

Evolution of denominations of Ivorian Pentecostal leaders in Île-de-France: Marketing issues, pastoral function, and identity construction?

[Évolution des dénominations des leaders religieux ivoiriens pentecôtistes en ile de France: Enjeux marketing, fonction pastorale et construction identitaire ?]

Vincent Konan Konan¹, Diarra Krikou², and Assougba Kabran Beya Brigitte Epouse Bouaki³

¹Laboratory of Anthropology and Cognitive, Clinical and Social Psychology (LAPCOS), Université Côte d'Azur, Nice, France

²Sociology, Felix Houphouet Boigny, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

³Sociology, Felix Houphouet Boigny, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes, through an essentially qualitative approach, the shift in denominations of Ivorian religious leaders in the Pentecostal milieu in Île-de-France, moving from official designations to «professional» designations. The study is based on observations and semi-structured interviews with religious leaders. The results highlight different dynamics. First, the new designations respond to a marketing challenge. Second, the role of pastor has become more than just a status, it has become a central function in the Pentecostal community of Ivorian immigrants in Île-de-France. Finally, the different denominations observed among immigration candidates are related to a process of identity construction.

KEYWORDS: immigration, Pentecostalism, religious leaders, identity, function.

RESUME: Cet article analyse, à travers une approche essentiellement qualitative, le changement des dénominations de leaders religieux ivoiriens dans le milieu pentecôtiste en Île-de-France, passant des dénominations officielles aux dénominations «professionnelles». L'étude repose sur des observations et des entretiens semi-directifs avec les leaders religieux. Les résultats mettent en évidence différentes dynamiques. Tout d'abord, les nouvelles dénominations répondent à un enjeu marketing. Ensuite, le travail de pasteur est devenu plus qu'un simple statut, c'est devenu une fonction centrale dans la communauté pentecôtiste des immigrants ivoiriens en Île-de-France. Enfin, les différentes dénominations observées chez les candidats à l'immigration sont liées à un processus de construction identitaire.

MOTS-CLEFS: immigration, pentecôtisme, leaders religieux, identité, fonction.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Pentecostal movement is the subject of a particular focus due to its internal dynamics and the forms that these dynamics take (Mayrargue 2004, 2008, Guibléhon 2012, Coulibaly 2016). By taking a closer look, one of the elements that can be noted in these movements is the construction of "professional" denominations. Indeed, within the neo-Pentecostal movement and particularly in Île-de-France, there is a proliferation of titles among leaders, who are referred to as "called by God" or "Men of God" (ministers). This study aims to examine the forms of specialization (institutional and professional) of pastors and to identify the stakes involved. On the question of Pentecostalism, if its dynamics constitute one of the most fruitful

heuristic fields for several decades (Willaine, 1999; Gadou, 2004; Fancello, 2006; Guibléhon, 2012; Lurhmann, 2012; Konan, 2022), these different approaches each provide an understanding of the Pentecostal phenomenon. However, none of these different productions focuses on the micro level of the various specializations, especially in the Île-de-France region.

Our reflection aims to open up avenues for reflection on the different specializations observed among Ivorian migrants in Île-de-France in order to reveal the different logics that underpin them. Indeed, in this region of the country, there are a multitude of "Pentecostal" churches, which generally share the same universe of values, practices, and theological references. Thus, despite the international presence of these churches with varying forms of expression, they manage to construct the same theology elsewhere in the world as well as in Côte d'Ivoire, based on the reading of the Bible as a "user manual of the world" and a key to understanding the world.

Drawing on our discipline, sociology, whose objects are not simply categories of common sense (Durkheim 2019: 51), and aware that scientific facts must be "conquered, constructed, and verified" (Fer 2022: 7) through "an epistemological rupture with the presuppositions inherent in social life" (Bourdieu et al 1964: 24), we will not address the existence of Pentecostalism, which appears as a given (Fer, 2022), but rather the dynamics it offers. This is the aim of this reflection, which focuses on the different shifts in denominations within the Pentecostal field observed among the Ivorian community in Ile de France. Our goal is to offer a critical analysis of the dynamics observed among these actors and to deconstruct any possible presuppositions. Such a posture requires reflexivity on the part of the sociologist in relation to the object being studied, especially since the sociologist himself is a member of the studied universe, raising the question of objectivity.

In the Ile de France region, it is possible to observe a plurality of denominations among religious leaders. Indeed, there has been a shift from institutional appellations (pastor, doctor, evangelist...) to professional denominations: specialist in night marriage, specialist in employment, specialist in regularization.

The observed Pentecostal dynamics merit further investigation, especially since modernization theorists saw religion as a category destined for decline. Attached as they were to the belief that the development of science should coincide with the decline of religious values, they "admitted that faith might survive in ethnic enclaves or family habits but insisted that the days of religion as a force capable of giving strength to culture and history were over" (Cox, cited by Gadou 2001: 9). However, everyday experience seems to show that the history of religion has not followed the same path predicted, or rather imposed, by 19th century theorists like Comte and Max Weber. Contrary to their predictions, there is a global religious dynamic (Gadou 2001). Such a finding warrants a sociological inquiry into the aforementioned Pentecostal dynamics.

If Pentecostalism was less popular in France in the early 2000s within the field of sociology of religion (Fer, 2022), because studies in this field were mostly conducted by anthropologists and focused on African territories, we want to contribute to another facet of reflection on the religious phenomenon in France.

Our aim here is not to revisit the great reflection on the migratory question, but rather to participate in the reflection on said question from a religious angle, specifically Pentecostalism. Additionally, as theory is the foundation of any scientific discourse, we propose to question the migratory project of the actors studied here as a quest for a new identity. We propose to produce our reflection based on the theory of self-invention (Kaufmann, 2004). Indeed, these actors, sometimes affected by social decline in their respective countries, will attempt to give themselves a new identity: social, affective or professional, in order to give their lives and existence a sort of (re) enchantment.

Religious migration and its expression through the different denominations observed among religious leaders would constitute a way for them to reinvent themselves in different forms. By doing so, they construct their new "self." It should be noted that identity is dynamic and requires perpetual construction, relying on elements of lived experience, as Kaufmann reminds us, "identity is a permanent invention that is forged with non-invented material" (Kaufmann, 2004: 102). Religious leaders, through these forms of specialization, thus manufacture a new "self" that is in rupture with the "self" they embodied before their migratory project. The redefinition of their being, the (re) valorization of their personality from the "professional" specializations carried out, thus creates their new identity, often understood in the Pentecostal milieu as a new birth. The individual thus becomes a "born-again." Specializing to heal or cure is indeed a part of what Kaufmann conceives as a "self-invention."

Before developing the above orientations, we will outline the methodology upon which this work is based.

2 METHODOLOGY

The corpus on which this reflection is based was collected in the Paris region during the summer periods from 2017 to 2020, through immersion in the religious activities of Pentecostal movements. More specifically, it was for me to participate in the

activities of religious actors such as prayer vigils, deliverances, and spiritual combat prayers. These were activities during which it was easier for me to observe and describe the phenomenon studied here as finely as possible. Then, a second part in 2020 during the realization of my Doctoral thesis in sociology on the quest for spiritual healing at CPJS. Subsequently, having gained the trust of religious actors, I was able to collect data from semi-directive interviews. In the Île-de-France region in particular, this movement is of greater interest insofar as a multitude of names for the same movement can be observed within the same circumscribed perimeter: Evangelical Mission for the Salvation of Souls (MIESA), Pentecostal Church, Baptist Church work and mission, Mission Bethel, Evangelical Church for the Redemption of Souls, Church of the New Victors, Evangelical Church of the Assemblies of God, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God for the Paris region, for example.

In addition to this quasi-proliferation of temples and names, there are specializations. It is important to make a different institutional specialization: pastor, evangelist, apostle, prophet, doctor, etc. And what I call in the context of this reflection, "professional specializations": healing specialist, miracle specialist, prophecy specialist, employment search specialist, marriage, night husband... The above-mentioned specializations are put to the test during encounters such as nights of healing and abundance, prophetic vigils, evangelization crusades, nights of blessings and graces... where exorcism sessions are often practiced, which sometimes resemble a scene from a play.

Our reflection is based on the hypothesis that professional specializations respond to a marketing challenge. But before going further in our reflection, it seems interesting to us to make some methodological clarifications.

Note that every actor carries different visions and experiences. It is based on this principle of variety that the "progressive constitution of the sample" (Bertaux, 1997) was made. For contact with informants, networks were solicited. This snowball method proved appropriate in the context of this essentially qualitative reflection. From this method, the people who participate in the survey can designate other people until the desired sample is formed (Mayer et al, 2000). The sample size was therefore determined by the saturation principle (Boyer et al, 1997).

The corpus collected from observation and semi-directive interviews. More specifically, we were given life stories in order to introduce a diachronic dimension to reveal the logic of action in their biographical development. From these stories, it was possible to understand the logic of action of the actors studied here in this reflection.

From the aforementioned clarifications, a sample of 20 people was constituted, all prayer group leaders claiming Pentecostalism and also from immigration in the Île-de-France region.

The corpus collected from the methodology used was the subject of a thematic content analysis, the main results of which are detailed below.

3 RESULTS

3.1 SPECIALIZATIONS AS A RELIGIOUS MARKETING STRATEGY

According to the Pentecostal vision, God has a triple dimension: Omnipresent, Omnipotent, and Omniscient. This would mean that God is capable of everything in the lives of men. However, there is a segmentation of the "body of Christ." Today, religious work is carried out by other chosen or anointed people, according to the etymology in force in Pentecostal movements. Thus, based on this classification, we witness the division of religious work in the sense of Durkheim. This division, according to the actors in the religious field, would allow them to be more effective in the exercise of divine work. Thus, for a pastor, a doctor, an evangelist, or for the one who has the gift of prophecy, healing, by exercising their gift or ministry, they become a specialist and participate in conveying the message of God.

The gifts of these leaders are manifested in religious activity, which alternates between routine manifestations (worship, Bible studies, prayer evenings, deliverance sessions...) and exceptional programs (evangelization crusades, major deliverance programs...) In worship, certain sequences are particularly developed, such as loud prayers and praises or testimonies (of conversion and healing). These loud prayers are the means for the "healed" to testify, which testimony allows the "unbelievers" to believe that their difficulties can also find a solution in the church. Endowed with a certain oratorical art, these leaders use these manifestations to win souls. This is what Pastor Y.P seems to be conveying through his words: "By performing miracles, we convince people who did not believe. Through deliverance, they believe and give their lives to God." In this interaction between the pastor and his congregation, a mercantilist relationship can be seen. Indeed, leaders are seen as "merchants" of the religious product. Often, it is when people are faced with difficulties and to solve personal problems (health, fertility, work, resources...) that they turn to the Pentecostal offer. The fact that a temple displays the different specializations which also rely on or thematize the great problems of society shows that they respond to marketing strategies.

3.2 THE PASTOR, FROM STATUS TO FUNCTION

The Pentecostal movement is characterized by a plethora of ministries: doctor, pastor, evangelist, prophet... People working in the public administration or private sector resign to take up the title of church leader because they feel they have received a "call from God", as evidenced by this excerpt from an interview: " [...] I was a bank executive at BIAO. And when I received the call, I resigned to come serve the Lord. When God calls you, you are obliged to follow him" (excerpt from an interview with Prophet Tahi. A). This situation is better understood if we agree with Morales that "churches also offer easy and significant opportunities for social and political ascension through the exercise of religious ministry" (Morales, cited by Pédrón-Colombani, in 2001). This state of affairs seems to be at odds with the Calvinists described by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. According to Max, being one of God's chosen or predestination, as the term is used, elicits a work ethic. A person who has received the call must work to remain worthy of God's promises. This view of things has largely contributed to the development of Western societies. While this reality is observable in so-called developed societies, the observation elsewhere and especially on our own terrain is different. Indeed, "faithful" people invest time in the church. These two contributions are substitutable: people who have a lot of free time and modest incomes can practice their religion more than those who, with demanding activities and relatively high incomes, essentially contribute financially to their community. Like a company, the "religious enterprise" sets the objective of maximizing the number of faithful under the constraint of covering its costs, in other words, equalizing its total revenue and costs (maintenance of buildings, remuneration of the clergy, worship expenses, etc.). This behavior is similar to that of business leaders. The dynamism of the clergy is explained and the emergence of new competitors on the market is attracting those who see the prospect of significant gains. It will be said that a lower price allows a religion to retain or even attract a greater number of faithful, which is the desired goal, but this policy is increasingly risky because the evolution of the number of practitioners does not allow the clergy to live, maintain premises, and meet worship expenses. To remedy this concern, church leaders often receive support from their faithful who offer them vehicles, costumes, and even houses to show their gratitude for a "miracle" performed by the religious leader. Today, more than a ministry as it claims to be, the job of a church leader has become a profession for most. Muriel Devey writes about this: "One of the common features of these new ministries is that they were founded and developed in cities, at the initiative of relatively young individuals belonging to relatively well-off social backgrounds. Their leaders-pastors, prophets, apostles, evangelists, and others with certain oratorical talents, are often from the educated urban elites (students, higher education teachers, civil servants, executives) " (Devey, 2006). Most belong to the generation of "disappointed people after independence, who have suffered from unfulfilled promises of development and the failure of traditional strategies of accumulation and social ascension. For this generation caught between two worlds, the Western and the traditional, affiliation with these movements allows them to partially alleviate their "social failure." By becoming pastors, they become "someone" (Devey cited by Lufungula in 2007). As we can see, the profession of a pastor is now more of an escape than a ministry. To encourage Christian faithful to "speak from their hearts," they use targeted Bible verses that resonate with the faithful like "bring your tithes, offerings, and donations to the house of the Lord so that there is enough to eat." Having heard this exhortation, the faithful joyfully offer what they have or "give the most of what little they have." The religious leader here mobilizes a strategy supported by rational action to make the faithful pay for the services offered. This raises the question of supply and demand. When asked about the cost of their services, Pastor K.N's words are revealing: "The service of God is not paid, only during worship, the faithful speak from their hearts. After maintaining the premises, buildings, some of it is used to pay our rent, medical bills...in short, to take care of ourselves."

An incursion into the religious world, especially in its Pentecostal version, allows us to make observations that need to be analyzed here. How are the specializations identified above taken up by actors in the religious field to structure their relationships? How are they expressed in religious activities? In short, it is a matter of seeing if these specializations are manifest. It should be noted that in addition to institutional specializations, other specializations appear to the extent that they respond to the demand for healing by the faithful. Specializations are offered as a commodification of the religious field, and these forms make it possible to "conquer" the maximum number of faithful-customers. It is in this order that we have specialists in miracles, specialists in "financial unlocking," specialists in enchantment, specialists in sterility (male, female), specialists who reconcile couples who are separated, specialists in unemployment, specialists in "marriage or night woman," specialists in prophecies, specialists in calling, specialists in soul calling, specialists in healing "incurable" diseases such as HIV/AIDS, renal failure, cancer... In doing so, illness becomes a marketing tool. Like any other church, Pentecostal churches are mainly formed of worship and biblical study, prayer vigils, testimonies (public confessions of God's blessings), healing and miracle sessions. Indeed, for these specialists, as much as success in life is considered a blessing from God, failures and setbacks are attributed to the action of an evil spirit. Poor academic performance, forced celibacy, sterility, poverty, brief illness, and death are all situations where individual responsibility is far from engaged: the individual is wrongly seen as inhabited, invaded, tortured,

or inhibited by an evil genius. In the evangelical and especially Pentecostal world, there are prayers for businessmen to prosper in their businesses, prayers for the sick, and prayers for couples in difficulty...

Regarding prayers for businessmen, what is the truth behind them? Also known as prayers on "the secrets of material success," they are tailored teachings by certain servants of God to enlighten faithful who do not necessarily have the same charisma and understanding of the divine message. These meetings are very similar to religious coaching sessions for businessmen who hope to know God's plan for them, the sector, and type of activity to undertake for the profitability of one progress or another. According to the men of God encountered, these prayers are organized to liberate this segment of the population from all blockages (especially mystical ones) so that they can fully devote themselves to their activity. If for some churches, there are special days for this kind of prayer (healing-miracle, prophecies, evangelization...), for others, they are practiced only during evangelization campaigns. These generally take place during school holidays. During these evangelization campaigns, also known as programs according to the customary terms, the nature of the prayers to be undertaken is defined beforehand, based on the needs of the faithful to attract and maintain new Christians. The pastor invites one of his peers for this special session, often accompanied by deliverance and miracles (word of knowledge). This type of prayer allows not only for the professional and material fulfillment of the Christian, but also for his spiritual elevation, convinced as he is of the esteem his creator holds for him. Through biblical passages chosen for the occasion (highlighting the success of servants who remained faithful to their creator throughout their lives and were blessed in return), the pastor manages to attract a large number of people. Certainly, men of God respond to the various requests of their faithful through special prayers, prayer vigils, worship services, evangelization campaigns, spiritual retreats... But the greatest beneficiary remains the church. Not only does it fulfill its cardinal mission, namely to restore the broken bond between God and his "children," due to the waywardness of the latter, but also, recognizing that they have been heard, these Christians return to the church with renewed fervor and devotion, their hands loaded with gifts proportional to the blessings received. A real boon for religious leaders who could not have hoped for so much. In concrete terms, this recognition is the manifestation of the gratitude of the faithful who have been cured of the "husband or wife of the night," in whose lives a miracle has been performed. Those who have received the prophecy translate their joy into offerings to the worship services, special offerings, tithes (1/10 of their salary), harvest festivals, and thanksgiving services. As we can see, the market for spiritual healing in Ivory Coast is a lively field. We can therefore deduce an interaction between the actors of this field. In this regard, the religious field can be apprehended as a field where there is a form of market economy characterized by supply and demand which requires a cost. Faced with the numerous solicitations of Christians overwhelmed by difficulties of all kinds, specialists offer them solutions through healings. In return, those who have been healed express their gratitude to the mother church. Moreover, it is worth noting that the various specializations, even divisions of religious labor, come from the will of these men who, by doing so, better respond to the solicitations of Christians. If it is true that the economy intervenes in the religious field through the supply and demand that requires a cost, then we want to understand the price of healings received by the faithful through three symbolic-ideological dimensions. Those who have been healed by the pastor make donations to the church by offering candles and giving their time to church services. In terms of the ideological dimension, we have evidence from people who have been healed. This testimony aims primarily to thank God for the healing obtained, but it also aims to convince the most skeptical of the need to seek the help of a man of God for their spiritual healing. Regarding the monetary dimension, the survey reveals that it is manifested through collections or offerings, tithes, and special offerings.

Finally, the deliverances, which are the ultimate framework for the expression of virtuosities (Weber, cited by Dericquebourg in 2007), where they are practiced take place either during worship, specific activities, or at the end of evangelization crusades. The goal is to deliver the person, usually a woman, by extracting the forces deemed diabolical responsible for the problems she encounters from her body. Each night is intended to solve a particular problem or theme, and for each of the themes developed, the faithful-clients registered in it mobilize to receive the desired divine healing. Here, we attempt to shed light on the logic of social actors' adherence to a community. In fact, these logics are matrices that reflect their representations of new religious movements.

Indeed, the religious field appears as a system of interpretation that governs actors' relationships to the world and others, directs and justifies behaviors, motivations, and strategies. We can say that representing a church is creating an act of thought by which social actors relate to the activities they develop. Social representations of the religious field within a society appear as a significant totality in relation to their daily lives.

While pastors have long been perceived as guides whose main mission was to lead lost souls to the divine, the notion of pastor, more than a status, seems to be analyzed as a function. This is due to the choices made by the pastor.

3.3 RELIGIOUS ACTORS IN ÎLE-DE-FRANCE, TOWARDS THE QUEST AND VALORIZATION OF THE NEW "SELF"

Finally, we note a form of individualization among these actors. Indeed, "revival" churches also contribute to spreading the new paradigm regarding the way of considering the place of the individual and social cohesion in the urban space. The valorization of the inner life and individual qualities of the followers are linked to the importance given to emotion in the contact with God and between believers through personal reading of the scriptures. The intimate contact between the Christian and the divine spirit, from which healing, intercession, vision, and "speaking in tongues" charisms stem, is fundamentally personal. In concrete terms, these churches multiply parish and associative functions where each believer finds a particular place and role. They become places of compensation and revitalization for those who are destabilized by their difficulties in finding a valued professional and/or social status. They also introduce new logics of inter-individual solidarity no longer based on family constraint but rather on a contractual association functioning that opposes the hostile and communal model. "It is not the profusion of evangelical churches that triggers individualization" or "networking," but they constitute spaces where a new personal culture can flourish and formalize.

In the construction of this new "self," a tendency is reversed. It is obviously an external identity that is replaced by an internal identity (Lévi-Strauss, 1977: 72).

This new identity becomes the driving force of the individual's actions and allows them to present themselves as a "professional" of healing. Acquired through the mobilization of some elements of experience (social capital, divine gift, religious knowledge), identity becomes a project in perpetual construction. The individual must constantly rebuild/reformulate it "under penalty of seeing their existence lose meaning" (Malrieu, 2003: 248). Thus, identity work resembles a mandatory constraint for the individual.

4 DISCUSSION

Since the 20th century, religion has become a commercial object that religious actors offer on the market. This is at least one of the conclusions of Usinier et al.'s 2016 study. Indeed, these authors believe that religious actors mobilize religion as a resource around which a whole marketing strategy is built. These actors therefore deploy a marketing strategy to "sell God" in order to attract "religious consumers." This perspective corroborates our Result N1, which postulates that the different "professional" specializations observed among religious actors in Ile de France respond to a marketing strategy. Indeed, actors from the Ivorian community who migrated to Ile de France offer different religious offerings to sell the religious product, which is the healing of suffering souls.

Furthermore, in his book entitled "Re-enchanting the Pastoral Ministry: Functions and Tensions of the Pastoral Ministry," (Picon, 2007) questions the pastor as a function. He defines five fundamental functions of the pastor: a theological function, a listening function, a social function, a symbolic function, and an identity function. This reflection corroborates our second result, which shows that the pastor has moved from a status to a full function. In this trajectory of thought, Nkolo Fanga (2019) in his study on the exercise of pastoral ministry emphasizes that the pastor is no longer a simple status and that a more therapeutic function is increasingly observed among pastors. By observing a dynamic at the level of pastoral ministry, we join these authors, based on our Result N2, which stipulates that the profession of pastor has turned into a function when observing the religious practices of migrants in Ile de France.

Continuing our reflection, note that one of the results we have reached at the end of this reflection is that among the different Ivorian migrants, a form of redefinition of a new "self" is observed to mark a form of renewal, a new start in their lives. More clearly, by operating the specializations mentioned above, migrants try to build a new identity because the migration project constitutes a new birth, a (re) invention of oneself (Kaufmann, 2004). This allows them to assert themselves and escape the social relaxation that they are sometimes victims of in their different countries.

Still in this perspective, Guibléhon (2012), based on his study of the market of Pentecostal spirituality in Ivory Coast, came to the conclusion that young people joining Pentecostal spirituality are placing themselves in a dynamic of identity construction. The conclusions of these different works corroborate our Result N3, which shows that the different denominations operated by the respondents respond to an issue of identity construction. Indeed, even if for some, specialization in such or such a "health offer" is not previously defined in the migration project, once on the geographical and social space that welcomes them, they must rebuild themselves for social revaluation first within the community and subsequently in the French relational fabric. All in all, the question of religious migration remains a heuristic field that is vast, and the reflection proposed here is intended to be a modest contribution to the understanding of the migratory question.

5 CONCLUSION

The issue of migration is sometimes accompanied by religious practice. More specifically, religious practices can also shed light on a part of the migration question. The purpose of this study was to highlight the religious dynamics of Ivorian immigrants in the Ile-de-France region through their religious practices. One observable practice in Ivorian social circles is religious practice, especially in its Pentecostal version. This study was conducted in the Paris region. To account for this phenomenon, a qualitative approach was chosen. It consisted of addressing an interview guide to the various social actors in the Pentecostal field who constitute the target population, notably church leaders and faithful. The data collected were analyzed, and the main results are as follows.

The different practices observed among Ivorian immigrants correspond to marketing strategies. Indeed, the specializations present in Pentecostal movements can be read as strategies mobilized by these actors in order to transpose their function as "stabilizers" into the religious field, or to create cohesion within the church. Moreover, the function of the pastor is now perceived as a form of success, and the Pentecostal field ultimately appears as a highly competitive market where sellers (pastors) come to display "quality" products (healing offerings) to attract a clientele (the faithful) with a growing demand for healing. Finally, the different denominations observed among Ivorian migrants in the Ile-de-France region are part of an identity construction process, as the migration project is sometimes accompanied by an identity project. The different specializations, whether institutional or "professional," are based on empirical facts to respond to the demand for healing among populations. Therefore, these practices can be designated as marketing strategies mobilized by these social actors to enter the market of spiritual healing offerings.

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