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Unstable Biographies. The Ethnography of Memory and Historicity in an Angolan Prophetic Movement

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In this article I discuss issues of memory and historicity in a contemporary African prophetic movement, the Tokoist church. I do so by focusing on the multiple processes of "biographization" of the prophet's (Simão Toko) life from the different allegiances within the movement. I suggest that, despite recent critiques on the biographical method, the ethnography of those (unstable and heterogeneous) processes can be very helpful to understand the place of memory and historical consciousness in contemporary Christianity.

Keywords: Memory; Biography; Ethnography; Tokoist church; Angola

> *Simão Toko é o nome do redentor*
> *O povo inteiro proclama a salvação*
> *Na Nova Jerusalém os anjos se encontrarão*[1]

In December 2007, I arrived at the Golfe district of Luanda, Angola with my colleagues and friends Ramon Sarró and Fátima Viegas to visit the main temple of the Tokoist Church, by invitation of its leader Bishop Afonso Nunes.[2] We had been invited to his headquarters after attending the Sunday service before more than 10,000 believers in a warehouse that served as provisional space for services, while the official temple, set to house more than 50,000 people, was being built. After taking off our shoes, we entered into his office—where, in contrast with what was happening in the premises, silence prevailed, and a strong scent of perfume filled the air; a sheet of white linen covered the

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sofa where he sat when welcoming visitors; on this occasion, we were officially presented as foreign researchers, and he discussed his memories and visions as a church leader with us.[3]

The Tokoist church—officially, Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ on Earth—is a prophetic-based Christian reformist movement, created after the following of an Angolan Mukongo[4] called Simão Gonçalves Toko, the original prophet. The movement began in the early 1940s in Leopoldville (Belgian Congo), to where Toko had moved when he was a young adult. Toko and his followers were persecuted by the Belgian authorities and, in 1950, expelled to Angola where, despite the efforts of the Portuguese regime (and, after independence in 1975, by the Angolan authorities), they developed a movement that grew to become one of the major players in this country's religious scene and in the Angolan diaspora to this day.

However, when the prophet passed away in the new year's eve of 1983–1984, a major conflict broke out within the church leadership, with different sectors claiming authority and legitimacy in the process of succession, and mutually accusing each other of corrupting the prophet's original message and goals. This conflict, that threatened the very existence of the church, rose to unprecedented levels of confrontation and violence (Blanes 2009). The situation lasted roughly until the turn of the century, when a man coming from the same region as the prophet's birthplace (Uíge, northern Angola) arrived at the main headquarters of the church in Luanda claiming that he had been visited by Simão Toko's spirit. The spirit had not only appeared and given him important messages, but had also "personified" (*personificado*) and "coated" or "re-dressed" (*revestido*) his body; this man thus "became" Simão Toko, who in turn had returned from heaven and prolonged his life on earth.

That man was none other than Afonso Nunes, who managed to convince a large portion of believers regarding this episode and soon became the leader (henceforth entitled "Bishop") of the Tokoist church, seeking to fulfil the spirit's three desires: to reunify the church, transform it into a universal venture and, finally, build a place of worship able to house tens of thousands of followers. It was at the site of construction of the new temple where Nunes/Toko kept his office and welcomed us for an interview. In our conversations, the Bishop—a man in his forties—described with extraordinary detail events that took place in, say, 1946 or 1949; but his personification went beyond the mere exercise in memory: his physical posture and even his handwriting were said to be just like the original prophet's.

This event—a "biographical extension" that included life, death and return to life—can be subject of diverse interpretations, some of which will be addressed later in this article, but this form of biographical extension also exemplified the many ways in which the Tokoist church, as many other religious and prophetic movements, dealt with its own (collective, institutional, spiritual) history.

In this respect, in this church, as a prophetic movement, there is an obvious structuration around the prophet's life, whose biography and legacy becomes, in many ways, a moral guideline for the believers. However, as I quickly understood, this prophetic biography was also object of multiple strategies of configuration and subject to diverse and conflicting interpretations. In other words, many of the disputes going on in the

church to this day were connected to particular understandings of the role of collective memory within the church and, specifically, of the prophet's life and personality. I could distinguish different strategies for relating to—or appropriating—"Simão's story", strategies that also revealed a need to solve particular political and experiential "uncertainties" (Engelke 2007: 81) and "anxieties" (Stewart 1997) among the believers in the moment of crisis.

To understand in detail what motivated these different narrative regimes and their impact in the world-views and historical consciences of the believers, during my research I found myself having to develop an ethnographic account that incorporated my own biography of the prophet—a biography that could establish a dialogue between the different biographical and autobiographical accounts I encountered along the way. In this article I propose to discuss the different strategies set forth in this religious context to appropriate and produce biographical memory, and reflect upon its ethnographic and anthropological pertinence in what concerns debates on religious memory and historicity.

I will start by invoking some of the relevant discussions on the place of biography in anthropology and ethnography, in particular the critiques set forth by Bourdieu and John and Jean Comaroff. As a counterpoint to their proposals, I will make a claim for the social relevance of biography, "biographical construction" and "memory narratives" for the study of issues of religious memory. Using a broader understanding of "biography" as a method of memory, and the Tokoist church as framework, I will suggest that "prophetic memory", as a biographical exercise, is an integral part of religious experience of such movements, inasmuch as it reveals the unstable, precarious and therefore innovative character of social memory—often presented as a process of fixation.

The Ethnography of Biography and Memory in Religious Contexts

Despite its changing status in the history of social sciences, the biographical method is a key instrument in contemporary ethnographical practice. Anthropology's long-lasting concern with identity and historicity has inspired several strategies to unfold discourses and narratives and their social relevance; life and family histories are invoked in a range of ethnographic moments such as interviews, informal conversations, and so on. Historically, this changing status is directly related to paradigmatic shifts towards either subjective or positivist philosophical standpoints (see Bertaux 2001; Pujadas 2000), as well as to *pro* or *anti* constructionist attitudes (see Berger and Luckmann 1966; Hacking 2000). In anthropology, Pierre Bourdieu's critique of the "biographical illusion" (1986) and the views of ethnography as "translation" (Clifford and Marcus 1986) undermined or explicitly questioned the epistemological validity of biography.[5]

Of these critiques, perhaps Bourdieu's comments on "the biographical illusion" were the most explicit, when he disregarded the use of life histories in social sciences as commonsensical, subjective and, therefore, "unreliable" (1986: 69). For Bourdieu, in the framework of his critique on issues of language and power, this "smuggling" of life

histories into the social sciences was dangerous, inasmuch as it promoted a uni-lineal "trajectorialized" account of history—that of a "story" made of coherent progression, beginnings and endings —that did not account for the complexities of historical knowledge and social life (1986: 69–70).

John and Jean Comaroff, in their discussion of a "historical anthropology", follow Bourdieu and mention the (methodological) dangers of biography as an instrument for ethnographical research, reminding us that it is, after all, a western bourgeois product, a projection of a particular idea of personhood in which anthropologists voluntarily or involuntarily participate in their production of life-histories (1992: 26). This alert comes as part of the broader effort to "rupture the basic tropes of western historiography—biography and event by situating being and action, comparatively, within their diverse cultural contexts" (1992: 27).

Agreeing with John and Jean Comaroff in that biography is all but neutral (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 26), and with Bourdieu in that it must be placed within a wider social field (Bourdieu 1986: 72; see also Werbner 1991) or semantic space (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 27), from our point of view the biographical framework they have in mind (the autobiographical narrative in Bourdieu; the private diary, journal, memoir and the life history in Comaroff and Comaroff) does not totally encompass the social presence and creativity of biographical production, and somehow seems to place the epistemological burden upon the western ethnographer or social scientist, as if the trajectorialized narratives frequently reproduced in the biographical accounts used were entirely of his or her own imagination.

My first suggestion in this regard is heuristic, as I propose a broader understanding of "biography" as a multiplicity of linguistic and narrative genres that produce or reproduce memory, not necessarily bounded with western bourgeois notions of personhood but also historically and geographically pervasive, ranging diverse narratives, from Hindu Puranas to John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563). My second point is methodological: does biography necessarily have to be a "singular dialogic contrivance of observer and subject" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 26)? How, then, can we account for the recurrence and diversity of biographical efforts in the empirical contexts we approach—be they Western, bourgeois or otherwise? After all, as we will see in the case of prophetism, biography, as a historicizing discursive regime, can be composed of multiple voices—"I", "he/she", "us" and so forth—that propose "different ways of being in history" (Bloch 1998) and not necessarily a singular (passive) subject that is "biographized"; thus, it is up to the ethnographer to account for and understand the multifaceted agencies and regimes of biographical narrative. Furthermore, this "placement" of narra*tor* and narra*tive* in terms of memory and agency can and should be a central problem in ethnographical inquiries on memory and historicity. In this particular sense I assume a "balandierian" perspective, suggesting that individual agency is fundamental in the understanding of societal and religious change (Balandier 1963 [1955]: 417 and following), and that the ethnographer's task is to understand the individual motivations and initiatives (or the "psychology", as Balandier would put it) behind social action. In this line of thought, the study of prophetism is, paraphrasing Balandier again, "revealing" (1963 [1955]).

My third point, in dialogue with the two previous ones, is empirical. The correlation between biography and memory as aspects of historical consciousness has been and still is frequently and intensively recognized in various religious contexts as a fundamental concern—an increasing recognition also shared by many anthropologists who are focusing on the issue of religious memory and transmission (see Berliner and Sarró 2008).[6] I am referring, for instance, to a body of religious ideologies and practices that have been accounted for, from straightforward religious leader biographies (see, for instance, Brenner 1984; O'Fahey 1990) to religious conversion narratives (among others, Stromberg 1993; Csordas 1994) and to hagiographies or the cult of saints (for instance, Christian Jr 1989; Claverie 2003; Greer and Bilinkoff 2003).

These examples, in one way or the other, highlight the social relevance and determinacy of both biographical and autobiographical accounts in religious contexts. Conversion narratives are, from this point of view, particularly significant. Csordas, for instance, in his account of charismatic healing narratives describes the "conversational" character of memory in revelatory discourses, in order to develop what he termed (invoking experimental psychology jargon) as "words of knowledge"—that is, the identification of significant and "effective" words, phrases and discourses that serve as memory cues (Csordas 1994: 144 and following). Susan Harding also understands Christian conversion as a process of language acquisition that produces doubt, contestation and transformation and transfers narrative authority into a specific context of belief and practice (2001: 34; see also Stromberg 1993). Using a historicist approach, Jean and John Comaroff (1991) highlight the conversational character of *longue durée* conversion to Christianity in colonial South Africa, as an interactive process of production of discursive intelligibility.

In sum, these different stances of biographical and autobiographical narrative suggest two things: in the first place, they stress the processual insertion of the individual in the collective, or what Michael Lambek and Paul Antze would define as a space of confluence between selfhood and sociality through processes of objectivation and subjectivation (Antze and Lambek 1996: viii), produced through tropes, idioms, narratives, rituals, discipline, power and social context (1996: xiii). My point here, following their metaphorical recourse, is that the different methods and regimes of memory necessarily produce a "tense past" that is often the ground for ideological, political, or even physical dispute. In the second place, and consequently, the necessary instability that is part and parcel of the production, negotiation and establishment of biography (see Harding 2001: 86). In other words, the precariousness of biography as a social fact, constantly subject to scrutiny and update by the agents involved or affected by it. Despite being frequently understood or presented as fixations, crystallizations of specific historical understandings, biography is, I suggest, inherently plastic and unstable.

On Prophetic Biographies

The problem of individuality and the narrative instability are, I believe, explicitly present in what concerns prophetism and "prophetic biographies". Regarding

individuality, since Weber's pioneering reflection on religious charisma and authority (2006), several authors have developed, from diverse empirical contexts, theoretical frameworks that debate the correlation that highlights the importance of individual personality in the development of modern religious institutions, namely in terms of Christian prophetic-based movements in the African continent.[7] Balandier's suggestion of the "revelatory character" of Bakongo messianism (and the prophet Simon Kimbangu, in particular) is, in this context, salient. Balandier addresses the problem of cultural contextualization of prophetic individuality—a problem inherent in the posterior work of scholars who also worked on prophetism in the Congo region, such as Effraim Andersson (1958), A. Doutreloux (1965), André Droogers (1980), Joseph Tonda (2001) and, especially, Wyatt MacGaffey, who discussed "Kongo prophetism" in terms of "cultural roots" (1977) and "religious commissions" (1970). MacGaffey sought to explain the cultural role of prophets such as Simon Kimbangu (1887–1951) as a Christian version of the Bakongo *ngunza* or religious leader/healer or prophet—in correlation with other roles, such as chief (*mfumu*) or magician (*nganga*) (1970)—produced within processes of "political allocation" (1976: 78).[8] As we will see, Simão Toko was also object of similar appropriations.

From a historical point of view, this allocation certainly applied in the anthropology of the "colonial situation" and the development of politico-religious movements of resistance as a response or reaction to the "constraints" of history (see for example, Balandier 1963 [1955]; Lanternari 1963; Bastide 1966). Many authors explained the sociopolitical claims and concomitant development of historical consciousness within independent African religious movements—from Ethiopianism and Zionism to "Kongo" prophetism and apostolic movements, and so on—from this perspective (see Barrett 1968 for a review). In other words, from the idea of an "oppression paradigm" (MacGaffey 1983: 1) that seemed to resume prophetism to a political problem.[9] This approach, however, revealed itself as being somewhat restrictive (Sarró 2009: 3), and does not account for persisting issues in the contemporary approaches to the subject: the persistence and revival of such prophetic movements in post-colonial and contemporary times (see Sarró and Blanes 2009); and their "survival" and regeneration after the removal of the "charismatic element", or the succession of the prophet into second and third generations of religious movements (Fernandez 1973).

These discussions on commissions and allocations in temporal perspective, and within a particular historical constraint, necessarily imply the problem of leadership and authority—a key issue in terms of understanding prophetic biography and the intersection of charisma and memory in the construction of "church history" (Engelke 2007: 109). Bennetta Jules-Rosette (1979) accounted for this issue regarding the Apostolic Church of John Maranke in terms of the problem of continuity and social change —a debate found in several studies of African religion (for example, Fernandez 1982: 170–186; Engelke 2007: 109–137; Sarró 2009). Wyatt MacGaffey himself described, through Simon Kimbangu's biography and legacy, and the generational transition after his death, in terms of the "success and failure" of the imprint of his message (1983: 102–120). What is at stake in these descriptions is, from this point of view, the problem of individual agency and societal change, and how it plays into

certain stances of collective memory. Simultaneously, these processes are permeated by the problem of generation and its relationship with religious change (Sarró, personal communication). Succession and generational transition are but two examples of contexts and motivations behind the questioning of biographies and hagiographies. This has certainly been the case for the Kimbanguist church (see Sarró *et al.* 2008) and, as I will explain henceforth, for the Tokoist church.

Be that as it may, in terms of religious charisma, agency and memory, prophets can also be understood as "markers of temporality". Not only are they "mythologized" (Middleton 1999) and "heroicized" (Mary 2002) into a particular memory narrative, but also produce, through revelation and prophecy, timelines that connect memory with eschatology. As Ramon Sarró has described for the Kimbanguist context, prophetic historicity can assume multiple discursive forms: linear, but also analogical (Sarró 2008), and the content of prophecy, as wisdom and prediction, requires constant actualization in the interpretation of the present and equation of the future (personal communication). Prophecy encapsulates and appropriates time in a non-lineal and non-trajectorialized manner (Dozon 2006). If we understand prophecy as a "temporal projection", we may begin to understand the narrative instability and precariousness that is inherent in prophetic biographies.

Remembrance: Sources and Modes of Memory in the Tokoist Church

One interesting feature in the academic literature on prophetism is the virtual absence of references to Simão Toko and the Tokoist church. Elsewhere I explained possible causes for this "forgotten history" in mainstream academy (Blanes 2009). This fact is all the more striking if we take into consideration the multiplicity of sources available regarding the prophet's life and the development of the church, both from within and without the church. These sources are, for the most part, available and accessed alike by believers and occasional ethnographers such as myself.

One such source is the immanent "living memory"—that of those who met and followed Simão Toko since the 1950s. Today, most of them belong to a faction of the Tokoist church called The Twelve Elders (*Os Doze Mais Velhos*) that is actively "writing down" their experience in the form of several, ongoing publications. There are also published sources, such as the three known biographies of the prophet written up to date by believers (Agostinho, n.d.; Quibeta, n.d.; Kisela, 2004),[10] as well as other theological publications of church leaders that debate his life (Melo 2001) and documentaries that rescue disperse film footage regarding Toko and his work.[11]

This internal archiving and production of sources constitute what I call "methods of memory", active ways of stating and reproducing the importance of a collective memory where the life trajectory of the prophet Toko is linchpin—methods that activate different "memory tropes" in the church. One such trope is the fundamental concern for "remembrance", since the mainstream church historical interpretation regards the prophet's actions and doctrinal proposals as a form of "remembering" the original, "true" church of the time of the Apostles (Blanes 2009). The church's official extended name is, in fact, "Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ on Earth, Remembered on

July 25th 1949 by His Holiness the Prophet Simão Gonçalves Toko". The discourse on remembrance is thus a reformist stance and simultaneously a critique to a white, European, missionary explanation of Christian experience, against which Toko began his movement.

This remembrance is not just about the incorporation of a biography into an official historical and theological narrative. Toko's words and actions are invoked and debated in sermons, his words are transmitted in youth evangelization, the hymns he wrote sung in the services, his directives transmitted from believer to believer, milestone dates in his life celebrated, and so on. His life has thus become "liturgized" in the ritual display, as the key moments of his life are pretext for an "official celebration" in the church, imposing a yearly calendar punctuated by those moments and inspiring celebratory sermons and the production of documentation that explains the ephemerid. Thus, by "remembrance", I refer not only to a key theological stance for the Tokoist church, but also to explicit acts of documentation and (re)production of historicized knowledge within the church, and especially to an expression of religious experience: the permanent and multifaceted remembrance of the prophet's life connects with a constant "narrative of suffering" that permeates the Tokoists' discourses on church history and memory (Blanes 2009).

This internal production of memory is counterbalanced with the abundant external sources available on the Tokoist movement. Perhaps the most impressive of those sources are the records from the PIDE (Portuguese political police, active during the

Figure 1.   Simão Toko interviewed by Portuguese Television; date unknown.

Estado Novo regime in Portugal and its colonies in the mid-twentieth century), compiled throughout twenty-four years, from Toko's expulsion from the Congo in 1950 until Angola's independence in 1975; these archives include an array of reports, correspondence, photographs and apprehended material that create a clearly distinct portrait of Simão Toko as a dangerous political conspirer and naive theologian, and also offer us the background against which many Tokoists reproduce the prophet's "life of suffering" (see Blanes 2009). These archives also include hundreds of letters written by Toko and exchanged with his followers during his years of exile (1963–1974). These letters were in many cases intercepted, translated and analysed by the PIDE in their effort to control the movement. Today, they have been recovered by the Tokoist church and circulate in the form of photocopies amongst the believers.[12]

These sources, necessarily heterogeneous, are the very substance upon which the Tokoists of today deploy different versions of a "Tokoist religious memory" that, despite an initial adhesion to an uni-lineal, trajectorialized account (that of the life of an Angolan prophet), become progressively disperse and conflicting after his death—a Turnerian "schism" that deemed the official remembrance depicted above as disputed and unstable.

A Prophetic Life

> Today we are celebrating this great joy, the day of birth, the 24th of February 1918. Perhaps our anthropologist Ruy, if he extends his research a little further, will tell us what was happening in those times when a child was born, in 1918. […] We talk about the end of the First World War, confusing and uncertain times […] We conclude, with great joy, that in that moment, a shining star was born, and showed us the path that our people, the chosen ones, are following. The steps of Our Lord Jesus Christ. (excerpt of sermon, Tokoist Church of Lisbon, February 2009; my translation)

In what follows I attempt a brief account of Simão Toko's life and work in the development of the Tokoist church. This account is necessary inasmuch as it allows me to illustrate the central aspects of his biography that are commonly recognized in this particular context, and to explain the flow of events that led to the particular moment that disclosed underlying tensions and initiated the "memory dispute": the moment (and implications) of his passing in the transition between 1983 and 1984. Despite the multiplicity of sources invoked, and our previous discussion of biography as non-lineal and non-neutral, what we will see in the following pages is a fairly convergent and consensual life-story; in contrast, the process of biographical divergence occurs precisely after 1984. This tells us that what is at stake is not so much conflicting facts and figures, but different ad-hoc appropriations of a prophetic memory and individual character. If the different sources—the "living memory", the evocative sermons, the hymns, the archival material, the interviews, the letters, and so on—coincide with objective facts and well-known events regarding his life, the different motivations behind them produce diverse "characterizations" of his figure and thus affect the current memory that is in dispute. Who was Simão Gonçalves Toko, after all?

Simão Toko, a Mukongo, was born in 1918 in a small village called Ntaia, in Maquela do Zombo (Uíge, Angola). He was named Mayamona—"he who has seen" in

kikongo—and later baptized "Simão Gonçalves Toko" in the Baptist mission of Kibokolo, who supported his schooling up to the secondary level and later offered him work as assistant (Kisela 2004: 31–32). In his teenage years, a few events took place with Toko that would determine the prophetic character of the church. On 17 April 1935, Toko claimed to have been visited, in Catete (southeast of Luanda) by God: one night, he could not sleep and decided to take a stroll on the premises. He headed off into the bush and suddenly saw a shining light. As he approached it, he realized it was a man with pale skin and khaki suit. The man identified himself as God, and told him: "I am going to put something inside you that you will not immediately understand." After saying these words, the vision disappeared. This was perceived by Simão as a first sign that he had a mission to accomplish on earth.[13]

After this event, Toko started working as a Sunday school teacher and choir leader in the local BMS missions, but in 1943, after a disagreement with the missionaries, he decided to move to Leopoldville, today's Kinshasa (Fernando 1995: 28; Grenfell 1998: 211). There, he got in touch with other Christian movements, but remained in close contact with the Baptist missions of the Belgian Congo, with whom he collaborated. He also started preaching among Angolan migrants (mainly the so-called *zombos*, Angolan Bakongos from the Maquela do Zombo region, Toko's homeland) settled around Leopoldville, organizing Bible study classes and prayer groups (Grenfell 1998: 212). A short time later he created a Choir, the *Coro de Kibokolo*, that eventually incorporated hundreds of singers and would soon become famous in Protestant circles in Leopoldville (Agostinho n.d.: 48; Quibeta n.d.: 29–32).[14]

In 1946, a second prophetic event triggered what is considered today as a foundational moment in the history of this church. Simão Toko, along with two other Angolan believers, was invited to pray before an audience in an international Protestant missionary conference held in Leopoldville. When he took the word, he summoned the Holy Spirit to give power to the Africans, and thus "save them from darkness".

In 1949, the prophecy was fulfilled. One night (Friday, 25 July), *Tata* (father) Simão gathered a few hundred of his fellow choir members in the home of a follower in the rue de Mayenge (number 159) in Leopoldville for a prayer session. That night, the Holy Ghost descended upon them, Simão "suddenly felt a wind, and some of the singers began to shake and speak strange languages" (Grenfell 1998: 214; Kisela 2004: 47). This descent in the form of a Pentecostal experience was interpreted by Simão Toko as an answer to his prayers in the 1946 conference, and he found himself with the wisdom to transform the movement into an official church, invoking two main ideas: first, that the "church" brought by missionaries was not the "real church"; and second, that the "African church" should return to its original state, just like it was in Biblical history.[15] The word on this event quickly spread throughout Leopoldville, and the morning after this event many people flocked into the Cité Indigène (*bairro indígena*) to see what had happened, and were also "attacked by the Holy Ghost, which made Leopoldville tremble".[16] The house in rue de Mayenge became, in the following weeks, a tabernacle.

This chain of events constitutes a foundational moment in the church's history. However, it also implied the beginning of the "narrative of suffering" within the church

Figure 2.   Celebrating the events of 1949 in Lisbon, July 2008.
Source: Photo by Ruy Blanes.

that describes decades of persecution, imprisonment and exile for its leaders and prophet (Blanes 2009). The Baptist missionaries in Leopoldville did not accept Toko's "emancipatory" attitude and alerted the local authorities, who decided that they should be arrested and prevented from disturbing the public order (Fernando 1995: 32; Grenfell 1998; 214–215). At this point—22 October 1949, recalled today as the "first imprisonment" of the prophet—Simão Toko, foreseeing the months of confinement that would lie ahead, decided to appoint a group of followers that had not yet been arrested to struggle for local recognition. This group was apostolically called "The Twelve Elders", and was to struggle for his liberation and try to keep the movement alive in the meantime.[17]

Eventually, Simão Toko, the Twelve Elders and the remaining followers, as Angolans and therefore Portuguese subjects, were all arrested and progressively deported back to Angola, delivered in the frontier station of Noki (near Matadi) to the Portuguese authorities throughout 1950 (Margarido 1972: 42). As Vumambo David, one of the Tokoists who were also deported from the Belgian Congo, recalls,

> When the Belgian authorities started deporting, the people started voluntarily turning themselves in; and the 12 Elders also gave themselves in. On April 6th, 1950, we all left to Angola […] In total, more than three thousand people, including women and children, were deported from the Belgian Congo into Angola in the subsequent years. (Interview with the Twelve Elders, Luanda, October 2008; my translation)

This deportation did not prevent the movement from growing (Grenfell 1998: 215). The Portuguese authorities, concerned with the potential danger of what seemed to be a conspiring politico-religious sect, then decided to divide and disperse the Tokoists to different parts of Angola, hoping to watch the movement wane and simultaneously keep track of their leaders by sending them to remote areas of the colony in small groups, to work at the *colonatos* (labour camps). Toko was eventually sent to Ponta Albina (near the village of Tombwa, southern Angola, in the Namibe desert) and put to work as assistant lighthouse keeper (1998: 216).

In those years, given the limitations in terms of mobility and communication, "Papa" Toko started to exchange letters with his followers, where he gave and received news from family and friends and recommended biblical passages for inspiration, in what was to become, throughout the following decades of exile, a "postal leadership" (Blanes 2009). After a few years in Southern Angola, the Portuguese government acknowledged that its strategy was not working and decided to send the prophet into a second period of exile that was to last eleven years (from 1963 to 1974), this time in the distant Azores Islands, where again he was appointed as assistant to lighthouse keeper. Nevertheless, during this period this postal exchange grew exponentially into the thousands of letters, and was to become a fundamental historical source for the church.[18] In those letters, Toko offered biblical lessons and recommendations regarding church organization that progressively became a corpus of Tokoist knowledge and memory; today, they are frequently and publicly quoted in both sermons and youth catechism: not only are the different biblical passages suggested in them recurrently transmitted and repeated, but also legitimized through the pedagogy of the remembrance of the prophet's wisdom attributed through the "prophetic circle" of 1935, 1946 and 1949. "I know what Christ said", a quote from the "His Holiness the Prophet", is stated in the fundamental principles of doctrine of the church.

In 1974, just before Angolan independence, the Portuguese authorities changed strategy and recognized the Tokoist church as an official religious body, allowing His Eminence the Prophet Simão Toko to return to Angola as a free man (Grenfell 1998: 221). This trip back to Luanda seemed to be a triumphant return for Simão Toko to his homeland and the end of suffering for his believers. The local media portrayed the event as the "return of a man of peace" (Kisela 2004: 204). Nevertheless, his involvement in the frustrated peace talks that led to the decade-long civil war in Angola, and the Marxist–Leninist ideological turn of the first government pulled the Tokoist church again into clandestinity.[19] Toko, deemed suspicious by all political parties, was arrested several times before passing away (Grenfell 1998: 222; Blanes 2009). In 1982, following a first governmental opening towards religious freedom, a first round of official church recognition was promoted by the government, but the Tokoist church was not included.

Narratives of Conflict

Brother Simão Toko is an extraordinary person; he is a man who committed his life to the Gospel and everything he achieved can be appreciated in his works. But one of the things he was not able to do was to remove the idea off his believers' head that he is not the rein-
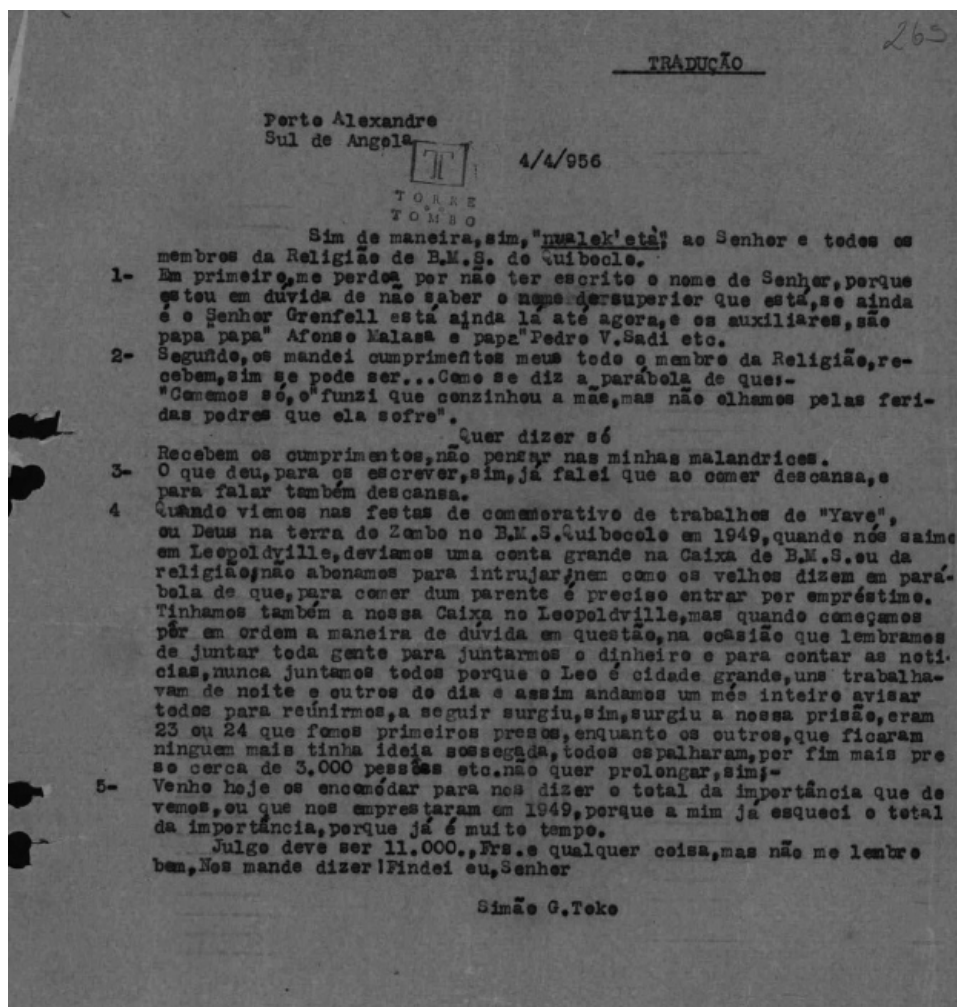
Figure 3. Translation of a letter written by Simão Toko in 1956.
Source: PIDE Archives, Torre do Tombo, Lisbon.

> carnation of Christ. Fortunately or unfortunately, he could not avoid this conception in his believers. (Pastor from the Evangelical Baptist Church of Luanda, in Simão Toko's funeral; quoted in Kisela 2004: 251; my translation)

The events described up to this point, despite the multiplicity of sources invoked, do seem to converge in a unique, stable narrative. In fact, most of the facts stated above remain uncontested by the different allegiances within the church today, and all sources seem to converge into a portrait of a sufferer and a man with the wisdom and charisma, attributed by the presence of the Holy Ghost, to restore an "authentic" form of Christianity for Africa. This is why he is also referred to as the "redeemer", the one with the mission to "remember" the world of Christ's true message (Nzila 2008: 13).

This convergence also translates into one of the key concepts in Tokoist (and Christian, in any case) memory and theodicy: the story of suffering that turns the prophet into a martyr (Blanes 2009). The episodes of incomprehension, disdain, imprisonment, exile, house arrest and even attempted murder[20] of his person conjure a clear sense of "inscribed pain" that is shared by his followers—who often call each other *irmão consofredor* (brother co-sufferer)—to this day.

By the end of 1983, Toko, the *Venerável Dirigente* (venerable leader) fell increasingly ill. Pedro Agostinho describes how, in church services, reunions and parties, he would not stop crying, knowing that his death would bring the "wolf into the chicken's coop" (n.d.: 82). On 25 December 1983, he gave his last public speech in the neighbourhood of Congolenses, in Luanda:

> When the farmer cultivates the land, he does not do so indefinitely. He knows there is a moment when he must stop cropping. Is this true or not, brothers? The same happens in the word of God. Everything in the world has its limit. Now, brothers, let us wait for the future. (Agostinho n.d.: 83)

A few days later, the "Venerable Leader" passed away, after a massive stroke. After a funeral that extended throughout days in Luanda, his remains now rest at his birthplace, in Ntaia—Maquela do Zombo. Joaquim Kisela argues that those tears were shed when Toko recognized that his followers were not as united and spiritually connected as they should be, and anticipated the crisis that was to come (Kisela 2004: 245).[21] Toko used an interesting parable: the church could become like a dead elephant in the forest—after his death, many vultures will come and have their piece (Kisela 2004: 245).

In fact, in the last months before his passing, a serious discussion broke within the church. Disputes over financial issues and mutual accusations of mismanagement within the *cúpula* (leadership) led to a separation, after 1984, of the organization into several groups that positioned themselves in different regions of Luanda: the "Central Directorship" in the official headquarters in the Golfe district; and the Twelve Elders (the group that stemmed from the original twelve elders appointed by Toko in Leopoldville before his arrest) in Toko's last residence in Luanda, in the Congoleses neighbourhood.[22]

The level of confrontation was high. Episodes of physical violence were reported and members of each group were forced to carry a *testificação* (testifying document) so as to be readily identified from congregation to congregation. In 1992, when the Angolan government opened a second round of official church recognition, three different "Tokoist churches" were recognized (both groups mentioned above and a third group previously known as called "18 Classes and 16 Tribes"—see Viegas 2007). Thus, the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ turned into several, opposed groups.

Obviously, when questioned, Tokoists today are not very keen on giving detailed explanations regarding what happened during the following years. Quibeta mentions that the church lived "anomalous situations due to incompatibilities in ways of being between brothers" (n.d.: 159–160) and says no more. Kisela (2004) and Agostinho (n.d.) end their biography in 1984, after the prophet's passing. Nunes, in our interview

of 2007, recalls nevertheless how in February 1987, a confrontation between rival Tokoist groups in Catete (the place of Toko's first encounter with God) ended up with the intervention of governmental special forces and the killing of four believers. Therefore, the decade after the prophet's death is, so to speak, part of the church's unwanted and often silenced history; but that silence is deafening, in terms of showing us the social significance of "contradiction" (Cabral 2000: 879), the "contradiction" of rebuilding and confronting different versions of Simão Toko's biography and legacy.

Ambiguous Biographies

> *People in heaven want to come back to earth.* (Bishop Afonso Nunes, personal communication, December 2007)

On a Saturday in January 2009, I arrived at the Tokoist church of Lisbon, where many meetings were being held. As I entered the parking lot in front of the church, a few boys and girls were playing an improvised soccer game with a smashed Coca-Cola can. After scoring a penalty kick, a young boy, son of one of the local Tokoist believers, celebrated as many professional soccer players do: pushing up his t-shirt to cover his face. Meanwhile, he screamed to an imaginary audience: "… And Simão Toko scores!"

To my knowledge, the prophet was no sporting champion, but this invocation by a young boy in Lisbon (who had never met Simão Toko nor been in Angola) was symptomatic of the prophet's "presence" in the believers' everyday life: he "lives" through the constant and multiple remembrance promoted by his followers.

Yet, as we have seen throughout this paper, the prophet also lives in the present in other ways—perhaps the most remarkable one being the spiritual incorporation into Afonso Nunes's body in the year 2000. Let us first rewind a few years: in the mid 1990s, in a moment of culmination of the separation between the different allegiances in the church, several rumours spread around Angola about the appearance of Simão Toko's spirit to believers, asking them to reunite the church into one sole entity. One such case was that of Fernando Tchiwale, later known as *O Mensageiro* (The Messenger). A believer from Capelongo (Lubango), Tchiwale arrived in 1996 to Luanda claiming that Toko appeared to him and explained angrily that he was to appear in the church on 25 July of that year, but was unable to because the church was divided in various groups (Quibeta n.d.: 162–163).

The Messenger remained in Luanda, trying to pull his message through the different parties—in what proved to be a difficult task, given the ongoing confrontations between the different sectors. Nevertheless, a few years later, the arrival of Afonso Nunes to Luanda changed the scene dramatically. As described above, Nunes claimed a particular form of "spirit possession":

> Sixteen years passed, and in the year 2000, after all the confusion in the church—when a leader leaves, there is bound to be a fight, and the same happened with us Tokoists, but God wanted it to be this way—I appeared in Negage [Uíge] to tell Afonso Nunes that I would speak through him to reunite the church and to lift from the ground that which had fallen. This vision, meeting, happened at 06h20, but as you know, man sometimes resists God's will, and it took time […] I asked him to accept the message and go to Luanda so I could

> speak through him. This vision happened once and again, and with the strength of the Holy
> Ghost we saw that brother Afonso would accept the mission […] So from there on, in
> Nunes, as in Galatians, chapter 2, verse 20, "it is no longer Afonso who lives, but Simão
> who lives in him". (Interview with Afonso Nunes, December 2007; my translation)

After Nunes's arrival, a meeting took place between him and the Messenger. The contents of the meeting were never disclosed, but both came out confirming that the spirit who had visited Tchiwale was the same as the one who inhabited Nunes (Quibeta n.d.: 163 and following). Thus, Nunes assumed leadership of the Central Directorship and began to attempt the fulfilment of the spirit's orders.

The transformation experienced by the church in the years that followed Nunes's "spiritual coating" has been, to say the least, spectacular. As Mille Hansen (2006: 58) also describes, Nunes developed a "new era" in the church, partially bringing the divided church back together, embarking on the construction of the Universal Temple, building "Tokoist schools" in Luanda, inaugurating churches throughout the Angolan territory and in the Tokoist diaspora in Southern Africa and Europe (Blanes, 2009; Sarró and Blanes, 2009), and so on. Nunes has also become a prominent figure in Angolan society, promoting the appeal for peace that was finally won in Angola in 2002 and campaigning for voting in the 2008 presidential elections won by the MPLA party. Furthermore, in the context of "religious proliferation" (Viegas 2007) that characterizes contemporary Angola, the Tokoist church stands out as an example of a successful,

Figure 4.   Bishop Afonso Nunes in sermon, Luanda, December 2007.
Source: Photo by Ruy Blanes.

"original Angolan" church—in contrast with other churches of foreign origin that are equally visible in the Angolan scene (Kimbanguist Church, UCKG, Maná Church, and so on).

Thus, the events of the year 2000 were highly meaningful for several reasons. From a sociopolitical point of view, the "return" of Simão Toko to the living can be interpreted as an attempt to resolve the conflict and the problem of the transfer of power from the original prophet to elsewhere—a second generation, an appointed leadership, and so on. In broader terms, it can be understood as a formula found within the church in order to "survive prophecy", that is, to adapt to the wider, "postcolonial situation" (rephrasing Balandier's expression) where local religious politics works in different frameworks than those of the early twentieth century.[23]

Therefore, this presence can be seen as a strategy to restore legitimation and authority in the church leadership. This form of presential memory can also be interpreted as a way of reproducing a certain memorial narrative, a particular biographical exercise that demanded, after the major conflict, a "re-moralization" of Tokoist belief through a process of social and political legitimation performed through the return of the spirit. The return of Toko's spirit into a "presential form" reordered and restated the question of moral leadership by proposing a physical continuation of the prophet's goals and ideas, and consequent prolongation/actualization of his memory—a process that is no doubt related to the charismatic personality of Bishop Nunes.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Nunes's proposal can be said to have been a major success among the Tokoists, if we consider the almost complete unification he achieved between the different branches, as well as the overwhelming growth experienced in the church since he assumed leadership. Nevertheless, this does not imply that his leadership is uncontested, nor the act of embodiment taken as certain.[24]

After taking possession as leader of the Central Directorship, Nunes began a round of meetings with the leaders of the rival groups. One such meeting took place in Toko's residence in the Congolenses, in the subsequent months, where the Twelve Elders received Nunes and assessed the truthfulness of his claims. They did not accept Nunes as Toko's personification, claiming that he "talked too much" when trying to prove that he was, in fact, Toko.[25] The Twelve Elders thus refused to reunite with the Central Directorship—a situation that persists to this day.

That the Twelve Elders were willing to meet Nunes in the first place is in itself meaningful. The argument set forth to explain their refusal is also important to understand Toko's "meaning" for this particular group. The question was not so much that they did not accept the possibility of Toko returning from heaven, but rather, the fact that he had descended upon an unknown young man. As they explained to us in October 2008, they did not "recognize" Toko in Nunes; nor did they agree with his vision for the church, since it was not what the original prophet had proposed.

Contrary to the invocation of presentiality performed by Nunes and the Central Directorship, the exercise of (un)recognition performed by the Twelve Elders was, in

Figure 5. Simão Toko's last residence and current headquarters of the 12 Elders, Congolenses neighbourhood, Luanda, October 2008.
Source: Photo by Ruy Blanes.

these terms, an invocation of legitimacy through a sense of testimoniality: they, who knew and worked with the original prophet, held the "memorial legacy" of Tokoism.[26] His appointment of the Twelve Elders, back in the first days of the movement in Leopoldville, was understood as a form of delegation of authority. Here, the "problem of presence" (Engelke 2007) was solved by a withholding of the prophet's memory, and its transformation into a testimonial legacy that would allow the Twelve Elders to invoke the capacity to decide whether or not Nunes was, in fact, Toko.

This testimonialization also implied to some extent a humanization of his figure, remembering Toko as a man with his own personal routines and preferences (such as a dish of chicken *muamba* with *funje*, or his favourite football team, Sporting Club Portugal), but also a man with his indecisions—such as the one that prevented him from explicitly appointing a successor.[27] Thus, the recognition that the Twelve Elders failed to perform with Nunes was that of the "man inside the body".

Today, the Twelve Elders are a group that represents a minority in the Tokoist context. If Nunes's sermons in the Golfe are performed before tens of thousands, the Twelve Elders' Sunday services in the Palanca *musseque* (Luanda slum) are held before a few hundreds—a crowd of mostly elders of Bakongo origin. Nevertheless, they are very active in the "production of memory", researching, teaching and editing several books on Toko and Tokoism—in what has been termed as a "flourishing literary

movement" (Nzila 2008: 3), and in the process of rebuilding their central church. Thus, despite their minoritary situation in the Angolan scene, they show no signs of interest in reconciliation.

*

Apart from these two opposing positions, marked by differing memories of the prophet, Toko's memory does not end in two seemingly opposed ideological points of view. Other narrative lines participate in Toko's multiple (and therefore ambiguous) portrait. In June 2008, I was at an Angolan restaurant in Lisbon with a Tokoist evangelist called Simão (like the prophet) Vemba. I had read a recent book on Toko (Melo 2001), and was struck by the intense "Africanization" of his person, accentuating the anti-colonialist discourse of his prophecies and the emancipatory character of his works. The author argues, for instance, that the third secret revealed by the Virgin Mary in Fátima, Portugal, in 1917 (and disclosed by the Vatican in 2000) was in fact that the paraclete would be born in Africa, and that the paraclete was Simão Toko (2001). This jump-starts a "heroic narrative" (Mary 2005) of Toko as a man who unmasks the true (African) essence of Christianity.

This Africanizing portrait, drawn as a hagiography of an "African Christian saint", was not only present in this particular book, but also in other narrative dispositions— such as the metaphorization of his birth into the "star of dawn" in Africa, the day God visited Africa, or the frequent invocation of a "prophetic link" with Simon Kimbangu, who had announced the coming of the Messiah in Africa.[28] Vasco Nzila (from the Twelve Elders), for instance, highlights the fact that Toko was a descendant from a local clan that survived a deluge in ancient times (Nzila 2008: 9–10), while Kisela describes, among many miracles that happened during the prophet's youth, how Toko's father prophesied on his deathbed that he would "become King" (2004: 24–26).

This linkage that reinserts Toko in the "Kongo prophet" lineage is nevertheless not consensual. I had also interviewed other Tokoist leaders from the two main allegiances who, in turn, invoked the "humanistic character" of the leader and preferred to highlight his "spiritual wisdom"– an ordinary man, after all, who was just chosen to receive the grace of God and bring a message to Christians in the world (see Blanes 2009), in continuity with the task begun by Martin Luther (Nzila 2008: 11). This downplaying of the supernatural qualities of the prophet implied seeing Toko as a "reformist", a person who worked towards the remembrance of the "authentic" church of the time of the apostles. It also implied seeing the Tokoist project as a philosophical proposal for spiritual ecumenism without necessarily rejecting other Christian beliefs or, for that matter, the teachings of missionaries in Africa.[29]

I asked Simão Vemba for his take on these conflicting portraits. Simão smiled, picked up his glass of water and invoked the classic rhetoric on optimism and pessimism:

> You see, it's like this glass. It sits here on this table, but whoever looks at it may see it half empty or half full. The same thing happens with the prophet. Depending on where you stand or which are your motivations, you will see him differently.

Conclusion: The Multiple Names of the Prophet

Eyandi Kibéni
("it is him", in kikongo; quoted in Kisela 2004 in reference to Simão Toko's birth)

Throughout the preceding pages we have seen several portraits of a man, Simão Toko. These images, expressed among other things in the multiple names with which I have been adjectifying him (from Mayamona to His Holiness the Prophet, the Redeemer, His Eminence, Venerable Leader, "Papa" or "Tata", and, finally, Afonso Nunes), compose what could be called a "multiple biography".

This description reflected the multiple strategies and appropriations set forth by the Tokoists in their attempt to select and impose a specific "image" of the founding prophet through different exercises of trajectorialization of his life. As a prophetic movement, one that accepts the wisdom to *vaticinar* (foresee), the stabilization of the prophet's biography is a linchpin; but the different portraits, or at least those that stemmed from the moment after his passing, did not necessarily question a given life timeline, but rather, questioned his personhood by highlighting certain aspects of his biography, to the point that even the idea of "prophet" as applied to Simão Toko is undermined: was he (from the Tokoist believers' point of view) a prophet, a saint, a redeemer, a reformist, a martyr, an "African king", a man blessed with charisma?

The portraits correspond to different memory tropes that were, in turn, backed by different methodological invocations: *presential* (as performed by Nunes's arrival); *testimonial* (as held by many of those who met and worked with the original prophet and are still alive); *hagiographical* (as researched by Tokoist writers and theologians and published in the form of biographies or church histories); *liturgical* (through the cyclical celebration in church ritual), and so on. These different biographical exercises of prophetic memory fashioned narrative instability inasmuch as they often competed among themselves, producing a necessary contradiction.

What this memory dispute ultimately reveals are the underlying problems and motivations that affect the church's contemporary situation. In the first place, they suggest a production of "certainty" through the promotion of the prophet's presence into the lives of everyday believers (Engelke 2007: 106–107). This urgent "pursuit of certainty" (James 1995) towards a specific prophetic biography is, from this point of view, related to two interconnected problems: (a) the problem of personality, leadership and power; and (b) the problem of generation and succession.

Regarding the first point, besides the expected efforts for biographical stabilization and fixation, in African (and Kongo) prophetism, what the major studies show is that religious leadership is, by definition, object of simultaneous admiration and contestation. Certainly, this is what one concludes after Wyatt MacGaffey's recognition of the ambiguities behind the "contrasting religious roles" in Kongo prophetism (1977: 178). More than a discussion on biographical facts, the competing portraits directly or indirectly questioned Toko's character as leader; but the motivations behind this questioning were not a personal disqualification of some sort but rather, a political strategy towards the establishment of social and religious legitimation.

This interplay between spiritual and political leadership may help us to understand the success behind Nunes's project: his charismatic personality, leadership qualities and spiritual association with the original prophet were able to produce the necessary conviction among followers and believers.

Figure 6. Celebrating Simão Toko's 91st birthday, Lisbon, February 2009.
Source: Photo by Ruy Blanes.

Furthermore, this disposition of leadership and power is especially displayed in the process of generational transition. As described above, this has been a problem recurrently observed in terms of continuity and change in African religious movements. The fact that Toko did not develop his own succession strategy may, at least partially, explain the subsequent conflicts and memory disputes, but the fact that the dispute was progressively structured around "elders" and "new era", that is, among a group that claimed authority through a testimonial withholding (those who "actually met the leader") and a group that proclaimed a prolonged biography (those who accepted Toko's "second coming") suggests that what is at stake is necessarily a problem of transition/transmission of charisma.

To understand what promotes this instability, and to play history, memory and remembering against each other (Fabian 2007) is at the core of the ethnographic work on prophetic movements. In this line of thought, biographical narratives—when assumed as socialized narratives and methods of memory—can be particularly enlightening in what concerns religious memory.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1]   "Simão Toko is the name of the redeemer / The world proclaims salvation / In the New Jerusalem the angels will meet". Excerpt from hymn sung in the Tokoist church of Lisbon, March 2009.

[2]   This paper is an outcome of my current post-doctoral research on African Christian movements in Europe (located at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon and funded by the FCT—Foundation for Science and Technology), and of my participation in two research projects: "Recognizing Christianity: how African migrants redefine the European religious heritage" (funded by the NORFACE consortium) and "The Christian Atlantic: ethnographies of religious encounters between Portuguese, African and Brazilian churches in Lisbon" (funded by the FCT), both coordinated by Ramon Sarró. The ongoing research, initiated in 2007, included ethnographic fieldwork in Lisbon and Luanda.

[3]   This was the first of two courtesy interviews we were privileged to have with the Bishop during our joint fieldwork periods in Luanda in 2007 and 2008 on prophetic movements (namely, the Tokoist, Kimbanguist and Mpadist movements).

[4]   A person of Bakongo ethnicity.

[5]   See Comaroff and Comaroff (1992). From a philosophical point of view, Foucault's highlight of the discursive regimes behind narratives and "statements" (2004) were also a source for questioning the method's scientificity—as was Derrida's deconstructionist and hermeneutic critique on language and text (1974 [1967]).

[6]   This growing interest is also contextualized by the "boom" of memory as a topic in the social sciences and anthropology, in particular (see Antze and Lambek 1996; Berliner 2005). The field of cognitive studies has also produced work on the psychology of religious memory (see

Bloch 2009 for a recent debate). Following David Berliner, I acknowledge the risk of episte-mological confusion with an a-critical usage of the concept of memory along with ideas of "collective identity" and "culture". In this paper, I associate memory with historical consciousness through the acts of invocation, transmission and, ultimately, remembering: how the "past" is lived in the present and projected into the future (see Ricoeur 2006). See also Bloch (2009) for a recent critique on this topic.

[7]   For debates on prophetism and charisma in Africa, see, among many others, Balandier (1963 [1955]); Andersson (1958); Fernandez (1973); MacGaffey (1977, 1983); Mary (2002, 2005); Soares (2004); Engelke (2007); Sarró (2009).

[8]   For a similar debate in other African contexts, see Fernandez (1970, 1973) and Mary (1993, 2000).

[9]   See Sarró (2009: 2–6) for a review and critique of this literature.

[10] Regarding these biographies, it is noteworthy to mention the following: Simão Quibeta's book *Simão Toco. O Profeta Africano em Angola. Vida e Obra* (Simão Toko. The African Prophet in Angola. Life and Works, n.d.) is written in "two voices", that is narrated by both Quibeta and Simão Toko "via" Afonso Nunes (thus making it hard to distinguish between both voices throughout the text). Joaquim Kisela, author of *Simão Toco. A Trajectória de um Homem de Paz* (*Simão Toko. Trajectory of a Man of Peace*, 2004) wrote the book after extensive research in Angola and Portugal. He was one of the founders of the first Tokoist church in Europe. Pedro Agostinho, in turn, wrote *Simão Gonçalves Toco e os Tocoistas no Mundo* (Simão Gonçalves Toko and the Tokoists in the World, n.d.) in collaboration with the Twelve Elders group.

[11] I refer to two documentaries, *Vida e Obra de Simão Toko* (1997, directed by Joaquim Kisela) and *Simão Toco, O Senhor da Paz* (2009, directed by Francisco Rebelo).

[12] Despite the richness of this material, with which I am only starting to deal, my focus here will be on the "internal" production of religious memory, that which stems from within the church and from ethnographic observation. Tokoists are in turn less aware of other biblio-graphical material produced by government agents (Cunha 1959; Gonçalves J. 1967; Santos 1969), writers associated with the Catholic Church (Estermann 1965; Gabriel 1978; Henderson 1990), and academic researchers (Margarido 1972; 1972b; Pelissier 1978; Fernando 1995; Grenfell 1998; Gonçalves A. 2003; Hansen 2006). Of these, Grenfell (1998), Margarido (1972) and Hansen (2006) are the only available accounts in English.

[13] See Quibeta (n.d.: 27–29) and Agostinho (n.d.). This event was also described by Nunes in our interview.

[14] Interview with the Twelve Elders, October 2008. The "Twelve Elders" quoted here and throughout the text are a group composed of the remaining original members still alive, their descendants and other followers. See below for an explanation of the contemporary situation of this group.

[15] This wisdom also implied the attribution of the charismatic gift of foreseeing (*vaticinar*).

[16] Interview with Bishop Nunes, December 2007. Interview with the Twelve Elders, October 2008.

[17] Interview with the Twelve Elders, October 2008.

[18] As mentioned above, these letters were often intercepted by the Portuguese political police (PIDE). Today, they can be found at the Portuguese national archive of the Torre do Tombo and can be publicly accessed. The Tokoists (namely those in the church of Lisbon), as well as several academics, have consulted them on several occasions,. In October 2008, Bishop Afonso Nunes, in a visit to Lisbon, also consulted them.

[19] Interview with Bishop Afonso Nunes, December 2007.

[20] Biographers and believers mentioned to us that the Portuguese authorities tried to kill him on more than one occasion, during his exile in the Azores islands. On this topic, see Kisela (2004: 190), Quibeta (n.d.: 52–53) and Hansen (2006: 57).

[21] Perhaps this explains why Simão Toko did not appoint a successor to the church leadership before his death, as the exact reasons for this decision were never made public. Be that as it may, the consequences of this decision were traumatic for the church.

[22]   The church split into more than two groups. Other groups, such as the "18 Classes and 16 Tribes", the "Palanca-Prenda" and, later on, the "Mundial" were formed. Nevertheless, these two are the most representative.

[23]   This has been suggested for a similar case in the Kimbanguist church in Sarró *et al.* (2008) and Sarró and Blanes (2009).

[24]   I should also mention that Nunes is not the only one to claim to have been visited by Toko's spirit. Other Tokoists have similar statements (Fátima Viegas, personal communication). Such is the case of Mateus Rogério, who does not follow Nunes and claims to communicate with him frequently (as well as being incorporated by his spirit). Nevertheless, the sociological impact of his claims within the Tokoist community is much less visible.

[25]   Interview with the Twelve Elders, October 2008.

[26]   This does not mean that all Tokoists who met the original prophet have remained with the Twelve Elders. Many can be found in the Central Directorship led by Bishop Nunes. Such is the case, for instance, of Auxiliary Bishop Luzaisso Lutango, leader of the Central Directorship up to the year 2000, that stepped down after the arrival of Nunes.

[27]   Interview with the Twelve Elders, October 2008; see also Agostinho (n.d.: 81–82)

[28]   See Kisela (2004). Interestingly, the Kimbanguists also have a similar discourse regarding Toko; nevertheless, they portray him as a former Kimbanguist believer who left the church to create his own (see Blanes 2009).

[29]   Interview with pastor in Lisbon church, May 2008.

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