Building on the Bible, a White, ethnocentric civilization with pretensions to universalism was born. Building on the Bible, peoples deemed uncivilized were Christianized. Building on the same Bible, a culture of resistance and counter-acculturation emerged and gave birth to independent African churches that espoused African peoples’ struggle against colonial domination. The guiding purpose of this book has been to analyze the ways in which the Bible was appropriated and made to respond to the needs of identity reconstruction within the frame of African-initiated churches.

I began with the movement of the Antonians, which almost coincided with the start of the Christianization of the kingdom of Kongo in the eighteenth century and is considered by many scholars to be the earliest messianic and prophetic African movement. As the head of this resistance movement, Kimpa Vita initiated a process of revision of the history of sub-Saharan Africa through an appropriation of the Bible, which she claimed had been confiscated, truncated, and ultimately whitewashed by colonial missionaries. Without any in-depth knowledge of scriptures—because the Roman Catholics were opposed to letting laypeople, let alone colonized people, access the Bible freely—she set about reeducating her fellow Congolese to a consciousness of their Blackness, which she believed had been warped by a logic of domination. Placing herself on the plane of myths, she appropriated the Bible by transgressing the imposed norms of Christianity: she defined Jesus, Mary, the saints, and the angels as Black. Although she
was burned at the stake in July 1706 after an ecclesiastical trial, the spirit of appropriation of the Congolese Joan of Arc was not reduced to ashes with her body; it remained alive in new spiritual leaders.

Twentieth-century Africa was the setting for other movements of anti-colonial protest, some of which gave rise to new African-initiated churches. Among the best known in Francophone Africa was the movement led by William Wadé Harris in Ivory Coast and Liberia. While he did not challenge the colonial order, Harris also appropriated the Bible and bequeathed it to his followers as a remedy for the predicament of Africans and their lack of technological development. In his turn, Simon Kimbangu in the Belgian Congo established a link between the scriptures and Blackness, prophesying the independence of African nations and the return of African Americans to the motherland. The lasting success of these prophetic movements is due to the appropriation of the Bible by the successors of the founders, who entirely reprocessed the parameters of Christian identity, which had initially been defined by colonial missionaries. The appropriation of the Bible by African-initiated churches must therefore be seen as a global process, reaching much further than the purely religious life. In these processes, the Bible is embraced so that it can be revised; the combination of acceptance and reinterpretation responds to the need for identity reconstruction that was identified and met by these African spiritual leaders, who transformed the scriptures into an authentically African religion.

This book has focused on the specific way in which Kimbanguists relate to the Bible, because their understanding of it is a religious process centered on an in-depth reflection on race, which involves believers in questioning the implications of Blackness. This process highlights a discrepancy between the normative approach to the Bible imposed by colonial missionaries in the Christianization period and the present understanding of the scriptures, which is shaped by popular beliefs. These beliefs are both informed and sustained by the Kimbanguist faith, and they are supplemented by references outside the Bible, namely the church’s inspired hymns and the prophetic messages delivered by its spiritual leaders. These specific features define the Kimbanguist faith.

Thus, the Kimbanguist Church is both an institution that tries to conform to the criteria of Christianity, as they have been universally normalized by the World Council of Churches, and a space for socialization and the internalization and transmission of new biblical norms. These new norms are elaborated by traditional, or popular, Kimbanguism, which dictates how each believer should act as a Black person, while the norms imposed by the
WCC are violated by the legitimizing of Simon Kimbangu as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit and his three sons as the Holy Trinity. Since the biblical norms were publicly modified by Kimbanguist popular theology in the year 2000, when the date of Christmas was officially changed as a result of Kimbanguist Christology, the Kimbanguist Church as an institution has been at odds with the World Council of Churches. Since there is no effort to radically and durably redefine the theology of the Kimbanguist Church in the name of its own founding principles, it is the traditional dogma that will gain ground and establish its legitimacy as the only Kimbanguist theology.

The success of popular Kimbanguist theology may be explained by the need for African believers to be in charge of their own destiny. Since the historical roots of the church in Africa were inseparable from colonial oppression and persecution, it was highly unlikely for its members to adhere to the God of the European colonists and a White, blue-eyed Jesus. As the African American theologian James Cone pointed out in very explicit terms:

> It is therefore the task of black theology to make theology relevant to the black reality, asking, “What does Jesus Christ mean for the oppressed blacks of the land?” . . . But black existence is in existence in a hostile world without the protection of the law. If Jesus Christ is to have any meaning for us, he must leave the security of the suburbs by joining blacks in their condition. What need have we for a white Jesus when we are not white but black? If Jesus Christ is white and not black, he is an oppressor, and we must kill him. The appearance of black theology means that the black community is now ready to do something about the white Jesus, so that he cannot get in the way of our revolution.¹

These remarks help explain the success of Kimbanguist popular theology over the discourse of the academic theologians of the Kimbanguist Church, who are silent on the future of Black men and women. Traditional Kimbanguism may be seen as revealing a desire to stop believing in a distant, foreign deity and relate instead to a Black God who looks like the believers. To this extent, Kimbanguists’ quest for spirituality is not so much a quest for God—for he has already been identified as Kimbangu—as an effort to overturn the existing hierarchy and eventually see Blacks endowed with a respectable, meaningful social status. As Dominique Zahan observed, “It is not to please God or out of love for Him that Africans pray, beg, or make sacrifices. They do so to become themselves and fulfill the order in which they are involved.”²
The greatest challenge for Kimbanguism remains the unification of Africans and people of African descent around its religious message. This challenge could be met if Kimbanguism keeps drawing strength from its critique of Blacks’ oppressed status and its deconstruction of Blacks’ negative identity. Its pan-African dimension leads to a consistent discourse built on a reformatted biblical past, a present interpreted through the exegesis of inspired hymns and messages from spiritual leaders, and a future anchored in a millenarian conception of hope. Even if hope seems shaky these days, because of all the crises affecting Africa and the Kimbanguist Church itself, inspired hymns such as the following (received in Lingala) have a soothing effect on believers:

Sooner or later, oh, sooner or later,
You will be in peace
You will be in peace
In times of joy
But also in times of suffering,
And even in times of grief,
Persevere,
Do not fear, or falter, or flee:
We shall overcome,
We shall rejoice forever!

Chorus: Do not be surprised
At the things you see:
You are not without knowledge
Of all that is happening.
Sound the clarion,
Let the whole world hear it!
For the Judgment Day
Has begun in this world.

Kimbanguists are here reassured that they are a chosen people who really grasp the meaning of sacred texts (and hymns) and hence are cognizant of the destiny of the world, which is announced by this hymn as being Judgment Day.

Analyzing the relation between Kimbanguism and the scriptures gives insight into the process of revising the parameters of Christian identity away from the legacy of colonial missionaries. In this sense, the biblical past
and the Kimbanguist present constitute a whole, both aiming at the reconstruction of Blackness. This often has caused the Kimbanguist Church to be considered racist by sister churches, but even though racial discourse is real and prevalent in this church, it is not racist. While the critique of social inequalities is formulated in such terms as the “Black race,” “Black people,” and so on, this expresses nothing but a yearning for the end of a situation of racial domination.

Finally, because they are intent on reading the Bible as a means of liberation, Kimbanguism and other African-initiated churches illustrate the successful appropriation of sacred scriptures. Studying Kimbanguist theology shows how an African religious phenomenon may be articulated with the study of the Bible. Kimbanguism represents a unique, African-initiated way for a formerly colonized people to make texts, revisit biblical personas, and both “signify” and “signify on” scriptures as vectors for understanding Black-White relations, in the hope of achieving liberation from the subordinate status imposed on Africana people since the beginning of the modern era.
NOTES

Unless otherwise noted, all English translations from sources published in French have been provided by Cécile Coquet-Mokoko.

INTRODUCTION

18. Ibid., 63.

CHAPTER I

4. Ibid., 24.
8. The term “Pygmy” is Greek and means nothing in the various African languages spoken in the countries where these indigenous people live. “Batswa” is one of the least derogatory names they are called by their Lingala-speaking compatriots. I chose this term because it is the one I am familiar with. On the Batswa, see Nobirabo Musafiri, “Right to Self-Determination in International Law,” and Musolo W’isuka, “Encountering the Mbuti Pygmies.”
12. Ibid., 66.
16. Ibid., 167–68. This list of “vices” reflects cultural realities that are still observable to this day. As in most African countries, homosexuality in the Congo is implicitly and explicitly condemned by moral authorities; gay men and women have no other option but to be closeted; and same-sex marriage is considered to be evidence of the moral decline of Western societies by the Kimbanguist Church (and by other Protestant and Catholic churches). The statement in the text does not reflect my personal position on gay rights.
18. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 254.
23. Ibid., 253.
28. Ibid., 9.
29. Las Casas published in 1542 his classic *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, in which he gave a firsthand account of the atrocities committed by the conquistadores.
32. Ibid., 69.
37. Coulon et al., *Libermann 1802–1852*.
40. See Laburthe-Tolra, *Vers la lumière?* and the research done on this question by the Congolese historian and Catholic priest Kavenadiambuko Ngemba Ntima, *La méthode d’évangélisation*, 148.
1. See MacGaffey’s comments on Kikongo translation of the scriptures in *Religion and Society in Central Africa*, 46.
5. A White settler called Dominik made the same observation among the Beti people of Cameroon; see Laburthe-Tolra, *Vers la lumière?*, 55.
6. Ibid., 60.
8. “Ham derives from the Hebrew Ch’m, associated with being black and burnt” (Rattansi, *Racism*, 17).
11. *Buku na koyekola: Botangi na likoma o Lingala* (Buta: Marist Brothers, 1925), 41.
25. Ibid., 46.
27. Ibid., 60.
37. Ibid., 29.
40. Ibid.
43. Ibid., 48–49.
47. Ibid., 116.
48. Ibid., 117.
49. Quoted in ibid., 117.
54. Ibid., 59.
56. Lucques, *Relations sur le Congo*, 238.
63. Hartz and Harrington quoted ibid., 60.
66. Quoted ibid., 67.
72. Interview with Kwasi, thirty years old, an official of the Harrist Church, in the greater Paris area, 2002.
74. Ibid., 46–48.
75. Ibid., 148.
76. See Dozon, *La cause des prophètes*.
79. Ibid., 134.
80. Ibid., 156.
82. Ibid., 124.

**CHAPTER 3**

2. Van Wing, “Le ki[m]bang[ujisme],” 566.
4. Ibid., 33.
5. Bourdieu, “Une interprétation de la théorie.”
6. Van Wing wrote, “While more and more schools were being created in the regions surrounding Bangu, Kibangu’s [sic] homeland remained deprived of any teaching to the masses” (“Le ki[m]bang[ujisme],” 592). According to this author, the region of Bangu was bounded on the north approximately by the Congo River, on the south by the Matadi- Léopoldville railway, on the west by the Kwilu region, and on the east by the Inkisi region.
12. Ibid., 735.
15. Ibid., 423.
24. Ibid., 575–76.
26. Ibid., 65.
28. Ibid., 38.
29. Secret document no. 885, folio no. 4/A. “Only a few pages from this important document have been found in the Belgian colonial archives in July 1960, that is, one month after the proclamation of independence of Zaire. It seems certain that, for the most part, the record of the hearings of Simon Kimbangu was shipped off to Belgium by the Belgian colonial authorities just before the independence of Zaire, then named the Congo” (Diangienda Kuntima, *L’histoire*, nn. 28, 96).
34. Nginamau, *Émission ya bazoba*, DVD 34.
41. Chomé pointed out that “until Simon Kimbangu was arrested, at no moment was there any rebellion, let alone the appearance of it, among his followers; and at no moment was the blood of any White person shed” (*La passion*, 24).

CHAPTER 4

3. Ibid., 571.
6. Marie-Louise Martin reported this legend in *Kimbangu*, 39.
8. Diangienda Kuntima, sermon to the congregations of Nkamba during the five-month retreat (December 1988–May 1989), PRESKI Nkamba.
13. Kisolokele, speech delivered to the Kimbanguist congregation of the Plateaux des quinze ans, Brazzaville, 1994, author’s notes.
16. The title was given to him by the Zairian state authorities, according to Marie-Louise Martin, so that he would be on an equal footing with the highest dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church.
18. Diangienda, sermon to church members, January 12, 1992, PRESKI Kinshasa.
21. The phrase “occult market” designates a place in the invisible world where the supply of and demand for human souls meet. Such markets attract sorcerers, who exchange for greater occult powers the souls (i.e., vital powers) of the people they hold under their influence. The phrase “occult restaurant” designates a place in the invisible world where human flesh is (symbolically) eaten. These notions are part and parcel of Congolese culture, hence the absence of any need for explanation in the sermon.
29. Ibid., 79.
31. “Spiritual leader” in Kikongo; the title for Diangienda, as explained above.
36. Munukutuba, a language spoken in the southwestern portions of the two Congos, is officially recognized as one of the national languages in each country.
39. I met this interviewee again eleven years later, in 2011. His premonition proved accurate, for he had recovered his gift by that time.
42. See Mokoko Gampiot, “Inspired Hymns as a Belief System.”

**CHAPTER 5**

4. Speech to church members, September 12, 1991, PRESKI Kinshasa and author’s notes. Diangienda (who had received long before his father the medal of the Order of the Leopard) had just received another decoration on behalf of his father on the occasion of Simon Kimbangu’s rehabilitation by the Zairian state. Building on the legend, he drew the members’ attention to the similarity between the medal he was wearing and the one presented his father.
5. Diangienda’s reaction to an article by Ndinga Masakuba, in a speech to church members, April 27, 1991, Matete, PRESKI Kinshasa.
6. Diangienda, speech to church members, November 5, 1990, Brazzaville, author’s notes.

7. Simon Kayobo, archives of the Kimbanguist press, Nkamba, 2000. This testimony is reminiscent of the Indian Sufi understanding of healing studied in Speziale, *Soufisme*, 172, where the author related how ailing Muslim believers saw themselves being operated on by saints in their dreams and woke up healed and bearing surgery scars.


12. Ibid.


22. This is also true of the sixty-three resolutions passed by the Kimbanguist Church in October 2002.


24. The resolutions drawn up in Nkamba in October 2002 presented Simon Kimbangu; his wife, Marie Muilu; and their three sons, Kisolokele, Dialungana, and Diangienda, as saints.


27. See Nguapitshi Kayongo, *Dr. Marie Louise Martin, théologienne*.


31. Interview with Gilbert, forty years old, an apostle of the Harrist Church, in the greater Paris area, 2002. See also Mokoko Gampiot, “Harrisme et kimbanguisme.”


38. A man calling himself Prophet Mangongele, residing in Kinshasa, claimed to be in contact with Simon Kimbangu. He explained that the sons of Kimbangu had betrayed their father’s memory in choosing the biblical and Christian way. His movement claimed
to be authentically African. Another man from the DRC, who called himself Messenger Mvuka Mbambi-Mozandu, claimed to be a “real Kimbanguist,” unlike the members of the Kimbanguist Church, who are Christians. See Nginamau, Émission ya bazoba, DVDs 16 and 21.


41. Etinga, “L’Église kimbanguiste.”
42. Exhortation to Kimbanguist congregation, Kimbanseke, Zaire, June 11, 1989, PRESKI Kinshasa.

44. See the Franco-Belgian documentary by Remiche, Miracle Merchants.

46. Halbwachs, La topographie légendaire; Halbwachs, On Collective Memory.

48. Ibid., 61.

49. Chenu, Le grand livre, 136. See also Chenu, The Trouble I’ve Seen.

CHAPTER 6

1. Martin, Kimbangu, 46–47.
2. Diangienda Kuntima, L’histoire, 40–41.
3. Ibid., 43–65.
4. Quoted in Chomé, La passion, 46–47.
5. Quoted in Diangienda Kuntima, L’histoire, 65.
7. Diangienda Kuntima, L’histoire, 36.
8. MacGaffey, Modern Kongo Prophets, 185.

10. Simbandumwe, A Socio-Religious and Political Analysis, 97.
12. This term refers to widely held beliefs about supernatural beings that visit men and women at night to sexually abuse them. Alternative names are “incubus” (for a male supernatural being) and “succubus” (for a female one).

14. In the Gospels, Jesus also simultaneously heals and forgives sins.
17. Diangienda, message to the congregations of Brazzaville, 1990, author’s notes.
21. Martin, Kimbangu, 45.
23. Martin, Kimbangu, 41.
27. Dialungana, who succeeded his brother Diangienda as the Kimbanguist Church’s spiritual leader, aptly summed up this point: “When you are taught something, it is best for you to have your own understanding” (PRESKI Kinshasa).

CHAPTER 7

9. After Mobutu’s demise in 1997, this word was changed to “Congo.”
10. Diangienda, exhortation to the congregants of Kinshasa, January 12, 1992, PRESKI Kinshasa.
17. Diangienda, speech to church members, January 4, 1989, PRESKI Nkamba.
20. Diangienda, speech to religious officials of the Kimbanguist schools of Congo-Kinshasa, August 1989 (emphasis in original), PRESKI Kinshasa.
21. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Brazzaville, 1987, author’s notes.
32. Martin contended that the policy of Zairianization imposed by Mobutu in 1972 had an impact on the additional names chosen by the sons of Kimbangu: Charles Kisolokele became Kisolokele Lukelo (Lukelo means “It is revealed now”), Paul Salomon Dialungana became Dialungana Kiangani (“What belongs to another”), and Joseph Diangienda became Diangienda Kuntima (“It went straight to my heart”). See Martin, *Simon Kimbangu*, 17–18.
33. Harris visited the Kimbanguist communities of Brazzaville, Kinshasa, and Nkamba (PRESKI Kinshasa).
34. Interview with Rufin Ossiala, Brazzaville, November 4, 2000.

CHAPTER 8

2. Tonda, La guérison divine, 20–21.
3. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Nkamba during the five-month retreat (December 1988–May 1989), PRESKI Nkamba. In Congolese culture, nakedness is considered to be the “combat outfit” of sorcerers. Many of my interviewees, as well as the non-Kimbanguist press, reported lived experiences in which men or women had been found at daybreak entirely naked and dazed, allegedly as a result of their souls being prevented from reentering their bodily envelopes at the end of their travels in the invisible world. A well-known anecdote in Kimbanguist spheres says that in 1921, Simon Kimbangu encountered naked sorcerers and struck them with paralysis so that their families would find out their real identities at dawn; this resulted in their banishment from their village.
4. Rosny, Les yeux de ma chèvre, 60.
5. Rosny, La nuit, les yeux ouverts, 15–16.
7. Sinda, Le messianisme congolais, 371.
8. Simon, La bretonnité.
15. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Nkamba during the five-month retreat (December 1988–May 1989), PRESKI Nkamba.
17. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Nkamba during the five-month retreat (December 1988–May 1989), PRESKI Nkamba.
18. Diangienda, sermon to the congregation of the Plateaux des quinze ans, Brazzaville, November 6, 1990, author’s notes.
19. Quoted in Bureau, Le prophète de la lagune, 186.
25. Kepel, À l’ouest d’Allah, 44.
28. Interview with Angelo Rodrigues Figueiredo, November 30, 2000, Nkamba, DRC.
29. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBTCP1pNRUU, beginning at the 4-minute mark. Figueiredo may be seen beginning at 1 minute, 37 seconds.
32. This term may be understood as referring to colonial oppression or in the sense of bewitching a person by stealing his or her soul.
38. When Simon Kimbangu was granted posthumous recognition by the Zairian government on September 12, 1991, the EJCSK replaced the term “prophet” in its official name with “special envoy” to emphasize that Kimbangu had been entrusted by Jesus with the task of retrieving the “lost sheep,” that is, Black people.
40. The exam topic was brought back by one of my cousins and is in my personal possession.
41. The exception is Kisolokele, who was a high-ranking cabinet member in the government of Joseph Kasa-Vubu in the independent Democratic Republic of the Congo from 1960 to 1965.
42. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Kinshasa, June 9, 1991, Kimbanguist conference center, PRESKI Kinshasa.
43. Diangienda, speech to religious officials in charge of regional Kimbanguist school boards, August 17–20, 1989, PRESKI Kinshasa.
44. Lipset, *Political Man*, 333, emphasis in original.
45. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Kinshasa, November 18, 1990, PRESKI Kinshasa.
46. Interview with David Wabeladio Payi, November 2000.
47. See http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2011/L201111053-mandombe.pdf.
49. “Interview of Mama Véronique Kabeya and Her Husband.”
52. Okeowo, “Handel in Kinshasa.”
53. Morgan, “The Scratch Orchestra of Kinshasa.”
54. By choosing to portray the essential motivation of the musicians and choir members as their common need to raise themselves out of poverty and escape misery through art, the filmmakers not only obscured the link between their energy and determination and the spirituality and sense of belonging given to them by their Kimbanguist community, but also erased the royal status of Armand Wabasolele Diangienda, whose charisma is attributable less to his sheer musical talent than to the prestige of being one of Kimbangu’s grandsons.

**CHAPTER 9**

2. Diangienda said that he paid out of his personal funds the wages of Jacques-Arnold Croquez, the attorney who pleaded in favor of the independence of the former
Belgian Congo. See Diangienda’s interview by Lembi Dilulu in La mort de Simon Kimbangu, 77.


4. Ibid., 125, 128.


7. Tabu Ley Rochereau, “Démocratie” (1990). The song was released seven years before the demise of the Mobutu regime. The artist, who died in 2013, served as the minister of culture of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

8. Quoted in Martin, Kimbangu, 125.

9. Asch, L’église du prophète Kimbangu, 64, 300.


13. See 1 Peter 2:13–14; 1 Timothy 2:2; Titus 3:1; Hebrews 13:17.


17. Diangienda, sermon to church members, Kimbanguist Center, Kinshasa, June 9, 1991, PRESKI Kinshasa.


20. Interview of Diangienda by Lembi Dilulu in La mort de Simon Kimbangu, 77.


22. The term Sassou II serves both to distinguish Sassou N’Guesso’s second regime from the first and to designate the president after he returned to power.


27. Diangienda Kuntima, L’histoire, 244–45.

28. Ibid., 245.

29. Diangienda to church officials, Kinshasa, January 2, 1992, PRESKI Kinshasa.

30. Diangienda, sermon to church members, January 19, 1992, PRESKI Kinshasa.


33. Soudan, “Le jeune sage.” See also the comments made by the spokesperson for the presidency on the official website of the president of the DRC (http://www.presidentrdc.cd) on January 26, 2006.

34. The conference proceedings, sixty-one contributions in all, were published in M’Bokolo and Sabakinu, Simon Kimbangu.

35. Ngandu Nkashama, La pensée politique des mouvements religieux, 76.
38. Wimbush, African Americans and the Bible, 17.
40. Transcribed and translated from videotape, PRESKI Kinshasa.
41. All quotations below are transcribed and translated from a videotape of the feast of April 6, 2002, in Nkamba. A copy was made for the author by PRESKI Nkamba.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Interview of Valente by Bobé Belo on the Kimbanguist program La Crainte de Dieu est le Commencement de la Sagesse, Office zaïrois de radio et de television, August 4, 1991. See also the testimony she gave in Nkamba in 1991: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WM1vtYnxQPQ.
47. “Dr. Ramona Tascoe’s Interview with Papa John (part 1),” 4:45–6:03.
49. Videotape of the feast in Nkamba, April 6, 2002, PRESKI Nkamba.
50. Quoted in Nginamau, Émission ya bazoba, DVD 34.
52. Exhortation by Marie Muilu (one of Diangienda Kuntima’s daughters) to the congregation of Saint-Ouen, November 10, 2008, author’s notes.

CONCLUSION

2. Quoted in Stamm, Les religions africaines, 5.