the place where mama Muilu was left when they incarcerated him. And today the different sites in N’Kamba are very significant for people as well.”\textsuperscript{57}

In particular, the spring of the Holy Water, Mayi ya Sima, is central:

“A: Also, in N’Kamba there is the holy water called, Maia Sima, where papa Simon Kimbangu used the holy water to heal people. And Kimbanguists also, they go to N’Kamba and when they go to Maia Sima, they take some holy water as well and they can bring home if they want and then we use it, you know, if you are sick or when you need help. People that believe, they take it in and drink the holy water.”\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{56} Interview with M.
\textsuperscript{57} Interview with A.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
The maintenance of the spring is assigned to the Fluki group, to which many of the interviewees belong:

“A: Sometimes if someone is going to Congo you can like maybe give to the person something that they can give to a relative down there. So I would say that yeah, we can ask for help or different stuff. We also usually use the occasion when someone is going to Congo to bring to ask for that person to bring something back.”

N’Kamba is thus central in the transnational practices of the community: it is the centre of economic and human flows, as well as the protagonist of a Kimbanguist mediascape. During a visit to the house of the pastor, for example, the television in the living room never stopped to project images and videos of the city, which circulate via YouTube mainly. Videos of different buildings completed thanks to the efforts of the believers, like a museum, were often shown with great pride during other visits. Panoramic shootings showing the houses and the huge mausoleums were shown to me, as well as the public discourses of Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, the actual spiritual leader of the church. Assisting the broadcasts is also a partial substitution for the times when travelling to N’Kamba is impossible: during a visit to the pastor’s house, I and the members watched the transmission of Simon Kimbangu Kiangani for the anniversary of Kisolokele’s death, a day that, as we have seen, the church dedicated to the musical group of fluki, to which many believers in Stockholm belong.

At the same time N’Kamba is not only the node that unites different Kimbanguist communities around the world together and to the central church: it is also the ultimate eschatological horizon of the church. It is the place where God lives among His people, where Heaven and earth meet, where all the people of the world will reunite to worship God till the end of times:

“K/T: N’Kamba is…it's simple, it's a holy city. So we think N’Kamba is the new Jerusalem, which John also is referring to. When he was in the island of Patmos, when he was a preaching, he said that he had a vision that he was seeing a city, a holy city. From the sky coming down to earth. And he said that the place is where the God is gonna live among his people and the people are gonna celebrate and worship him in all eternity.”

It is the place of eschatology, where humanity finds its salvation, but also the place of origin: as Mokoko-Gampiot reports, it is from the dust in N’Kamba, Kimbanguists believe, that God formed the first humans (Mokoko-Gampiot, 2017: 190). As we discuss in the next paragraph, it is place where Kimbanguists of the diaspora can experience a unique sensation of unity, of the presence of God, a
chance to renovate the sense of belonging and overcome the difference that is felt with Congolese people.

If the act of creation makes N’Kamba the place of origin, the life of Simon Kimbangu makes it the place of the “achieved eschatology” (Ivi: 185); it is not limited to this though, as the very flow of time is organized and sacralised according to specific events in it. The calendars of holy days is huge, as the members of the community explained: it includes important dates in the lives of Kimbangu and his children. The most important days are the 6th of April, the day in which Kimbangu started his mission on earth, the 12th of October, the day in which Diangienda passed away and the 25th of May, the birth of Dialungana, in which Kimbanguists celebrate Christmas; outside of these three dates though, almost every week is characterised by a specific celebration.

4.3 Crossing the limits, widening the boundary

In the previous pages, we have highlighted the ways in which a sense of belonging and a specific worldview are maintained by the Kimbanguist community in Sweden: posing the focus on ritual and symbolically informed practices, we tried to emphasize the dynamicity of this process, which does not consist in a reproduction of fix social and cultural models. Religious dynamics are not only related to this work of maintenance though: religious tropes and symbols are used also to orient actions and representations of change. Such symbols do not only mark boundaries, but help also to move across them, to widen them (Tweed, 2006: 123). In the context of migration in particular, religions may help the believers in constructing transtemporal and translocative geographies (Tweed, 2002, 163-164): religions link different places and different times, thus orienting the believers’ experience. We have discussed the role which is given to the developmental projects of the church during the mass: these projects are fundamental in constructing a sense of communion and a bond with N’Kamba, but they are also the enactment of a prophecy, the construction of the city of God in Earth. Nsinsani in this sense enlarge the spatial and temporal perspectives of believers. It is important to note that not all the believers were born in Democratic republic of Congo: half of the interviewees were in fact born in Sweden and have Swedish as their main language. In this last paragraph, we focus on the ways in which religion help to cross the limits of the believers: on the one side, religious practices help Kimbanguists born in Sweden to overcome differences with Kimbanguists from Congo, on the other we are going to see how Diangienda’s and Kimbangu’s prophecies allow migrant Kimbanguists to
make sense of their migration. Lastly, we are going to discuss the ways in which the believers use religious tropes to move across dramatic experiences in their lives.

Projects and prophecies of migration

The first way in which Kimbanguist tropes help the believers thinking and practicing these movements across is migration. Two of the interviewees narrated to me their experience of migration and the two tales presented a great number of similarities. In particular, even if both the believers were already members of the church since their birth, the project of migration was not connected to or organized by the church. While one of the interviewees preferred not to discuss explicitly her motivations, papa\(^{61}\) K. offered an account of his migration:

\[ \text{K/T: So he said that he has two answer to the question. Firstly, he left because the conditions in Congo was not good for him. He wanted to... like many do, we try to find another life. He said that firstly as I said he left, because socially and like work opportunities and stuff was not that is in Congo at that time so he left to find a better life; and then how he ended up a specifically Sweden was that it was someone that was helping them and the visa that he got was for Sweden. So it was a bit random but he don't say that it's random because he said that everything happens for a reason.} \]

\[ \text{K/T: He said that for someone that's younger, it's harder because especially you don't maybe you don't have a job as it's also harder to apply for visa and also it's usually someone that helps you to, to get the Visa.} \]

Migration does not emerge as an actual project, but rather as an opportunity that was grasped without much organization. The encounter with other Kimbanguists was a lucky coincidence that later led to the birth of a church:

\[ \text{“K/T: So when he came to Sweden for the first time it was a family that took him in that he knew from Congo. He arrived in Linkoping which he said two hours 30 minutes’ drive from Stockholm, and in the in the family that he arrived to, I think the mother there in the family, she was a Kimbanguist. And her younger brother lived here in Stockholm, and he was attending church here at the Kimbanguist church and when he heard that he came to Sweden he called him and told him “I know that you also Kimbanguist and there is a church here in Stockholm so you can start attending as well.”} \]

\[ \text{“M/T: So it was quite a process, she said that firstly when they came to Sweden they were living quite far from Stockholm and the place that they were in was for people to be accepted} \]

\(^{61}\) See note 8
to have residency in Sweden and where she lived she met other Kimbanguist and hey started to talk and then it came up that maybe three other people and when they understood that they also were Kimbanguist they started to have services at that place and then fast forward, they got residency but some did not get it so they moved to Finland or France and the ones that got residency, including her, and moved to Stockholm and they started to have the service in her older sister's house and when you have a church outside Congo you have to register it, that you have a church in Sweden, and you have to put down information, the telephone number of someone that's responsible for the service and when they started to have service in her sister's house they sent the contact information to Congo, they said "We are a small group but we are starting to gather now" and during that time they had two men that came from Angola that came to visit here in Stockholm, before they left Angola the spoke with the church and said "we are going to Sweden, do you have a register if we have church there" and they said yes and we have the contact information of Sweden and gave it, so when the two visitors came from Angola they called the number and said "Hello, we are from Angola and we want to attend the service" and they called her older sister and she said "Yes, that's true we have our service here but we don't have a church we still have service in my house". So the following Sunday they came, they joined the service and then one of them he said "You should try to find a place to rent so you can have your services in a church because now it's become a bit small to have service like this" so he came up with the idea that we should ask the Swedish church if we could rent a place and that's how we founded it."

The actual church in Stockholm emerged as the meeting point of many distinct life trajectories that led Kimbanguists to Sweden. The choice of Sweden itself as a destination seems the result of external conditions and possibilities as well, as many of the members of the church in past years were forced to move due to the impossibility of receiving a residence’s permit. In K.’s account of his arrival, the impact with Swedish reality appears as a hard moment, where solidarity among members of the church emerges:

"K/T: So he said when he arrived it was very difficult because it was a new country, a language that he didn't know, a culture that he didn't know, he didn't know a lot of people here. So he found it very hard to assimilate to the society because he didn't know anything about Sweden basically before he came here and it took time for him to learn everything about the country and the culture since he didn't know a lot of people here, so he said it took a lot of time, but he still managed.

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62 Interview with K.
I: Did things get better now?

K/T: So he said also from the help of a lot of people in the church and people recommending him to do stuff and all that. And then he started to build his network and contacts with people and then he said that... That's how he he managed to."\(^{63}\)

Religion does not seem to play an important role in shaping these movements, but, as both the interviewees explained, it plays a major role into explaining them. They referred to one of the prophecies of Simon Kimbangu to explain their experiences as migrants. As papa K. said, the travel may look random, but it is not:

“K/T: [...] because papa Simon Kimbangu also predicted this in 1921 that our grandchildren and the kids of our grandchildren are going to live among the people that colonised us. And they're gonna preach my name and they're gonna celebrate God together with them. And our mission is that we came here to spread his name for people to learn about papa Simon Kimbangu. So we see ourself as we have also a different meaning. We have of course our families and our jobs, but we also have the biggest mission which papa Simon Kimbangu predicted that we're going to speak his name and all the nations are going to learn about papa Simon Kimbangu.”\(^{64}\)

“M/T: [...] but she said that she sees her visit or stay in Sweden as something that was also a part of the big prophecy that papa Simon Kimbangu had about the Kimbanguists being spread around the world to speak about him and to show his teachings and so she feels like she is here for a reason as well, she said how could she have known that she would be here when she was younger she feels like everything that has happened was part of God’s plan.”\(^{65}\)

The prophecy of Kimbangu helps to give meaning to the experience of living abroad, thus including Sweden in the religious geography of the believers that can look at the past events with a unifying lens. Moving to a foreign country appears more comprehensible when looked through the perspective of prophecy. The relevance of this prophetic reason emerges also when discussing a possible return to Congo, which appears a project as vague as the migration one, and framed in a similar religious perspective, even in the words of second generations:

\(^{63}\) Ibid.
\(^{64}\) Ibid.
\(^{65}\) Interview with M.
“K/T: Yes, he can absolutely see himself moving back there in the future because he feels like his mission here it will be fulfilled since papa Simon Kimbangu wanted us to come and preach his name. So he can absolutely see himself living there in the future.”

“M/T: Her answer is yes, they are going to move back in the future and she is saying that especially Kimbanguist people that are outside Congo, they always have the knowledge that they are going to go back home someday. Countries here, especially Sweden, are not really good for people who are getting older because of how the social life is here and she finds it very hard to see herself living here when she is, you know, much older. Her husband knows that when the time is right they are moving to Congo.”

“R: […] We have to keep the Kimbanguist church open. We are like ambassadors, we are here to preach the news of Papa Simon Kimbangu, the church of Papa Simon Kimbangu. So, in the future we’ll always have to build, to make the next step. Maybe how we can send more money, how we can make more effective the preaching, for people to come. We are trying to start again a website on the internet, about the Kimbanguist church here in Sweden. Of course, we want to get as many people [as possible] to come to the church here in Sweden. That is one of the goals, but anything is in the hands of the Lord.”

A Holy city that erases differences

While migrants find in Kimbanguism a way to interpret the experience of moving across the border, it is again through religion that second-generations find a way to overcome the difference that separates them from Congolese people.

We have seen in previous pages the relevance that N’Kamba has inside the worldview of believers: it is a city to which they are connected in many ways, and one of the most important is the pilgrimage to the city itself, that the believers try to organize as often as possible:

“M/T: she visits Congo regularly and she goes there once or twice a year. […] She specifically goes on a mission to visit N’Kamba because it’s recommended to all Kimbanguist to at least go to N’Kamba once a year if you have the opportunity, and she also said that she goes to participate in the projects that are going on there.”

While the travel to Congo represents a chance to reconnect with homeland and relatives for first-generation migrants, it is an encounter with a new reality for the younger members of the community,
who were born in Sweden. Here many differences emerge in the interactions with local population: on the one side, the language represents a challenge, because Lingala is not used daily by these members of the Swedish community; on the other, differences in behaviour and manners shape this encounter:

“R: There is also the language barrier. N’Kamba is in Congo-Kinshasa and there a lot of people talk Lingala. We can understand Lingala very well, but to talk a language... we have some barrier of course. When you don't live there 24/7, 365 days per year you feel a bit different, you are always gonna feel a bit different. Even if you go one or two times per year, you always gonna feel something a bit different. I don't know if... I can say... for people who live in Kinshasa that talk to me, that see me from their point of view, if they view us as different... Of course, we are not different because we are all Kimbanguists but... it's always something that is in your brain, you know, in your head... It's something different because you are not, how can I say; you are not living there... The language, the manners, the social life are a bit different than here in Sweden. So, you always gonna feel different.”

This feeling of difference has two implications: it allows the second-generation members to have a deeper understanding of their social habitus, making possible to confront with a different cultural context; during my first visit, for example, A. expressed appreciation for the Congolese sociality, which she described as more open and warmer that in Sweden. On the other side, she complained about the representations that people living in Congo have about the life of Kimbanguist in Europe, who are deemed to live easy and successful life and, thus, to owe a greater contribution for the projects. In her words, a strong sense of non-exclusive identification with Swedish-ness emerges:

“A: I would say people that are born in another country, it's like someone that has two cultures, I would say. As much as I feel Congolese, I feel that I'm Swedish and I have grown my roots here, you can say. And I have become part of this society in a way that this also feels like this is my home as well; it's like two parts.”

As discussed in the theoretical framework, there is no exclusivity: social actors participate in more than one social network and deal with more than one cultural inventory. This dynamic allows a

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70 Interview with R.
71 Interview with A.
72 While a similar degree of participation in Swedish society did not emerge in interviews with first-generation migrants, a considerable openness was still manifested by some episodes: for example, A. highlighted her participation to after-school activities organized by Swedish Protestant Church while attending school: while I asked about why her parents left their children do so and if they had problems with these activities, she answered: “A: No, because they knew that the Swedish Church is a home for us as well. Even if it wasn't super, super Christian. But they felt comfortable. For us be in that environment and also to spend our time in a in a good way and not just wandering around and doing bad stuff. You can do something with your time. So they thought it was a very good way for kids to learn stuff.” Interview with A.
greater degree of critical analysis of one’s situation in different contexts but can also lead to the sense of difference to which the two interviewees referred. As in Congo, the same happens in Sweden, where the many prohibitions and rules of the church contribute to shape the interactions with non-Kimbanguist people.

N’Kamba emerges once more as a special place, as it is a city where these differences are somehow surpassed: both R. and A. described a similar sensation of calm and concentration, the transcendence of daily problems and worries in order to focus on faith, community and joy. Talking about the differences felt in Congo, R. explained:

“R: But in N’Kamba it’s not [like this]. You are not concentrated on that. In N’Kamba is more like, you are there to pray and get new strength. I would end it like that.”

He explained also the experience of moving to N’Kamba, a place where renovate his will and his strength:

“I would say that N’Kamba is something that, as I grow older, I understand more and more why... If I didn't have an understanding, it would be meaningless to send my money, to go there, visit N’Kamba. N’Kamba is a place where I know God is... of course He is in your hearth, he walks with you, but [N’Kamba is] a place where he himself have said "here is where I came down to the world, where I'll have my temple". It's a very special place, it's hard to describe... But N’Kamba is a place where you, as a Kimbanguist, find the strength to continue your journey as a Kimbanguist, to follow to follow the lord, follow the commandments. It gives you... It's hard to describe... It's a fantastic feeling of fulfillment in your body. I don't get it if I travel to another place and that is hard to describe for somebody that haven't been there, that haven't understood it how it is to travel to N'Kamba. That is the relation I have with my faith and with N’Kamba”

His reflection is echoed and reinforced by the words of A.:

“A: [...] The first time, the first time I went, I was 10 or 11 years old and that's the first time I went to N’Kamba. It was like 2003 or something. And I was quite young, so I don't remember everything, but I remember the feeling when I came to N’Kamba the first time because we went with my family and my cousin’s family, we were two families that went on the trip that time. And, during that time, it was quite expensive to travel to N’Kamba, so

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73 Both the interviewees highlighted also that the degree of religious tolerance in Sweden is high: they said that they feel understood when explaining their moral code and rules and that people respect such behaviours. “They are very understanding here in Sweden, you can practice your beliefs very openly, it’s nothing you need to fear for or gonna be criticized for.” Interview with R.
74 Interview with R.
75 Ibid.
family, my parents had to work very hard to save a lot of money for us to be able to go. But it was very important for us, for them, for us to go. And I would say. I would say for me I remember the feeling when I came to N’Kamba, I felt... It was very different because Kinshasa and N’Kamba are very different: Kinshasa is a big city, there’s a lot of people there, eleven million people that live there but N’Kamba is in the countryside: it’s very quiet, very peaceful. Everything feels very light and there forget about everything: even if you work, you forget about your job, you forget about your friends, not in a bad way, but you are just living in the moment and you feel that you are in a different place. Like, you feel that this is not just a regular place, this is a very special place. And also, what I really like about N’Kamba is the different people you meet there. I have had a lot of great experiences, of meeting people from all around the world, like you cannot imagine how many different kinds of people that come to N’Kamba. I remember that on one of my trips, I went in 2011 and I met a group that came from America, that went there: they had heard about Kimbanguist church from a friend, they had started attending church, I think it was in Atlanta. And then they wanted to go to N’Kamba. So they gathered, it was a group, they gathered together and they paid their ticket, they went to N’Kamba to see, you know: you talk with people there, you talk about their different experiences, like you and me are talking now. They ask, you know, similar questions like “How long have you been Kimbanguist?” and “How did you hear about papa Simon Kimbangu?”, “Where do you live?” and, you know if I say Sweden, then [they ask] “How is it living in Sweden?” So, you talk with so many different people, you talk with people that come from South America, you talk with some people that’s from different countries in Africa, from different countries in Europe, you hear so many different languages. It’s very beautiful to see that people can actually come together, even if you are from totally different cultures, from different countries, but when we gather with one single purpose. You know we become as one and I would just say that this letter is just, it’s more like a feeling that you get. It’s like a warm feeling. And you see that people are super happy: they’re happy to finally come to N’Kamba, because there are some people that have been hearing about N’Kamba for so long and they’re like “I’m so happy to finally arrive”. They’re happy to see the spiritual leader papa Simon Kimbangu, to have a moment to talk with him and to ask for stuff; you can also see the different projects, because if you live in a country far, far away, of course you are participating in this project but it’s different to see it in front of you and [you think]: “Oh this is the house that we that fluky built” or “Wow! This is where my money went”, “This is the place where we harvest food, and we have animals”. All of these places that we’ve been hearing about… you see everything that you just been hearing or participating to, and you see it in front of you,
coming to life. So that's something that's very cool about N’Kamba and Kimbanguist society when you come to N’Kamba.\textsuperscript{76}

The travels to N’Kamba are a chance to reinforce a sense of belonging, of unity: even if people that gather there are from different nations, speak different languages, have different cultures, they understand each other since they share a common symbolic inventory: beliefs, stories, rules, feelings, projects for the city.

Making sense from chaos: religion and the challenge of sufferance

The third situation where members of the community are helped by their religion in moving across is represented by chaos, by situations where the ability of making sense of one’s symbols seem to fail. In particular, the ability of Kimbanguism to give meaning to one’s life, to help overcoming sufferance was highlighted by A., while discussing the importance of faith for her:

“A: For example in Sweden, I would say this is a very big question or a problem is, you know, people with psychological troubles, like people that are depressed and people that are suicidal. It's a very large problem in the Swedish society, especially the young population. It is widely known, and I think there's a lot of these problems in the United States, but here in Sweden there is a lot of young people, and they have their battling with depression and suicidal thoughts. And they take medication for this because in the hospitals nowadays there are very quick to give this antidepressive to kids or to young people. If you go to the hospital and you say that: “oh, I feel depressed, you know, sometimes I can't, I can't go to work. I can't go to school”. They will give you anti-depressives in a heartbeat. But I don't believe that that's the solution because you're getting people addicted, addicted to that medicine, because now they're gonna think that they don't function without it. And for me, I feel that religion or beliefs is a way to feel a purpose in your life and if you don't believe in God at all you're going to have a hard time to see the world like you are even meaningful, and you're gonna start asking yourself: “why am I even here” like “what purpose do I have” or “if I'm not here then it doesn't matter”. But that doesn't come from God, that's the devil that plays with our minds. I would say that I tried to help people, to help friends that sometimes get depressed or start asking questions. I had a friend last year that, she happens to be a non-believer, she's also atheist and she said like “I feel that you are so lucky that you have something you really believe in, and you really dedicate everything to this because I feel like I don't believe in anything, and I don't even really have a purpose.”\textsuperscript{77}"

\textsuperscript{76} Interview with A.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
Beliefs, practices and faith are able to give meaning to her experience, to give a sense to her life: as the song Nsilu a Nzambi stress, being Kimbanguist means to be part of God’s plan. Narrations about the hardships that are going to characterize the World before the affirmation of the Kingdom of God also help to think of huge tragedies as a pandemic:

“A: There's a lot of people that are reacting to different kinds of events that are happening around the world. We know that some situations have gotten worse. Different countries are in war. Different countries have problems. But for me as a Kimbanguist, I feel that I can see these things in a totally different way, in a different light. And I don't feel this hopelessness that maybe some people feel sometimes. During the pandemic, for example, there were people that were calling us, that were calling a church’s members and saying: “is this the end of the world? Like, I don't feel like there's a point in living anymore”. People were in despair. They didn't have a hope. But we knew that it was just a phase. Like, this is going to come to an end, but this is something that we have to live with now. So, I feel that I see the world differently from someone else. And I feel that I'm lucky that I have this foundation, so that I don't feel the same hopelessness that maybe someone else feels sometimes.”78

Religion helps not only in dealing with sense or great events, but also with concrete life episodes, like the death of relatives. Death is met with sadness, but also as a natural part of existence, and the church have specific practices to confront it:

“A: [...] When someone dies, we usually celebrate it. [...] When you when you see like a funeral, when you think about the funeral we think about, you know, something that is sad, of course the person has left us and it can be a mother, father, sister, brother, cousin, uncle, whatever. But in the Kimbanguist church we see that like a natural [thing], it's a natural transition. We go back to where we came from. We celebrate the persons' life basically. And it's very hard, of course, because we are humans. But. We have someone... if, for example, if I had someone that has died in my family, I would stay at home, I would stay at home firstly, I would not work. So, I will stay at home and then people, you know, friends, relatives, would come to my house, we would have a wake until the person is buried. And then, after the person is buried, we have a small ceremony with the people that are mourning the one that left us, we have a small ceremony that means that now you have laid this person to rest: now you can start your daily activities as usual. During the funerals we play faky play music and there are specific songs that they play, specific songs about life and death. And there is also a specific ceremony. So, we also call it like one of our sacraments.”79

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78 Interview with A.
79 Ibid.
5. Conclusion

The first of the questions have shaped the present research is what allows to describe the members of the Kimbanguist church as a community? We have argued that Kimbanguists in Stockholm form a community of symbols: following Cohen, we defined symbols as the tropes, narratives, practices and artifacts that are shared by a social group which uses these symbols to construct the meaning of experiences and the boundary of the group. At the same time, we have argued that such kind of community does not constitute a homogeneous group: on the one hand, we have discussed the fact that, while participating in a community, social actors are also involved in wider social networks, which includes, for example, friends and coworkers; identification with a specific community is thus situational (in different situation different identification can be claimed) and non-exclusive: in particular when discussing the words of the second-generation believers, we reported a high degree of fluidity between a Congolese and a Swedish identification, while Kimbanguism appears as a much less negotiable. On the other, communities present an internal differentiation in the interpretation of the shared symbols. Discussing the values of the church, for example, individual effort was declined in different ways: some highlighted the relevance of economic contribution, while others emphasized individual effort in faith and understanding of Simon Kimbangu’s message. The travels to Congo represents another occasion in which internal differences emerge: while for the first-generation migrants they appear as desired reunions, for the people born in Sweden they represent a complex challenge to their identifications, a challenge which is resolved only in the Holy City of N’Kamba.

The second question was about the daily life of believers: I have discussed the central role played by the mass, a ritual in which Kimbanguist beliefs are re-asserted, through sacred hymns, which are deemed to be direct revelations of God, preachings and prayers. While representing also an occasion to feel the divine presence, the mass is also an occasion to renovate the sense of belonging of the community, through a specific clothing and through the symbolic and material contributions to the church’s projects. Outside the mass, I have discussed, relying on Tweed’s theory of religion, the ways in which Kimbanguist symbols mediate the relations with the world, both to maintain a specific worldview (make home) and to modify it (cross boundaries): a huge emphasis on individual behaviour emerged as one of the main characteristics of the community’s symbolic inventories. Purity, expressed to a strict moral code and a great number of prohibitions and rules, shapes the relation of the believers with the body: purity involves alimentary norms, avoidance of nudity in any form and the prohibitions of activities such as dance. Work, on the other hand, emerged as a fundamental practice, both when performed to deepen the understanding of faith when used to materially contribute to the development of the church. I have also discussed the appropriation that is done of a
specific representation of Congolese history: historical figures such as Kimpa Vita are appropriated to confirm the pre-existence of a faith in God before colonization, a process that is itself interpreted as the triggering event for the revelation of Kimbangu, descended to Earth in order to free African people and renovate their conscience. Lastly, I discussed the role of N’Kamba in the teleology of believers: N’Kamba emerges from the words of the interviewees as the place of eschatology, the New Jerusalem, a city donated by God that is going to be built, and it being built, by believers in order to be the centre where God will live among His believers.

Answering the third question, about the relations between the believers and the church in Congo, I highlighted again the role of N’Kamba in the words and practices of the believers: N’Kamba represents not only an eschatological horizon, but also the target of many economic projects organized by the church. Kimbanguist believers around the World contribute to these projects, offering donations during the mass. I have included this practice among others that constitute a transnational field. Links with the Congolese reality are maintained economically, but also through kinship and culture: travels to N’Kamba are organized as often as possible, and these travels are also occasions to reunite with relatives. I have also emphasized the role of media, in particular the website Youtube, in favouring the construction of a Kimbanguist mediascape: through the videos uploaded on the site songs circulate and are learned by Kimbanguists around the world; at the same time, the live broadcast on the same website allows a constant presence of images of N’Kamba. Migration at the same time shaped the practices of believers, limiting their autonomy since they have to rent a space for their collective practices, thus not allowing the same number of services and activities.

Small religious communities are a new characteristic of contemporary European cities: often composed by migrants, they are paid little attention by public opinion and have rarely occasions to assert their presence in the public sphere. This fact makes them vulnerable to imposed reductionist representation: in particular, they can be depicted as closed and hostile group, with isolationistic tendencies, foreign bodies in a foreign nation, especially when they are reduced to ethnic groups. Social research is fundamental to highlighting their complexity, as well as to allow the voices of these people emerge.
Appendix A

Interview’s questions

These are the questions included in the interviews with the members of the community. Minor
differences occurred depending on the biographical background of the interviewee (migrant or born
in Sweden).

1. I thank you so much for your help, I am glad that I can rely on your knowledge for my work.
   Would you like to share your thoughts about today’s mass? I found it really meaningful.
2. Now I have attended a few masses, but I am not sure I am understanding everything. I would
   really appreciate if you could explain to me how the mass goes.
3. Many languages are used during the mass, what is the reason for it?
4. I have seen that you all wear specific clothes: what is the reason behind these choices about
   clothes?
5. I have seen that music and songs play a really important role, what can you tell me about
   songs and hymns?
6. I am really curious about the march that is performed at the end of the mass: could you tell
   me something about it?
7. On which other occasions do you meet other members of the church?
8. Could you explain to me what are the most important festivities that you celebrate?
9. Can you tell me something about the sacraments in the church, like baptism?
10. I have read a lot about Papa Simon Kimbangu, but I had never the pleasure of talking about
    him with a member of the church: can you tell me about him?
11. I have read and heard a lot about the city of N’Kamba but I would like to know more about it.
    Could you describe, in your own words, what N’Kamba is?
12. When I first came, I was told about the offerings that you gather for many projects in
    Democratic Republic of Congo. How does this system work?
13. Is it possible for anyone to become a Kimbanguist?
14. Are there things that you must or must not do, according to your beliefs?
15. How many times have you been to N’Kamba or in Congo-Kinshasa? And what does it mean
    to you to go there?
    15.1 How long have you been living here?
16. Once we talked about the afterschool which was organised by the Swedish church and that
    you used to attend. Can you tell me more about that experience?
    16.1 When did you arrive in Sweden? And why did you leave?
17. What can you tell me about your social relations outside the church, how does (if at all) your faith impact on them?

18. If I have understood correctly, the church puts a great emphasis on work and individual effort. What can you tell me about your relation with work and faith?

19. What are, in your opinion, the most important values for the church and for you?

20. Could you explain to me how important is, for you, to belong to this church? What is its role, or meaning?

21. What kind of future do you imagine for the church here in Sweden?

22. Would you like to move to Congo Kinshasa or would you prefer to remain here?

23. Is there something we did not talk about that you value important? Would you like to add something?

24. Could I ask you a contact, in case I need further explanations, or you want to read my transcription?

Data Card

Name
Surname
Gender
Age
Place of birth
Family status
Education
Profession
Year of arrival
Time spent in Sweden
Translator
Place of residence
Date of the interview
Place of the interview
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- Interview with M., 16/04/23
- Interview with R., 05/05/23