Raça, Jinshu, Race: Whiteness, Japanese-ness, and Resistance in Sūkyō Mahikari in the Brazilian Amazon

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RAÇA, JINSHU, RACE: WHITENESS, JAPANESE-NESS, AND RESISTANCE IN
SŪKYŌ MAHIKARI IN THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON

A Dissertation
Presented to
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by
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Abstract

This dissertation presented an analysis of how leaders and adherents of a Japanese religion called Sūkyō Mahikari understand and interpret jinshu (race) and hito (person) in a particular way, and how this ideology is practiced in the city of Belém, in the Brazilian Amazon. The teachings of Sūkyō Mahikari classify humanity into five races (yellow, white, red, blue/green, black/purple) and five religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism). In this classification, the original humans – hito, the kingly race ōbito, and the God-given supra-religion sūkyō – deteriorated into ningen (people), the other races, and shūkyō (religions) along an evolutionary timeline. I argued that this organization developed an overrepresented and ideal hito who is a wajin (predominant ethnicity of Japan), kumite (Sūkyō Mahikari practitioner), Japanese citizen, cisgender heterosexual male, middle- to higher-class, anti-Marx, rational and modern Man (Wynter). This instantiation of Man is based on a form of racism and systemic oppression centered on Japanese supremacy to which I have given the term Japanese-ness.

My objective is to present the concept of Japanese-ness and analyze case studies of oppression in Sūkyō Mahikari in Japan and Brazil. The methodology, framework, and research commitment is anti-racism, whereas the methods used to analyze the religious experience and texts are: representation analysis of its official literature (Hall), autoethnography (Ellis et al.; Jones), auto-archaeology (Fox; Harrison and Schofield),
and participant observation (Bernard) to describe my insights first when I was a follower, and then in the role of ethnographer.

This study has contributed to the expansion of Communication Studies and Religious Studies by deepening research on Whiteness, religious racism, *jinshu sabetsu* (racism), and Brazilian *racismo*. To achieve this contribution, I directly challenged Euro-U.S.-centrism and Abrahamic-centrism.

**Key words:** Sūkyō Mahikari, Japanese-ness, religious racism, *hito*, Brazilian Amazon.
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Finally, I am deeply grateful to my mother, who nurtured my curiosity from an early age and has always been by my side even if only in spirit.
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Introduction

When my maternal grandparents were children, they migrated from Japan to São Paulo between the two world wars with their families. My mother married a Brazilian Northeastern man, had me, and got divorced when I was a baby. Carrying me in her arms, my mother moved to Belém in the Brazilian Amazon, where she raised me alone. I attended a Japanese school called Associação Nipo-Brasileira da Amazônia (Japanese-Brazilian Association of the Amazon) from six to ten years old, but always felt embarrassed by my lack of language proficiency and cultural competency in comparison to full-blood students who spoke Japanese at home. We visited our family in São Paulo every year, and there I felt upset about my inability to understand conversations and talk in Japanese, write essays in Japanese like my cousin, or read my grandmother’s books and manga (comics).

My nikkei 1 best friend who was not any more fluent than me would participate in many Japanese festivals and activities with me that made me feel part of the community. In 2008, I applied for a Master’s degree at Kyushu University in Japan, so I felt the need to acclimate myself again to Japanese language and culture. Upon learning about Sükyō Mahikari, I thought it was a great opportunity to become a member of a Japanese

1 Nikkei is the adjective and nikkeijin is the noun used to describe Japanese-Brazilians.
religious community, while honoring and spiritually helping my ancestors. I joined in 2009, quit about two years later, then began to conduct research about Sūkyō Mahikari while enrolled in my PhD program in the United States.

In my exposure to kamikumite 2 in Brazil, a substantial proportion anecdotally seemed to be middle-class nikkeijin, and the remaining proportion middle-class “white” Brazilians. Many nikkei kumite had lived in Japan for many years as dekasegi, 3 and would tell stories about that period.

Although there were Japanese immigrants before (Inagaki), 1908 is the official year of the first wave of Japanese migration to Brazil. The Brazilian census (IBGE) calculated that of the national population of 200 million people in 2016, approximately 1% were nihonjin 4 or nikkeijin. Extreme poverty and wars in Japan, and the need for manual labor in Brazilian plantations after the abolition of slavery in 1888, prompted the Japanese and Brazilian states to encourage Japanese people into believing that they would prosper in South America. After their arrival, the nijonjin who were planning to make money fast and go back home found out they were trapped in a form of semi-slave labor (Adachi, “Japanese Brazilians”; Beltrão and Sugahara; Kodama; Ribeira; Sakurai).

2 Kamikumite literally means people who walk hand-in-hand with God, shortened as kumite. This is what Sūkyō Mahikari practitioners are called.

3 Dekasegi is how the Brazilian media and academy call Brazilians who temporarily migrate to Japan to work in factories as manual laborers.

4 Nihonjin means Japanese. There are many expressions connecting nihonjin to a wajin citizen ideal, such as wareware nihonjin (we the Japanese) and junsuina nihonjin (pure Japanese)
The Japanese who migrated to the Southeast and South Brazil interacted mostly with Brazilian whites and Italian, German, and Polish immigrants in coffee plantations. In contrast, Japanese migrants in the Amazon had close contact with indigenous tribes, who would often teach them survival and planting techniques in the rainforest (Homma; Inagaki; Tafner Jr. et al.; Saes et al.). Despite the continuing close relationship with *caboclos* in the rural Amazon, urban *nikkeijin* have been trying to assimilate into white middle-class culture, and in doing so many seem to be as estranged from natives and blacks as their counterparts in São Paulo. Nonetheless, notable is that several *nikkeijin* who now live in Belém migrated from the neighboring towns of Tomé Açu, Santa Izabel, and Castanhal, where Japanese communities still cherish a sense of old Japanese traditions and rural Amazonian identity.

Brazilian immigrants make the third largest foreign community in Japan, after those from China and Korea. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Japanese government encouraged Latin Americans of Japanese heritage to work as manual laborers for Japanese factories. Thousands of *nikkei* Brazilians migrated to Japan as blue-collar workers despite being members of the middle class and having a higher level of education than the Brazilian average. These *nikkeijin* usually sought temporary employment to save money to open a business, pay for a house, or buy a car back home. In the end of the 1990s, a major Japanese economic downturn resulted in many Brazilians losing their jobs, that in turn led to the Japanese government encouraging them to leave the country. Due to their status as part of an ethnic minority working in the kind of jobs...
that most nihonjin rejected, many feel discriminated against (Ishi; Lesser, *Searching for Home*; Linger 88; Pullano; Quero; Roth; Sasaki; Tsuda 148).

Japan and Brazil thus have a relatively recent and complex history of migration, which forms the context for the focus of my dissertation: the practice of a Japanese religion called Ōkyō Mahikari in the city of Belém, in the Brazilian Amazon. In academic publications, Ōkyō Mahikari is defined as a shin-shūkyō (new religion) or shin-shin-shūkyō (neo-new religion), because its inception occurred after modernity. Ōkyō Mahikari blends different spiritual traditions from Japan and the West. Some former practitioners, scholars, and journalists have judged Ōkyō Mahikari harshly, claiming that it is a cult that brainwashes people into quasi-Nazi ideology. However, the religion is spreading and adapting around the world, thus allowing for various interpretations and practices. Ōkyō Mahikari has centers in 59 cities in Brazil with the Latin American Center located in São Paulo, according to the official website.

This research investigates how Whiteness and Japanese-ness – the structural manifestations of white supremacy and Japanese supremacy – work together through various forms of globalized systemic oppressions. My principle argument is that Ōkyō Mahikari is founded on Japanese-ness, through which it instantiates a type of overrepresented, ideal Man (Wynter) called hito (person). Hito is given shape per the classification of humanity into Five Races and Five Religions; in this cosmology, wajin.

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5 Wajin or yamato, especially those from Edo (Tokyo), is the predominant ethnic group of Japan, comprising 98% of the population.
*kumite* are placed on top of a hierarchical pyramid, and at the end of an evolutionary timeline.

Four research questions have guided my dissertation:

RQ1: How can Sūkyō Mahikari serve as an example of the ways in which racism and religiosity have origins and manifestations that are related to, but also different from Europe, the United States, and Abrahamic religions?

RQ2: What part can religion play in “glocal” racism and anti-racism?

RQ3: What instantiations of Man (Wynter) does Sūkyō Mahikari manifest?

RQ3: How do Japanese-ness and Whiteness work together in Sūkyō Mahikari in Belém, and what does it mean for Japanese-Brazilians in terms of being both complicit with racial supremacy, and potential allies for social change?

After offering a brief introduction to Sūkyō Mahikari, I consider more the significance of this religion for academic study—particularly on the relationship between race and religion. There are few publications about the complicity between Japanese-ness and Whiteness in Brazil. Publications in Portuguese about Japanese-Brazilians tend to focus on the history of Japanese migration to Brazil from 1908 to the 1960s, and nikkei migration to Japan from the 1980s to the 2000s. They emphasize discrimination against Japanese-Brazilians and their perseverance, but generally omit nikkei participation in racist structures. I am interested in how Japanese-Brazilians are complicit with racial supremacy in Brazil, which necessitates my going beyond the assumption that racial supremacy equals Whiteness and religious supremacy equals European Christianity. In the twenty-first century, when scholars write that “the nexus between race and religion
[...] seems to be at the heart of current controversies” (Fadil 2264), they are almost always referring to Islamophobia in the United States and Europe. In contrast, I have demonstrated that religious racism has occurred in different contexts, as well as in complex intersections with nationalism, classism, cis-hetero-patriarchy, and ableism. For instance, Sūkyō Mahikari has perpetuated Japanese-ness by assuming the person is a wajin, middle-class, cisgender, male, heterosexual, and able-bodied ideal called hito (person, human), descendant of the superior race ōbito.

What is Sūkyō Mahikari?

In 1959, Yoshikazu Okada allegedly received a revelation from God, who revealed His real name to be Mioya Motosu Mahikari Oomikami-sama, or Su God for short, and Okada’s sacred name to be Kōtama or Sukuinushisama (honorable savior). Then, Okada founded the organization L. H. Yōkōshi Tomo no Kai (Company of Sun Light Children), which then became Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan (World Divine Light Organization) in 1963.

Upon the founder’s death in 1974, his two highest-ranking followers Sachiko Inoue and Sakae Sekiguchi legally disputed the leadership of Mahikari. Sakae Sekiguchi won the dispute and became Yoshikazu Okada’s successor in Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan. In 1978, Sachiko Inoue founded Sūkyō Mahikari. Inoue (1929 - 18 September

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6 Religious racism is a systemic oppression against groups perceived to belong to non-normative races and religions. This definition is in accordance with my conceptualization of racism as structural violence with symbolic, affective, and material consequences rather than just an idea, ideology, or rhetorical strategy.
2016), who is also known as Keiju, Keishu, and Seishu Okada, was therefore the first leader of Sūkyō Mahikari. Her successor and current leader since 2002 is Tairiku Teshima (1949-). Information about Tairiku Teshima online seems to suggest that he is curiously more famous to the outside public for his calligraphy art than as Kohoh Okada, leader of Sūkyō Mahikari.

In Sūkyō Mahikari discourse, it is hard to differentiate the three supreme leaders by name. In my notepad during the Basic Course, I wrote that Sukuinushisama was the first founder, Oshienushisama was his daughter, and Odairisama was the third leader. However, the three leaders have dozens of spiritual names, are never called by their birth names, and Teshima Tairiku is now called both Sukuinushisama and Oshienushisama. Sachiko Inoue changed her name to Keishu Okada after being adopted by Yoshikazu, then Teshima Tairiku changed his name to Köō Okada after being adopted by Sachiko. This confusion contributes to Tairiku and Inoue’s legitimization, since their pre-Mahikari identities are erased, while their new identities are mingled with Yoshikazu Okada’s.

The legal dispute between Sachiko Inoue and Sakae Sekiguchi is not well known among ordinary kumite in Belém and, according to academic literature, nor are these figures well known in other countries. Sūkyō Mahikari manipulatively advertises itself as an unbroken continuation of Yoshikazu Okada’s religion. On the official website, printed materials, and preaching, Sūkyō Mahikari leaders say that Inoue was directly chosen by the founder as his successor.

Other groups also split off from Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan, such as Shin Yu Gen Kyusei Mahikari Kyōdan, Subikari Koha Sekai Shindan, and Mahikari Seiho no Kai.
Nonetheless, the original group and Sūkyō Mahikari are the most successful and well-studied factions. Therefore, there is no single religion called “Mahikari”, nor is there a linear continuation between Yoshikazu Okada’s ideology and the religions that followed it after his death.

Yoshikazu Okada was a higher-class military man in favor of Japanese imperialism. He encouraged close ties with right-wing politicians, businessmen, academics, and journalists. Today, the involvement of Sūkyō Mahikari in politics and right-wing movements can be exemplified through Nippon Kaigi (NK, “Japan Conference”). NK is Japan’s largest and most powerful conservative right-wing organization, whose members include current Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and most of his Cabinet. (Mizohata 1) NK boasts affiliations with many Shinto and other religious organizations. Such groups include Yasukuni Shrine, Ise Shrine, Reiyūkai (霊友会 Spiritual-Friendship Association), Sūkyō Mahikari (崇教真光), Makuya of Christ (キリストの幕屋), Gedatsu-kai (解 脱会), The Institute of Moralogy (モラロジー研究所), Rinri Kenkyūshō (倫理研究所, Institute for Ethics or Ethics Study Group), and the like. (Mizohata 10) On the official Nippon Kaigi website, 7 Sachiko Inoue is listed as a member of the group’s representative committee, under the name Okada Keishu 岡田光央 and title Sūkyō Mahikari Oshienushisama 崇教真光教え主.

7 http://www.nipponkaigi.org/about/yakuin
According to Mahikari preaching, there are Five Races (goshiki jinrui 五色人類) and Five Major Religions (sūmei godō 崇盟五道). The races are:

1. Ōbito 黄人 (ō means yellow) or 王人 (ō means king): wajin Japanese
2. Kibito 黄人 yellow: other Mongoloid (mongoroido) Asians such as Chinese and Koreans
3. Akabito 赤人 red: Native Americans, Jews, Arabs, and Northern Africans
4. Shirobito 白人 white: Western Europeans or Caucasians with blond hair and blue eyes
5. Aobito 青人 blue/green: pale-skinned Eastern Europeans such as Slavs
6. Kurobito 黒人 black/purple: from Africa, India, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia, etc.

The religions are: Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, and Christianity.

Okada harshly criticized those religions for straying too far from God’s original supra-religion created in the beginning of time, which supposedly was Mahikari. In this ideology, Mahikari is not a religion (shūkyō), but rather a supra-religion (sūkyō), out of which all sets of beliefs emerged.

Mahikari warns about an imminent apocalypse in which only the chosen people will be saved and enjoy eternal happiness. Unless humanity repents and converts to Mahikari, we will be doomed. The necessary conversion requires everybody to culturally become more wajin, or ascribe to a normative ideal of Japanese identity involving language, morals, body movements, eating habits, and more. In other words, Mahikari
uses a universalistic discourse suggesting that all races come from the same original race (ōbito) and the same original supra-religion (sūkyō), and must go back to those sources to be saved. Since Okada’s supra-religion strongly resembles State Shinto, his universalism is, in fact, masked wajin-centrism, Shinto-centrism, and nationalism.

The Five Races and Five Religions are barely known among most practitioners. They are explained only in intermediate and advanced courses, but most kamikumite have only attended the basic course due to lack of interest and/or money. Membership has a rapid turnover, and the three courses not only require an enrollment fee, but also travelling to the dōjō (center or temple) where they occur, which is Japan in advanced courses. In Brazil, discussions about the topic usually come up in sermons emphasizing the compatibility of Catholicism and Sūkyō Mahikari (but not African and indigenous religiousities practiced in Brazil), interracial solidarity (through post-racial discourse), and Japanese pride (thus appealing to our nikkei nostalgia). In the same way, explicit Japanese supremacist ideology is only taught in intermediate and advanced courses.

Yet, it is important to recognize the ways in which Sūkyō Mahikari, like all religions, has potential for developing a racial consciousness and racism. Along with its explicit hierarchy of races and religions, and its assertion that one needs to return to an inherent Japanese identity to be saved from apocalypse, Sūkyō Mahikari is influenced by Japanese religious and spiritual practices such as Shintō and Buddhism.

Sūkyō Mahikari denies any influences and crucial contributions from non-wajin societies in its ideology by placing ōbito (king race) and sūkyō (supra-religion) in the beginning of time, thus presenting all other peoples and cultures as corrupted imitations.
Mahikari takes the Five Races and Five Religions for granted. In this sense, Okada did not borrow from cohesively distinct religions, but rather from an amalgam of folk spirituality, a nationalistic standardization of Shinto, Japanese new religions, and Japanese interpretations of foreign religions such as Christianity. All of them have been historically hybridized and commonly practiced in Japan, and therefore Okada’s claim to the independent and primeval emergence of sūkyō is not only inaccurate, but also feeds into Japanese supremacy.

Sūkyō Mahikari has centers in 59 cities in Brazil with the Latin American Center located in São Paulo. According to the Brazilian census, there were 74 Mahikari practitioners in the North and 3,054 throughout the country in 2000, and 155,951 practitioners of Asian new religions in 2010.
Figure 1 - Map of cities with Sūkyō Mahikari centers. Source: official website.

![Map of cities with Sūkyō Mahikari centers.](image)

Figure 2 - 2000 Brazilian census on Japanese religions.

![2000 Brazilian census on Japanese religions.](image)

Sūkyō Mahikari was introduced in Brazil in 1974 (Capellari 130; Watanabe 118), and Reiko Machie Seki is always presented at the dōjō in Belém as the main responsible
for divulging the religion in the state of Pará. When I was *kumite*, she was still a highly regarded and active member, while her teenage granddaughter was one of the leading figures of Mahikari-tai. At the time, the *dōjōchō* (head of the *dōjō*) was Ms. Joselice de Oliveira Campos (middle-aged, female, non-*nikkei*) and the *dōshi* (leader of Mahikari-tai) was Mr. Marcelo Pinto (30-40 years old, male, non-*nikkei*). In Brazil, Japanese new religions seem to mostly attract the *nikkei* middle class in search for ethnic roots, community, and familiar beliefs, and the white middle class in search for Oriental wisdom or exotic spiritual practices (Cordovil).

*Race and religion theory review*

Understanding Japanese neo-new religion among *nikkei* and non-*nikkei* people in the Brazilian Amazon, race, religion, requires that the human mean be considered in terms of religious racism and resistance to oppression. I use the following literature to say that: first, Sūkyō Mahikari is a carrier of religious racism in the form of Japanese-ness through its concepts of Five Races, Five Religions, and *hito* (person); second, Whiteness is not the sole or primary form of structural racial supremacy in the whole world, because there is also Japanese-ness. These arguments have never been said because Sūkyō Mahikari has only been analyzed either uncritically, or without centering on and

8 Sūkyō Mahikari Seinen Tai 崇教真光青年隊 (youth corps), abbreviated Mahikari-tai 真光隊, is the youth corps of the organization.

9 Academic literature on Japanese religions divide them into old religions (e.g., Shintō), new religions (e.g., Oomoto Kyō), and neo-new religions (e.g., Sekai Kyū sei Kyō) (Tsukada).
sometimes not even mentioning race. Moreover, Japanese-ness is a new concept I have
developed in this study.

**Race and religion, racialization of religion, and religious racism**

Much of the research on race and religion focuses on the development of race and
racism in Europe in relation to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, particularly
Islamophobia in a context of European and U.S. racism. Research on race and religion is
not new, as Marx’s and Weber’s work can attest. After reading recent literature with the
expression “racialization of religion” (Fadil; Husain and Howard; Meer; Smiet;
Tamarkin), I concluded that the expression often means either one of the following: first,
racism against a religious group through the ascription of a race to a community assumed
to practice a specific religion, especially Islam; second, the historical process in which
“race” and “religion” were constructed together in Europe and for the same oppressive
purposes.

Sylvia Wynter’s main argument is that today, in a world where most people are
impoverished and of color, the white, middle- to higher-class, cisgender, heterosexual,
able-bodied men as male gender, whom she calls Man and went through phases Man1

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10 The words within the term “racialization of religion” are built upon the binary science
versus religion, wherein race is a scientifically proven fact that should not be mingled
with spiritual faith. In this logic, race can be empirically found in genes (biology,
medicine) and culture (anthropology, sociology), whereas the supernatural can never be
proven – or we should not doubt God by trying to prove it. Notwithstanding, there are
virtually no words in English free of a violent history, so my intention is not to condemn
the term, but rather to be aware of its limitations.
and Man2, is overrepresented. In common sense, media, academia, law, policies, corporate business, and every other aspect of contemporary life, Man is the ideal human, and all decisions are taken on his behalf. In this context, there is a struggle between Man (a small elite) and humanity (the great majority of the world’s population who have been exploited by the small elite):

The Argument proposes that the struggle of our new millennium will be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves. (Wynter, “Unsettling 260)

Wynter conducted a historical investigation about how Man developed. The Christian Church in Europe had supreme power in politics, economy, ideology, and socio-cultural life. However, a small elite of noblemen, wealthy merchants, and lay politicians, wanted to rule instead. Therefore, laymen invented a partially secular or “de-godded” version of Man. “De-godding” in this sense is the process through which the rendering of personhood becomes anthropocentric, so agency is no longer projected primarily onto an extra-human power, more specifically the Abrahamic God.

**Figure 3** - The development of de-godded Man.

| Man = the religious subject of the Church (theocentrism) |
| Not Man = infidels, heretics, pagan-idolaters, enemies of Christ (e.g., Jews, witches) |
| Mortal/immortal, natural/supernatural, human/the ancestors, the gods/God distinction |

| Man = the political subject of the state (anthropocentrism) |
| Not Man = Africans, Native Americans, Asians (i.e., the enslaved and the colonized) |
| Human / sub-human distinction |
The first period of the invention of Man was from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century, when physical science was developed. Man1 was born largely from physical science, which created a ratiocentric (centered on rationality), hybrid of religious and secular, view of people. The second period was from the nineteenth century until today, when biological science was developed. Man 2 was biocentric (centered on a biologically determined essence) and purely secular. Henceforth, Man transformed from Christian to Man1 to Man2. To counter the overrepresentation of Man, Wynter urged us to reflect on our current definition of the human, destroy it, and build a better understanding of what it means to be a person: “one cannot ‘unsettle’ the ‘coloniality of power’ without a redescription of the human outside the terms of our present descriptive statement of the human, Man, and its overrepresentation” (268).

For Wynter, all societies produce a specific definition of “human” and then project this definition onto the extra-human by creating a mythology saying that their specific definition is universal and fixed by the cosmos, the supernatural, or gods. Today, Western philosophers still do so, but the extra-human has become de-godded: “in the case of our now purely secular order, the extrahuman agency on which our authorship is now projected is no longer supernatural, but rather that of Evolution/Natural Selection together with its imagined entity of ‘Race’” (273).

Lebner asserted we should engage with his definitions of the secular, the religious, secularization, religion, and secularism to understand Talal Asad. The secular is a condition and discursive formation that stands in tension with the religious, so Asad
applied genealogy to trace the trajectory of the simultaneous construction of the secular 
and the religious, thus providing evidence of their mutually constitutive relation 
(\textit{Formations}). Based on the secular, the European and U.S. American empires developed 
secularism in the modern sense from the end of the eighteenth century, defined as:

an enactment by which a political medium (representation of citizenship) 
redefines and transcends particular and differentiating practices of the self that are 
articulated through class, gender, and religion. In contrast, the process of 
mediation enacted in “pre-modern” societies includes ways in which the state 
mediates local identities without aiming at transcendence. (Asad, \textit{Formations} 5)

If in “pre-modern” societies people were expected to obey the political authority 
but not to identify with it, in modernity people are taught to see citizenship as their 
primary identity, and therefore transcend their other identities: race, religion, class, 
gender, etc. Together with secularism, religion in the modern sense was invented and 
given universal definition and applicability. Counter to the classification of all non-
Western spiritualities in Christian nomenclature and epistemologies, Asad defended that, 
“there cannot be a universal definition of religion” (“\textit{A Construção}” 264).

As a modern project, secularism is a governance technology aimed at pressuring 
the whole world to become modern, and hence adopt secularism. This pressure or 
imposition is secularization, a process relying on the social constructions called religion 
and the state, which are artificially placed in opposition. In this binary, religion begins to 
be deemed an autonomous individual’s choice, whilst the state is kept apart in the public 
sphere: “the view that liberal religion should primarily take the form of private belief” 
(“\textit{Thinking}” 41).
To deconstruct assumptions about secularism, Asad focused on embodiment and the senses to demonstrate how secularism as a modern project did not guarantee peace and, in fact, depended on violence: “A secular state does not guarantee toleration; it puts into play different structures of ambition and fear. The law never seeks to eliminate violence since its object is always to regulate violence.” (Formations 8)

Asad investigated Christian normativity and anti-Muslim racism in religious discourse, legal proceedings, and media disputes to question whether critique was secular, thus questioning “the ideological status of European Muslims as not fully human because they are not yet morally autonomous and politically disciplined” (“Free Speech” 50). The scholar reflected on how universities were originally religious and were then secularized for liberal professionalization, for knowledge to become useful to

11 Christian normativity is the tendency to position Christianity as the default, the center, the normal way of being in the world. Christian privilege encompasses the structural, cultural, and symbolic advantages of being Christian in a society where Christianity is more valued than other sets of beliefs. Christocentrism is the tendency to interpret everything in relation to Christianity instead of in each context’s own terms. (Engstrom and Valenzano; Gries et al.; Stutzman)

12 Like homophobia is a misnomer (White), so is Islamophobia (Alietti and Padovan). I prefer the term anti-Muslim racism to Islamophobia, meaning a form of religious racism against Muslims.

First, phobia (fear, antagonistic sentiment) is a feeling. The emotional response to marginalized groups is but one consequence of systemic oppressions, which are: symbolic (stereotypes), affective (prejudice), and material (discrimination).

Second, phobia has been historically used in psychiatry to define psychological pathologies, i.e., irrational fears rooted in the individual psyche (micro level). In contrast to that, Fanon urges us to consider the conjuncture that causes those mental disturbances (Black Skin, White Masks). This difference changes the ways we fight the problem: if Islamophobia were a phobia, it could be solved through psychological or psychiatric consultation; but if Islamophobia is a systemic oppression, we must struggle to destroy the whole structure that sustains it.
governmental and corporate interests (idem 47-48). This was precisely Tomoko Masuzawa’s argument in “The University”.

For Masuzawa, analyzing the history of universities is important to understand the current secular imperative in science and politics. She traced how the nearly moribund European university as an institution was thoroughly reformed in the nineteenth century in Germany-Prussia to respond to: elites’ demand for useful knowledge free from ecclesiastical control; the state’s interest to rule over the church and school; and the market’s search for formally educated professional expertise.

The state was apparently eager to take ownership of both churches and schools to a greater extent than before, with the understanding that these traditionally interrelated institutions were in fact matters pertaining to the polity and therefore of public interest, and as such, properly the business of the state. (Masuzawa, “The University” 127)

Besides the constructedness of the secular, Masuzawa was also concerned with the constructedness of religion. She placed the invention of race and religion together in Western Europe in the long nineteenth century, and explained how the various academic divisions of language families brought about the construction of a model to classify human races and world religions. Writers in the 19th and 20th centuries de-orientalized and de-Semitized Indo-European languages thus reinforcing a binary between East and West, Judaism and Christianity. Simultaneously, Islam was classified as a religion that was not universal, instead determined by race and ethnicity, by: “many nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers intent on appropriating Christianity fully and exclusively for the West while drawing a delicate line of separation between European Christianity and its
Semitic-Oriental origin.” *(The Invention* 321). At the same time, “Islam came to stand as the epitome of the racially and ethnically determined, nonuniversal religions.” *(idem* xiii)

Although intellectuals have increasingly included more spiritualities in the category of world religions, they have maintained racist assumptions: “the new discourse of pluralism and diversity of religions […] neither displaced nor disabled the logic of European hegemony – formerly couched in the language of the universality of Christianity – but, in a way, gave it a new lease.” *(idem* xiv) This is another example of how inclusion is not enough to guarantee justice when the system is left unquestioned, and when no alternative is presented to the subaltern other than to be included in a system that is detrimental to their interests (Fanon, *The Wretched*).

Denise da Silva mentioned religion in several passages, when explaining how white scholars used it as one of the factors determining the classification of the colonized farther or closer to civilization. For da Silva, the three concepts used to describe current conditions all produced collectivities, but had different effects: 1. The racial creates fixed difference based on exterior determination (e.g., natural selection); 2. The nation creates unfolding difference based on interior determination (history) in a temporal transcendental essence (progress); and the cultural can produce either or both (xxxvii). Religion seemed to be listed among language, arts, customs, and other aspects of the cultural (123).

Denise da Silva’s work in Ethics, Political Science, and Post-colonial Studies delve into pressing questions that radically challenge most academic scholarship nowadays: Why are we still relying and placing agency on “the subject”? Why does academia lament “the
death of the subject’’ when most of the world’s population have much graver issues to worry about, such as hunger and war? Why are we treating racial difference as if it existed before European colonization and enslavement? Why are we treating diversity as if it caused racism? Why are we placing our hopes on linear temporality and progress, i.e., history? Why are we trying to “discover” or “unveil” the truth as if the Truth were out there to be found? Why do academics engage in competition to determine which country has the worst racism, which colonizer was less cruel, which group is the most oppressed, which country has more critical consciousness, and other useless endeavors? Why do scholars and activists assume that U.S. social movements based on identity and racial consciousness must be the model in the struggle for liberation everywhere? Why do scholars and activists assume that inclusivity must be the model in the struggle for liberation everywhere? If the white Self needs the Other of color to make white supremacy work, then why kill the Other?

Denise da Silva criticizes theories that present racism as lack of tolerance for racial difference or a form of oppression based on racial difference:

neither those who call for the moral banishment of the racial nor those who find moral solace in the cultural are able to comprehend how the analytics of raciality operates as a political-symbolic arsenal. No apostle of inclusion and historicity recognizes that the social scientific arsenal they deploy to explain racial subjection, the one that assumes that racial difference is a substantive signifier of cultural difference, always already both assumes and […] reproduces, an irreducible and unsublatable difference between the kinds of minds indigenous to Europe and those that originated in other global regions. (da Silva, Toward a Global 133)
The reason for her disagreement is that racial difference is not a substantive, empirically observable bodily trait, since human diversity cannot be proven in biology or genes, neither can it be associated with any specific characteristics such as intelligence, skills, talent, morality, culture, etc. Presuming that racial difference precedes race is presuming that the racial exists before its politicization and theorization.

To show how subjectivity is not a natural thing or a natural result of the Enlightenment, in *Toward a Global Idea of Race* da Silva traces the trajectory of the construction of race in written texts from the fields of history and science: a) history: human or social sciences such as philosophy and anthropology that privilege time over space; b) science: natural sciences such as biology and physics that privilege space over time.

The investigation leaves no doubt that the “transparent I” – the Western European modern male self-determined subject endorsed with individual free will and rationality – and the “others of Europe” – the outer-determined affectable object who can be deemed a subject but never the subject – did not simply exist, but rather were created with significant conscious efforts by the European intelligentsia to justify colonization, slavery, labor exploitation, and other capitalist tools through white supremacy. In other words, black death is often presented as an irrational exception to an otherwise egalitarian system, for example: “raciality also accounts for how, in the aftermath of WWII, the Third Reich was singled out as a pathological exception; a racist state as opposed to the other rational ones.” (“The Banalization” 62). In contrast, da Silva argues that people of color’s murder is the condition for the existence of a racist system.
Denise da Silva’s critique of academic literature on Brazilian racism sheds light on its differences from U.S. racism, for instance, miscegenation for whitening was encouraged since the beginning of Portuguese colonization. In the first decades of the twentieth century, when a national identity was being forged, the intelligentsia had to come up with an explanation of why Brazil was not an inferior country, despite being predominantly of color:

the solution was to deploy anthropological strategies in a rewriting of miscegenation [e.g., the myth of racial democracy, the anthropofagic ability to “eat” all cultures] that also re-signified whiteness, one in which the temporal trajectory of the national subject is narrated not as the actualization of “racial purity” but as a process of “racial or cultural purification” – that is, the fulfillment of the logic of obliteration [black death]. Though it did not eliminate blackness and has, in fact, produced Africanity itself, this solution has constituted a powerful strategy of racial subjection, the effects of which are neither superior nor inferior to but just as efficient as those deployed in the United States and South Africa. (da Silva, *Toward a Global* 227)

In this vein, da Silva criticizes the common scholarly assumption that Brazil is just a variation of U.S. racism (“Facts of Blackness”) and the attempts to fight Brazilian racism by simply importing anti-racist strategies from the First World (“Bahia Pélo Negro”). Instead, she suggests the destruction of oppressive systems, which require questioning the “I” in time and space frameworks, through tactics like Olodum music (*idem*) and black feminist poethics (“Toward a Black”).

Rooted in theology, J. Kameron Carter contends that Christianity went through a process of whitening by denying its Jewishness: “modernity’s racial imagination has its
genesis in the theological problem of Christianity’s quest to sever itself from its Jewish roots.” (4)

Still, Christian resistance is possible. Carter offers a method called counter-exegesis (20), i.e., using scriptures to challenge conservative interpretations. Counter-exegesis is basically textual analysis with a Christian meaning, since exegesis traditionally is the interpretation of Bible texts. However, this method also presents a conscious reflection on the double-edge sword of taking a canon (the Bible, European philosophy, history, etc.) that was created by and for a small elite, and then use it to challenge social oppression led by the same elite. My representation analysis of Sūkyō Mahikari is no different: like Carter, I analyze content alongside various aspects of the context in which a religion’s precepts are founded and practiced, and subvert the texts for social justice purposes.

To understand Afro-Christianity, Carter reflects on enslaved Africans’ hybridizing of African religions like vodou (125) and candomblé (466) with Christianity. This mixture was possible due to commonalities between those faiths, the fact that religion is always alive and changing, and the necessity of survival. In his analysis of theological research on Afro-Christianity, Carter unearthed the need to go beyond essentialist assumptions about blackness, Africanity, and black spirituality:

overcoming this problem will require the audacity of theological imagination. It must be audacious because it will require that theology […] no longer do its work in Kantian fashion. It can no longer do its work as the enterprise of a Bildungsbürpertum or as an enterprise of the religious elite functioning in the interests of power. (Carter 372)
Therefore, despite pointing out numerous ways pseudo-Christianity and pseudo-theology have been used to reinforce slavery and colonialism, Carter urges scholars to create a new Christian theological-intellectual practice centering on anti-racism, which in the United States means anti-Whiteness.

I was inspired by Junaid Rana’s and other authors’ differentiation between Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism (see note above): “Islamophobia is a gloss for the anti-Muslim racism that collapses numerous groups into the single category “Muslim’.” (30) Rana postulates that Catholic Spain and Portugal’s encounters with Moors were formative to the development of race as a modern construct: “The racialization of Islam emerged in the Old World, was transposed on indigenous peoples of the New World, and subsequently took on significance in relation to black America and the Muslim immigrants.” (31) From this postulate, we might incur that the importation and adaptation of the European concepts of race and religion to Japan in the Meiji Era, and the Portuguese colonization of Brazil influenced how Sūkyō Mahikari was developed and is practiced in Brazil.

Rana explains how Europe utilized the mutually constitutive categories of race and religion to classify themselves as civilized and evolved, while the colonized and enslaved were deemed barbarous and primitive: “religion was regarded not just as belief but as a level of human evolution” (32). Like Masuzawa, Rana explains the impact of

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13 The Meiji Era (1868-1912) was when Japan became a nation-state and an empire with the goal of colonizing Russia, Korea, China, Indonesia, and other countries to become a global super-power. It was a response to European and U.S. imperialism within the logic of, either you are a colonizer or you become colonized.
philology in the classification of races, geographies, and religions. Moreover, he follows the historical process of racialization of Muslims since the crusades, explaining how stereotypes changed over time and space, but can be generally categorized as: infidel savage, slave/captive, terrorist, and immigrant.

This literature is limited because it does not take into consideration race and religion outside of Europe, the United States, and Abrahamic religions.

**Literature on Sükyō Mahikari**

Scholarship in English about Sükyō Mahikari practiced in Japan has been published in Japan (Hotaka; Knecht), the United States (Anderson, R. W.; Cornille, “Nationalism”; Davis; McVeigh; Pfeiffer; Picken 180-181; Young), Canada (Stein), England (Swift), and Germany (Dessi); about Mahikari practiced outside Japan, in the U.S. (Cornille, “The Phoenix”), England (Bouma et al.; Matsunaga), in France about Sükyō Mahikari in Senegal (Louveau), and the Caribbean (Hurbon); 14 about Mahikari in cyberspace, in Italy (Introvigne, “A Symbolic”). There are also publications that, although not peer-reviewed, were written in academic style, such as Andris Kārlis Tebēcis and Garry A. Greenwood. 15 Due to the tremendous success of Mahikari in Australia, many of the publications investigate the Canberra headquarters.

14 Geraldo de Paiva’s article offers misinformation: the Church of Perfect Liberty パーフェクトリバティー教団 was founded by Miki Takahito 御木貴日止 in 1916, not by Yoshikazu Okada in 1946. For this reason, it is not reviewed here.

15 Andris Kārlis Tebēcis (born in 1943 in Latvia), PhD, was a former researcher in the fields of neurophysiology and neuropharmacology. He studied and taught at Adelaide
Anne Broder hid her identity with a pen name, but we can assert with relative certainty that almost all writers of Mahikari in English seem to be white and/or male. Most importantly, except for Hurbon and Louveau to a limited extent, these publications fail to explore race, gender, class, sexuality, and (dis)ability in a context of power differences and oppression. Although nationalism is central to some of those pieces, racism is not. On the one hand, publications that briefly mention Mahikari (Camurça; Clarke; Costa and Reis; Inoue, N.; Levin; Matsue; Matsue and Ogasavara; Reader; Saito; Shimazono, “The Expansion”; Shoji and Usarski; Tomita; Uehara; Watanabe; Werblowsky) tend to have more diverse authors and mention race; on the other hand, none explores social justice aspects in depth.

Hurbon and Louveau offer insights on ways in which Sūkyō Mahikari is adapted in countries where most people are black and brown folks who believe in various religiosities not restricted to Abrahamic institutions. Hurbon investigates how traditional beliefs brought to the Antilles by enslaved Africans made Caribbean people open to Sūkyō Mahikari, whose teachings are interpreted through black spirituality. Moreover, the author recognizes how this Japanese organization, which the French introduced in the islands, can serve both to maintain the status quo and to build community solidarity, vent about social problems, and challenge the colonizer’s imposed Catholicism and

University (Australia), Monash University (Australia), Basel University (Switzerland), Australian National University, and Kyushu University (Japan). Garry A. Greenwood narrates in his book how Tebēcis’ medical credentials helped persuade Australians of trying Sūkyō Mahikari. Tebēcis and Greenwood were friends and worked together to expand the religion in Australia, New Zealand, South Asia, and the Pacific Islands, hence becoming instrumental to the organization’s expansion outside Japan.
secularization. Through the religio-scientific language of Śūkyō Mahikari, Caribbean kumite question the stereotype that blacks are ignorant and superstitious, thus allowing them to practice ancestor worship, talking to spirits, dealing with spirit possession, and other African-derived rites under the guise of Asian wisdom and white rationality.

Louveau’s article, which was originally published in French, also points to the adaptation of Śūkyō Mahikari to Senegalese spirituality by mixing environmentalism and religious beliefs from outside with local concerns about urbanization and modernity, which break the link between humans, nature, gods, spirits, and ancestors. Furthermore, she explores how, in Śūkyō Mahikari, the body is interwoven with the universe (the invisible worlds dictate a body’s condition in the visible world), mirrors the whole family (spiritual level of ancestors, relatives, spouses, and children), and reflects the evolution of one’s soul in Time (ancestors, past lives, current decisions, responsibility for the future).

For the purpose of the present research, Hurbon and Louveau offer the most pertinent tools to understand practices of Śūkyō Mahikari in the Third World, where a long history of social disparities creates a situation where a predominantly black-brown population to make sense of injustice, suffering, and disconnect between individuals and their families, communities, non-human animals, the bushes, ancestors, spirits, etc. Similarly, Japanese-Brazilians in the Amazon conciliate Śūkyō Mahikari with Christianity, the memory of their grandparents’ ancestor worship, the common practice of African-native religions, espiritismo, and other Japanese new religions.
Brazilian Whiteness Studies and Japanese-Brazilian Studies

Literature on Whiteness among Japanese-Brazilians, like studies on Brazilian Whiteness and national research in general, concentrated in the São Paulo. Moreover, further investigation on the relation between race and religion under this topic would help expand and complexify this insipient literature.

The chosen articles are recent and directly address Whiteness, while relating it to racism by and against Japanese-Brazilians. These articles trace a history of Brazilian Whiteness and Japanese imperialism, showing how they were adopted and rejected among Japanese immigrants, dekasegi, and their descendants. Then, they conduct ethnographic work interviewing nikkeijin. Thusly, this literature escapes the tendency in Brazilian racism scholarship to rely on the trinary of the myth of racial democracy, in which Brazil is composed of the white, black, and native races, thus ignoring the Japanese and other immigrants.

One interesting feature of the three authors is their explanation of the various ways in which nikkeijin are still openly racialized, thus contradicting most Brazilian racism scholarship, which say that this racism is subtler than in the U.S. due to the myth of racial democracy and absence of openly segregational laws (e.g., one-drop rule, Jim Crow). In contrast, Adachi, Kingsberg, and Nishida point out that U.S. scholars visiting Brazil are sometimes surprised at how non-nikkei Brazilians say racial slurs, make slanted eyes, use mock Japanese, sing ding-a-ding-a-dong, bow, and conduct other racist behavior without restraints in public. Perhaps this inconsistency can be explained by the
researchers’ positionalities and interests, since most academics in Whiteness Studies are white and ignore *nikkeijin*, being therefore less sensitive to overt racism against Asians.

Like Asian Americans, we have been stereotyped as model minorities, yellow peril, “the whites of Asia”, and unassimilable, i.e. forever foreign. Another similarity is the historical complicity with Whiteness at the expense of black and brown folk. However, the specificity of the *isei, nisei, sansei* classification, *dekasegi*, enduring *nikkei* identity, etc. should be analyzed in context.

Adachi’s “Japanese Brazilians” challenges the commonly held myths among *nikkeijin* that they do not suffer from racism, and that they are superior to black and brown Brazilians.

And it is very hard for Japanese Brazilians to react to these things [Brazilians’ mockery of them] or to reply back, because Japanese Brazilians are stereotyped as being “very serious people” by other Brazilians (who supposedly know how to “let it go” and just enjoy life). Thus, they get teased about being overly sensitive or uptight: *japonês, muito sério, neee* (“You Japanese are so very serious, aren’t you?”). [*Neee* is mock Japanese.] Thus, they are almost forced by default to buy into the party line that these racial labels are “simply an amusing commentary on” physical differences (Adachi, “Japanese Brazilians” 64).

Both adopting whitening ideology and maintaining *wajin* supremacy, some *nikkeijin* tried to assimilate, others to keep ethnic isolation, and still others to conciliate the two. However, no matter their choices, “Japanese Brazilians are seen as hardworking and very serious by non-Japanese Brazilians in Brazil, but they are seen as lazy and playful people in Japan.” (66)
Kingsberg explains how nikkeijin have been used by the Japanese state to construct Japanese identity in various ways. For instance, their upbringing in Brazil, haafu nature, and frequent Okinawan ancestry were contrasted to a purported Japanese homogeneity.

Although historians of Nihonjinron have emphasized its bilateral comparison of “Japan” and a monolithic “West,” the Nikkei were also strongly present as a partial Other and foil for Janpaneseness. As Imin co-authors Gamō Masao and Ōno Morio later recalled, fieldwork abroad naturally inspired a thorough reconsideration of identity at home. The metamorphosis of Japanese emigrants into Nikkei exposed the mutability of biology and culture, prompting anthropologists to seek more stable pillars of national belonging in space and time. (Kingsberg 88)

At the same time, the empire encouraged the whitening of emigrants to prove the Japanese capacity to Westernize and acquire the best of every culture. One way of doing so was through religion: “In São Paulo, Noda Ryōji of the Japanese consulate promoted assimilation by urging religious conversion to Catholicism, restricting the entry of Buddhist and Shintō priests, and requiring new arrivals to swear to refrain from proselytizing.” (73) Concomitantly, following the distinction between folk Shinto and State Shinto, “several hundred primary schools provided young emigrants and Brazil-

16 Haafu ハーフ is a derogative term meaning half-blood (Watarai).

17 State Shinto was the ideology the Meiji Empire created through the appropriation and adaptation of Shinto beliefs, as well as invention of many pseudo-Shinto rituals for imperialistic purposes. Because the Meiji Empire and nationalistic religious leaders used “sacred” texts such as Kojiki or Furukotofumi 古事記 (1711-1712) by Ō no Yasumaro, and Takeuchi monjo to justify imperialism, the line separating religion from politics is blurry (Fujitani).
born children with a Japanese-style education, including inculcation in State Shintō, the dominant political ideology in the home islands since the 1880s.” (76)

Nishida explains how nikkei identity was formed and transformed over time, beginning with the fear of Mongolization in Brazil and culminating with nikkei pride mostly due to the dekasegi phenomenon. In the first half of the twentieth century, Japanese immigrants:

held strong prejudice against all non-Japanese Brazilians as gaijins (‘foreigners’ in Japanese, originally referring to whites only), especially against Afro-Brazilians. Furthermore, Japanese immigrants tend to look down on Okinawans (who were or are, of course, Japanese nationals) and their descendants, and other Asians, such as Koreans and Taiwanese, who did not start to immigrate to Brazil until the 1960s. Pre-war Japanese immigrants and older generations of the Nisei have always compared themselves to Germans and Italians in Brazil, and have positioned themselves as another group of ‘whites/Westerners’ in Brazilian society. (Nishida 432)

In the 1980s, dekasegi were marginalized in Japan, and resisted by taking pride in their mixed blood:

The Japanese did not accept them [dekasegi] as their equals, socially or culturally. For the local Japanese population, these Japanese Brazilians were cheap foreign guest workers and/or descendants of the long-forgotten emigrants. In return, Japanese Brazilians separated themselves from the local Japanese population to a considerable degree (Nishida 429)

Nevertheless, back in Brazil, dekasegi wanted to be associated with Japanese development and escape racial microaggressions by hanging out with other nikkeijin:
Over the years many Japanese immigrants in Brazil continued to long for a true belonging to Japan as a ‘first-class’ nation (itsutō-koku) in contrast to Brazil as a ‘third-class’ nation (santō-koku). When dekassegui actually began, it provoked a strong sense of shame among the earlier waves of Japanese Brazilian workers in Japan […] On the other hand, Japan’s emergence as the world’s leading economic power made a positive impact on the collective self-perception of younger generations of Japanese Brazilians in São Paulo. […] suddenly felt superior to Brazilians and longed for Japan (Nishida 430)

The sense of superiority among nikkeijin continue today: “The self-identified Nikkei youth continue to perceive themselves as elite ethnic Brazilians and position themselves above the Japanese youth in Japan for ‘respecting the elderly’.” (Nishida 440).

This literature added to Whiteness Studies an investigation of how Whiteness in Brazil works differently from the U.S., and how Japanese-Brazilians have adapted in this racist society.

Methodology

My dissertation methodology was anti-racism. In this sense, anti-racism was the framework through which I conducted qualitative research, whose purpose was to reflect an axiological and ethical commitment to social justice. For this endeavor, I applied the following methods: representation analysis, autoethnography, auto-archaeology, and participant observation.

Hall’s representation analysis is detailed in the circuit of culture (Fig. 4). The circuit of culture is composed of: representation, the analysis of written texts and cultural artifacts in terms of content and media; identity, how race, class, gender, and other
intersected positions are central to the ways in which agents see themselves and are seen by society; *production*, the process of producing texts and artifacts in a specific context, and the ideologies that inspired such making; *consumption*, the reception of messages, as well as an audience’s negotiation and resistance to hegemonic discourse; *regulation*, systemic oppressions and power relations in the context of an ideological, socio-cultural, political, and economic conjuncture in which the texts and artifacts were produced, distributed, and consumed.

**Figure 4** - The circuit of culture (adapted from Hall 1).

Autoethnography is a qualitative method that combines autobiography and ethnography to investigate how certain personal experiences relate to specific social and cultural contexts (Ellis et al.; Jones). Auto-archaeology is the autoethnographic narrative
of what artifacts meant and mean to me, centering the interpretation of memories on systemic oppressions and resistance (Fox; Harrison and Schofield). Participant observation is the ethnographic practice of “getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives”, while using self-reflexivity and ethical approaches such as maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship with research participants (Bernard 256).

Chapters outline

Chapter One makes a historical overview of proto-racism and racism in Japan. It attempts to complement scholarship on Japanese nationalism and jinshu sabetsu by following the trajectory of race, religion, and humanhood construction in Japan, which were then transferred to Brazil with immigrants and mixed with Brazilian Whiteness.

Chapter Two conducts a representation analysis of Goseigen, the holy book. It investigates how Yoshikazu Okada’s discourses create hito through the classification of five religions of different colors and five major religions. To demonstrate the ways in which language is political, the chapter delves into the concepts of kotodama, otodama, kazudama, irodama, and katadana.

Chapter Three conducts a representation analysis of Golden Teachings, Youth Who Shine with the Light of God, and Yōkōshi Prayer Book. It gives attention to different instantiations of Man/hito brought about by Okada’s support for Japanese-ness.

Chapter Four conducts a representation analysis of textbooks, magazines, pamphlets, and personal notes accumulated from the time I was kumite to 2016.
Discourses change over time and space, since Brazilian practitioners interpret and practice Sūkyō Mahikari in ways very different from what Yoshikazu Okada envisioned in 1960s Tokyo, and from what Teshima Tairiku envisions today.

Finally, Chapter Four applies autoethnography, auto-archaeology, and ethnography to explore my experience as an insider *kumite*, and then an outsider researcher years later. I believe that Sūkyō Mahikari is becoming increasingly conservative and gaining governmental leverage at a time of right-wing control inside the state. For this reason, *kumite*, scholars, activists, and other actors should reflect on how religiosity is implicated in power struggles, and follow the lead of socio-religious movements.
Chapter One: Japanese-ness

The Introduction presented Sūkyō Mahikari as a complex spiritual practice that retains potential not only to develop a Japanese racial identity in Brazil, but also Japanese racial supremacy. It also introduced the plan for this dissertation to combat religious racism through critical analysis and autoethnography of my experiences. Before conducting this analysis, I write specifically about how Japanese-ness developed from a combination of Japanese proto-racism or racialism, and Whiteness (Nakayama and Krizek).

Both Whiteness and Japanese-ness are types of racism; however, they are not the same in scope, impact, or forms of manifestation. Trying to combat Whiteness in Brazil as if it manifested the same way as in the United States is self-defeating (da Silva, D. F., Toward a Global). The consequences of Whiteness in Brazil are pretty much the same (Adachi, “Japanese-Brazilians” 40): people of color have less access to basic needs, life opportunities, and respect. Nevertheless, scholars and activists can only challenge Whiteness in a meaningful way if we understand it in context. Even differences between the Brazilian Amazon and the Southeast, for example, must be taken into consideration. Because Japanese-Brazilians have been racialized in relation to other groups, we should recognize our complicity with Japanese-ness and Whiteness, acknowledge our privileges, and join forces with other groups committed to fight against racial supremacy. Given that
almost all scholarship on Japanese-Brazilians is either focused on our oppressed status or take for granted that we have already completely assimilated to Brazilian mainstream culture, it is time for us to take responsibility in challenging racism. This chapter allows us to do so by exploring the following topics: my definitions of terms related to racism; a comparison between U.S. Whiteness and Brazilian Whiteness; a comparison between Japanese Japanese-ness and Brazilian Japanese-ness.

1.1. Definitions of racism, systemic oppression, proto-racism or racialism, Whiteness, and Japanese-ness

I define racism as: a systemic oppression based on the myth that a particular race, ethnicity, culture, or nationality is inherently superior to another because of a historical hierarchy established due to unequal power relations and social injustice. Racism has material, affective, and symbolic consequences, causing the subaltern racial group to suffer from dehumanization in the following ways: a) discrimination: maltreatment in daily life, less access to basic needs (food, shelter, safety, etc.), and worse life opportunities (formal education, well-paid jobs, leisure, etc.); b) prejudice: affective and emotional harmful responses such as disgust and pity; c) stereotype: symbolically reducing a racial group to one type which positions it below the dominant group (Fiske).
Whiteness is a form of racism based on white supremacy, whereas Japanese-ness is a form of racism based on Japanese Whiteness, anti-Whiteness, self-Orientalism, Occidentalism, Japanese nationalism, and wajin racial supremacy. As racisms, both follow the same principles described above. In scholarship about Japanese imperialism and nationalism, the term “Japanese-ness” refers to Japanese identity and the “imagined community” (Anderson, B.) created by the empire during the Meiji Era to justify the colonization of Asian territories. However, I am using the term in a broader sense, as a form of racism based on Japanese supremacy – that is, a systemic oppression. In Japan, Japanese-ness works to oppress Okinawans, Ainu, burakumin, migrants from China, Korea, Brazil, Peru, and other minorities. In Brazil, Japanese-ness works with Whiteness as Japanese-Brazilians aspire to climb the social ladder at the expense of the brown majority.

Proto-racism or racialism (Robinson) comprises incredibly varied forms of oppression against certain communities before the invention of racism in the long nineteenth century in Western Europe. For Sylvia Wynter (“Unsettling” 270), all societies categorize and judge others, oppress each other based on those categorizations and judgements, and then justify their acts by projecting responsibility onto an extra-human entity: a god, nature, the universe, the market, genes, etc. Although this is true in most societies, pre-modern forms of racism lacked at least one of the characteristics of

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18 Some Brazilian scholars (e.g. Paterniani) differentiate between branquitude and branquidade, but I choose to use them interchangeably as synonyms for Whiteness.
racism, for instance, the assumptions of biological or cultural determinism, inheritable inferior essence, dehumanization, and systematic oppression. Moreover, most communities around the world did not develop an overt accumulation of power in the hands of a small elite, and therefore did not develop empires, systemic oppressions, or hierarchical institutionalized classification. Despite those communities’ skillfulness in the arts, medicine, technology, architecture, and other areas, they were usually less developed in military power, and therefore were conquered by empires.

Modern natural and social sciences emerged at the same time as racism and were essential for its invention by the white male intelligentsia: Linnaeus, le Comte de Buffon, Immanuel Kant, Petrus Camper, Darwin, Spencer, etc. (da Silva, D. F.) It is no coincidence that the concepts of world religions (Masuzawa), the nation-state (Anderson, B.; Gellner; Hobsbawm) were created during the same period. “Religion” was defined in contrast to the secular and secularism (Asad), superstition, magic, and mythology (Josephson-Storm). Concomitantly, the development of anthropology in academia allowed for the current understanding of “culture”, while the development of philology allowed for the current understanding of “language” in contrast to dialect and accent. In this sense, racism requires modern science to justify nature and nurture determinism through the myth of rationality (da Silva, D. F.).

Modern science created a de-godded or secularized version of Man, classifying it as the only fully human being (Ahmed, Willful; da Silva, D. F., Toward; Wynter, “Unsettling”). Proto-racism or racialism lacked the current concept of human, and it often
also lacked the idea that certain people were non-people or sub-people closer to animals (Robinson). In fact, many indigenous societies did not clearly differentiate people from animals, neither did they consider people superior to animals before the European imposition of the human-non-human binary – which still holds true among Amazonian natives (Descola; Wawzyniak). For instance, a man in Africa before European colonization and enslavement could encounter communities different from his own and use typing to compare himself to them without necessarily resorting to stereotyping to establish a hierarchy, generalize, or essentialize (Hall, S. 257): “although Equiano is disturbed by these strangers and their practices, they are still, to him, people.” (Carby 631) In other words, it is possible to notice differences without dehumanizing.

Proto-racism or racialism also sometimes lacks systemic oppression. Without the written Law, there is no legal racism; without the nation-state, there is no governmental racism; without capitalism, there is no corporate racism; without imposed universal formal education, there is no academic racism; without the institutionalization of religion (e.g., the church), there is no religious racism; etc. Pre-modern systemic oppressions occur in empires such as the Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Kongo, Vijayanagara, Chinese, and Mayan empires. Every empire involves a small elite dominating a majority through colonization, war, genocide, pillage, or other forms of exploitation. Notwithstanding, even when there are structures of oppression in a pre-modern society, racism is still absent due to the missing pieces explained above.
What is constructive about my definition of racism is a challenge to the following notions: proto-racism or racialism and racism are the same, i.e., racism has always existed everywhere and at any time; racism is human, i.e., all humans have the natural tendency to develop it; racism and Whiteness are rhetorical strategies or ideologies. Instead, I argue with scholars like Wynter that: racism was invented with modernity; most humans have suffered from proto-racism and racism in history, in the hands of comparably outnumbered elites; racism contains aspects of rhetoric and ideology, but there are also other elements involved, such as the body, affect, politics, and economy. They are all interrelated, but cannot be subsumed to rhetoric and ideology.

Rotem Kowner argues that the term “proto-racism” dismisses the long, processual development of racism (in contrast to the mistaken presumption that racism appeared suddenly out of nowhere), as well as the extremely oppressive practices based on xenophobia and ethnic bias present in East Asia before contact with Europeans: “Scholars have tended to dismiss these racial ‘rudiments’, so to speak, as mere elements of ‘proto-racial’ thinking.” (From White to Yellow 8) On the one hand, I agree that the dismissal of proto-racism as “not so bad” in comparison to modern racism might occur among some academics. On the other hand, critical scholars focusing on race are very aware of the processual development of racism, and many have traced those histories from various perspectives, from far back in time. Furthermore, the fact that critical scholars are more preoccupied with the recent history of racism does not mean that they are disregarding
pre-modern pain, but rather that they are prioritizing the current form of systemic oppression which we must fight nowadays.

In the same vein, Masuzawa’s argument that religion as a scientifically defined category emerged with modernity (*The Invention*) neither dismisses pre-modern spiritualities or beliefs in the supernatural, nor proto-religious-racism. The creation of academic and legal classifications for race and religion was a result of extensive, often conscious, efforts by European elites to justify colonization and slavery; nevertheless, this creation was processual, hence the historical investigations conducted by Asad, Masuzawa, Rana, and other authors concerned with the racialization of religion.

In sum, Whiteness and Japanese-ness are modes of racism, and therefore they are systemic oppressions instituted in modernity. So, what are the differences between them?

Japanese cultures, ethnic divisions, political systems, trading practices, religiosity, and scholarship were influential in the development of Whiteness. For instance, Europeans considered the Japanese to be white for centuries, because this Asian society had characteristics that Europe valued: pale skin, written language, bodily and emotional discipline, sumptuous architecture, imperialistic tendencies, etc. Of course, Western elites were judging Japanese elites to be civilized, while the vast populace of peasants whom they subjugated were deemed the instruments of civilization, not actors in it. Later, when the West was trying to argue for Occidental superiority, it had to demote the Japanese from white to yellow (*Kowner, From White to Yellow*), thus establishing that no matter how brilliant a civilization was, its people were inherently inferior. In this logic, Japanese
skin was not pale enough, *kanji* was not as evolved as roman syllabary, their discipline was irrational, etc. In other words, the West used Japan to confirm the fixed debased nature of all non-whites.

Although Japan was influential in the construction of Western superiority, once Whiteness matured, it had a much more widespread and profound impact on Japan and the world than the other way around. Since Europe colonized almost the entire planet, and the U.S. Empire has come to neo-colonize every strip of land in the last century, Whiteness reached everywhere. This does not mean that white people are considered the most superior race everywhere, but rather that globalization allows for Whiteness to reach people in every country through the Internet, pop culture, the news, formal education, nation-state conventions, and other media: “there can be few people left in the world who do not employ whiteness to define at least a part of what they are. [...] White identities have been deployed in the dissemination and maintenance of power across the globe.” (Bonnett 100)

Japanese-ness emerged through a mixture of Asian traditional structures and Whiteness. The result was a complex amalgam of Japanese Whiteness, anti-Whiteness, self-Orientalism, Occidentalism, Japanese nationalism, and *wajin* racial supremacy.

Proto-racism in Japan can be introduced with a brief overview of slavery, outcastes, physiognomy, and *bihaku* in the islands prior to the widespread of Whiteness.
1.2. Slavery in Japan

Japan had slaves before contact with the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. They were children and wives sold by their fathers or husbands, people who sold themselves, war prisoners, and slaves’ children. The first two cases usually happened in times of desperation when peasants needed urgent money to feed the rest of the family, but those times of desperation were very frequent due to widespread poverty.

What Europeans considered to be slavery could not be directly translated to the Japanese context: “Differing sharply from the contemporary slave-holding systems developed by Europeans in their colonies, slavery was actually one facet of a broad spectrum of labour bondage in Japan” (Kowner, *From White to Yellow* 146). In the spectrum, there were various terms to define slaves, whom were called *nubi* or *nuhi* 奴婢 (male servant, female servant), *genin* 下人 (lowly person), *shojū* 所従 (subjugated position), *yatsuko* 奴 (servant), and *fudai no mono* 譜代の者 (hereditary person) (Nelson, T. 472) rather than *dorei* 奴隷 (slave), which is the modern term used to designate enslaved Africans. The practice was called *jinshin baibai* 人身売買 (trading in people). Additionally, prostitutes – daughters and wives sold by impoverished households’ patriarchs, prostitutes’ daughters, and comfort women – were not considered slaves by the Japanese until the Meiji Era (Botsman).

The process of unification of Japan was mostly carried out by Oda Nobunaga 織田信長 (1534-1582), then Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1537-1598), and finally Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1543-1616). Despite this unification, Japan was neither
homogeneous nor a nation-state, and therefore the lines between self and other were different. Although many slaves were brought from elsewhere to Japan before the nineteenth century, “foreigner” and racial terms such as “black” did not have the same meanings as today. In other words, a person did not become a slave in Japan due to national citizenship or race.

Despite the legal prohibition of slavery and prostitution at certain points in Japanese history, and the *de jure* temporary nature of bondage in most cases, many servants and prostitutes ended up treated like commodities, and bonded for life through unpayable debts. Prostituted girls (many as young as seven years old) and women suffered the most, since they were not considered town citizens by law, but rather the property of town citizens, brothels, and private owners (Yokoyama).

Legally, slaves in Japan could get married (in some epochs, solely within their own caste or status group), own property, and buy their freedom. This is not to say that their lives were necessarily much better than the lot of societies who were enslaved, colonized, and racialized by Europeans; until the end of WW2, most people in Japan faced severe hunger and exploitation by local and global elites, yielding constant revolts throughout the islands’ history. Therefore, slavery in Japan was traditionally based on xenophobia, social inequity, a status system, and a caste system, but not on national citizenship or race.

Portuguese merchants entered and influenced the slave trade in Japan in the 16th and 17th centuries. They “reshaped traditional forms of servitude and slavery and
increased considerably the number of indigenous slaves, as they had done earlier in Africa […] Slavery was common in Japan since ancient times, but during the 16th century, it was particularly booming.” (Kowner, “A Failure” 14-15) After their expulsion along with Jesuit missionaries, Dutch retailers and their trade corporations won the competition for trade in general and the slave market in Japan against Portugal, Spain, England, and France.

European merchants shared the seas with Chinese traders during the wakō (piracy) phenomenon, when Japan hosted people from lands now known as Korea, China, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, etc. (Yasunori). Many of them were Muslim, such as South Asian and African servants brought to Japan by European slave owners (Morris, J. H.). Therefore, the country enjoyed an extensive variety of bodies, ethnicities, cultures, and religions before the myth of a homogenous Japan was created.

1.3. Caste system in Japan

Outcastes now called burakumin (peoples from a village or ghetto) have been called numerous pejorative names with various meanings in Japanese history: eta (much impurity), hinin (non-person), kawaranin (person by a dry river bed, because outcastes were often forced to reside in this kind of place), inu-jinin (person-dog who serve gods, because outcastes often worked for temples and shrines, cleaning the buildings and performing purification rituals that others did not want to perform), sōsō-hōshi (funeral prosecutor), tsurumeso (person who trades
bowstrings, because bowstrings were made of leather, which required killing animals) or 弦売僧 (monk who sells bowstrings), *kiyome* 浄め (person who cleans), *kuma-hōshi* 熊奉仕 (service bear), *kōya* 紺屋 (dyer), *amabe* 余戸 (door), *saka-no mono* 坂の者 (person of the slope), among others (Nagahara).

Before the introduction of Buddhism from China, Shinto already professed the danger of defilement through contact with human death. For example, the moribund were abandoned outside the house, while lepers and other sick people were cast out and confined in facilities called *hidén-in* 悲田院 (originally created to house orphans, the homeless, and other people who needed help). Subsequently, the addition of Buddhist pollution taboos expanded this fear to animals’ death, and henceforth hunting and the encounter with dead animals became polluting as well.

Discrimination against outcastes began to spread and became institutionalized around the tenth century (Nagahara). Some scholars believe *senmin* became *buraku* (Alldritt), while others believe the *senmin* were a different caste (Nagahara). In the 7th century, the Ritsuryō 法令 legal system classified the Japanese population as either *ryōmin* 良民 (good people) or *senmin* 賤民 (low people). The *senmin* was sub-divided into *goshiki no sen* 五色の賤 (lowly persons of five colors): 19 *ryōko* 陵戸 (dedicated to the imperial family or guards of imperial tombs), *kanko* 官戸 (dedicated to public

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19 The character for *iro* 色 (color) did not refer to race before the European introduction of the concept of race in the nineteenth century. At that time, color meant “type”, “caste”, or “status group”.

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ministries), *kenin* 家人 (servants of high-ranking families), *kunuh* 公奴婢 (public slaves of the court), and *shinuh* 私奴婢 (private slaves of families) (Ohnuki-Tierney; Viskočnik).

The caste *burakumin* was formed mainly due to two reasons: first, the traditional fear of defilement coming from contact with death, which stigmatized professions such as funeral prosecutors, executioners, butchers, leather makers, those who used ox and horses for transportation and were thus responsible for disposing dead animals’ bodies, etc.; second, the nobility’s desire to exploit and monopolize outcasts’ labor, especially their military contributions during the incessant wars between numerous lords, as soldiers and producers of weapons and armory made with leather. Nevertheless, the long shunning and exploitation of *burakumin* led to treatment akin to ethnic oppression: less access to health, education, careers, marriage chances, etc. (Alldritt; Htun; Sorte Jr.; Viskočnik).

1.4. Physical determinism and beauty: physiognomy and bihaku

My mother has always told me about *sanpaku*: “eyes that show the white below the iris; this expression is thought to be typical of an unhealthy mental and physical condition” (Evans 150). She would say that people whose bottom of the iris does not touch the lower eyelid are destined to die horribly. Some Brazilians in contact with *nikkeijin* have also adopted this belief, for instance, there is a 1991 movie called *A Maldição do Sanpaku* (The Sanpaku Curse). My family’s belief in *sanpaku* is one aspect of the old native East Asian reliance on physiognomic determinism, later turned into
biologic, genetic, and social determinism through the influence of European racist science.

It is more likely for a person with big eyes, rather than slanted eyes, to be sanpaku. For instance, John F. Kennedy and Princess Diana are often cited as typical sanpaku. Therefore, the curse can be a way for modern Japanese to affirm that despite white people’s economic and political power across the globe, they have spiritual imbalances engendering sickness and tragic death. In contrast, Japanese physiognomy point to their healthier soul and auspicious fate. This belief, which persists not only in Japan, is another important thread to Japanese proto-racism.

One example of what could be loosely called “Japanese phrenology” is in the book Shinsō zenpen seigi 神相全編正義 (Kornicki 494-495), a Japanese translation of the Chinese book on physiognomy Shenxiang quanbian (Complete Guide to Spirit Physiognomy), which is popular even today (Barnes et al. 375). Physiognomy resembles other racist systems of thought:

Bearing broad and superficial similarities to Nazi eugenics philosophies and physiognomy, Chinese physiognomy [xiang shu 相術 or mian xiang 面相, face reading] is little understood and even less studied in the West, possibly due to negative associations with racist appropriations of Western philosophies of physiognomy during WWII, which were employed by German and Japanese armies. Nevertheless, the principles of the first comprehensive handbook on physiognomy written in China, the Sheniang Quanbian (Complete Guide to Spirit Physiognomy), written by Yuan Zhongche during the early Ming dynasty (1367-1458) have been widely adapted and applied by Chinese health practitioners and “body divination” or “somatomancy” body analysis experts in the Sinophone world, as well in as other East Asian countries, including Japan and Korea. (Zuo 95)
As early as in the twelfth century, the Chinese were already painting demons with dark skin color, ape-like appearance, muscular bodies with scant clothing made of animal skin, feathered hats, and other symbols associated with barbaric peoples: slaves, peasants, lower-class workers, foreigners (from Mongolia, southern parts of Indo-China, Polynesian islands, East Africa, etc.), and ethnic minorities (Khitan nomads and other non-Han Chinese). Many Chinese paintings depicting demons in a proto-racist manner were exported to Japan, hence influencing Japanese ideas of the monstrous and proto-racism (Tsai).

For Sūkyō Mahikari, people’s physical appearance show their personality, destiny, and spiritual development in life and at the time of death. For instance, the Basic Course textbook and Mahikari Responde magazine explain that the more a person receives okiyome, the more their health improves, thus engendering a healthy demeanor: glowing eyes and skin, smile, disappearance of wrinkles, etc. These sources also ask kumite to pay attention to moribund and dead people’s faces: the spiritually illuminated are warm, smiley, calm, and young-looking even after death. Like Chinese

Okiyome お浄め (cleansing) is the practice in Sūkyō Mahikari of emanating God’s light from the palm of our hand to purify the soul. The word was used in the fourteenth century to refer to people of the lowest-ranking caste, later named burakumin, who worked with “funerals, the disposition of dead horses and oxen, the daily sweeping of the temple grounds, etc.” (Nagahara 393)
physiognomy studies (Barnes et al.), Sūkyō Mahikari believes in the relation between soul and body, fire and water, looks, personality, and destiny.

Although Japanese beauty ideals have been influenced by European ideologies since the seventeenth century, the over-valuing of white skin in Japan is not a clean-cut consequence of Whiteness. In fact, bihaku (white beauty) has existed in Japan for millennia, and is connected to the class privilege of not having to work in the fields, and being able to afford whitening cosmetics (Fowler and Carlson; Kyo; Miller, L.; Morris, P. K.; Zuo). In this context, Japanese elites painted their faces in white since the Middle Ages, defined themselves as the real whites in contrast to the red-faced Dutch in the eighteenth century, and then added a Caucasian female ideal to bihaku: long legs, big eyes with double eyelids, and big breasts. Today, many Japanese still regard themselves as the real white people, considering blue-eyed blondes’ skin to be of an ugly tone of grey, red, or transparent rather than milky white like their own (Bonnett 98-99).

Japanese have traditionally valorized white skin – either natural or, as in the case of oshiroi, cosmetically whitened, a tradition that arose during the Nara period (710-784) in imitation of China’s aristocracy. Conversely, during their initial encounters with the west in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Japanese did not view caucasian skin as whiter than their own; in fact, they frequently regarded it as darker. It was during the nineteenth century that negative perceptions of caucasian whiteness began to change. Contemporary attitudes toward it remain ambivalent, with Japanese describing it as translucent, blotchy and freckly, and texturally coarse. […] It was not until the Meiji period that they began referring to themselves racially as ōshoku jinshu (the yellow race), a term translated from German anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s five-fold racial typology. (Russell, “Replicating” 30)
As the quotation above shows, the import of the German division of humanity between five races, wherein the Japanese are deemed yellow, was not enough to unambiguously place Europeans on top of the world’s racial hierarchy in Japan. In a context of Japanese-ness, Sūkyō Mahikari places the wajin on top, then other yellow people and whites. Thus, the common conclusion among U.S. opinion-makers that Japanese people just want to be white like them is simplistic and Eurocentric. Rather, contemporary bihaku is a consequence of the complicity between Whiteness and Japanese-ness, promoted by the cosmetics, fashion, pop culture, and other industries.

This chapter has focused on precursors to Japanese-ness before the Meiji Era, when there were already discriminated caste and ethnic minorities, a beauty ideal predicated on white skin, and certain physiognomic and geographic determinism. The next sub-chapter will analyze how contact with European racist science and politics turned Japanese proto-racism into jinshu sabetsu (racism).

1.5. The Meiji Era: State Shinto and jinshu sabetsu

We may recall how precursors to racism in Japan—slavery, the caste system, physiognomy, and bihaku—underscore how we cannot rely on US-centered definitions of racism, whiteness, and race alone. None of the precursors reviewed correspond exactly to European experiences with similar forms of servitude, social stratification, essentialism, and determinism. They were mixed with Whiteness in the nineteenth century to form Japanese racism. Therefore, I concur with Myslinka (1): “Definitions of ‘the other’ and
‘white privilege’ need to move away from monolithic notions of race and power, which are white-centric and racist themselves.” This sub-section considers how whiteness and race in Japan developed within and after the 1800s, setting up the study of Sūkyō Mahikari.

In 1853, Commodore Matthew C. Perry from the United States forced Japan through gunboat diplomacy to open its ports to the West after 220 years of attempted isolationism through sakoku 鎖国 (closed country) policies. This push yielded the Japanese modern quest to adopt European science and institutions, while attempting to build a Japanese identity that embraced and at the same time rejected the West. In the Meiji Era, Japan was trying to prove Europe that it was civilized and deserved respect, and they found out that the only way to be considered worthy in the eyes of the West was to become Westernized, which also meant to become an empire, i.e., to colonize instead of being colonized.

The Maria Luz incident was an important marker of this change (Botsman). In 1872, the Peruvian ship María Luz was carrying 231 coolies from Macao (Portuguese colony in China) to Callao (main seaport of Peru) and weighed anchor in Yokohama. Suddenly, a man called Mo Hing 木慶 jumped from the ship trying to escape, but was captured again and returned to Captain Ricardo Herrera. When one more coolie tried to flee, a diplomatic dispute ensued.

Japanese and European authorities heard both parties in court, confirming the kidnapping and cruel treatment of the enslaved. However, British lawyer Frederick
Dickins, whom the captain had hired, argued that Japan could not condemn Peruvian slavery when they had slaves too, especially prostitutes. In response, Japanese authorities said that the way a sovereign state treats their people is its own business, and the export of slaves was the problem. In the end, all but one were escorted back to China, and the *María Luz* crew left, with Ricardo Herrera taking back a coolie girl no older than 13, because the authorities had concluded that she had been well treated and needed a protector.

The accusation that Japan had slaves was embarrassing, rushing the empire to establish policies against slavery and forced prostitution. After European states began to condemn slavery and forced prostitution to expand their consumer market, they pressured other countries to do the same using moralistic arguments. Europeans had introduced human trafficking in some societies (e.g., Native Brazilian lands) and globally systematized it in others (e.g., Japan), but once they decided to move on, all other countries were pressured to abandoned what they had just learned.  

Japan was trying to challenge the European view of them as backwards, thus being obliged to surrender to the following assumptions: history is a linear timeline; the

21 The same can be said of extensive environmental destruction, the abuse of hallucinogenic drugs, unhealthy industrialized food, institutionalized religion, etc.: now, the white middle class wants to be environmentally friendly, criticize drugs, eat organic food, and become spiritual or atheist, whilst they blame Brazilians for burning rainforests, stereotype Native Americans and African Americans as alcoholics and drug addicts, are disgusted by the fat poor, and feel sorry and contempt for the naïve lower class formed by Christian fanatics.
white man is always ahead in the evolutionary timeline; every single society must go through the exact same phases that Europeans did to get to perfection; Europe went through uniform and clear-cut phases; whatever the West is doing is the most advanced practice in the world. Hence Japanese Whiteness developed, i.e. an admiration for and emulation of Whiteness (Ashikari; Debnár; Russell, “Replicating”). In the past, the Japanese intelligentsia had been more preoccupied with mimicking the Chinese empire, while trying to differentiate Yamato or Edo or wajin culture from Chinese culture. From the nineteenth century, the Japanese inferiority complex in relation to China was transferred to the West (Bonnett 93).

To create Japanese nationalism and wajin supremacy, Japan had to rely on self-Orientalism by building the myth of a homogeneous nation-state. Racist science was an important tool in this epistemological process, through which the modern conceptualizations of hito 人 (person) or jinrui 人類 (human), dōbutsu 動物 (animal), and shizen 自然 (nature) were created (Miller, I. J.). The empire invited scholars from Germany, the United States, France, and other hegemonic countries to teach and research in Japanese universities, while also sending Japanese students and professors abroad. Henceforth, the white overrepresented Man created through the lens of Christianity and then de-godded science (Wynter, “Unsettling”) was adapted in Japan to become a wajin Man who combined the best of both worlds: Western modernity and wajin racial superiority.
Medicine, biology, anthropology, and other disciplines domesticated evolutionary theories, eugenics, phrenology, and other racist fields (Otsubo) by mixing them with local sciences, ideologies, cultures, and religions. For instance, Buddhist rules of reincarnation already relied on a classification of souls from the most righteous to the most sinful, and from the most complex (humans) to the most basic (plants). In Buddhism, souls were placed in different heavens according to their level of righteousness, and reincarnate in higher or lesser bodies according to their level of complexity, need to learn specific lessons, and virtue. Another example is the Confucian call for humans to exploit nature, albeit in a harmonious manner, thus assuming that humans are entities separate from nature. In fixing hito or jinrui on top of a racial hierarchy and separating us taxonomically from non-human animals and nature (Miller, I. J.), Japanese scientists built the modern foundations for Japanese-ness.

Nevertheless, Japanese racist science was already leaning towards cultural determinism before WW1: “unlike those in the British Raj or other Euro-American empires, the mechanisms of assimilating Koreans relied more heavily on the less visible, somatic criteria of race (cultural sensibilities) than they did on the more dependable differences of scientific biology.” (Henry 14) Therefore, colonized Koreans were pressured to assimilate to wajin elite culture rather than be racially segregated.

In WW1, Japan was on the side of England against Germany, even though some politicians in Winston Churchill’s government feared a Japanese naval attack (Maurer). Acting almost independently from the empire, the Imperial Japanese Navy assumed
control over the former German colonies in the area: Shandong province in China and the Pacific islands Mariana, Caroline, Marshall, and Palau (Park, S.-H. 68). In the Treaty of Versailles, Japan requested a clause for racial equality to be treated equally among the Allied Powers, albeit maintaining its belief in racial superiority over yellow, brown, and black others (Coicaud 237). Western powers rejected the clause, but recognized Japan as a great world power.

Since the Russo-Japanese War but especially during WW2, Japanese nationalist, militarist, and racial supremacist ideology justified horrendous war crimes (Yamazaki) against people from Korea, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, the U.S., and other countries: massacres, rape, looting, arson, destruction, and dishonorable disposal of corpses (Xiaokui); execution (Francis); forced labor (Kang and Bang); biological warfare, chemical weapons, and human experimentation (Cathecart); maltreatment of prisoners of war and civilian internees, torture (Yap); death march (Murphy); murder and cannibalism (Aszkielowicz); and comfort women (Muta; Ueno; Yamaguchi). 22 Most Asian victims were being colonized, whereas most white victims were prisoners of war.

In WW2, the Japanese empire strongly identified with Nazism and Italian fascism (Jacoby 455; Otsubo 210). Nonetheless, Hitler’s dichotomy of Aryans versus non-Aryans created tensions between the two empires: Japanese politicians and higher-class German-Japanese pressured and threatened Germany to recognize the Japanese and German-

22 Similar crimes were committed before Japanese modernity, but they only began to be justified by nationalism and wajin supremacy in the Meiji Era.
Japanese as “honorary whites”. Fearing Japanese military retaliation and the dismantling of the Japan-German alliance, Hitler and other Nazi representatives had to make constant amends to their racial definitions. For instance, they issued apologies for German citizens’ discrimination against Japanese citizens – blaming it on Japanese oversensitivity – and for German articles about the “yellow peril” referring to the Japanese. They also clarified that Germany was solely against Jews and racial mixing with inferior races, so if Japan remained non-Jewish, racially pure, or mixed solely with Aryans, the Führer’s followers would continue to respect their military power, racial homogeneity, and ancestor worship practices (Krebs).

The U.S. would not have prospered without occupying Japan and taking control of the Japanese empire’s former colonies under the guise of official decolonization and recognition of new nation-states in Asia and the Pacific Islands:

from World War II to the onset of the Cold War [...] the vast areas of Asia and the Pacific Islands that were formerly colonized or occupied by the Japanese Empire were reorganized and then mobilized in an attempt to secure the United States’ geopolitical ascendency, even as the region witnessed the waning of formal European colonial rule. (Yoneyama 472)

Therefore, Japanese Whiteness also refers to the Japan-US alliance, which never allowed for Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, and other nations to achieve liberation.

Nowadays, Japanese-ness (Japanese Whiteness, anti-Whiteness, self-Orientalism, Occidentalism, Japanese nationalism, and wajin racial supremacy) in Japan works in the macro, meso, and micro levels, but it is complex: “Although admired and arguably
privileged over other outsiders, Caucasians are nevertheless mocked and discriminated against – openly, frequently, and with impunity.” (Myslinska 1). Structurally, all modern institutions are founded on European standards: the government, corporations, formal education, the nuclear family, etc. At the same time, there is discrimination against white immigrants in real estate (some landlords refuse to rent to foreigners), at work (e.g., white employees are assumed to be unintelligent, incompetent, unable to speak Japanese well), on the streets (e.g., police racial profiling, covering the nose due to the assumption that whites smell bad, scolding their impoliteness), in sexual objectification (e.g., Eastern European women are hired as exotic prostitutes), etc.

Culturally, the white body and the English language are fetishized as symbols of power, modernity, beauty, and *kakkoii*-ness (“coolness”). At the same time, there is prejudice: fear (many Japanese openly say that white men are *kowai*, scary, due to their tall, muscular, hairy bodies), hilarity (in parties, festivals, and pop culture, Japanese commonly wear fake blue eyes, blond wigs, chest hair, and white masks, which are sold in stores like *Don Quixote* ドンキホーテ, and mockingly imitate whites), anger (white individuals are blamed for the Westernization of Japan), etc.

Symbolically, several stereotyped images of white people circulate in the media. They can be a powerful white man, a scantily clad white woman with aggressive sexuality, an angelic white body, a clown who cannot adapt to Japanese culture, etc. In general, the Japanese public does not recognize these discourses as racist, since *jinshu* (race) is seldom acknowledged except when referring to a U.S. white-black conflict
White immigrants in Japan who are subject to Japanese-ness are often descendants of those who had not been considered fully white until the twentieth century: Eastern European and Russian women who become sex workers, mail order brides, or entertainers of Japanese salarymen; U.S. migrants of Scottish, Irish, Slav, and other ethnicities previously called “white n*”; European Jews, gypsies, and other not-quite-white ethnicities; etc. (Debnár)

Despite Japanese Whiteness, anti-Whiteness, and Occidentalism, white people are treated significantly better than non-white non-\textit{wajin} people: “in internalizing fictions about the White Other, Japanese have simultaneously incorporated ancillary fictions about themselves as they distance themselves from Black, Brown and Yellow Others.” (Russell, “Replicating” 43) When Japanese academic and state rulers adopted racist science from Europe and the United States, they de-racialized themselves, racialized Ainu, Okinawans, and \textit{burakumin}, and alternated between placing themselves and the white man at the top of the racial hierarchy. Concomitantly, they retained Koreans and Chinese as yellow, South Asians, Pacific Islanders, Middle Easterners, and Latin Americans as brown, and Africans or African descendants as black.\footnote{Native Americans, Australian aborigines, and other peoples are mostly ignored in daily rhetoric.}

For instance, during modern wars, Japan pointed to the \textit{wajin} burden to save yellow and brown Asian women from Russian men (Bejarano 172-4) and from yellow and brown Asian men (Park, J.-K.) – a strategy similar to the white man’s burden.
(Spivak) and the white woman’s burden (Abu-Lughod; Shome, Diana) to save women, children, the elderly, and injured men from racialized villains. Another related attitude today is Japanese conservatives’ argument that Japan saves Asia from white racists (Schreiber and Wetherall 198).

In sum, “the privilege of the dominant native ethnic group in Japan (Yamato, also called wajin, the ‘Wa people’) [is] akin to the position of whites in the United States.” (Myslinska 9) Not because white people in Japan are treated as badly as people of color – they are not – but because Japanese-ness places the wajin man at the top of a racial hierarchy like Whiteness places the white man in that position. Structurally, culturally, and symbolically, wajin men in Japan are at an advantage and ideologically said to have the moral right to dominate other residents.

The state’s intention to politically conquer the world was crushed with defeat in WW2, but the government is investing tax money on the Cool Japan campaign, Japanese corporations are strongly competing in Asian markets, and Japanese supremacist groups are calling for the murder of Koreans on the streets. Furthermore, wajin supremacy can be verified in Brazil with Shindō Renmei (da Silva, C. L. B.; Kajimoto; Maeyama; Rinaldi), Sūkyō Mahikari, and even the way I grew up hearing from my family and nikkei friends’ families that we were superior to Brazilians, Koreans, Chinese, and Okinawans.

This chapter delved into the historical development of jinshu sabetsu (racism) in “the only nonwhite colonial power in the modern world, Japan” (Henry 12). The next chapter explains the context in which Sūkyō Mahikari is practiced in Belém.
Chapter Two: Representation analysis of *Goseigen*, the holy book

2.1. *Introduction to Goseigen*

On February 27, 1959 at 5am, the exact same day and time he was born, Yoshikazu Okada received a revelation from God while suffering from a high fever (*Goseigen* 3). When Okada woke up in his 58th birthday, both the Creator and himself had new names: God revealed His real name to be Mioya Motosu Mahikari Oomikami-sama (Original Parent, Lord, God of True Light 御親元主真光御み神) or Su-no-Kami (Su God) for short, and Yoshikazu’s name to be Kôtama (jewel of light 光玉) (McVeigh, *Spirits, Selves* 15-16). Okada also called himself Seigyoku (saint jewel 聖玉), Seiō (saint old man 聖翁 or saint phoenix 聖凰), Nakamichi or Chôdô (way of the relationship 仲道), Mahikariro (the musical note of the true light 真光呂), Ryôdô (way of the dragon 龍道), Oshienushisama (honorable teacher 敎え主様), and Sukuinushisama (honorable savior 救い主様). In *Goseigen*, Okada is also referred to as the true Messiah (*meshia*), whereas Moses, Jesus, Prophet Mohammed, Gautama Buddha, Confucius, and other important religious figures are explained to be *ohobotoke*: “great men, saints, heroes, wise men” (69) – not messiahs.

24 The Portuguese and English versions follow the same page numbering as the original Japanese *Goseigen*. 

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The practice of assigning numerous names with numerous meanings is part of Shinto and Buddhism, by which Okada was inspired. For instance, when a person dies, a religious leader must choose or help the bereaved family choose a new name for the deceased. A wooden tablet with the new name is placed on the altar, so that the spirit will let go of their earthly life, detach, and depart. Name changes occur when there is a corresponding life change related to a person’s role, and each of Okada’s names is presented as evidence of his God-given functions.

McKerrow explains that naming is powerful and new names create new meanings, so critical rhetoricians or rhetorical critics must investigate the situation in which a name is developed, and in the analytical process, we change that which or who was named. “Naming is the central symbolic act of a nominalist rhetoric.” (105) Butler makes a related observation when she writes about the power of naming: “After having received the proper name, one is subject to being named again. In this sense, the vulnerability to being named constitutes a constant condition of the speaking subject.” (Excitable Speech 30) Through the power of naming, not only does Okada have several functions as humanity’s savior, but he also accumulates them like honor titles or badges.

Yoshikazu Okada was born in Tokyo to a wealthy family. His father Inasaburo Okada was a major general in the Imperial Japanese Army and studied military mobilization strategy in Germany, where he began to appreciate German nationalist ideology (Greenwood, chapter 8). It is important to note that European Whiteness was a major catalyst to Meiji Restoration, when Japan as a nation-state (Iwabuchi; Sakai), “the
Japanese” as a superior race (Kawai), and Shinto as a religion (Fujitani; Isomae; Shimazono, “State Shinto”; Zhong) were invented to justify Japanese imperialism.

Moreover, German romanticism and Nazism had a strong influence in Japanese nationalism (Inaga; Winter). Finally, U.S. colonialism was a major catalyst of Japanese protectionism and desire to become recognized as a developed country:

The diplomatic relationship between Japan and the United States was unambiguously colonial, predicated on the fact of wartime victory and subsequent military occupation for one and defeat and subjugation for the other. However, let us remember that, since Japan’s independence in 1952, neither of these governments has ever openly characterized their relationship as colonial, despite the fact that even today, more than a half century later, the U.S. government on occasion explicitly ignores Japan’s sovereignty so as to remind its leadership of these power relations. The two countries are supposedly in equal partnership as two independent sovereign states, but the transnational reality that conditions their interaction far more resembles the unilateral domination of imperialism. In a similar way, there seems to be a peculiar sort of double structure in which the nationalisms of both the United States and Japan are accommodated within a unitary hegemony. (Sakai 172)

Okada studied with Prince Chichibu (Yasuhito) and others who came from prominent Japanese families (magazine, June 2005), graduated from the Japanese Army Officer Training School in 1922 and was commissioned a lieutenant in the Japanese Imperial Guard. After serving in military campaigns in China and Indochina, Okada retired from the army in 1941 due to a back injury with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (McVeigh, Spirits, Selves 15).

After several subsequent revelations, Okada wrote Goseigen (Holy Words 御聖言), which contains Su God’s revelations. Goseigen is narrated in first person, supposedly
by God Himself and in God’s exact words, through Okada’s hand. God-as-narrator alternates between addressing Okada, humanity, and *kumite*. Okada introduced some passages in parentheses or chapter introductions to clarify God’s words or explain the process of writing and publishing certain divine revelations.

The writing of *Goseigen* is based on *kotodama*, the principle that Japanese is the original holy language of humanity, and therefore each *kanji* (ideogram) has a specific meaning. For this reason, Okada could not have solely *heard* God’s voice but rather *seen* which *kanji* he was supposed to write.

Although Su God is supposed to be the same from Abrahamic religions, there are some particularities and contradictions that reveal ideas of God at odds with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The most important one is the fact that God created numerous gods, whose spiritual elevation ranges from the highest level of the 48 gods (*yotoya-gami*) to the intermediary level of *ohobotoke* (e.g., Jesus), to the lowest level of evil gods. One of the most elevated gods is Izunome Ookunitama Ookuninushi-no Ookami-sama, whose statue lies in the altar of Mahikari temples and to whom we must pray alongside Su God. He is a chubby, smiling figure carrying a bag of rice and a hammer to symbolize abundance and happiness.

These contradictions do not point to Okada’s inability to conform to Abrahamic principles, but rather to his argument that Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, and other central figures did not have celestial permission to reveal the whole truth about the Creator’s nature and plans. For the first time in the history of humanity, He told the entire truth – to
Okada – and allowed almost everything to be revealed. However, *Goseigen* still has ellipses (…) in passages God commanded to be kept secret.

There are certain similarities between Okada’s understanding of geography, and that of European Christianity. In Medieval Europe, especially Scholasticism, earth’s geography was considered non-homogeneous: there was a habitable area (temperate weather; supernaturally held above water due to God’s Providential Grace) and an uninhabitable area (too hot weather, like in Africa; naturally left underwater, like the Americas). In the Renaissance, earth began to be deemed homogeneous: European imperialist voyages (Portuguese Great Navigations and Christopher Columbus) proved that both Africa and the Americas were populated, and therefore habitable (Wynter, “Unsettling” 275). In spite of this, Eurocentric discourses still present the Amazon, Africa, Arabian deserts, Asian jungles, etc. as uninhabitable.¹²⁵

In Sūkyō Mahikari, God’s light is stronger at the goshintai in Suza, Mount Fuji, and the Mahikari supreme leaders’ bodies. The general areas where the light is at its strongest are Takayama (where Suza is), then Honshū (island where Tokyo is located), then Japan, and finally East Asia. The bigger and closer a dōjō is to Suza, the stronger it is spiritually. Therefore, although the rest of the world is inhabitable, kumite who frequent Suza – defined in the organization’s official literature as Noah’s Arc – are more

²⁵ For instance, in nature documentaries (e.g., BBC television series), the narrator says things like, “untouched jungle”, “This soil has never been touched by men”, “This animal was named last year for the first time”, etc., thus ignoring indigenous peoples’ presence and knowledge of the land.
likely to be saved from floods, earthquakes, lava, and other natural disasters in the
apocalypse. Furthermore, Mahikari cosmology tells that Japan used to be at the center of
the legendary Mu continent; when it submerged, Japan remained above water. Therefore,
from Mahikari ideology, it is possible to notice that Japan is considered the epitome of
civilization, and thusly the true inhabitable landmass on earth.

God has been sending signs to spiritually cleanse and warn us about the upcoming
apocalypse: floods, earthquakes, abrupt climate change, diseases, accidents, etc. The hi-
no senrei (Baptism of Fire 火の洗礼 or 火の洗霊) was a spiritual “end of the world” that
occurred in 1962, marking the end of the Water Era and the beginning of the Fire Era.
Soon, the apocalypse will bring famine, pestilence, mass slaughter, natural disasters, and
other cataclysms that will transport evil humans to hell, where they will be punished for
centuries. Mahikari offers trainings with military discipline and drills for the kumite and
especially the Mahikari-tai to prepare for this period. After the apocalypse is over, Earth
will become heavenly and the righteous will live happily forever.

In Mahikari, happiness means health, prosperity, and harmony.

You should make others serve God so that He and men serve each other (tsukai
awasu 仕い合わせ). Happiness 幸せ (shiawase) shall come 仕合わせ
(shiawase). Kami (神 god) (+ of 仕) means “up” 上 (ue or kami). 一 (ichi,
meaning “one” and the horizontal) （ – of 仕) means all creatures under heaven, or
“down” 下 (shita). I made the ideogram 幸 to mean happiness in the upper and
lower levels. (263)
Material, mental, and spiritual health are maintained by following Mahikari practices, especially okiyome (purification). In Mahikari teachings and practices, diseases and disability are God’s way of punishing and therefore cleaning a person’s body and soul. This discourse reflects not only the traditions of Asian folk medicine that connected body illness to spiritual imbalance, but also contemporary ableism in Japan that stems as much from biased beliefs as from the Japanese conjuncture: a growing rate of elderly people (about one quarter of the population is over 65 years old), insufficient public health care, expensive private care, the capitalist over-valuing of the young vigorous body, the destruction of communal support and extended families, etc. (Sako and Falcus) In this situation, God’s punishment can be understood to fall on patients, family, caregivers, and the nation.

Prosperity means that one has enough to live comfortably and still have money to donate to the temple. Harmony means eternal peace, i.e., complete lack of conflict. In tandem with Japanese etiquette, one should smile and be gentle even when offended, and avoid debates at all costs. Unfortunately, the Japanese Empire and government have frequently abused this principle to prevent social unrest. I will elaborate more on these notions in the next sections.

2.2. Constituting hito in Goseigen

Goseigen constitutes hito (person 人) as the ideal subject who is ontologically determined by race, geographical location, language, religion, gender, and other factors.
In terms of race, *hito* resembles Charles Darwin’s construction of the human as the epitome of evolution, wherein the white man is the most evolved and everybody else strives to progress, but many people of color are destined to disappear due to their inferiority (da Silva, D. F., *Towards a Global* 110).

As many scholars of nationalism have explored, the nation is co-constitutive with language (Gellner), invented traditions (Hobsbawm), and imagined communities (Anderson, B.). Additionally, “the nation always comes about as a result of xenophobic distinctions” (Sakai 176), so nationalism and racism are co-constitutive. Notwithstanding, an alternative anti-racist nationalism as a movement for liberation is also possible (Fanon). By the same token, race, nation, and religion are co-constructed (Asad; Carter; Masuzawa). Because of the simultaneous invention of terms such as race that assign personhood to some groups and savagery to others, *hito* is a normative ideal.

In regular Japanese, *hito* 人 (singular) or *hitobito* 人々 (plural) is a synonym for *ningen* 人間. However, Goseigen reads those words differently.
Some critical scholars like Sarah Ahmed, Denise da Silva, and Sylvia Wynter criticize “the subject” as an intrinsically problematic concept. From the start, “the subject” implies a white man who is free to make choices and to utilize “the object” (women, people of color, the poor, the colonized, the enslaved, etc.) for his own benefit. Therefore, we should completely rethink the ways in which we think about ourselves in order to strive for liberation (Wanzer-Serrano), rather than solely try to re-imagine “the subject” as if it were a necessary concept for social justice. Differently from the white male subject, Mahikari’s hito is a wajin man. However, if we subvert this ideal to turn hito into someone akin to Anzaldúa’s new mestiza, for example, then hito can become a transformative, complete, and fully human being.
Charland’s *constitutive rhetoric* can be used to explain the process by which *Goseigen* creates *hito* through rhetoric. This rhetoric is both particularist and universalist, because it is based on the premise that the Japanese are the original and noble race, so all humanity must follow their lead and become more Japanese. The argument assumes that the Japanese are ontologically special, whereas the other races must epistemologically learn how to follow the axiological precepts of Mahikari. The remaining of this section will explore how *Goseigen* characterizes *hito* through a series of normative requirements.

In Mahikari cosmogony, God created the Japanese, who then diversified until there were Five Races:

God created the races of five different colors. They are yellow (*ki*), red (*aka*), white (*shiro*), blue/green (*ao*), and black-purple (*kuro*). There are two kinds in the yellow race (*kibito*): the head family *ōbito* and the branch family *kibito*. The land called *hinomoto* (origin of day/sun 日の本 or origin of fire 火の元), in which thou are living, is the Land of Spirit’s Origin (*hinomototsu-kuni*). It is the original place where God created spiritual forms (*hinagata*) and spiritual images (*higata*) of all with the art of *mu-u* (無有 from nothingness to existence). I placed *ōbito* (the king race 王人) here and dispatched and spread all five races throughout the world as branch races. It is the unique (不二 Fuji) place called *Sumera* where God placed the ones with the role to unite (*suberu*) as His deputies to govern this world. I named *yamato* those who are the original race of the five races because they are in the center of the vertical, established in the mountain. *Ya* means tall and noble, *ma* means the true center, *to* means to stop or stay (*tomaru*) in the country where *hito* retained their spirit 靈止. Because they were obedient in practicing God’s rules, they lived in a paradise full of love and harmony called Garden of Eden. There emerged *eda* (branches). *Ede* is a word from the Ancient Divine Era meaning Father (親 *oya*) (the origin of ancestors 祖元 *oyamoto*). For this reason, those people were called *yamato* ヤマト, which was written 大和 (*yamato*, great harmony). (457-458)
Okada subverted the predominant myth that in a linear timeline of evolution, “Europe is the absolute end of history, just as Asia is the beginning” (Hegel qtd. in Bernasconi 178). The Meiji Empire strongly relied on Japanese, European, and U.S. white intellectuals to build its own nationalism, racism, laws, and other modern concepts, and these concepts are fundamentally grounded on Hegel and other German philosophers. For this reason, some comparison between Hegel and Okada can elucidate this link. 26

Clear in the Mahikari division of races according to continent and appearance is a similarity with Western geographical and biological determinism: “For Hegel natural geographical differences corresponded to racial differences.” (Bond 189) To be fair, Hegel was anti-nationalist – against the unification of Germany as a nation-state with a homogenized culture, language, religion, etc. – and even advocated for equality between Protestants and Jews, despite criticizing Jewish culture for being isolationist (Avineri). Nonetheless, Hegel was defending people whom he considered relatively capable of evolving, those who were inside history but behind in its development, like Italian Catholics; Africans were excluded from this consideration because they lacked history, religion, state, law, rationality, and true humanhood (da Silva, D. F.).

26 A comparison between Hegel and Okada is fair not only because of the latter’s support for the Meiji Empire, which was inspired by German romanticism, but also because I believe his thought is philosophically elaborate. In my opinion, he could be classified as a philosopher alongside many religious thinkers from Japan, China, and India whom receive recognition nowadays in the academic canon. Okada cited some of them: Kūkai (774-835), Shinran (1173-1263), Nichiren (1222-1282), etc. He also cited contemporary professors, and was friends with some of them.
Mahikari cosmology states that God created *kotodama* (spiritual power of calligraphy) and gave it to *ōbito* (kingly race), but in the process of degeneration from *hito* to *ningen* (see analysis below), and division into Five Races and Five Religions, some cultures corrupted *kotodama*, while others completely forgot how to read and write until European colonization. So, Mahikari and Hegel have scriptocentrism in common, but Hegel believed that writing was impossible before Europeans developed it along with the state.

Mahikari places Africans, Native Americans, Arabs, and other primitive races inside history as inferior descendants of *ōbito*, in contrast to Hegel who placed them outside history. For Hegel, *res gestae* (history as human trajectory in real life) existed for thousands of years, but could not develop the Spirit until Europe developed *historia rerum gestarum* (history as written record). For Okada, the universe and *kotodama* were created together, and in fact, God used *kotodama* 言霊 (spiritual power of written words), *otodama* 音霊 (oral words), *kazudama* 数霊 (numbers), *irodama* 色霊 (colors), and *katadama* 方霊 (shapes) to make the universe. Therefore, in Mahikari the non-*wajin* are inferior not due to never having had writing, but due to having lost it; not due to being outside history, but due to having forgotten or denied Japanese ancient history. Okada

27 Scriptocentrism is a term developed by Raymond Williams and taken up by performance scholars like Dwight Conquergood and Soyini Madison, meaning the over-valuing of written language.
even suggested a conspiracy theory about powerful people who intentionally kept Japanese ancient history hidden from the public.

Okada thanked Europe (water, the material) for hurrying the development of technology in Japan (fire, the spiritual) and other countries, but affirmed that time has come for Japan to “take it from here” and “be great again” by combining science with spirituality like they were combined in the beginning of time, before moon gods wrongly prioritized the material. For Hegel, “history, like the sun, moves from East to West” (Bernasconi 178); for Okada, science and spirit began in Japan, moved to Europe, and is coming back to Japan (the land of the rising sun), where the whole world will reach heaven on earth through wajinization.

Hegel considered the white man to be on top and at the end of evolution, China and India close behind, and Africans the least likely to reach self-consciousness. Building on this widespread European logic, Japanese intellectuals, the Meiji Empire, and then Okada considered the wajin man to be on top and at the end of evolution, but was unclear on which race was second: kibito (yellow people from China and Korea) or shirobito (white people from Western Europe). 28

In regular Japanese, racist science reads the ideograms for Mahikari races differently: instead of kibito, akabito, shirobito, aobito, and kurobito, the reading is ōjin

28 Sükyō Mahikari publications lack further explanation about racial hierarchies among the other races (red, blue/green, black/purple). It is possible that this comes up in Intermediate and Advanced Courses, in which the revelation of exclusive information, and attendants’ questions (Q&A) occur.
or mongoroido モンゴロイド (Mongoloid) for all East Asians, akahito, hakujin, aohito, and kokujin. The power of naming allows for Okada to re-signify racial categories and give them an aura of spirituality, while omitting the history of racism associated with mainstream slurs.

*Yamato minzoku 大和民族 (race of great peace) or wajin 和人 (peaceful people)* are terms created to differentiate the predominant ethnicity of Japan from ainu, ryūkyū, Nivkh, Orok, and other peoples residing in, migrating to, or forcefully brought to Japan, as well as natives of Korea, Taiwan, and other countries the Japanese Empire was colonizing. Nowadays, *yamato* or *wajin* supremacy, along with Edo-centrism (Edo was Tokyo), are still prevalent and reflect *jinshu sabetsu* (racism) against racialized minorities (Arudou; Ho; Kawai; Park, S.; Tsutsui; Tsutsui and Shin; Yamamoto; Winchester).

Some Japanese politicians have publicly apologized for colonization, but compensation and a structured fight against *jinshu sabetsu* are yet to occur (Suzuki). Japanese colonial history is reflected in *Goseigen* rhetoric, which idealizes civilization 文明 (*bunmei*) (274) and laments the end of Japanese expansion: “By displeasing God’s Power, England and Japan had their lands taken away.” (170) This lament comes from Okada’s confidence that Japan was the original land, and the world will return to be Japan.

Mahikari cosmology says that in the beginning, there was Su God. He created the spiritual world and many gods, then the astral world, and lastly the physical world. This was the Ancient Divine Era (*kamiyo* or *kamunagara*). Then, He allowed some of the 48
gods to assume human form and descend to Earth as buddhas, also called saints, messengers, or prophets. Finally, He created humans.

At that time, all humanity was Japanese. They were created first and were the most spiritually developed group. Then, the yamato spread around the world and divided into the other families. The Five Races have had the same “essence” since the creation of humanity, so their change over time concerns moral decline and biological adaptation to various environments, but not a transition in their core being. After humanity spread around the globe, some Jews returned to Japan and became the burakumin caste.

Next, Su God allowed humans to develop through religion, science, medicine, technology, etc. Through material development, humans became “unexpectedly” (243) arrogant and forgot Su God, thus changing from hito to people who only care about material matters: ningen.

Ningen 人間 and hito 人 are similar but not identical. Ningen is a man who still has a distance 間 to walk down to become hito 人. […] God wishes to make hito. Few people can interpret the calligraphy of hito correctly. You shall realize its meaning and then become hito 霊止. You must go back to being God’s child. […] Stare at this ideogram until you assimilate its significance. (102)

Su God kept sending punishment (diseases, catastrophes, bad luck, etc.) to purify humans, and He sent buddhas to teach them, but still ningen wouldn’t learn. Finally, Su God told all holy secrets to Okada for him to teach humanity how to be saved. Goseigen warns us that an imminent apocalypse will save the tanebito (seed people). Thereafter,
the *tanebito* will become *erabito* (chosen) and one with Su God, thus creating Heaven on Earth, while the rest suffers in hell.

**Figure 6 - Transformation of humanity.**

| Godly people (*shinjin* 神人) |  
|———|  
| Half-God and half-human (*hanshin* 半神 and *hanjin* 半人) |  
| Ultra-man (*chōjin* 長人) |  
| God’s child with a divine soul (*hito* 人) |  
| Half-human and half-animal (*ningen* 人間) |  
| Seed people (*tanebito* 種人) |  
| God’s child with a divine soul (*hito* 人), the chosen people (*erabito* 選人) |  

The condemnation of *ningen* 人間 and appraisal for *hito* 人 may be a consequence of Western modern epistemologies: the transformation of religion from collective / social / public (culture, ethnicity) to internalized / individual / private (a person’s choice) (Asad, Formations); as well as the turn from **inclusive humanism** (mutual constitution, inter-dependence, fluidity) in which the “I” is “a network of relationships in constant change” and the *aida* 間 in *ningen* 人間 means “in-between-ness”, to **exclusive humanism** (individualism, essentialism) in which the “I” is “an isolated self-conscious ego” (Kim, H. Y. 295-296). Therefore, being human is no longer a constitutive relationship between people permeated by *ki* 気 (vital energy), but rather a relationship between each person and God (represented by *chon* 長 on top of *hito* 人 as seen in Fig. 5).

The seed people are *kumite* who are sincere followers. Not all *kumite* will be saved; only the ones who go back to being *hito* will. To become a *hito*, people must make
the choice of walking the True Spiritual Path (*seihō*) and thus become truly free. These choices consist of converting to Mahikari, diligently studying its precepts, and performing meritorious deeds for God: practicing *okiyome*, converting people, vacuuming the temple carpet, organizing events, etc.

In *Goseigen*, God first created the only supra-religion (*sūkyō* 崇教) of true light (*mahikari* 真光), which was True Science. Henceforth, He allowed humans to develop their own religions (*shūkyō* 宗教) and sciences in a period governed by moon gods that was planned to be temporary, i.e., a transition towards Heaven on Earth.

However, humans went too far: religious leaders began to make financial profit out of people’s naïveté, turn them into fanatics, and preach untruths. 29 Then, scientists created a false chasm between religion and science, and developed technologies and medicine that ignored the soul. Finally, God lost His patience and decided to destroy religions in the era of unification of the Five Religions, when religions will cease to exist and its source (Mahikari) will reemerge.

Without this [the true belief in God], the present condition of religions (*shūkyō*) is only ugly teachings (*shūkyō* 醜教) or group insanity (*shūkyō* 衆狂). Although they proudly talk about traditions, protection of teachings, newly established religions etc., how can they fulfill the Will of God as shown here after ending up as the ugly teachings and group insanity? They can be like that as long as they can deceive the world with deception of exaggerated propaganda, being conceited by regarding themselves as rational and scientific. However, as I told and promised thee before, the arrangement has been proceeded to the age of God’s unmasking the hazard of chemically produced medicine and agricultural

29 Ironically, Mahikari has been accused of the same problems.
chemicals of which men will become fearful. [...] All religions (shūkyō) cannot but go back to their origin which is the supra-religious teaching (sūkyō). [...] Thus religious belief was originally allowed as a convenient method before the coming of the true belief in God based on Tuning-in-with-God (kamimuki). Since it has been misled in an unexpected direction, I have sent ones with the role to destroy it. [...] Priests of Shinto, Christianity and Buddhism, abandon your masquerading costumes and man-made titles. Cut off your eyes and hands of obstinacy and delusion. [...] Thus, let them be united with the Divine Plan of Su-no-Kami and spiritually elevate to attain godhood. When this is done, they, for the first time, can meet the Divine Will; and their prayer can reach God. (239-244)

Goseigen uses a friend-enemy logic (Foust) to place Mahikari in “the righteous path” and all other religions in “the adverse way.” Academic scholars, scientists, medical doctors, priests, and followers are the enemy. They can only become allies if they convert to Mahikari and use their niche knowledges to explain Okada’s teachings in scientific terms, prove miracles, publish books for divulgation, etc.

Goseigen also distorts the meaning of equality: “Men must make a choice in all aspects. They insist on ‘equality for all,’ but equality as it is understood by men does not exist in God’s Kingdom or the natural world. Absolute equality is God’s equality, i.e., ‘the equal and unequal equality.’ It is ‘the fair and unfair fairness’.” (67) In this sense, true equality means universalization through conversion to Mahikari and wajinization. It means understanding one’s place in the machinery so that one’s value is equated to one’s assigned function, i.e., having equal opportunities to choose the only righteous path. In this logic, fair inequality means obeying divine hierarchies such as the Japanese imperial family and the ranking structure of Mahikari – which resembles a corporate system –, accepting that some will be saved and others will suffer in hell due to their life choices,
taking on great responsibility as guides and leaders to humanity, and welcoming harsh life conditions because they are deserved and bring spiritual cleansing.

_Goseigen_ and other Mahikari publications imply that _hito_ are endorsed with free will. _Hito_’s good choices are called meritorious deeds, whereas their bad choices are called sins. In this discourse, people suffer from diseases, poverty, urban violence, natural disasters, and other misfortunes mostly because of their own or their ancestors’ sins. By this token, the poor are to blame for their poverty, the sick are to blame for their sickness, the woman or her family is to blame if she is unable to give birth to a boy, etc. This is the main reason why people should always welcome suffering and interpret it as spiritual cleansing.

For Okada, all suffering originates from fights between gods, our ancestors’ and present family’s sins, and our own sins in previous and present lives. Ultimately, this suffering originates from God’s plan of cleaning impurities by imposing pain. The solution is to gratefully accept pain for several reasons: first, suffering purifies the soul; second, we learn from it, and therefore hard times must be thought of as training; three, _depois da tempestade vem a bonança_ (after a storm comes good weather), so one can

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30 Traditionally, Japanese households would often adopt boys and men to carry on their family’s surname, or even allow women to pass on their surnames in certain situations. However, Mahikari explains that if a woman is unable to give birth to a boy, then there must be a reason why God is not allowing the family to continue their lineage. This change to emphasize biological heritage is probably related to European influence in the Meiji Era, and has caused much stress in the modern Japanese imperial family because Crown Princess Masako could not conceive a male heir.
hope that hard times will eventually bring easier times; fourth, God has higher expectations for good *kumite*, so suffering may be a sign that one is in the right direction.

Humanity’s capacity to change our destiny is present in some passages and absent in others. In some paragraphs, humanity can avoid the apocalypse or a harshest version of it, if we change our evil ways. In others, there is nothing we can do because it is too late. Still in others, humans have little power over their destinies because inauspicious occurrences are sometimes consequences of sins in past lives, ancestors’ sins, disturbances by clinging spirits, gods’ fights, and a necessary compensation that occurs to keep the cosmic balance.

The impossibility to know for sure whether one’s misfortune springs from personal sin or factors out of their control allows for *kumite* to avoid judging each other to a certain extent, but also allows for practitioners in higher positions to exert the power of knowledge: they frequently offer a myriad of possible explanations to a person’s misfortune, for instance, a woman is mistreated by her husband because she was an abusive man in her previous life. Some explanations are more judgmental than others, and some *kumite* may receive harsher judgments than others. Because *kumite* in important roles are believed to be closer to God, their opinions are taken very seriously.

In sum, *Goseigen* rhetoric presents *hito* as a transcendent, given, natural, and already agreed upon subject (Charland 133). This discourse that uses the ideographs “freedom” and “choice” ignores that certain groups are more vulnerable to suffering not due to their sins, but due to a dominant group’s sins, i.e., systemic oppressions.
Now let’s talk about hito’s geographical superiority in Goseigen. In the beginning, all humanity lived in the lost continent of Mu, a landmass extending from Japan to Easter Island in the south and to Hawaii in the east. Okada’s ideas about the lost continent:

heavily relied on the Takeuchi texts [...] At the time of the formation of these ideas he was closely linked to an ‘Association for the Study of Ancient Times’ (Taiko kenkyūkai 太古研究会), which was devoted to the investigation of a mythic prehistory of Japan under nationalistic premises” (Winter 16)

Sekiguchi, who became the leader of Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan when Okada passed away, was probably the person who introduced Okada to Amatsu Kyō’s holy text Takeuchi/Takenouchi monjo/bunsho 竹内文書, an alleged old scripture written by the legendary Japanese hero-statesman and kami Takenouchi no Sukune 武内宿禰 (14-294). The scripture first appeared in 1928 and was later revealed to be a hoax written by Kiyomaro Takeuchi 竹内巨麿 (1875-1965) (idem).

The name Mu for the continent was invented by French-American amateur archaeologist Augustus Le Plongeon (1826-1908) and adapted by British pseudo-scientist James Churchward (1851-1936), whom Okada seems to have read (Cornille, “Nationalism”; Davis; Dessi, Japanese Religions). Differently from Churchward, Okada placed Japan at the center of Mu. Japan is Nihon or Nippon 日本, meaning “the origin of the sun” or “land of sunrise.” Because Mahikari considers the sun or fire (hi) to be the
most superior element, Okada uses the popular expression “land of sunrise” to place Japan at the top.

Okada denies archaeological evidence that mainland Japanese people came from Southern islands, and instead says that ōbito migrated from the mainland to the South. This denial is essential to understand how Mahikari is based on Japanese supremacy, because it privileges yamato people from Edo (Tokyo).

Not only is the Mu continent a.k.a. mainland Japan the origin of humanity, but also Mount Fuji is the spiritual center of the world. In the passage quoted above about the Five Races, Goseigen cites Sumera (458). Sumera is Mount Meru, a sacred cosmological mountain with five peaks in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist cosmology. It is the center of all the physical, metaphysical, and spiritual universes. In this passage, Okada is suggesting that Mount Fuji is Sumera. This suggestion is originated in the Shinto tradition of revering mountains, but it is also connected to the nationalist use of Mount Fuji as a symbol of Japanese identity. In Mahikari ideology, Mount Fuji is a sacred mountain in the sacred land where humanity was born. Mount Fuji 富士山 (Fuji-san) is “the mount of unequaled beauty. This is why it is called 不二 (Fuji, unique). Fuji is unparalleled, it is the navel of the spiritual and material worlds. [...] It is △. It is ⊙, which I [God] made into Moses’ symbol.” (485-486).

Explanations about the sacred nature of Mount Fuji, kotodama, matsuri (festivals), and the imperial family are abundant in much the same way as they are in Goseigen. Emotional poems exalting the beauty and sacredness of sakura (cherry
blossoms), *baika* (plum blossoms), *momiji* (red leaves), lakes, mountains, and other traditional symbols of Japan\(^{31}\) that have been exploited by the government and tourism industry through nationalism also convey the same sentiment in Sūkyō Mahikari literature.

*Hito* is also the ideal subject because he is fluent in Japanese. *Goseigen* considers Japanese to be the original language of humanity. It was created by God, whereas all other languages were created by humans. Su God carefully named each being and thing in the universe with specific meanings, which can be interpreted through the five arts of *kotodama, otodama, kazudama, irodama*, and *katadama*, derived from Shinto. Most of the time, the meanings are said to have been decided by God in the beginning of time, but sometimes He created new meanings to convey urgent messages.

In *kotodama*, each syllable has one or more ideograms, and each one has a meaning decided by God, but which humans often misunderstand. In the movie, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, the main character’s father believes that all words in any language come from Greek, including the Japanese word *kimono*. *Goseigen* does something similar by assigning Japanese “spiritual” meanings to words from other languages, such as the English expression *jingle bells*. *Kotodama* and *otodama* ignore that *kanji* has developed from Chinese, and changed over time. Similarly, they neglect the influences of languages

\(^{31}\) The Buddhist aesthetics of groomed nature can be observed in Sūkyō Mahikari’s valuing of gardens, which are present in every *dōjō*, taken care of in Senegal by Mahikari-tai (Louveau), and praised in Mahikari poetry, songs, and narratives.
from non-wajin peoples living in what is now considered Japan, and languages from areas now called Korea, China, India, and other nations (Frellesvig).

Kotodama involves kanji (ideograms), katakana (syllabary to write non-Japanese words), hiragana (syllabary to write Japanese words), and non-calligraphic symbols. See the examples below.

- Kanji: Myō 妙 means “wonder” and its roots are onna 女 (woman) and shyō 少 (less). This is because women inhabit “the negative” whereas men inhabit “the positive” (397).

- Katakana: Yo ヨ in Mahikari means the righteous path of uniting the spiritual, astral, and physical worlds symbolized by ≡. To do so, we must look at ヨ as if on a mirror, where the symbol 1 is vertical and on the left side, both of which symbolize the spiritual. The vertical line connects the horizontal lines leaning towards the right side, which represents the flesh (73). This is why God made Okada’s parents name him Yoshikazu, as explained before. The kotodama of 车主 (nushi, owner), which Goseigen instructs us to read as Su, is similar (Fig. 7).
Figure 7 - Kotodama of Su (McVeigh, Spirits, Selves 82).

1. The chon of Su God
2. Divine World
3. Astral World
4. Present World
5. The True Light flowing down from Su God and connecting the three worlds

-Hiragana: Generally speaking, Shinto preaches that the first letter of this alphabet, あ pronounced with an open mouth has the power to open up one’s spirit and begin a journey, and the last letter ん pronounced with a closed mouth has the power to close it and end a journey. In Goseigen, あ is the positive and ん is the negative (282; 462-463).

-Non-calligraphic symbols: Chon getitem(1) is an iteration mark in hiragana that in Mahikari is the symbol of God. Kagome ✡ is written 籠目 (basket holes or cage) and in kotodama it is written 神護目 (the eye of divine protection). Kagome is the combination of the masculine, upward fire, and positive △ with the feminine, downward water, negative ▽. When God is in the center, we have a six-pointed star with a middle dot *, which means God’s Kingdom (463).

In otodama, every word has a correct pronunciation and vibration, and therefore pronouncing a prayer incorrectly may bring negative consequences, such as inadvertently calling evil spirits. Moreover, Goseigen usually prioritizes kun-yomi (Japanese reading)
over on-yomi (Chinese reading), thus showing how Japan has been historically sensitive to the admission that its writing system and other cultural traits were imported from China.

In kazudama, each number has a spiritual meaning. For example, five is male and three is female, which explains why Boys’ Day or Children’s Day is on May 5th and Girls’ Day is on March 3rd. Kazudama prioritizes culturally specific meanings of numbers in Japan, thus omitting the essential contributions of Ancient India and China to math in Japan, and the crucial contributions of Ancient Middle East and North Africa to math in Europe, which has established international standards for numerals through colonization and neo-colonization (Merzbach and Boyer).

One example of kazudama is Miroku. Miroku is the Japanese version of Bodhisattva Maitreya, a kind of messiah. Indian Buddhist beliefs in Maitreya have crossed many countries such as China and Korea, arriving in Japan around the sixth century and gaining popularity among the elite in the Heian period (794-1133) and among the masses in the Tokugawa period (1600-1867). The hope in the apocalypse, the coming of Miroku, and the subsequent emergence of miroku-no-yo (弥勒の世 Miroku’s world) would usually increase in times of hardship, since the most vulnerable and oppressed people would be the first to enter Heaven (Rinehart 50-58).

In Mahikari, the world has become impure, thus acquiring the kazudama Namua, represented by the descendant numbers nana-roku-go 7-6-5. Miroku are three great gods who assist Su God (83-84), represented by the ascendant numbers go-roku-nana 5-6-7.
Concomitantly, Okada is the *me-shi-a* (messiah), meaning the numbers *san-yon-go* 3-4-5 (46).

The original law of *miroku* is the Principle of Triplicity of all the universe. That is, the Law which, you may think, is functioning vertically interlocking the three great spiritual worlds of 5 (fire) - 6 (water) - 7 (earth), Heaven-Air-Earth, Sun-Moon-Earth, the Divine-the Astral-the Physical and spirit-mind-body. (53-54)

*Irodama* can be observed in the association of the five sacred colors to the five races, and the superiority of red (masculine) over blue (feminine).

*Katadama* is found in symbols (e.g., cross, six-pointed star, circle), the format of the universe, and land placement in the world map.

2.3. *Implications of the Mahikari constitution of hito*

One goal of *Goseigen* is to place the origin of everything and everyone in Japan, and present non-*wajin* knowledges as corruptions of *wajin* knowledge. This move denies the great development of language, philosophy, medicine, architecture, astronomy, clothing, silverware, math, music, and other arts borrowed and adapted from non-*wajin* communities inside and outside Japan. This is a similar move to the Western European re-writing of history to place their origin in Athens as if Ancient Greek philosophy had not been heavily inspired by the more developed Middle East and North Africa (Robinson). It is also a similar move to the U.S. re-writing of history to place their origin in England as if colonizers had not been heavily inspired by Native Americans (Wynter).
Another consequence of the idealization of *hito* is a binary logic justifying hierarchy and inequity. Following Denise da Silva’s explanation of Hegel, we can understand Okada’s dichotomization through Self and Other. In *Goseigen*, the Master needs the Servant to understand himself by contrast, but not to be a wholesome human being. The Master is truly human; the Servant, not quite – or not at all. In the same logic, *hito* is truly human, whereas *ningen* is half-human and half-animal. The only way *ningen* can be recognized as human is by turning into *hito*.

**Figure 8** - Binaries in Sūkyō Mahikari.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superior</th>
<th>Inferior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin, upstream</td>
<td>Branches, downstream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sūkyō Mahikari</td>
<td>- Five Religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, Christianity - Superstition: folk Shinto, shamanism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Su God (the Fire God) and fire gods</td>
<td>Water gods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ōbito</td>
<td>Kibito, akabito, shirobito, aobito, kurobito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mu, Japan, Mount Fuji, Suza</td>
<td>Other places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese language</td>
<td>Other languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang</td>
<td>Yin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscience</td>
<td>Desire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>Chaos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual realm</td>
<td>Material realm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light, day, white</td>
<td>Darkness, night, black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left side</td>
<td>Right side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical I</td>
<td>Horizontal –</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following chapters will make clear that these are indeed binaries, and not just contradictions. Sūkyō Mahikari makes clear that elements on the left side of this table are superior and should rule over the ones on the right side.
In contrast to the Buddhist disbelief in absolute goodness and absolute evilness, Mahikari tries to incorporate the Buddhist premise of balance into a good-evil polarization:

In this world, evilness has been overlooked and has run rampant. Therefore, it may be natural that ningen has become confused about society and his life. However, evilness does not exist in reality. All is good. I have placed evilness in order that goodness be differentiated. In other words, since it is necessary in order to accelerate ningen’s progress to show ningen that goodness will end up in prosperity, and evilness in destruction, I have had to exert the Arrangement of convenience by placing “evilness” as a transitory, temporary existence. (413)

In the quote above, evilness is understood as a necessary period to be destroyed and overcome. God purposely allowed for evilness to happen, but now it is the time for goodness. The tension between progressing towards the future and going back to an imagined origin can be explained through the nationalist rhetoric of “modernizing Japan” and “making Japan great again.” Although these two desires may seem at odds, in fact they work together to idealize a past when Japan was an empire colonizing neighboring countries, when the imperial family was said to be kami in an imperial lineage eternally unbroken (bansei ikkei 万世一系), which can be traced back to goddess Amaterasu (despite evidence of racial mixing with Koreans), or when the United States had not yet won WW2, economy was growing, there were less immigrants, etc. Humiliations
imposed by European forces in the Meiji Period, the U.S. since WW2, and the Japanese
government and corporations since the 1980s economic crisis have created nostalgia, but
also a desire to move on. Unfortunately, the means to move on have been conservative
and discriminatory: privatization, labor exploitation, ultra-nationalism, etc.

_Goseigen_ makes everything associated with the moon end up becoming evil, but
elements associated with the moon are necessary for fire elements to develop. More
specifically, a moon phase is indispensable for the final sun phase, just like Marx and
Engels believed that capitalism was indispensable for communism. Therefore, the moon
is evil but not evil. As long as the moon understands and accepts its inferior place, it can
live in harmony with the sun.

The superiority of fire over water is not always evident because both sides are co-
dependent. For instance, the _yin-yang_ symbol, the swastika, and the symbol of Mahikari
called _shinmon_ can be misleading because the two parts are symmetrical.

**Figure 9** - Yin and yang, swastika, and shinmon.

_Yin and yang_ 阴陽  _Feminine mi_ 水  _Masculine hi_ 火  _Shinmon_ 神紋
The justification given for these binaries is that yin and yang, 卐 and 卐, ▽ and △, – and I are complementary and interconnected. This argument indirectly reduces Japanese people to the wajin and the wajin to masculinity, thus making wajin men the ideal that all humanity should strive to become. In this narrative, there is no space for hybrid, gender-non-conforming, queer, or other identities. The closer hito gets to ningen, the farther they are from Japanese identity and masculinity, and the closer they are to blackness and femininity: “Do not be a weakling. Go forward in a manly way.” (Goseigen 194)

Before European domination, the subject in pre-Meiji intellectual and spiritual ideologies was not based on a subject-object binary and either-or logic. Even after the Meiji Period, many Japanese philosophers have refused the polarization and dehumanization involved in individualistic conceptions of the self. One example of a more collectivistic interpretation of a person comes from the near absence of the word “I” in everyday conversation, and the gesture of meekly pointing at one’s nose when saying “I” instead of slapping one’s chest. Furthermore, humans are part of and continuous with nature rather than trying to control and dominate it. For this reason, the “I” is not constructed through a stark contrast with “them” or nature (Arisaka; Kagawa-Fox).

This is not to say that Japanese ethics are perfect, of course. For instance, the male-female binary in Confucius is undeniable. Confucius certainly valued social responsibility and justice, but he also established a sexist and heteronormative epistemology whose application has constrained non-conforming Asian people for over
2,500 years. Confucianism has “penetrated all strata of society, influencing political, social, economic, religious, and cultural life” and “shaped the state and the society of China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam” (Yun 584) similarly to how the U.S. government and society are shaped by a white-washed version of Christianity (Carter). Most importantly, Confucius believed in the necessity of hierarchy for social order, which could take the form of unquestioning obedience and loyalty to authorities such as the male family leader and the government (Yun 585).

Japanese political powers alternated between closing and opening its ports to the West across centuries. Consequently, Japanese philosophy was strongly influenced by the Portuguese and Dutch in the seventeenth century, the English and French in the nineteenth century, the Germans from the 1920s to the 1940s, and the United States since 1945. However, intellectual, cultural, religious, economic, and political exchange has never stopped with neighboring nations, especially Korea and China (Iwabuchi).

Due to this religious hybridity and cultural specificity, meritocracy in Goseigen does not appear in an Adam Smith fashion, i.e., a recommendation for individuals to act selfishly because “the invisible hand” of the market will always turn chaos into order. Rather, meritocracy in Goseigen focuses on the individual’s responsibility towards self, the community, and God. When an individual makes the wrong choices and therefore fails to selflessly serve humanity and God, then they experience unhappiness. Therefore, one’s unhappiness is a consequence of one’s bad choices as much as happiness is a consequence of a person’s good choices and God’s generosity.
Notwithstanding, Mahikari teachings were partially interpreted in a Western Protestant fashion in Belém when I was *kumite*, perhaps because Neo-Pentecostalism was growing fast at the time. During a Saturday lecture, the speaker explained that for a person to become a genius in a specific field, they need to reincarnate several times in the same profession. For instance, a spirit who chooses to come back numerous times as a piano player will eventually become a prolific pianist. So, working hard in the present life is not enough; to achieve success, we must give our best through many lives.

On the one hand, good results come from merit; on the other hand, skill and success come from birth. If someone is prosperous now, we can assume that they were born to prosper due to efforts in their previous lives, rather than due to privilege or the random appearance of an opportunity. This logic ignores that most widely respected classical music pianists had access to a piano, private lessons, expensive music schools, parents who could drive them to auditions, and other opportunities denied to most children from the racialized underclass.

Several thinkers (Hall; Hardin; Kish and Leroy; Williams, R.) have pointed out that there is no universal or uniform neoliberalism, the same way that the bourgeoisie or the proletariat do not exist in the same form across time and space (Robinson). For this reason, Mahikari draws from the neoliberal reliance on individual choices, meritocracy, and obedience to institutions, but is also rooted on collectivism, physisheism, and a certain fluidity: “to discern but not to separate” (*Goseigen* 77).
One example of Mahikari’s hybrid neoliberalism is that staring at one’s navel in U.S. neoliberalism means to care solely about one’s interests, whereas staring at one’s navel in Goseigen means remembering the umbilical cord, and thus to revere and be thankful to those who have created us: God, our parents, and our ancestors. Again, this argument can be used both for oppression and liberation: on the one hand, Goseigen urges people to be thankful to God and reject all other beliefs, worship the imperial family, and value Japan at the expense of other cultures; on the other hand, people should be grateful for others’ sacrifice and aware of our privileges.

Mahikari discourages efforts to change the status quo through revolution (e.g., anarchist street rebellions), reforms (e.g., demanding public services, changing laws), or social work (e.g., volunteering, donations, distributing food to the homeless). Goseigen argues that only Mahikari can turn this violent world into Heaven on Earth, so okiyome is a meritorious deed to save humanity, whereas joining a social movement, protesting, or planning a strike are materialistic selfish endeavors. Kumite are rushed to think transcendently and forget about earthly matters, because if the soul is cured, so will be the material world.

Okada’s disgust for revolution appears, for example, in his critiques of Karl Marx. On the one hand, he agrees that religion is the opiate of the masses, but adds that Mahikari is not a religion but rather a supra-religion, i.e., the original teachings created by God when building the universe. On the other hand, Okada chastises Marx for using human-made knowledge instead of God-made knowledge:
[Ningen] have begun to make mistakes and believe that separation, confrontation, and fighting are necessary for evolution. They have forgotten the law of maruki (maru ○ means circle and ki \(^{33}\) means divine essence) and ended up in “the age of Marx” (Marukusu ○丸苦終 the circle shall suffer and be terminated) which brings “the world of confusion, illusion, and aridness, and empty content. […] Whatever advancement you may make, you cannot go beyond the category of human wisdom as long as you are based upon “man-made truth,” “pseudo-true science,” and “the path of human wisdom.” You cannot establish any other world upon the earth than the world of chaos, confusion, bewilderment, confrontation, in a vicious circle with Marx (Marukusu 丸苦終). […] Ningen’s only choice will be self-destruction. They will end up destroying the earth. (464-465)

Okada presents the good representation of maru as ○, which means centering on God, and the evil representation of maru as 丸, which means walking around in circles. If Goseigen assures that God chooses babies’ names and makes their parents name them accordingly, then Marx was born with a tendency to do evil because his very name set up a disastrous destiny. In contrast, the entire fourth chapter of Goseigen (“Give and You Will Be Given: Save and You Will Be Saved”) is dedicated to God’s explanation to Yoshikazu, in first person, of his name: “You are Yo since you were born. Think about the name you have received. There will be Shinto priests who will doubt your divine soul, but every occasion will prove that you are God’s messenger.” (42)

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\(^{33}\) Ki 気 is the Japanese version of the vital force called qi or chi 氣 in China. Okada inserted hi 火 (fire) under iki 气 (spirit) instead of me メ (katakana alphabet letter) or kome 米 (rice, which is central to Shinto [Urita 488]) to create a new ideogram 気 meaning divine essence.
Okada plays into the middle-class apathy and fear of revolution by confirming that activists, scholars, and religious people concerned with social justice are just driven by ego and bringing no meaningful change. Most practitioners of Sūkyō Mahikari seem to be of the middle class, especially due to its expensive requirements for paying the monthly fee to keep a spiritual connection with Su God, participating in events, giving offerings at the altar, etc. Therefore, Mahikari gives us license to feel good and useful from the comfort of our air-conditioned temples.

In a paragraph of Goseigen condemning shūkyō, God speaking in the first person reveals that He made Karl Marx say, “religion is the opiate of the masses” (253). In this twist of the economist’s words, the holy text suggests that only sūkyō can free people from religious corruption:

If men remain the same by mistakenly prioritizing the material, money, and flesh, I shall make a turnabout by terminating the world where the “haves” gain and the “have-nots” lose. Then, both will be deprived. On the other hand, the “haves” (the spiritually elevated) will be given more than before. The “have-nots” (the spiritually debased) will be deprived more than ever; their physical bodies will become weakened, contaminated, and withered. I am telling you that God is going to switch this world in this way.” (302-303)

In the quote above, Okada uses Marxist and religious rhetoric to make kumite believe in the end of inequity and injustice through God’s Baptism of Fire rather than through social unrest. Similarly, it appropriates the activist expressions “haves” and “have-nots” to promise a reversal of roles in the Baptism of Fire, i.e., the rich will suffer and the poor will be saved. Social inversion is a seductive promise in several religions:
“O sertão vai virar mar e o mar vai virar sertão” (The drylands will become the sea and the sea will become the drylands), predicted Antônio Conselheiro.

Figure 10 - Social inversion in Mahikari.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Now</th>
<th>Apocalypse</th>
<th>Heaven on Earth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The “haves” (people who have material possessions) gain and the “have-nots” lose</td>
<td>Both “haves” and “have-nots” lose</td>
<td>The “haves” (people who are spiritually elevated) gain and the “have-nots” lose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this chain of events, the hope is not for a future when all people are equally valued, but rather for a future when those who are higher up in the spiritual hierarchy are compensated, whereas those who are lower are severely punished. In this utopia, conflict between the elevated is completely absent, so the good represent harmony and the bad represent pain in a binary opposition.

Goseigen’s promise is counter-productive if we believe in change through praxis. From a social justice perspective, there will always be conflict, even among activists who fight for the same purpose. So, we must learn how to deal with disagreements and form coalitions to destroy our common enemy, i.e., systemic oppression (Griffin; Lorde, Sister Outsider 124). Any large social change, be it a divine apocalypse or a revolution, is only the beginning of an intense struggle to suppress the formation of elites, rebuild from the ashes, and create a better world (Fanon, The Wretched) where there are no “goods” or “bads”, and therefore no “haves” or “have-nots”, either materially or spiritually.
Chapter Three: Golden Teachings, Youth Who Shine, and Prayer Book

In the last chapter, I showed that the holy book of Sūkyō Mahikari called Goseigen created a biologically and culturally determined Man (Wynter) named hito, through the concepts of Five Races and Five Religions. The overrepresented and ideal hito is established in opposition to its Others: yang versus yin, ōbito versus other races, sūkyō versus shūkyō, and other binaries.

This chapter elaborates on this idea through the analysis of three germinal books written by Yoshikazu Okada from the official literature in Portuguese: Ensinamentos de Ouro: Orientações para a Vida (Golden Teachings: Guideposts for Life), Jovens que Brilham com a Luz Divina: Ensínamientos para os Jovens da Sukyo Mahikari (Youth Who Shine with the Light of God: Teachings for Sūkyō Mahikari Youth), and Livro de Orientações do Yokoshi (Yōkōshi Prayer Book).

Citations of Golden Teachings and Youth Who Shine will be taken from the English versions, but when the meaning differs from the Portuguese version, the translation into English will be mine. The prayer book contains both the Japanese and the Portuguese versions; translations into English are my own. The English translation of Daiseishu: Great and Holy Master, Yoshikazu Okada’s biography written by Kentarō Shibata, was published in 1993 and will be used as reference despite not having a Portuguese version.
Citations will refer to chapter numbers rather than pages because chapters have the same numbering across language versions, whereas pages change. Chapter numbering in these analyzed books does not seem to follow kazudama (art of spiritual numbers), whereas page and chapter numbering in Goseigen probably does.

When Yoshikazu Okada was alive, his religious group was called Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan, but the three books analyzed in this sub-chapter referred to it as Nossa Entidade (our organization)–capital letters in Portuguese and lower-case in English. Scholars and Sūkyō Mahikari ex-kumite critics have noted that the original name, “Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan” was substituted by either “Mahikari” or “our organization” from all Sūkyō Mahikari publications, to omit the legal dispute over the group leadership after the founder’s death.

After the publication of Goseigen, Yoshikazu Okada and his followers continued to elaborate on the biological and social evolution of humanity, thus reinforcing a Sūkyō Mahikari instantiation of Man. Sūkyō Mahikari texts present Time through cyclical, loop, and spiral arrow symbols representing:

a) The cycle of life and death;

b) The ups and downs of life;

c) The turn from left (spiritual) to right (material) and vice-versa;

d) The evolution of humanity in a progressive and upward trajectory.
Despite the impression of cycle, continuation, fluidity, and alternation of power, the Sūkyō Mahikari timeline has a clear goal: the end of history, when hito will live happily ever after in heaven on earth. Spiritual progress allows them to reincarnate less and less until they reach nirvana. At that point, the spiritual body has no need to reincarnate, and ultimately no need for an astral body: the “true self” becomes pure spirit. The correct path to reach nirvana is the way of fire, which is the way of Man.
In this cosmology, history does not follow a straight line, but still follows a Hegelian and Darwinian logic. Hegel placed the end of history in the achievement of absolute knowledge through philosophy, when representation would be supplanted by reality (Biareishyk 256); likewise, Sūkyō Mahikari places the end of suffering in the achievement of absolute knowledge through the understanding and practice of God’s revelations to Okada, when the physical and astral bodies will be supplanted by the spirit. Darwin placed the end of biological evolution in the achievement of *Homo sapiens sapiens* through biology, when apes and ape-like humans are supplanted by the white man (da Silva, D. F. 110); likewise, Sūkyō Mahikari places the end of spiritual evolution in the return to hito and sūkyō. Hegelian philosophy accounts for unexpected revolutions but trusts in a clear destination for all who deserve to reach it; genetics account for unexpected mutations but trusts in the selection of the fittest; and Sūkyō Mahikari accounts for unplanned human errors but trusts in a final stage of bliss.

**Figure 12** - Mahikari evolutionary timeline.
Sylvia Wynter argues that each community creates its own ethnocosmology with its own overrepresented Man. Similarly, I believe that Man is an invention of every empire – although not every community – because elites’ desire to dominate internal and external populations tends to necessitate a Man in the image of the elite. The Japanese empire designed many types of Man: *wajin*, Japanese citizen, cisgender heterosexual male, able-bodied, obedient to the state and the family patriarchal figure, and right-wing – anti-Marx, anti-Mao Tsé Tung, anti-student movements. The *hito* of Sūkyō Mahikari is an overrepresented Man based on a Japanese nationalist and racist ethnocosmology.

The end of history is directly related to the end of the world. For Marx, the communist revolution would destroy the capitalist world and build a new world free of social oppression. In contrast, Sūkyō Mahikari says that the Baptism of Fire will destroy the over-materialist world and build a God-centered world, which is free from certain consequences of capitalism – e.g. consumerism, individualism, secularism – but not antithetical to other capitalist structures – e.g. business, nation-state, private property. In Japan and other modern countries, “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” (Fredric Jameson qtd. in Posadas 431).

Posadas suggested three main reasons for the Japanese obsession with the end of the world: the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and other war atrocities in the first half of the twentieth century, causing inter-generational trauma; the Aum Shinrikyō
attack; and Japanese nationalism, which partially explains the first two. The humiliation of WW2 defeat and nostalgia for an idealized Japan as a world power created the desire for an end of the world after which the country could re-build its empire anew, and fear of a catastrophe leading to chaos, meaninglessness, and loneliness (Posadas 430-431). In this scenario, the ghost is often a symbolic scapegoat reflecting an unbalanced Japanese spirit, as lost souls cause depression and vice in a confusing society (idem). Similarly, Sūkyō Mahikari blames most suffering on attached ghosts and perverse gods, while imagining an end of the world capable of bringing about the end of history.

3.1. Hito as a Japanese citizen

Japanese-ness instantiates a Man who is a Japanese citizen loyal to the state. Sūkyō Mahikari writings are favorable to the military, the police, and right-wing politicians. There are numerous complimentary references to Japanese war ‘heroes’ whose stories are romanticized, thus omitting the atrocities they committed and the imperialistic context in which they were inserted. Okada’s war narratives and role as a military high officer are also romanticized, presenting him as a nationalistic, divinely driven, and ethical hero, while ignoring the war crimes in which he directly or indirectly participated.

Aleph, formerly known as Aum Shinrikyō, is a religion founded by Shoko Asahara in 1984. It carried out the deadly Tokyo subway sarin attack in 1995. Officially classified as a terrorist organization and doomsday cult, it has created a strong anti-cult and anti-religion sentiment in Japan that affects the general perception of Sūkyō Mahikari.
Sūkyō Mahikari literature glamorizes the unification of Japan under Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598), and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616) during *sengoku jidai* (era of wars).

During the period of Warring States (1467-1568), warlords made great efforts to foresee what was coming. For this purpose, they trained themselves to maintain calmness of mind. For example, even when in battle camp, they held tea ceremonies and practiced flower arrangement and Noh chanting. They tried to make a complete shift in their thoughts so that they could receive inspiration. (*Golden Teachings* ch. 55)

The three unifiers of Japan (Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, Tokugawa) were divinized after death to be worshipped as *kami*. They received divine names, and their likenesses were painted in the form of divine images (Satō 94). Many centuries later, the government and media industry made them ideals of nationalist masculine heroism (Heinze 90).

Okada was mostly in favor of Japanese nationalist war, but sometimes he was ambiguous. Although the founder never clearly admitted to having personally murdered and injured people during the war, he mentioned in a couple of occasions his need to make up for the sin of having participated in war, and owning a military aircraft factory. Unfortunately, these brief allusions of guilt are overshadowed by heroic accounts of his endurance in the battlefield. Another instance of relatively ambiguous rhetoric about war is his comment on the Cold War:
As part of God’s plan, the Japanese have a spiritual mission that they should strive to fulfill. Americans and Russians also have their respective missions to fulfill for the sake of humankind. Thus, Americans, Russians, and Japanese all have special missions to fulfill so that humankind will be able to establish a heaven on earth in accordance with God’s will. In fulfilling their particular roles, the peoples of the world need to unite as one. (*Golden Teachings* ch. 23)

The quotation above assumes that God approves of the present division of nation-states, and has one mission for each country; thus each nation-state is assumed to be homogeneous. For instance, if God recognized Okinawans as a different nation for having their own language, culture, and dislike for the Edo colonization of their land, then He would have given Okinawans a different mission. Instead, God gave the whole territory of Japan one single mission, thus rendering Okinawa an assimilated part of the nation-state.

The Cold War is presented as an unnecessary quarrel because the divine plan has already chosen each country’s role, thus rendering disputes meaningless. The presented solution is for the USA and the USSR to dedicate themselves to their respective divine roles separately, and at the same time unite by placing Su God in the center of their missions.

At the same time, Okada’s anti-communism and pro-imperialism assumes that the Cold War is wrong not because of the inherent unfairness of wars in the global sphere, but rather due to the requirement for every country to fulfill their assigned celestial roles, wherein Japan is supposed to lead. The passage refrains from analyzing the political and historical context of the dispute.
Okada likewise felt sympathy for the police. He narrates stories of supposedly real people who found out the spiritual cause of their problems through his organization. Every time a character ends up in jail or asks for police officers’ help, the law enforcers are unable to assist despite their best intentions, because: a) bad spirits manipulate them; b) they do not know how to solve spiritual disturbances.

In this narrative, police officers are victims of bad spirits, but if they convert to Mahikari, crime will disappear: “the role of the police should be to help solve spirit disturbances” (Youth Who Shine, part 2, ch. 3, A Habitual Shoplifter). Though more humane police tactics were possible, converting the police force to Sūkyō Mahikari would maintain the prison system (Alexander) and the “discipline and punish” logic (Foucault) in place.

Following the Confucian principle of the Five Bonds – ruler to ruled, father to son, husband to wife, elder brother to younger brother, friend to friend – the ruled should trust that the ruler works in their best interest; the ruled should thus be obedient. When kumite concern themselves with the spiritual instead of the material, they do not waste time criticizing politicians: “We tend to worry more than is necessary about ourselves, our families, our country, and international relations.” (Youth Who Shine, part 5, ch. 1) Their concerns are unnecessary because strife is planned by God.

Okada assumed that the state had the best intentions and worked for the sake of the people:
When people with such important roles as government ministers or labor union leaders remain unaware of divine truth, their ability to help the less fortunate members of society decreases dramatically. Sometimes, even though they are doing their best to improve society, their inattention to spiritual matters means that they unwittingly lead their fellow citizens in unwise directions. Many people in leadership positions, in spite of their sincerity, are accumulating spiritual impurities and are also causing others to do the same. (*Youth Who Shine*, part 5, ch. 1)

Because the state knew best, there was no indication that politicians should listen to the people, ask them what they need, and work with them; rather, Sükyō Mahikari encouraged *kumite* to become politicians. Henceforth, God led politicians through Sükyō Mahikari, and politicians led the people.

According to Mahikari ideology, Japanese imperialism is not about cultural appropriation, *wajinization*, and colonization, but rather about benevolently guiding a lost humanity towards its origin: Japan. Politician and scholar Sakuma Shōzan (1811-1864) coined the phrase *tōyō dōtoku, seiyō gakugei* 東洋道德西洋学芸 (Eastern ethics, Western technical learning) which Yoshikawa Tadayasu (1824-1884) later abbreviated to *wakon yōsai* 和魂洋才 (Japanese spirit, Western technique) (Josephson 108). Sükyō Mahikari heavily utilizes the ideology of *wakon yōsai*, *Yamato-damashii* 大和魂 (Japanese spirit), and *Yamato-gokoro* 大和心 (Japanese heart) to justify the preciousness of modernity, civilization, science, and technology while simultaneously criticizing Western materialism or human-centered development.

In the Mahikari version of *wakon yōsai*, Su God allowed humanity to go through a phase of material advance led by water gods, but people went too far and forgot about
spirituality. Therefore, the Baptism of Fire will put an end to the current phase and bring about the God-centered civilization led by fire gods, where the original and true science created by God will triumph. The book Daiseishu offers the most summarized explanation of Mahikari’s wakon yōsai:

The West gave us the civilization of the twentieth century. Mankind must be grateful for this. But, we cannot deny that it has also led humankind to be excessively materialistic. Now I’d like people to change their sonen and to think about humankind in the holy twenty-first century.

The time has come when human beings must unite in a civilization based upon the cross of spirit and matter. Thus, for the first time, the cross civilization, the age of theocracy, will come into being. To achieve this, we must unite and continue this work. I firmly believe that this is the foundation that will, in due course, enable us to bring into existence a stable civilization for mankind. (Daiseishu 191, my emphasis).

Equating the East with fire and the West with water reinforces self-Orientalism (Iwabuchi) and Occidentalism (Carrier; Miyake), wherein the Other is everybody who is not a wajin kumite: “We must bring about a reconciliation between the East’s divine spiritual world of fire and the West’s divine spiritual world of water” (Daiseishu 208). In this sense, the spiritual land of Japan is eternal, whereas Western hegemony represents a necessary but temporary stage.

Sūkyō Mahikari uses “East” and “Japan” interchangeably, thus leaving the reader unsure whether China, Korea, South Asia, Pacific Islands, Russia, the Middle East, etc. are part of the East, and whether Africa, Central and South America, Eastern Europe, Australia, New Zealand, etc. are part of the West. Either way, the masculinization of
Japan and feminization of its Others require *yang* to be grateful for *yin’s* contribution, but take back his rightful leading position.

The demand for gratefulness to the West has fundamental ideological consequences for Brazil and other colonized countries, which are expected to thank Europe for colonizing and enslaving them. Sūkyō Mahikari ignores the dehumanizing violence advanced with the imposition of Western modernity, and with the imposition of Japanese modernity during its imperialistic expansion in Asia. This is the same logic Western European natural and social sciences applied to defend that slavery and colonization were good for the enslaved and colonized, because Reason made savages “enter history”, thus acquiring some hope of evolving towards becoming fully human (da Silva, D. F.; Mignolo; Wynter).

Another way Okada justifies the imposition of civilized modernity is through his valuing of European, Japanese, and Japanized Asian fine arts and business ethics. For instance, when talking about music genius, he cites Schubert as an example of how hard work leads to beautiful results (*Golden Teachings* ch. 39). Later, Henry Ford is mentioned alongside Japanese businessmen. Okada exalts successful businessmen in a similar way he compliments war heroes. There are no examples of businesspeople from outside Japan, the U.S., and Western Europe.

When it comes to ancient religious philosophy, non-Japanese thinkers like Confucius and Zhuangzi are listed alongside Japanese thinkers like Nichiren and Shinran. Non-Japanese Asian art is referenced too, such as the Ten Ox Herding Pictures. The
citations do not explain where the artists and philosophers come from, probably due to Mahikari’s principle that all knowledge originates from God in Japan. In other words, even if Gautama Buddha lived in South Asia, Su God who resides in Mount Fuji 35 gave him wisdom. Another way to Japanize foreign prominent figures is to deny their historical biography and rewrite it in Japan:

In these texts, it is assumed that Jesus traveled to Japan when he was eighteen, and there was instructed by Shintō priests and mountain ascetics in secret practices through which he acquired his magical powers. Then he left Japan and visited various regions before arriving in Galilea where he taught what he had learned in Japan. Jesus’ preaching provoked the reaction of the authorities and his death sentence, but his brother Isukiri took his place and died on the cross. Then Jesus embarked at the age of thirty-six on a long journey back to Japan, where he arrived with many followers who had joined him, and died at the age of 118. These ideas are taught in intermediate and advanced courses offered by Mahikari, and not all of its members are aware of them. (Dessì, Japanese Religions 124)

Similar to how Western Europeans whitened Christianity through the denial of Jesus’ Jewishness (Carter), Mahikari wajinized Christianity by attributing Jesus’ powers to Shintō priests and mountain ascetics in place of Galilean Jewish elders. Concomitantly, Mahikari admits to Jewish contributions but places them in the past as a phase that will be overcome by the Japanese new era: “By truly crossing the spirit of the Land of Spiritual Origin [Japan] with the material power of Judea, build the Garden of Eden” (Yōkōshi Prayer Book, Hi no Mototsu Kuni, verse 122). Despite the religious influence of

35 “The sacred mountain, where God is seated since antiquity, pleases Him with its wonderful and beautiful image.” (Yōkōshi Prayer Book, Hidamashimpo verse 176)
Judaism on Sūkyō Mahikari, Judea is equated to an outdated stage governed by water
gods in the same way that secularized Western knowledge is defined in *wakon yōsai*
(Japanese spirit, Western technology).

Sūkyō Mahikari emphasizes two characteristics that hito must have: to be makoto
and sunao. *Sunao* 素直 (obedient) or *Su-nao* ス直 (obedient to Su God) means absolute
submissiveness to God’s will (McVeigh, *Spirits, Selves* 136). It means to nourish a good
sōnen (innermost feeling), hold a profound desire to follow spiritual leaders’ instructions,
gladly accept suffering for purification, and practice *gohōshi* (service) without
questioning, in a good mood, and willingly.

*Makoto* 誠 (sincerity) means genuine care for others (Chung 264). In English,
sincerity means to openly say and do what one is thinking and feeling, regardless of the
consequences (hurting another’s feelings or appearing impolite or foolish); the virtue lies
in abandoning pretense and falsity, i.e. showing one’s true self rather than a social mask.
In contrast, *makoto* involves a preoccupation with others’ feelings and well-being, and
therefore may involve pretending to be okay despite inner turmoil, “white” or “noble”
lies, and euphemism.

The problem with Okada’s use of *makoto* is that for a *kumite* to be truly sincere,
they should not question Mahikari’s teachings or practices: “When we have doubts about
the power of True Light, we emit brain waves that accord with these doubts, thus making

\[\text{36 I cannot but notice the racial and classed nature of the expressions “white lie” and “noble lie.”}\]
it difficult for the Light to penetrate our souls.” (Golden Teachings, ch. 25) Su God, the
gods, spirits, *kumite*, and outsiders are always watching, and God can see through
people’s hearts. This surveillance (Foucault) makes *kumite* try to avoid reflecting too
much on Okada’s God-given words, because even the “waves” of a negative *sōnen*
(innermost attitude) can travel to the astral and spiritual realms.

*Sunao* and *makoto* are the principles of helping the vulnerable (e.g., by giving
money to a beggar), people around you (e.g., kindly teaching *kōhai*), 37 and the
community (e.g., cleaning a shrine) with honest regard for their welfare rather than just to
maintain good appearances or because you were pressured to do it. However, Sūkyō
Mahikari publications and *kumite* in daily practices tend to manipulate these concepts in a
way that followers feel constantly pressured, thus engaging in self-surveillance and the
surveillance of others to check whether practitioners are being *sunao* and *makoto* enough.

Furthermore, *makoto* is originally contextual: we must make ethical decisions
based on each situation in real-life interpersonal relationships rather than relying on an
immutable and transcendent cosmic order, tradition, or social structure (Chung 267).
Sūkyō Mahikari adapts this principle to allow for religious authorities to give orders, but
forbids the latter to challenge leaders or the teachings and still be considered right,
because those religious authorities are supposedly just following God’s law. For this
reason, Okada insists that God’s law is both fluid and fixed: little changes are possible if

37 *Kōhai* means a junior or freshman at school or work, and *senpai* means senior,
superior, elder.
the great plan for saving humanity is followed, and only the supreme spiritual leaders completely know how to follow the great plan correctly: “Similarly, kumite and I need to melt into one in regard to God’s will. Otherwise, nothing will go well for Mahikari. If there are differences in our understanding of this, there can be no salvation or expansion of Mahikari” (Golden Teachings, ch. 30).

The prompt trust in supreme leaders’ decisions and teachings engenders a reverence and dependence that makes them appear divinized: “In our organization, a growing love for the oshienushi (the spiritual leader of the Mahikari organization) will help make your link to God’s love that much stronger.” (Golden Teachings, ch. 37) In his books, Okada narrates stories of when his business went bankrupt and he had to sell products from door to door. In some passages, he tells of when, in the first years of the organization, followers would treat him as an equal and call him sensei (honorific term for teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc.) instead of using the numerous divine names he had been calling himself since he was a Sekai Kyūsei Kyō minister. In such narratives, Okada seems upset about the lowly status to which he had been submitted. This is an example of how Okada is presented as an idol, thus preventing kumite from questioning his words.

3.2. Hito as kumite

In the making of a Japanese identity, the Japanese state created State Shinto, “the sacred imperial institution and the non-religious super-religion” (Kitagawa 164). State Shinto was an ideology that appropriated folk Shinto but denied its spirituality, invented
religious rituals but presented them as ancient, recycled religious thought from the Asian mainland but created the myth of a purely Japanese ideology. Inspired by State Shinto, Sūkyō Mahikari places Western secularism in a developmental stage after superstition and religions, but before the ultimate victory of God’s supra-religion. In this logic, Sūkyō Mahikari rejects:

a) *shūkyō*: “you don’t need any recourse to dogmas or theories” (*Golden Teachings* ch. 21);

b) religious hybridity: “It is important to correctly grasp every word and phrase of the teachings. Furthermore, it is important to fully transmit the teachings without adding your personal opinions.” (*idem* ch. 88);

c) human-centered science and activism (e.g. medicine, philosophy, Marxism): “Up until now, peace movements have focused on the physical realm only, which is subordinate to the spiritual realm, and have disregarded the spiritual realm itself.” (*idem* ch. 116);

d) agnosticism: “People place themselves above God, demanding Him to save them for free, if He exists” (*Yōkōshi Prayer Book, Kamimuki Kyoka Part I*, verse 205);

e) atheism: “The most important form of altruistic love is to love God. Next comes love for others.” (*Golden Teachings* ch. 114);

f) membership without full commitment: “God will not be pleased if your family feels that praying alone before the Goshintai in your home is enough. What God is interested in is how many people you gather before your family Goshintai and are
saving.” (*idem* ch. 123). In this logic, all efforts to survive, be a good person, build community, relate to the spiritual, and fight for social justice outside of Sūkyō Mahikari are not only useless, but also harmful to the divine plan.

Okada’s obvious inspiration in other religions is denied by the idea of *sūkyō* as the original supra-religion, and *shūkyō* as its sullied version. On the one hand, he praises and references Shinto throughout his writings; on the other hand, he attributes Shinto knowledge to a perverted version of God’s knowledge. For instance, if Shinto fundamentally revolves around the worship of rice (*Urita* 488), then there is an inconsistency in the way Okada portrays rice. On the one hand, he frequently explains how rice is a gift from God. On the other hand, he associates rice with the material:

I’d like you to be fired by real spiritual energy (*ki* 気). Nowadays the ideogram for energy is written with the component for “rice” (*米*), thus (*氣*). This way of writing the character reflects the materialism of our society, a society where people place priority on money, material goods, and eating. (*Youth Who Shine*, part 3, ch. 5)

In Japanese, “rice” is read *kome* or *gohan*, and the latter also means “food”. By associating food with an inferior classification of physicality, we diminish the possibility of acting against world hunger because the body is deemed a distraction from transcendental concerns. In this spirit-versus-body binary, the spiritual aspect of rice in Shinto is denied.

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*38 Perhaps like corn in Mayan cosmology.*
In most publications, Okada refers to Mahikari as supra-religion, but in some passages, he contradicts himself by referring to his organization as the most important, or the only true religion – therefore, still a religion. At the same time, Mahikari is said to be the True Science, the one created by God.

According to Okada, spirit mediums sought personal and material benefits, which were temporary; they had “no teachings or doctrines”, manipulated the naïve, and their role was over, so “they will not participate in the next stage” of the divine plan.

“Therefore, people who place their faith in spirit mediums do not make spiritual progress in life.” (Golden Teachings ch. 4) In opposition to religions, Mahikari sought universal and spiritual benefits, which were eternal. The more dedicated to Mahikari, the more progress (health, harmony, and prosperity) one would achieve, and henceforth “naturally cease to be attracted to spirit mediums” (idem).

As long as temples and shrines strive to promote God’s teachings and to give salvation to the world, God will allow them to continue to serve people. At the very least, it can be said that temples enshrining Amitaba, Mahavairocana, or Seikannon are worshipping the gods who participated in the creation of heaven and earth, albeit under different names. That is to say, these temples, in reality, worship the forty-eight gods who were active at the time of the creation of heaven and earth. (Golden Teachings ch. 9)

The quotation above implies that certain religions, i.e. the ones that worship the same gods as Mahikari, are valued by God, whereas others should be eliminated. It also assumes that the gods worshipped in other religions are indeed the same gods as Mahikari’s, and with the same meanings attached to them.
There are many passages equating Su God to figures from various religions, especially Kannon or Seikannon (Guanyin) and Amaterasu (written Amatera-Su), but also Yahweh, Jesus Christ, Allah, and Miroku (Maitreya) (Yōkōshi Prayer Book, Kamimuki Sanji). Perhaps Okada was unaware of the differences between Abrahamic religions and their internal heterogeneity. Nevertheless, he certainly knew the differences between Su God, Amaterasu, and Kannon—and still implied an indistinction. 39

In accordance with revelations from God, the time has come when all religions need to refer to the Creator God by one name. As long as we continue to refer to the Creator God by different names such as Kannon, Yahweh, or Ame no minaknushi, the five races will remain in disunity. 40 This is why the Creator God has revealed that His name is “Su”. The spiritual meaning of Su is “unity” or “unification”. (Golden Teachings ch. 156)

In other words, the mission of Sūkyō Mahikari is to unite the five races and five religions around the one and only true race (wajin) and supra-religion (sūkyō). Thus everybody on the planet must recognize that everything they are (including being human) and believe in (including science) comes from “the East of the Far East” (Yōkōshi Prayer Book, Gueinen verse 140).

39 During the Edo Period (1603-1868), when Christianity was illegal and punishable by death, many Japanese Christians disguised the Virgin Mary as Kannon holding a child. Therefore, Okada’s hybridization is not new. Additionally, Amaterasu’s gender as female was not settled before the sixth century (Kitagawa 134). However, rendering Kannon and Amaterasu masculine eliminates the potential feminist use of the goddesses like Marianismo does with the Virgin Mary (Campos and Nascimento).

40 In the English version: “human beings will remain in disunity”.
There is a big difference between what Okada meant by “other religions” and “spirit mediums”, and what Brazilians understood as such. Okada tended to write more favorably about Christianity, Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism, but less favorably about Buddhist and Shinto institutions and rituals, and always negatively about independent shamans. There was also a certain anti-Semitism in his texts and disregard for Islam – Prophet Mohammed was frequently mentioned but none of His teachings was explored.

Okada’s taste for social order made him appreciate institutions and dislike disruptions to these institutions, such as shamanism. In Japan, independent healers, fortune tellers, enchanters, spiritual dancers, and other independent religious professionals – many of whom were women – have challenged the authority of Buddhist and Shinto institutions connected to the state (Ambros; Josephson). In the Meiji Era, the state’s agents attacked folk religions through the destruction or manipulation of local shrines and the suppression of “irrational” beliefs – whether they were of shamans, diviners, or what were called *inshi* [淫祀], evil deities – while also instructing them in proper modes of worship. The new rulers preached ideas about “civilization and enlightenment” while also prohibiting numerous folk practices, such as extravagance in festivities, either to gods or Buddhas, or excessive leisure and gambling. (Fujitani 19)

Reflective of the ultra-nationalist atmosphere in which he was raised, Okada was not very fond of independent shamans, whom he accused of charlatanism. He emulated the Japanese empire’s opposition to *inshi*, and its attempt to control practitioners’ bodies.
3.3. Hito as a cisgender heterosexual male

As discussed in the analysis of *Goseigen*, Sūkyō Mahikari appears to advocate for the equality between *yin* and *yang* due to their complementarity, but is in fact sexist. The denial of injustice in the treatment of women and men can be observed in the understanding of the trinity: spirit, mind, and body.

**Figure 13 - Trinity in Sūkyō Mahikari.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spiritual realm</th>
<th>Astral realm</th>
<th>Material realm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>Mind</td>
<td>Physical body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband / Father</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Wife / Mother</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mahikari literature places great emphasis on binaries based on a conservative reading of *yin-yang*. However, the gray area between the poles is left unexplored, while the possibility that opposites do not exist is unthinkable. In Sūkyō Mahikari, the middle ground can be interpreted as: a) a path through which the inferior pole walks to evolve towards the superior pole; b) a buffer area for the poles not to clash directly; c) a realm of middle value (neither at the top nor at the bottom of hierarchy); d) the element that guides the inferior pole on how to serve the superior pole. The potential of the in-between space (Bhabha) and borderlands (Anzaldúa) to negotiate power relations is left out.

Sūkyō Mahikari refuses to acknowledge systemic oppressions, and blames the victim for wanting recognition:
[…] if you take pride in limiting yourself, telling yourself such things as, “I’m a woman, so I can’t…” or “I have a weak constitution, so I can’t…”, you will not grow. […] Your hidden talents could come to the fore at any time. […] For example, if you have a gastrointestinal disorder and keep telling yourself that you have a weak stomach, your stomach will never improve. But if you remind yourself that you are undergoing a cleansing and that it is something to be appreciated, even when you are vomiting or having diarrhea, then your stomach will get better and your chronic gastrointestinal disorder will be cured, just as mine was. This happens when you don’t place limitations on yourself. (Golden Teachings ch. 35)

Indeed, women and people with (dis)abilities do have talents and strength. Moreover, people in marginalized positions sometimes have internalized systemic oppressions, self-doubt, impostor syndrome, and hopelessness because society tells them over and over that they are not worthy of success. However, we must recognize that a patriarchal and ableist society imposes violence on them.

The accusation that women and people with chronic illness take pride in limiting themselves demonstrates a-criticality and an empathy gap (Keith). Furthermore, contrary to what the privileged might think, people in disadvantaged situations often downplay their own oppression to psychologically cope with suffering, because most people do not want to face that they are not loved (hooks, All About Love).

Man as anti-Marx and Man as male combine when Okada blames youth rebellion on women power:

When I read a police report on the United Red Army, I found that there were lessons for parents on how to bring up their children. The police report stated that one of the main reasons young people joined this group was the way they had been raised. Many of these young people complained that from childhood their
mothers were too domineering and never let them do anything on their own. Moreover, their fathers were ineffectual in the home. These factors drove them to rebel against their families and to go out into society to test their abilities. (*Youth Who Shine*, part 6, ch. 3)

The quote above remarkably resembles the critique to female assertiveness and youth non-conformity in the movie *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), wherein teenagers become irresponsible, aimless, hedonistic, confused, and angry because their adult male figures are too weak and their adult female figures, too authoritative. However, Okada was more preoccupied with left-wing student movements in his writings, whom were supposedly being lured into Marxist activism due to their parents’ leniency and gender inversions.

If some student activists really joined social justice movements because they thought their fathers were subordinate to their mothers, then we can conclude that cis-hetero-patriarchy – not gender inversion – caused their discomfort with female power. By the same token, capitalist alienation – not Marxist meaningless-ness or destructive ideology – caused their decision to join student movements to lack criticality.

The centering of the nuclear family in Mahikari reflects the common-sense idea that this relationships arrangement is a natural part of Japanese culture. However, the nuclear family is a modern invention adapted from the West. The meanings of *ie* 家 (home) have changed significantly over time, becoming discriminatory over illegitimate children, requiring brides to adopt husbands’ surnames, decreasing the relevance of multiple co-residents (e.g., grandparents), and generally resembling more Western
patriarchy upon the officialization of an *ie* system during the Meiji Era (Tanaka, “Surnames”).

### 3.4. Hito as anti-Marx

Okada elaborated on Mahikari ideology in a period of transition from post-WW2 poverty and the U.S. (unofficial) colonization of Japan, to a period of social rebellion and admiration for U.S. pop culture in the 1960s, to the beginning of economic growth and rampant capitalism in the 1970s (Farrington et al. 269). The late 1950s until the early 1970s was the period when the concept of *seinen* (youth) was formed as a social category (Daliot-Bul), and urban middle-class youth was involved in student movements:

> Even though Western mass media outlets traditionally depict Japanese society as passive and conformist, advocacy movements and contentious politics have always existed in postwar Japan. Most notably, New Left movements in the 1960s and 1970s had large-scale and violent collisions with the Japanese government over issues such as the Japan–US military alliance and the Self-Defense Forces. (Shibuichi 72)

In the late 1960s, Japanese journalists, politicians, artists, and intellectuals offered abundant information about the Chinese Cultural Revolution in newspapers, novels, conferences, and other media, and therefore the public was well informed about those events (Esselstrom). Japanese audiences had various reactions related to both dismissal and admiration for China, both a sense of Japanese superiority and self-criticism (*idem*).
It is probable that Yoshikazu Okada criticized Marx in response to the Japanese New left movements and student rebellion, as well as to indirectly criticize Mao Zedong.

When Mahikari-tai was introduced in Europe, many people were weary of its militaristic outlook (uniform, march, salute, flag, intensive training, and drills), which awakened fears of fascism and the “yellow peril” (Cornille, “The Phoenix” 281-282). However, Mahikari-tai is an efficient way of addressing Okada’s concern for 1960s and 1970s teenagers, whom he considered “are all too easy on themselves” (Golden Teachings ch. 6). For Okada, only individuals who conform to their assigned role in society can enjoy health: “When we compare the state of society today with that in my youth, we see that more people have emotional and physical problems.” (Youth Who Shine, part 5, ch. 1)

Okada’s nostalgia for an idealized past and his belief in the degradation of hito into ningen could be compared to Nietzsche’s announcement that God is dead, Lyotard’s crisis of the metanarratives, Vattimo’s end of modernity, the post-modern lament of the subject’s death or fragmentation (da Silva, D. F. xx), and McGee’s warning that the world has become more complicated with modernity. The similarity lies in nostalgia and the desire to “make the empire great again.” Nostalgia emerges when an elite realizes that their world is being challenged by an-Other (Mignolo), feels threatened by diversity, and longs for an idealized past when things were allegedly simple. However, the world has never been simple: every society has always been diverse and complicated.
Okada discouraged the participation in struggles for social justice in NGOs, other religious groups’ initiatives, social movements, community centers, ethnic minorities, and any other vulnerable groups. Volunteering, cooperation, and revolution were understood as efforts to be made within Mahikari:

There is no sight more beautiful than that of people cooperating with each other – for example, when one Mahikari center cooperates with another or when members of the youth group from one Mahikari center cooperate with a center from a different area or a different regional headquarters. (*Golden Teachings*, ch. 18)

In contrast to the benefits of dōjō helping each other, Okada considered social movements, coalition between non-kumite communities, rebellions, and communism to be violent and destructive. Even the hippie movement was said to be a typical reaction of immature and confused people who were lost, and could only find the correct path through Mahikari (*Youth Who Shine* part 7):

people who lack what it takes tend to resort to violence or to try to work towards violently overthrowing the government. To tell the truth, these people are empty inside and in a sense deserve our pity. They need our help and it is our mission to extend the hand of salvation to them. (*Youth Who Shine*, part 3, ch. 5)

Okada was probably referring to communist students in 1960s Tokyo. However, in the context of the Brazilian Amazon in the twenty-first century, kumite probably have other revolutions in mind: the constant strikes for better pay in Belém, *Movimento dos
Sem Terra (Movement of Landless Peasants) in the countryside, mass marches on the streets against political corruption, the struggle against the military dictatorship, etc.

In such environment, Okada’s words does not account for the daily violence perpetrated by the government and corporations onto the wretched, and the essential role of rebellion in responding to structural violence (Fanon, *The Wretched*). Brazilian *kumite* are not only discouraged to form coalition with the African-indigenous poor, but are also led to forget how Japanese immigrants suffered violence due to the same logic of structural violence (racism and war), and would be much worse off nowadays without struggles for social justice. In the end, the middle class receives the most benefits from rebellions filled with black and brown impoverished bodies.

even if we strive to promote peace with the aim of creating a healthy and happy world free from conflict, our efforts will be in vain unless we purify the spiritual realm first. […] no matter how ardently we talk about peace, it will all come to nothing. Whether we are talking about an individual, a nation, or even all humankind, the spiritual realm must first become pure and bright. (*Golden Teachings*, ch. 36)

Okada goes on to say that when the number of people who practice Mahikari increases, the world will become peaceful, and this is the only way to achieve world peace (*idem*). Ironically, this argument somewhat resembles Marx and Engels, for whom a class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat was the sole possible way to end oppression, without considering different contexts, interests, and possibilities.
I believe many people join Sūkyō Mahikari due to a genuine desire to help others. However, the organization limits the possibilities for constructing a better world, overwhelming kumite with so many religious obligations and condemning efforts outside Mahikari, that there is no energy or will left to pursue alternative ways.

3.5. Hito as middle- to higher-class

Yoshikazu Okada was born into a wealthy family. After serving in military campaigns in China and Indochina, Okada retired from the army in 1941 due to a back injury with the rank of lieutenant colonel. When he faced financial hardship after WW2, some influential friends helped him:

I have known Fukuda-sensei 41 for about ten years, during which time he has watched over my activities. Actually though, there was an occasion just after the war when Fukuda-sensei was of great assistance to me. […] I was immediately impoverished when the war ended. But thanks to the swift measures of Shoshiro Kudo, who is now chief manager of the Tomin Bank, and of Fukuda-sensei, I was able to get out of the situation smoothly. (Daiseishu 179)

In Okada’s books, the passage above is the only one that admits to receiving help from wealthy and politically powerful friends in his time of need. Everywhere else, Okada tells dramatic and self-pitying stories of deep poverty, the humiliation of

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41 Takeo Fukuda (1905-1995) was the prime-minister of Japan from 1976 to 1978. He was the father of Yasuo Fukuda (1936-), prime-minister from 2007 to 2008.
becoming a door-to-door salesman after the previous glory he had enjoyed during the war, and the great strains he went through alone to pull himself from the bootstraps: 42

God sent me indescribable hardships [...]. He did this to train me. [...] [D]uring the war, I was sent to serve in a place where survival itself was a great challenge. Then I fell ill and was given only three years to live. Later, I experienced extreme poverty and had to work day and night to repay huge debts. [Footnote: “Sukuiinishisama incurred these debts when his companies were destroyed in bombing raids.”] It is thanks to these hardships, which you cannot even imagine, that I am able to stand here before you today. 43 (Youth Who Shine, ch. 6, section 4)

In Sükyō Mahikari, the fact that Yoshikazu Okada had an affluent network was a sign of merit, because people only meet and form relationships when their spiritual level is almost the same. In this logic, God brought hardship to Okada’s life to make him stronger, but placed elite friends in his life to allow for a fast recovery. For the Brazilian majority who were not born into a higher-class family, faced extreme poverty their whole lives, and were ignored by the elites, working harder in the name of God and apologizing for sins are the only possible solutions.

42 Sükyō Mahikari meritocracy must be understood as a hybrid of Japanese and Western conceptualizations of working hard. Some examples of how Japanese meritocracy is different are in the expressions: ganbatte (give your best), daijōbu (everything is alright), and itadakimasu (I am grateful for). Moreover, Mahikari ideology asserts that nothing we have was acquired solely through individual merit, so kumite should be grateful to God, parents, ancestors, and others who allowed for fortunate events to happen in their lives.

43 In the English version, the part “which you cannot even imagine” was omitted.
Okada frequently used economic or business language to explain religious concepts, pointed to the spiritual causes of bankruptcy, and told several success stories of himself and other businessmen as models to be followed. In this discourse, *kumite* should emulate corporate structures for Mahikari to expand until “all humankind practices the art of God’s Light.” (*Golden Teachings* ch. 2) Like today’s mega-corporations, Sūkyō Mahikari aims at nothing less than monopoly in the religious market. Because it is a supra-religion, all religions are destined to be engulfed by it.

Expanding the Mahikari organization is the outward form our love for humankind takes, but the heart of this practice is altruistic love for others. […] You can walk from place to place to give salvation, as I have been doing, or you can make donations or offer service to help build Mahikari centers. […] Love for all humankind should be what motivates us, not a desire to promote our center or the Mahikari organization. (*Golden Teachings* ch. 33)

Debt, repayment, interest, credit, *prejuízo* (money loss), profit, and property are the most common examples of business terms used to elucidate people’s responsibility towards God:

([…] we all have another kind of debt that we need to repay. We receive everything from God – from our very lives to our food, clothing, and shelter. We need to recompense God for His blessings.) When a person becomes aware of the debt that he owes God because of his spiritual impurities and has the desire to repay that debt, the interest on that debt, so to speak, will be reduced, and his suffering will be reduced as well. (*Youth Who Shine*, part 4, *Nodes Help Maintain Purity*)
The quote above presents the human body as God’s private property. This notion is problematic because it commoditizes the body and reinforces the imposition of private property, which is the basis of capitalism. This idea was probably inspired by the Shinto and Buddhist principles of the body being part of the universe and obligated to feel gratitude for nature, ancestors, parents, etc. – but transplanted into a neoliberal language of economism.

In Mahikari, a winner is someone with strength and willpower to overcome difficulties, thus implying that those who allow themselves to be defeated are losers (Golden Teachings ch. 32). This neo-liberal meritocratic stance reinforces mass rivalry (Yoda 192) among the middle class, normalizing inequity through individual-blaming while ignoring systemic oppressions. In this context, Japanese new religions relying on the winner-loser binary and promises of “unending opportunities to move up the ladder of spiritual development” can offer fulfillment in ways that corporate life cannot (idem 195).

3.6. Hito as rational and modern

The historical process of “de-godding” Western philosophy (Wynter) and the secularization of science (Asad; da Silva, D. F.; Masuzawa) led to the current pressure for religious organizations to substitute transcendental language for purportedly “rational” rhetoric. Due to this shift, Sūkyō Mahikari rhetoric is surprisingly similar to SOCE (Sexual Orientation Change Efforts) (Clucas) in their use of sanctified science (Robinson and Spivey 655).
Sanctified science means the practice of using religious and pseudo-scientific rhetoric simultaneously to justify an ideology wherein religious assumptions are usually hidden behind scientific language. Nowadays, scientific language has substituted religious language as the most reliable in mainstream rhetoric. I understand sanctified science to be the religious appropriation of scientific language. A completely understood and ‘real’ science does not exist because science and religion are intrinsically connected social constructs: the secular and the religious have always been in tension with each other, and modernity transformed this tension into a polarized dichotomy (Asad; Lebner).

The fact that religious groups are pressured to adopt scientific language to be taken seriously is already a form of oppression, because it is based on the myth that science is rational, unbiased, and opposite to religion. Sūkyō Mahikari both resists and accepts secularization: on the one hand, it defends the intrinsic connection between religion and science, while criticizing the academic, medical, agricultural, and other industries dependent on an anti-religion attitude and modern technological development. On the other hand, it co-opts scientific language to attract highly educated professionals like doctors, engineers, and lawyers, whom are later used to further proselytize under the image of a rational organization.

The main racist heritages Sūkyō Mahikari received from natural and human/social sciences were the concepts of the five races, five religions, *Homo sapiens*, free will, biological and social evolution. If Okada had been born before the exposure of the Japanese intelligentsia to those European theories, he would have certainly lacked this
vocabulary. However, this language appears to be changing or adapting to branches abroad: looking at Mahikari texts written from the 1960s to the 2010s, there seems to be a greater preoccupation with inclusivity, color-blindness, and sanctified science.

_Goseigen_, the first Mahikari publication, was more invested in criticizing human-centered sciences than corroborating them. For example: “children of divine souls were allowed to have physical bodies and descend to earth. It was the beginning of _hito_ (humans with divine soul within). They are not children of apes and amoeba.” (174) This is clearly a critique of Darwin’s theory of primates’ evolution from a common ancestor. In contrast, later writings condone Darwin’s survival of the fittest:

Animals do not know how to train themselves, so God has arranged for them to undergo training by exposing them to all types of extreme weather and by seeing to it that they fight for their existence according to the law of survival of the fittest. However, human beings were granted special wisdom that enables them to protect themselves from the dangers of nature by taking countermeasures such as building various forms of shelter. This wisdom became the foundation of material civilization. (_Golden Teachings_ ch. 143)

Nowadays, Sūkyō Mahikari still relies on biological, social, and geographical determinism. For instance, in magazine # 233 from August 2016, Teshima Tairiku tells he had just come from a conference at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in honor of Dr. Raphael Judah Zwi Werblowsky (1924-2015), invited by a Japanese _kumite_ businessman in Israel. According to Tairiku, the ambassador of Israel in Japan asked him to go because his presence would ease the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and terrorism in “the Middle East, often known as the world’s gunpowder barrel” (10).
Dr. Werblowsky was a professor of comparative religion who used to attend Sükyō Mahikari events, offer speeches in those occasions, and publish articles in the organization’s magazines. As his academic publications and the Mahikari magazine attest, he believed that each society’s spirituality had “a direct relation to geography”, i.e. “geography influenced populations on ways to deal with the divine. For instance, rivers, mountains, etc. which provided sustenance were seen as manifestations of the sacred.” (10). The Israeli researcher’s probable belief in geographical determinism resonated not only with widely respected philosophers like Tetsurō Watsuji (1889-1960), but also with the mainstream Japanese public opinion nowadays. The publication of this text in Brazil may have resonated with readers who still believe that tropical weather, beaches, and forests influence Brazilians’ nature and spirituality.

Color-blindness was absent in Goseigen, but appears in a prayer from 1959 called Erabito-to Kumite (The chosen people and the kumite): “For Su God, there is no distinction of race [jinshu] or socioeconomic class. The chosen one will be that who corresponds to the Divine Intention.” (Yōkōshi Prayer Book 155) In recent times, inclusivity and color-blindness discourse are more common, for example: “in only three days, the elderly and the youth, men and women, regardless of faith, race, or nationality, i.e. all who wish to do it, can begin to apply okiyome.” (Mahikari Responde 9)

Perhaps Sükyō Mahikari is developing a language typical of multiculturalism not only due to the pressures of political correctness, but also because people who care about social justice but are not so radical have been joining the organization. If this is case, the
religion is adapting to a new audience. In a world where dissatisfaction with the status quo, activism, social work, and volunteering have not been changing structures, it is understandable that some conscientious youth would try to feel useful for the salvation of humanity through Sūkyō Mahikari. I also wonder whether Portuguese translations adapt to the Brazilian greater diversity and concern about racism, which would make the language more inclusive than the Japanese version.

Sūkyō Mahikari encourages newcomers to conduct empirical experiments to prove the efficacy of okiyome, the existence of the soul, and the reality of God. Even when fledglings do not believe or are not entirely convinced, they are stimulated to persist until witnessing miracles. According to Okada, the fact that okiyome cleans impurities “proves” that the soul exists (Golden Teachings ch. 9). The tricky part for a newcomer is how to define purification, pinpoint the real cause of a result, establish the cause of a lack of results or the occurrence of negative results, and establish until when they can wait for miracles before giving up.

Another example of sanctified science is in the re-interpretation of scientific theory to fit Mahikari cosmology by, for example, insisting that what Mahikari calls “vibrations”, “waves”, and “nanoparticles” are the same things described in science (Golden Teachings ch. 10). The mentioning of statistics and medical advice without any reliable references is common as well:

if you introduce ready-made dietary supplements into the body, its factories “go on holiday”. […] by taking a ready-made supplement, you may be weakening
your body’s ability to absorb the nutrient naturally from food. Furthermore, there will be a proportional decrease in your overall stamina. (Golden Teachings ch. 20)

There is no proof of the above statement. Okada uses scientific language without the scientific search for intensive experiments, multiple sources of information, peer reviews, etc. This does not mean that everything lacking proof is false, or that science can objectively offer evidence for or against any hypothesis, but it means that despite its scientific image and abundance of highly educated followers, Sūkyō Mahikari does not need strictly scientific research to persuade the college-educated middle class that their religious teachings are backed by rationality.
Chapter Four: Other texts

The previous chapter argued that the three books Yoshikazu Okada wrote after Goseigen further elaborated the various instantiations of hito as a Man (Wynter) whose place is on top of a racial hierarchy and at the end of history in the evolution of humanity. Based on Japanese-ness, hito was observed in several types: Japanese citizen, kumite, cisgender heterosexual male, anti-Marx, middle- to higher-class, rational and modern.

In this chapter, I examined textbooks, personal notes, pamphlets, the hymn book, and magazines collected from 2009 to 2016, first in my time as kumite, and later during fieldwork for this study. This analysis was crucial to demonstrate how new generations and Brazilians have adapted Okada’s rhetoric to different contexts, for example, by introducing Amazonian nikkei elements to the discourse. Because the books analyzed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three are rarely read by regular Brazilian kumite, Chapter Four can introduce the disparate denotations of Mahikari texts in the Third World.

4.1. Textbooks

During the Basic Course, I wrote on a notepad and followed lectures with the textbook Apostila do Seminário Básico. One image in the guidebook gives a hint on how Sūkyō Mahikari envisions humanity. Even though the words read, “human society”, the drawing seems to portray a family. The character on the top left seems to represent a
stereotypical Japanese man: slanted eyes, straight combed hair, glasses, collared shirt, tie, no beard, and childish or feminine appearance, thus reinforcing the stereotype that Asian men are not very manly. The character on the right may be the man’s wife and children’s mother. She is skinny, young, and looks in the direction of the children and elderly woman, as if watching over them – in contrast to her husband, who is not looking at anyone.

Figure 14 - Partial scan of graph: “Summarized diagram on the poisoning of humanity” (Apostila do Seminário Básico 34).
The elderly woman, the girl, the boy, and the baby are looking straight ahead. The elderly woman is the only one with eyebrows, thus showing more facial expression. The boy is the only one with black hair, thus inviting the question of whether the other characters have light-colored hair. He is using a sideways cap, the girl a headband, and the baby a pacifier, which are accessories associated with Western customs.  

Despite the air pollution from factories and vehicles above them, all characters are smiling. Their contentment may be to conform to the predominant image of an ideal family, or a reference to Okada’s differentiation between temporary, apparent happiness (human society might think they are fine, but in fact they are suffering from intoxication) and permanent, true happiness (through spiritual purification and environmentally responsible decisions).

The racist science present in the textbook reinforces the myth that human races exist biologically and can be scientifically classified:

A drug for asthma called ephedrine provokes pupil dilation. Its effect is stronger in people of the white race, and weaker in those of the yellow race. It is even weaker in those of the black race. The efficacy and performance of medicine vary from one animal species to another, as well as one race to another. (Apostila 43)

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44 About 75 to 85% of children in Western countries are given pacifiers at some point (Niemelä et al.), 78% in the U.S. (Nelson, A. M.), 41 to 47% in Brazil (Buccini et al.; Rigotti et al.), and 12 to 13% in Japan (Nelson et al.; Yonezu et al.).
Scientific racism can be observed in the guidebook’s citation of Yūjirō Ikemi (1915-1999), who established the Japan Society of Psychosomatic Medicine in 1960, inspired by U.S. scholarship on the subject, and later became an emeritus professor of Medicine at Kyushu University. According to Mahikari’s rendering of Ikemi, men who are incapable of adapting to their environment acquire physical and mental illness (Apostila 45). This geographical determinism is related to racist biological determinism, particularly in the assessment that the Japanese are hard-working, closely bonded, and enduring people forming a homogeneous race due to being isolated in a mountainous island prone to natural disasters, where agriculture requires peasants to rely heavily on each other and the whims of environmental changes. The myth is not only the basis of Nihonjinron, but is also very common in daily Japanese rhetoric, even among youth – as I have witnessed in numerous conversations in Japan.

The assumption ignores that Japan has always exchanged cultures, goods, and people with neighboring lands, especially what are now known as Korea and China (Iwabuchi). It also ignores that being an island does not impede interchange or hybridization; for example, England colonized a great portion of the world, and Pacific Islanders have always crossed the ocean to contact other communities. Furthermore, the presumption of incapacity to adapt implies a lack of ability, or a fault, thus blaming the patient for their illness.

45 “Men” and “man” as synonyms for “human beings” appear throughout all Sükyō Mahikari publications.
Scientific racism only makes sense through Darwinism, as in the textbook’s quote of Ikemi: “I have always thought that evolution, through the solid bases of psychosomatic medicine research, is the only way to solve problems.” (Apostila 46). It is unclear whether he is referring to human evolution, or the evolution of psychosomatic medicine; either way, there is a clear belief in science, modernity, and linear progress.

Religious racism and anti-cult tendencies are directly related to scientific racism. For Yūjirō Ikemi, according to Sūkyō Mahikari, “true religious faith” is different from diabolical sects, superstitions, and cults:

It is lamentable that true religious faith is mistaken for beliefs in diabolical sects or with strong superstitious tendencies. Nonetheless, the cure of certain diseases through faith cannot be completely repudiated under the accusation that it is superstition or a new cult. (Apostila 46).

The reliance on “religion” as a universal category in contrast to “primitive” beliefs in the supernatural is a tool of colonialism (Masuzawa, The Invention). Like Europeans in the nineteenth century dismissed Shinto as a product of a less evolved society, Ikemi laments the incapability of medical doctors to differentiate the scientifically provable cure through religion from the irrational belief in magic, which promises to, but cannot cure diseases. In this sense, only “true religious faith” is evolved enough to be mixed with science. Furthermore, science is recognized as a Western positive development, which Japan should emulate and perfect:
In Japan, to this day, medics and religious people act, to a certain extent, as if they were enemies. However, in many hospitals in the United States and Europe, religious people are accepted in hospitals, and while they cooperate with doctors, they learn through practice some notions of medicine. In New York, the Academy of Religion and Mental Hygiene was founded, with the participation of Wolf and Menningen. In it, medics and religious people from various religions gather periodically to discuss topics of mutual interest. I wish this type of association were organized in Japan too, as soon as possible. (Apostila 46)

The quote above is in accordance with Yoshikazu Okada’s call for Japan to recognize the Western contribution to the development of Japanese science, and follow European and U.S. good examples. Rather than acknowledging how “religion” and “science” are mutually constitutive as modern concepts and institutions (Masuzawa, “The University”), Sūkyō Mahikari gives the impression that a religious view on science is new, an extraordinary revolution (Apostila 24). However, the current Japanese anti-religion sentiment serves to omit the reality that Japanese people, including scientists, are not completely secular beings.

The textbook *Veneração dos Antepassados* (Worship of Ancestors) is a manual with instructions on how to worship ancestors, and an explanation of the meanings behind each gesture in this daily ritual. It is fifteen pages long, without copyright page, offering no information about who wrote it, when, or where. However, the language and cultural references are much more Brazilian than the Basic Course textbook, thus giving the impression that the manual is either a highly-adapted Portuguese translation, or an originally Brazilian composition. Despite lack of information, the guidebook gives a hint on where it was produced:
Offer *cachaça* 46 (alcoholic drink) every day. As ancestors get rid of their attachments, 47 descendants change their habits.

Offer *chimarrão*, 48 traditional dishes, or other delicacies, in accordance with the regionalism of the place where ancestors used to reside. (*Worship of Ancestors* 8)

Because *chimarrão* is typical of the Brazilian South, the handbook was almost certainly written there. Given the strong regionalism of the Amazon, if the manual had been written there, the example would certainly be *maníçoba, pato no tucupi, cupuaçu* juice, or other Amazonian foods and drinks. We must remember that Pará was the last State to adhere to the Brazilian Empire (1823), and tried to gain independence in the *Cabanagem* movement (1835-1840), 49 while Rio Grande do Sul managed to gain

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46 *Cachaça* is the national alcoholic drink of Brazil. It is made of sugar cane.

47 When people die, their spirits are often still attached to a living person (e.g., espouse), an inanimate belonging (e.g., house, car, object), an addiction (e.g., alcohol, tobacco, gambling, drugs), etc. Sometimes ghosts cannot leave those attachments behind and move on, so they linger in the material world. This is not an original Mahikari revelation, but rather a widespread Buddhist and Shinto belief.

48 *Chimarrão*, also called *yerba mate* or *mate*, is a sugarless tea served inside a bowl with a metal straw, introduced by indigenous peoples from the South of Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

49 In the Brazilian flag, there is a solitary star above a white stripe representing the Equator line, with the positivist inscription: “order and progress”. The star stands for Pará, which was placed alone for two reasons: it was considered a Northern frontier far away from Rio de Janeiro (the capital of Brazil at the time of independence from Portugal); it was the last state to adhere to the Brazilian Empire. For many residents of Pará, the solitary star is also a symbol of Amazonian insubordination (Garcia 71).
independence in *Guerra dos Farrapos* (lit., Rags War) (1835-1845). These memories of desire for independence strengthen Northern and Southern respective regional identities.

The textbook *Ensinamento sobre Gohoshi* (Teaching about Gohoshi) is eight pages long and has no indication of who wrote it, when, or where. According to this guidebook and the Basic Course textbook (73-80), there are three forms of *gohōshi* ご奉仕 (service): *hosse* 法施 is sharing religious knowledge to proselytize, *gyosse* 50 is physical labor, and *busse* 物施 is material donations. The number of pages dedicated to persuading readers to offer service is astounding, especially the emphasis on money donations for the construction and maintenance of Suza (World Shrine), the museum of Yoshikazu Okada, Mahikari-tai training center, Yōkōshi Clinic, *dōjō*, and other buildings.

The segments about Suza are where references to human races appear, since the shrine is defined as the world’s spiritual center where the five races of different colors unite to serve God. Sūkyō Mahikari books are full of references to the five races and *hito*, but the three textbooks analyzed here barely mention those topics. In fact, I cannot recall any explanations about human races or the difference between *ningen* and *hito* during the Basic Course (which I attended twice, as a newcomer and as Mahikari-tai), lectures, or meetings. Mahikari cosmology is only taught in the Intermediate and Advanced Courses.

50 I do not know the Japanese ideogram for *gyosse*, but it seems to correspond to the Buddhist principle of *taise* 体施. In Buddhism and its Shinto adaptation, *hosse*, *taise*, and *busse* are the three ways to accumulate virtue and become a better person.
so most *kumite* have no idea about Yoshikazu Okada’s conceptualization of the human, race, and religion.

The logic goes as follows: if Sūkyō Mahikari makes a point to frequently offer Suza as the place where the five human races of different colors can unite, then the organization acknowledges that racialized groups suffer from disunity, i.e. racism; if Sūkyō Mahikari makes a point to frequently define itself as promoting salvation for all regardless of race, nationality, class, gender, and age, then the organization acknowledges that certain races, nationalities, classes, genders, and ages are usually treated worse than others. In other words, Mahikari presents itself as an exception to the rule of worldwide racism.

If Sūkyō Mahikari indirectly recognizes that races are disunited and treated differently from one another, then it should recognize that whites are treated better than blacks, and *wajin* are treated better than other groups in Japan. Now, remember that the conditions under which people reincarnate depends on their spiritual evolvement, because reincarnation aims at evolution. Moreover, spirits tend to reincarnate around the same groups (e.g., relatives, spouses, friends) across generations due to spiritual affinity and the obligation to amend past conflicts. Henceforth, people with more merits accumulated across reincarnations tend to enjoy easier lives, whereas people with more accumulated sins tend to suffer in hard lives. This would mean that: whites and *wajin* are treated better than blacks, Koreans, Brazilian immigrants, etc. because they have accumulated more merit than sins; being born a person of color is a punishment decided by God.
If God punishes people, there are two types of chastening He could impose: natural pain such as genetic diseases, a loved one’s death, failure in an endeavor, etc.; and oppression-based pain such as smallpox-infected blankets given by white colonizers to Native Americans, war, poverty, unemployment, etc. For the most part, people in privileged positions experience only natural pain, and to deal with it, they have access to doctors, medical drugs, legal and illegal recreational drugs with no legal repercussions, psychologists, psychiatrists, life coaches, yoga classes, and other kinds of treatment. In contrast, impoverished people of color experience both natural and oppression-based pain, which they cannot afford to treat.

Because most people in the world have little access to healthy ways to deal with natural pain due to the global system being unequal, their natural and oppressive-based pains are indistinguishable. For this reason, a God who punishes people by imposing reincarnation in a Third World body while rewarding people by granting reincarnation in a First World body cannot be just, and a truly just God would not do it.

Using methodological agnosticism (Bell and Taylor), let us imagine how reincarnation can be true but not racist. Reincarnation would have to be interpreted in direct challenge to a modern evolutionary and meritocratic framework. In this approach, God is aware of human violence and encourages people to destroy the structural injustice they have built, to construct a better world where everybody works together to deal with disagreements, make decisions, and maintain justice for all.
Sūkyō Mahikari believes in an oppressive system of reincarnation that is bound to lead to the Baptism of Fire, when sinners will die horribly and suffer in hell. However, I suggest an alternative system of reincarnation where every person has the mission to struggle for equity, and help the most vulnerable if a global catastrophe occurs. Only when earth is rid of systemic oppressions, can reincarnation depend on equality, i.e. a spiritual evolvement plan through the accumulation of merit. Only when systemic pain is eradicated can people suffer solely from natural pain.

4.2. Personal notes

My personal notes contain interpretations of what the lecturers were saying. One note reads: “Animals and plants have spirits, but they lack the divine spark, and therefore cannot reincarnate.” At first glance, it appears that I created a contradiction, since there are many testimonials of kumite who have been reincarnated from, or possessed by spirits of animals or plants. If animals and plants cannot reincarnate, how can people be reincarnated from them? However, it turns out that this contradiction is present not only in my notes, but also in the magazine Mahikari Responde:

Sometimes, men are reborn as women and women as men, and rarely humans as animals and vice-versa. We call this transmutation. This process is determined by the behavior or way of thinking they had while alive in the material world. For example: somebody had been born a man in this world and was a terrible

51 On the difference between equality and equity, see: da Silva, D. F. “The End of Brazil”; Mistry and Sood 550.
husband. In the next reincarnation, he may be reborn as a woman with a husband as terrible as he used to be. Moreover, in extreme cases, a person may reincarnate as an animal, in complete consonance with the way of thinking they had when alive as a human. […] only human beings are permitted to reincarnate, and therefore spiritually evolve, develop civilization, and live eternally. (Mahikari Responde 18)

Sūkyō Mahikari professes that a change from man to woman follows the same logic as from human to animal or plant. This logic follows traditional yin-yang, in which there are opposite poles that constantly shift power positions and turn into each other, but always keeping their inherent positions as separate, distinguishable, inferior and superior sides. In other words, even in reincarnation (being reborn as the same type of body) and transmutation (being reborn as a different type of body), the man remains superior to the woman, and turning into her is a punishment.

Similarly, the human remains superior to the animal or plant. Nevertheless, Mahikari opens the possibility that there are animals and plants that think exactly like humans, due to having been human in their previous life. In this case, we must treat animal and plant lives in the same manner we treat humans, because they might have a human mind. This idea comes from the Hindu belief that we must never kill animals no matter how small because they might be reincarnations of humans, even our diseased loved ones. It also stems from the Shinto worshipping of nature.

In contrast to Sūkyō Mahikari dichotomies, feminism questions the empirical existence of sex and gender, while indigenous and environmentalist epistemologies blur the line dividing humans from non-human animals, and sometimes from plants, minerals,
oceans, rivers, wind, soil, mountains, the universe, etc. These epistemologies not only acknowledge the inter-dependency and interchange between different sides, but also question the very existence of opposite poles.

Despite lacking references to the five human races, my notes offer many examples of hierarchical schemes defined by God. The inherently racialized ideas of evolution, level of humanness (from most to less divine), and meritocracy follow people in the afterlife.

**Figure 15** - The seven levels of heaven and hell. My scan and English translation.
The division of heaven and hell into numerous dimensions responds to the common doubt, “Should a pickpocket go to the same place, and be punished the same way as a genocidal dictator?” The Basic Course textbook and *Worship of Ancestors* explain about afterlife “floors” and the types of punishment that each sinner receives. For instance, a man who cheated on his wife in life will have to perform straining, repetitive, and useless labor in one the levels of hell depending on the gravity of his adultery. He may reincarnate as a cheated wife or as a person with gynecological illness, such as uterine cancer or AIDS. The same will happen to his host if he possesses a living person.

The desire to be closer to God is the desire to evolve from *ningen* to *hito*, and therefore become closer to the *wajin* ideal. In Sūkyō Mahikari, *hito* abides to his nation-state’s laws, obeys his superiors, is a productive member of society through corporate labor, researches about Japanese ultra-ancient history, is proud of Edo symbols such as Mount Fuji and cherry blossoms but not symbols of Japanese ethnic minorities such as Okinawan language and Korean art.

Conversely, sins are associated with non-*wajin* ways. For instance, when I was *kumite*, the *dōjōchō* said that a certain *kumite* – *nikkei* middle-aged man whose wife and children were active members – was too fat. To solve this health hazard, he spent some weeks in reclusion inside the *dōjō*, eating mainly *misoshiru* (soup made of soy paste). A critical reading of Sūkyō Mahikari rhetoric offers a critique of the industrialized and fast food industry, Americanization of local cuisine due to U.S. hegemony, and their
consequent health problems especially on vulnerable populations. At the same time, the “fat West” versus “slim East” binary reinforces Orientalism, the dehumanization of fat people, and the placing of the ideal *wajin* (thin follower of Edo cuisine) at the top of human evolution, close to God.

4.3. Pamphlets

Another medium used at the *dōjō* was the pamphlet.

**Figure 16** - Pamphlet: “The family is the base on which the nation is built.”
It is fundamental to maintain love and harmony in our homes and inside the community

In the family, each member has functions and responsibilities to be followed. Families with genuine love and harmony will generate societies with love and harmony and, consequently, countries with love and harmony.

Education

The true goal of a spiritualist education is the betterment of the human character, i.e., the improvement of personality.

Without the improvement of personality, people may end up not being useful for society. Intellectual education alone is not enough for children to grow up to become adults with improved character.

It is good for youth to receive, alongside intellectual education, moral education and orientation about good manners, for them to acquire a desire for developing a sense of responsibility.

A complete education encompasses intellectual, moral, and spiritual education.

If education at school and at home models for good manners and integrity to children, it will help them grow to become productive members of society and examples for others.

Young people must assume responsibility for their own future

There is such explosion of information in today’s world that a lot of it causes an adverse effect on many people, even youth.
A society that prioritizes academic studies may lose their humanity. The exaggerated emphasis on technical and academic education may engender an arid and desolated world.

**Brief narrative of a practitioner of Mahikari Art**

Despite having been born in a family with good financial standing and excellent education, I had a troubled adolescence: I was undisciplined, caused a lot of conflict, didn’t want to study, and ended up being expelled from school. After junior high school, I quit school and just went to bars, making my parents very worried. I heard about Mahikari through a practitioner’s son, began to daily receive purification energy (Okiyome), could feel an extraordinary change. I became a practitioner and thanks to hand irradiation, I had strength to abandon bad habits, went back to school, and even entered college, then graduated. Thanks to Mahikari, I got the permission to be born again.

José Luis de Carvalho
São Paulo, Brazil

**At home the essential bases for the construction of character are cultivated:**

*“giving love” and “being considerate”*

Children and adolescents who receive unconditional love at home since their early years are touched in their hearts. Nevertheless, if this does not occur, it will be very hard to generate altruistic sentiment in youth.

The foundation for the establishment of world Peace can only be built when husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters do their best to reach harmony through love.

Because pamphlets are directed toward potential newcomers, the expression “practitioner” substitutes “kamikumite”, while “Mahikari Art”, “purification energy”, and “hand irradiation” substitute “okiyome”. Many messages in this pamphlet will be lost to
non-nikkei non-kumite, such as the meanings of “harmony” and “peace” \(^{52}\), individual function and responsibility \(^{53}\), and \textit{ganbaru} (doing one’s best).

References to nation and family sound quite odd in Brazil, where these words have not been broadly, consistently, or popularly used except during \textit{Estado Novo} (1930s) and the military dictatorship (1964-1984). However, the cis-hetero-normative and patriarchal idealization of “husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters” are familiar to Brazilians raised under Christianity.

José Luis de Carvalho’s narrative strongly resembles personal testimonials \(^{54}\) and official rhetoric in Neo-Pentecostal churches and \textit{Renovação Carismática Católica} (Catholic Charismatic Renovation) in Brazil, which tend to broach the following topics: bridging individuals to society; finding the meaning of life; converting through personal choice rather than inheriting a religion from one’s family; power to lay people instead of ecclesiastical authoritarianism; insertion in the government, usually with conservative agendas; use of mass media; large events with strong emotional appeal; etc. (Oro and

\footnotesize{
\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{The words Yamato and \textit{wajin} (the predominant ethnic group in Japan), broadly used as synonyms for Japan and the Japanese, carry the ideogram for peace \(\text{和}\). Moreover, Confucian tradition has a very specific meaning for harmony \(\text{調和}\).}
\item \textit{The sense of individual responsibility and assigned role in the societal machinery is much stronger in Japan than Brazil.}
\item \textit{The first version of a testimony is written by the narrative protagonist, but the text is heavily edited for publication. In blogs in Japanese, English, and Portuguese, many people have posted complaints about how their own or acquaintances’ original texts were heavily modified to fit Sūkyō Mahikari language, for instance, from “I had cancer” to “I was allowed by God to be purified through cancer”.
\end{itemize}

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In fact, testimony itself is a central rhetorical strategy in Neo-Pentecostal churches and Sükyō Mahikari.

The definition of Pentecostalism is contested in the academy, but most authors point out core similarities in Pentecostal movements: they are charismatic or emphasize emotional ecstasy; the Day of Pentecostal, the Holy Spirit, and glossolalia (speaking in tongues) are important; followers are born again; the Bible is literal; break with the worldly order; miracle healings; demons and the devil are destructive forces (Robeck and Yong). Most of these premises are present in Sükyō Mahikari in the Amazon.

Sükyō Mahikari professes the necessity to be born again not only through reincarnation, but also the transformation from *ningen* to *hito*, from useless to useful, from vicious to righteous. Moreover, both Neo-Pentecostal churches and Sükyō Mahikari teach prosperity theology, i.e., an ideology that justifies capitalist accumulation through religion (Ferreira). From my experience, most Brazilian Neo-Pentecostal practitioners are from the lower class and interpret prosperity theology as a way out of marginalization, drug addiction, and hopelessness (Lanz), whereas most Brazilian *kumite* are from the middle class and interpret prosperity theology as a response to national corruption, the imposition of secularization, urban atomization, and other concerns unrelated to urgent threats to life such as food, shelter, or employment. Finally, I believe that religious racism against *espiritismo* and Afro-Brazilian religions in Neo-Pentecostal churches and Catholic Charismatic Renovation influence *kumite* in Brazil.
Most photos in the pamphlet create a connection with local audiences by showing symbols of the Amazon (river, trees, the plant *vitória régia*, the bird *guará*, roofs made of palm leaves and wood) and people of color, some of whom are real Amazonian *kumite*. This is a smart strategy, given how many Amazonians are sensitive to *paulistocentrismo* and proud of their regional identity. Symbols of Japanese identity are also present: *nikkei* bodies, *kanji* on a shirt, and *tatami* on the background. This strategy attracts *nikkeijin* as well as non-*nikkei* readers who admire Japanese culture.

**Figure 17** - Pamphlet: “For a long time, Humanity has searched for the truth and happiness through science, religion, arts, philosophy, and various ideologies. It is like climbing a mountain by walking infinite paths to reach the peak.”
There comes the time when Science should turn to research on universal principles that allow for a correct comprehension of all existence – both the spiritual invisible world and the physical world.

**Medicine**

The Medicine that can save the world is a trinity encompassing spiritual, mental, and material (physical) Medicines.

Sciences that treat only the material, medical sciences of the mind and body (psychosomatic, psychology, psychiatry, among others), and spiritual Medicine should work together.

Spiritual Medicine should encompass at least 80% of all Medicine, whilst mental and material Medicines should take up only 20%. Because nowadays the opposite happens, the number of sick people grows and diseases become worse. Our movement is dedicated to reverting this trend and start a great Science for the benefit of Humanity.

The focus of Sūkyō Mahikari is to combine spiritual practice and positive aspects of Medicine.

**Nature and the environment**

As human beings, we have the responsibility to give back to Nature its original abundance and purity so that in the future people can live in a beautiful and safe environment. The unrestrained exploitation of natural resources is a threat to this future.

Our way of life, which emphasizes profit and financial success, must change. Technological development must be a benefit for Humanity rather than a
threat to society. It is important to promote a Science centered on God, which can conduct Humanity towards a lasting happiness.

**Brief narrative of a practitioner of Mahikari Art**

From a doctor, I received the following diagnosis: “Due to thrombocytopenia, you have only 9,000 platelets. Therefore, if you have a hemorrhage, you may die.”

I went through a treatment, but the number of platelets did not increase. I dedicated myself to hand irradiation and divulging Mahikari Art, with the desire of helping people reach happiness. Thanks to these activities, my aunt also became a practitioner. Later, I repeated the exams and it was proven that my life was not in danger anymore because my platelets had risen to 50,000.

Hatsue Takeo
Hachidai, Chiba, Japan

**When people concentrate on working for society and others, they prosper because his attitude is in accordance with God’s Will.**

If you conduct activities with the goal of helping society, you will naturally obtain benefits. Society would get better if people around the world lived with the purpose of helping others.

Despite the mention to God, most of the text is in secularized language, which is a tendency in rhetoric from numerous religious groups directed at middle-class formally educated interlocutors (Clucas; Mariz). Secularized language in Sūkyō Mahikari is valued because the organization seeks practitioners and allies with economic, political, cultural, and social capital who can legitimize its ideology in the public sphere.

Only a photo on the cover of the pamphlet make unmistakable reference to the Amazon by depicting the plant *vitória régia* on a river. One photo on the back probably shows real Amazonian *kumite*, whilst the other one presents two white men. Photos inside have people who may not be *nikkei*, Amazonian, or Brazilian. Moreover, the testimony is by a Japanese woman in Japan. The first pamphlet’s theme is “family” and
gives prominence to Amazonian nikkei identities, whereas the second pamphlet’s theme is “science” and gives prominence to Japanese and white men in academic and medical sceneries. In other words, Amazonians of color are associated with child rearing, whereas Japanese and white men are linked to rationality.

4.4. Hymn book

The hymn book contains both original Japanese song lyrics and Portuguese translations. The hymns consistently mention the five human races under various names: goshiki-no hito 五色の人 (people of five colors), itsuīro 五色 (five colors), irobito 色人 (people of color), and goshiki jinrui 五色人類 (humans of five colors). The word jinshu 人種 (race) does not appear, probably because the Japanese generally interpret races to refer only to blacks and whites (Kawai).
The textbooks mention gods and the greatness of the three supreme leaders only briefly, whilst the hymns bring up gods such as Konohanasakuya-hime 木花開耶姫 (goddess of Mount Fuji and cherry blossom trees) and worship Yoshikazu Okada and Sachiko Inoue with deep emotion. Because the hymns are direct translations of Japanese, they are more faithful to the original themes of Sūkyō Mahikari: *wajin* supremacy, Asian gods, and the leaders as *kami*. 55

Another aspect of the hymn book, also present in Okada’s books but absent from the textbooks, is having “the chest full of pride of being *hito*” (*hito-no hokori-wo mune-ni*).

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55 The Basic Course textbook subtly suggests that Yoshikazu Okada was a saint in the Catholic sense: sinless and miraculous. The use of the term “saint” may be an adaptation to a Brazilian Catholic audience.
shite) (15). In Brazil, being hito or a true child of God meant being an exemplary kumite who worked hard for God’s plan, a rendering that lacked the racialized aspect of hito. Japanese nationalism is also much stronger in publications other than the textbooks, talking about the land of the rising sun as the world’s divine capital, and Japanese people as the chosen ones.

4.5. Magazines

Below are the three magazines I read as kumite: Mahikari Responde (Mahikari Answers) of March 2008, magazine # 124 of July 2007, and magazine #148 of July 2009.

Figure 19 - Sūkyō Mahikari magazines from the time I was a practitioner.

Magazines #124 and #148 have the same introduction, explaining the basics of Sūkyō Mahikari on the back of the cover, including: “the Spiritual Light of God the
Creator and the practice of the Teachings [...] constitute a safe guide for all people, regardless of religion, race, or culture” (2). Here we can see a language of multiculturalism (Ahmed, On Being Included) that was absent in Okada’s texts.

On magazine #124, Teshima Tairiku explains a passage of the Yōkōshi Prayer Book that talks about yosuka (expand Sūkyō Mahikari to the whole humanity) and sumeigodo (make all religions return to their common origin). He explains numerous kotodama, then retells the story of the Shinto priests who “confirmed” Yoshikazu Okada’s role as chosen through tenjo 天書 (heavenly writing), the method of letting gods use human hands to write. Finally, the master explained how humanity’s evolution is passing through phases that correspond to the katakana syllabary. We are now in the yo ヨ phase, almost in the end of the alphabet, and the ra-ru-ro ラルロ tempest represents global cataclysms. Wa ワ (peace) will be the peaceful phase, the same syllable of wajin 和人, who will take back their place as conductors of humanity.

On magazine #148, the Sunkyo with Yoshikazu Okada’s words says something frequently mentioned in his publications, which may sound strange to Christian ears: God loves only those who love Him. In contrast to the Catholic teaching that God loves all His creation and children, no matter who they are or what they do, Sūkyō Mahikari makes clear that people who fail to follow Su God and be useful to the organization are not

56 Tairiku was famous in shodō (art of calligraphy) even before becoming the Sūkyō Mahikari leader, and therefore his detailing of kotodama might be a pleasurable activity, or at least based on deep knowledge of Japanese writing.
loved by Him. Those who have already heard of, or learned about Okada’s preaching have a greater responsibility, and therefore will be judged more harshly. At the same time, those who have never heard of these teachings are still unloved and damned, because Sūkyō Mahikari literature says that having Su God as the center of all human endeavors is the only way to achieve salvation. Therefore, hito as an overrepresented ideal Man can only be kumite.

On the same magazine, Teshima Tairiku gives a speech for the seeding ritual of rice in a Yoko farm in Asahi, Mie. The ritual was invented in 1975, one year after Yoshikazu Okada’s death – an admission that troubles Okada’s supposed dislike for rituals and the belief in God-given practices. During the ceremony, many politicians were present, including the mayor. Tairiku thanks each politician and private sponsor by name, and offers a general thanks to volunteering kumite who manually work at the farm, thus demonstrating a valuing and individualization of powerful contributors, but generalization of commoners. The master manifests his desire for Yoko farms to spread throughout Japan and the world.

Next, Tairiku offers a scientific explanation of microbes and pandemics, blaming the sins of greed and arrogance for swine flu, bird flu, and mad cow disease, AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and other illnesses. His long critique borrows heavily from the natural and social sciences, but adds the argument that infectious dangerous diseases are God’s devices for the purification of humanity. In contrast to Yoshikazu Okada’s constant comparison of sinful ningen to disgusting animals, Tairiku is empathetic towards
cows, chickens, and pigs. The new leader makes a persuasive, emotional critique with scientific arguments against environmental destruction and animal cruelty in the meat industry. According to him, groups of animal spirits with grudges due to mistreatment in life can generate negative energy, which may cause infectious diseases on humans.

Below are the magazines I read as an ethnographer: the Japanese magazine #645 of June 2016, and the Brazilian magazines #230 of May, #231 of June, #232 of July, and #233 of August (Fig. 23).

**Figure 20** - Magazines of summer 2016.
Most of the content in the Brazilian magazine of July is translated from the Japanese magazine of June. Brazilian magazines are 60 to 70 pages long with medium-sized font, whereas the Japanese magazine is 118 pages long, with small font. The Japanese magazine contains: articles with information about Sūkyō Mahikari events and Teshima Tairiku’s calligraphy exhibitions; one article written by Teshima Tairiku; one article by Yoshikazu Okada; numerous articles written by, or referring to (right-wing) politicians who support or are members of Sūkyō Mahikari; practitioners’ narratives of having the great honor of seeing, listening to, shaking hands with, and receiving okiyome from Teshima Tairiku; and testimonies of miracles and life changes.

The Brazilian version translates the articles written by Teshima Tairiku and Yoshikazu Okada, and a couple of testimonies. The other testimonies are by kumite from Brazil and Peru. The magazines from 2007 and 2009 listed the address of only one dōjō outside Brazil, in Argentina, but the 2016 Brazilian magazines listed dōjō from Mexico,
Peru, and Venezuela instead. Argentina and Chile are known by South Americans as prosperous countries with the whitest populations of Latin America, so the substitution to predominantly brown impoverished countries may point to a change in focus. Additionally, the number of Brazilian dōjō has increased from 52 in 2007 to 54 in 2009 to 62 in 2016, although the North Region has had only two temples in all those years, in Belém and Manaus.

In the magazines from 2007 and 2009, the three Brazilian testifiers were non-nikkei women. In the Brazilian magazines from 2016, the Brazilian testifiers were nikkei and non-nikkei men and women, and there were also testifiers from Peru and the United States. Another difference is the addition of excerpts from Daiseishu, Yoshikazu Okada’s biography. This part is written in large font, accessible language, and illustrations, like a children’s book. It strongly reminded me of Focolare \textsuperscript{57} magazines I read as a child, for example, the narrative of Okada’s encounter with Pope John Paul VI resembled stories of Lubich’s encounters with him. Sūkyō Mahikari framed it as an official approval from a legitimate religion, from one religious authority to another.

In the testimonies, a common theme is the overcoming of financial, family, and health problems through Sūkyō Mahikari, after lawyers and doctors had already said that a solution was unattainable. Besides legal and medical powerlessness before spiritual

\textsuperscript{57} Focolare is an Italian Catholic youth movement founded in 1943 by Chiara Lubich. Like Sūkyō Mahikari, Focolare is often seen by ex-practitioners and outsiders as a cult trying to conquer the world and brainwash children.
disturbances, another common theme is other religions’ incapacity to guarantee happiness. Usually, Japanese testifiers initially do not see themselves as religious, but upon becoming *kumite*, they begin to see themselves as spiritual and dedicated to God. In contrast, Brazilian testifiers are from the start either non-practicing Catholic, or active Christians who later combine church and *dōjō* practices. They conclude that although Christianity alone is not enough, Sūkyō Mahikari further explains all other religions, adding meaning to them and to practitioners’ lives.

Testimonies in magazines are moving, persuasive, and impressive, especially when babies (even newborns), unconscious patients, and non-believers whose doctors had condemned them to death get cured forever in a short period of time (in some cases, days) from cancer, congenital illnesses, kidney failure, and other grave ailments.

The testifier is usually someone who has been a *kumite* for a very long time, ranging from ten years to their whole lives. In magazine #124 of 2007, there was one Japanese woman, two Japanese men, and one non-*nikkei* lady from São Paulo who had been a member since 1984. In magazine #148 of 2009, there were two Japanese men, one non-*nikkei* woman from Brasília who had learned about Sūkyō Mahikari in 1982, and one non-*nikkei* woman from Londrina who had received her *omitama* in 2007.

The kind of information you get from Okada’s books is different from what you get from lectures, meetings, informal conversations, textbooks, and pamphlets. The former is stronger in Japanese-ness ideology, offers more references to Asian religions, and has an older-generation tone; the latter is weaker in Japanese-ness ideology, offers
more references to Catholicism, and has a newer-generation tone. As Okada is increasingly sanctified, he is also left in the past, for example, current magazines say that Tairiku has the same powers as Okada: divine predictions, the ability to turn bad weather into good weather (often only on top of his car or head), direct talk to Su God, etc. What has not changed is the affiliation of Sūkyō Mahikari with right-wing politicians and movements, whose support has been expanding. I hope kumite question this affiliation.
Chapter Five: Autoethnography and auto-archaeology

In the previous chapter, I introduced the most read Sūkyō Mahikari texts in Belém and my notes, written when I was kumite. Having argued that Man (Wynter) takes different forms in the Brazilian Amazon than in the rest of Brazil and Japan, I showed how Brazilian Japanese-ness and Whiteness creates a variety of hito: not so much a Japanese citizen, but a wajin ancestor from nikkeijin’s imagined homeland.

This chapter further elaborates in the idea of adaptations of hito across generations and countries. In contrast to common accusations of Sūkyō Mahikari as Nazi Japanese imperialist propaganda, I tell stories of interpretations and practices that do not fit into this simplistic description. To this end, I use autoethnography and auto-archaeology to reminisce on my experiences as kamikumite from 2009 to 2011, and as an ethnographer in Summer 2016, comparing what Sūkyō Mahikari discourses meant to me at the time, and what they mean to me now.

5.1. Memories as a kamikumite

In childhood, I hated being called names, having my appearance mocked, and suffering other microaggressions (Sue et al.) for being nikkei. However, attending a Japanese school, having nikkei friends, and talking to my relatives always made me feel better – not only “less sad”, but better than everybody else. Despite my embarrassing
short legs and slanted eyes, I had superior moral and intellectual capacities due to my race. My grandparents talked about how Koreans were dishonest and improved with Japanese colonization; my grandmother called dark-skinned Japanese immigrants Okinawan *pretos* (blacks), my family commented on how impolite and noisy Brazilians were, and how dirty the Chinese were; my friends talked about how Brazilians were loose but the Japanese had self-control; acquaintances opposed Brazilian laziness to the Japanese hard-working spirit; and so on. Most of the time, I felt more embarrassed by not being Japanese enough, than by having Japanese heritage.

My maternal grandmother passed away unexpectedly in 2005, taking with her a lot of stories about life in Japan and as an immigrant in Brazil about which I regret not having asked her enough. In 2009, I was waiting for the result of my application for the Monbukagakusho scholarship and Master’s course at Kyushu University. Despite having studied Japanese for several years during my childhood, I re-started Japanese classes since applying for the grant. I was thirsty for connection with my Japanese roots, and as always, with spirituality.

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58 Many Japanese immigrants in Brazil are of Okinawan (Itokazu; Petrucci and Miyahira) and *buraku* descent: “One cannot be silent with regard to the segregation and discrimination suffered by some of the Japanese immigrants of low social status – such as the ‘eta,’ ‘hinin,’ and ‘burakumin’ – by their compatriots.” (Hirano 11)

My partner at the time had a quite similar background to mine: his mother was completely Japanese by blood but born and raised in Brazil, his father was from the Brazilian Northeast, and they were not married. However, my mother was a devoted Catholic, whereas his mother was *kumite*. My partner’s uncle and his wife were extremely dedicated to Sūkyō Mahikari, and I decided to try it out although still with one foot in agnosticism.

The *dōjōcho* interviewed me to know why I intended to enter the organization. I answered that my Japanese grandmother was probably in trouble in the spiritual world, so I wanted to check whether it was possible to make her feel better. She said my intentions were noble, and allowed my entrance. What I had said was true, but I cannot recall if my life-long desire to belong to a Japanese-Brazilian community came up in the interview.

My partner’s uncle would frequently explain Sūkyō Mahikari beliefs, focusing on purification through *oki-yome* and spirit possession. I thought it was funny how the uncle would say that 80% of problems in the world are caused by spiritual disturbance, 80% of humanity is suffering from spirit possession, 80% of medicine should be concentrated on spiritual healing, we should avoid gluttony by filling only 80% of the stomach, etc. Later I found out that this “information” is written in Mahikari official publications. I have the impression that Japanese people like to throw the number 80% for a lot of things without any empirical evidence – like I am throwing this impression from personal experience without data to back it up. As a graduate student in Japan, every time I heard a local person randomly say “80%”, I would remember Mahikari.
I began to frequently receive okiyome and explanations of doctrine in informal conversations at the dōjō. I met some nice people, and I especially enjoyed the company of a middle-aged non-Japanese brown-skinned lady. Once, she told me: “I apply okiyome on myself while thinking about what I should do to improve my sōnen. We know what we do wrong, so we should reflect on that and try to get better.” I thought those were wise words.

Self-reflection was also encouraged through a prayer I recite before sleeping, even now: “Thank you very much for today. [I remember the good events of the day and feel gratitude for them.] I am sorry for my mistakes and great spiritual pollution. [I remember the errors I committed on that day.] Despite that, I pray for Your protection and orientation so that I can increasingly become useful to You, like a true God’s child. [I think about ways in which I can become a better person, and things I can do to make the world a better place for myself and others.] Makoto-ni (sincerely), thank you very much”. This prayer encourages gratitude, self-reflection, action, and sincerity.

The altar had a framing that looked very much like a torii 鳥居. A narrow red carpet led to a donation box, behind which was the altar. At the center, the altar had the goshintai – a scroll with calligraphy supposedly written by Oshienushisama with the chon on top, from which God’s light emanated more intensively than from our hands. When we were kneeling in front of the goshintai, we saw the statue of Izunome to the left, and ikebana (art of flower arrangement) on the sides.
There were banners hanging on the walls: points of the body for okiyome, sun-moon table, and Ten Commandments of Sūkyō Mahikari. The okiyome banner is reminiscent of body images for traditional Chinese medicine such as acupuncture and massage. However, body images for traditional Chinese medicine represent a Chinese man and emphasize body flow, interconnectedness, and balance. In contrast, the okiyome banner shows a white-skinned, light-colored-haired man, and adds to Man the idea of an autonomous spirit and mind that controls the body. Kumite must discipline our bodies when handling the omitama, separating objects associated with the pure upper body from those associated with the impure lower body, signing a log book upon entrance at the dōjō, being filmed at the dōjō entrance, and other acts of self-surveillance.
Figure 21 - Points of the body for okiyome. Source: Basic Course textbook.
Sūkyō Mahikari makes kumite see our bodies like machines which, when dirty and clogged, need to be cleaned (Louveau). When “the great clockmaker” Su God sends light to burn the hardened clogs, they melt and descend, being eliminated either through orifices in the form of excretions (e.g., tears, sweat, pus, menstrual blood, feces) or invisibly through the sole of our feet. Excretions on the head are meant to avoid the toxins to reach thoracic internal organs.

This interpretation of the body can be analyzed considering industrialization and the invention of the nation-state political body, wherein the government is the head and the masses are its organs, with each citizen having a fixed function. Such was the nationalistic ideology of the Meiji Era in Japan and Estado Novo in Brazil. The influence of Kantian mind-body binary has contributed to Mahikari discourse, wherein the spirit and mind can make the autonomous decision to either reach happiness through sūkyō, or continue in the path of unhappiness. Moreover, the disciplining of the body through state and social surveillance, which also requires self-surveillance, is a central characteristic of modernity (Foucault). In this sense, hito is not only a being who shares ki (cosmic energy) with the universe like in Asian traditional medicine, but also a rational individual who can control his own body for salvation.

After some time, I paid for the Basic Course, which encompassed three whole days of okiyome, lectures, communal meals, and a ceremony. The lectures were divided into themes, and it was very hard to maintain my eyes open during the long speech in scientific language about the physics and chemistry of atoms, waves, energy, the
universe, and the three human bodies. The most exciting parts were supposedly real tales of people who had been possessed by spirits, or had problems during reincarnation, and solved those problems through Sūkyō Mahikari.

Most newcomers seemed to be excited about the prospect of getting rid of illness, economic difficulties, and problems in interpersonal relationships, but I have always considered myself happy for the most part, ⁶⁰ so my excitement came from: learning new explanations for the mysteries of life and death; learning new tools to perhaps make the world and the afterlife a better place; belonging to a Japanese-Brazilian community.

On the third day of the Basic Course, Mahikari-tai members prepared newcomers to finally receive the omitama. ⁶¹ A lecturer reminded us that omitama was precious because it maintained a chord connecting God to our bodies, making His light eradiate from the pendant to our hands. After speeches and rituals on the third day of the Basic Course, we got diplomas and had omitama placed around our necks, as if in a graduation ceremony.

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⁶⁰ Japanese culture generally says that life is pain. This means that instead of getting overworked with problems and trying to deny, run away from, or cure the symptoms of pain, we should expect, be prepared for, and deal with it. For instance, when someone we love dies, we should allow ourselves to feel sorrow and go through the emotions, rather than take medicine to feel numb. Such logic partly explains Yoshikazu Okada’s call for kumite to endure, embrace, and learn from pain. I personally find the “life is pain” motto comforting. It does not mean we should be okay with systemic oppressions that causes suffering, but rather that we should learn how to handle personal difficulties while avoiding harm to self and others.

⁶¹ Source of the image: http://memo.kouheibun.com/blog-entry-140.html
The *dōjōcho* said that the difference between *okiyome* and *johrei* from Sekai Kyūsei Kyō was that the first uses God’s light, whereas the latter uses the person’s own energy, thus making them weak. Another advantage of Sūkyō Mahikari was that the goal was to guide spirits, whereas *espiritismo* and other religions dealing with the dead encouraged spirits to manifest, but were incapable of saving them. Comments against *espiritismo*, *candomblé*, *umbanda*, and other religions dealing with spirits and gods occurred not only at the *dōjō*, but were repeated in daily conversations with members of Catholic and Neo-Pentecostal churches. When people want to show how tolerant they are, they say: “I accept all religions. Except the evil ones, of course.” Most Amazonians
believe in ‘black magic’ or at least fear the possibility that it might be real, so instead of accusing witchcraft of charlatanism, they accuse African-indigenous religions of working with the devil (Coelho et al. 62; Oro 37).

**Figure 23** - My Sūkyō Mahikari diploma for the Basic Course.
Kumite warned us that we might have fever, intense sweating, or an unusual amount of defecation in the following days. Those excretions would be signs that our bodies were getting rid of impurities due to being so many hours in contact with the True Light. I did not believe it, but upon arriving home, I defecated a lot – not diarrhea, just normal poo. I imagined it would be impossible for me to poo again in my usual daily time, but it did happen. I thought, “Is this really a result of Mahikari? Or did kumite put extra fibers in the food on purpose?” All meals were prepared and eaten at the dōjō on the third day of the Basic Course, so it was impossible to tell whether miraculous poo was real, or just a well-intentioned and God-approved manipulation to provide proof of spiritual purification.

After taking a shower, I cleaned a section of my wardrobe at the level of my chest, placed a blank sheet of paper there, hand sanitizer, a small white towel, a small blue flowery purse that my aunt had given me, and a shinmon pin. These materials should be used exclusively to handle my omitama: the hand sanitizer to clean my hands before touching the omitama, the towel to dry them, the purse to transport the omitama if necessary and hang it somewhere so that it never touches impure surfaces, and the shinmon pin to wear in ceremonies. I applied okiyome to everything for purification, and finally placed the omitama box on the sheet of paper. Then, I organized my clothes so that upper drawers kept upper-body clothes (e.g., bras, shirts) and lower drawers kept lower-body clothes (e.g., panties, skirts, socks). In Sūkyō Mahikari, the lower part of the
body is impure. *Senpai* even recommended using one side of the towel to dry the torso and the other side to dry our legs after shower, but I thought it was too much.

I soon realized that attaching my *omitama* to the bra was hard. Since I have always considered bras uncomfortable anyway, I decided to buy 100% cotton fabric and order with a seamstress bras containing a square pocket the size of my pendant. Those bras were much more comfortable, and made the wearing of *omitama* easy, but my mother got worried that my “new weird clothes” were a sign that I had been brainwashed.

Most beliefs and practices in Sūkyō Mahikari seemed just different versions of customs already familiar to me due to my part-Japanese and Catholic upbringing. Some cultural beliefs and practices that Mahikari shares with most Japanese people are observing taboos related to impurity, clapping before praying to call gods and spirits, and *seiza*. 62

Another similarity between my upbringing and Sūkyō Mahikari was a preoccupation with the apocalypse. Perhaps the Baptism of Fire resonated with Japanese-Brazilians because of Japanese immigrants’ trauma with Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Loula). Another reason is Japanese immigrants’ nostalgia for a glorious imperial past after the defeat in WW2. To shake off this sense of humiliation, some Japanese in colonies in the Brazilian countryside joined Shindō Renmei, others kept on teaching

62 *Seiza* 星座 is a position in which we sit on the floor with our legs tucked below the body and the buttocks resting on the sole of our feet. The standardization of *seiza* as the correct form of posture began in the Meiji Era (Nakayama).
Meiji ideology to *nikkei* children in their schools, and others fantasized about the end of world, after which Japan would recover its old glory.

My preoccupation with the apocalypse began early. My best friend’s father was a Japanese immigrant who taught his children and grandchildren to survive cataclysms. He built a shack in the forest and instructed my friend on how to fish on the river, cook in the woods, build tools, and other skills. Once, he took us to the beach, caught hornets, put them inside an empty can, made fire, put the insects inside the can, and put the can on the fire. They were delicious. Nowadays, I can eat any animal. To this day, I think about world catastrophes much more than the average person.

In childhood, my Catholic fervor was stronger than in most kids my age, because my paternal aunt was a *focolarina* (a nun of sorts) in Focolare. I was an active member for most of my youth, and saw my participation as a way to have fun activities with friends, honor my paternal Italian roots (my grandmother’s father was an immigrant from Southern Italy), and emotionally connect with my aunt, to whom I was close until she died in a car accident.

When I was a member of Focolare, mentors taught that our bodies were God’s property. For this reason, getting tattoos and piercings was sinful, because it damaged our borrowed bodies. So, when I joined Sūkyō Mahikari, it was easy for me to understand the rendering of the body as God’s property. Other similarities include: never placing the holy book (Bible, *Goseigen*) on the floor, participating in a religious youth group (Focolare, Mahikari-tai), following a sanctified leader (Chiara Lubich, Sukuinushisama),
etc. Due to my religious background, *kumite* did not appear any more fanatic than Catholics in many ways, and were to a certain extent more open to female sexuality and queer identities than the Church.

At school, I had learned about the indigenous rejection of private property. However, only when I began my graduate program did I reflect on the problem of privatizing the body. If lands and natural resources should be equally shared by all peoples, without any fences demarcating private property, what to say about the body? Treating bodies as commodities is the very principle of slavery, but can humans be God’s slaves? If the body really belongs to God, how can we know for sure what God wants us to do with it? Those who speak for God say that queer sex, tattoos, and abortion defile the body – but do they? Those were doubts in my mind.

When I entered Mahikari-tai, the organization gave me a red necktie. I had to buy a plain white long-sleeved formal shirt to wear with it in ceremonies, but nobody asked or expected me to buy the whole uniform, which consisted of a green jacket, a beige bonnet, beige skirt, white socks, and white sneakers. I only wore the white shirt and necktie in two or three events.
The leader of Mahikari-tai said that ceremonial attire was like a shield against bad occurrences, such as accidents. If I remember correctly, he mentioned that I would be safer riding my motorcycle while wearing the uniform. I was raised in a culture where most people say, “I don’t believe in superstition, but just in case…” and justify the daily repetition of apparently superstitious acts with, “There’s no harm in following the tradition anyway.” So, I did not believe that special clothes had the spiritual power of protecting the wearer, neither did I wear them, but a thought would linger: “What if…?”

When I was a member of Mahikari-tai, a brown girl of approximately seventeen years old passionately told me about her training in Japan. She narrated how there were military-like drills that were important because when the apocalypse comes, times will be so hard that we will probably have only our own pee to drink. Then, the girl told me how
she had the honor of seeing Odairisama (Teshima Tairiku). There were many members of Mahikari-tai from all around the world standing in military salute, waiting for the Sukuinushisama to walk among them. They had never been so nervous and excited in their lives! As Odairisama calmly walked through the teenagers without saying a word, they fainted one by one, some without even having the chance to see his face. The Amazonian girl prayed to be allowed to see him without fainting, and God granted her this wish. How grateful she was! I was surprised to witness her profound emotion, which I could not share. I silently thought, “Did the teenagers faint because the leader has an overwhelming divine power, or just because of their nerves?”

One of the attention-grabbing stories I heard at the temple was that a woman was watching Mahikari-tai make a marching demonstration at a gymnasium, and could visualize the True Light literally eradiating from the teenagers’ feet when they stomped the floor, and from other parts of their bodies as they moved.

Some kumite brought their children to the dōjō, and they were all Mahikari-tai. Some were too young to be allowed to receive the omitama, and they seemed excited about the coming-of-age experience of getting one. There was a white-skinned teenage girl who was anxious to be approved into a next stage in the organization’s hierarchy. The girl said she had already bought the uniform for the prospective role, and showed her new shoes. Unfortunately, she was devastated about the negative result. I thought, “This girl did not seem to have God in mind when wishing to change positions, and she was too confident about passing. Her ambition and lack of sincerity made her fail, so that was
probably the best decision.” In a way, I still think that the decision to not let her pass, if due to the causes above rather than internal politics, was faithful to Sūkyō Mahikari teachings and therefore it may have been a decision to stay true to the religion’s ethics. Nevertheless, it is cruel to encourage kids to passionately desire important roles in the institution, and then deny them the fulfillment of this young ambition.

At the time, I did not notice the militaristic aura of Mahikari-tai because their uniforms, titles, marching, and greeting were like school uniforms and routine, especially when students are performing at a parade. Both school uniforms and marching bands were traditions imported from Europe to Japan and Brazil. The similarity between Western institutions of formal education and the military has not escaped Foucault’s observations, and therefore we must avoid assuming that Sūkyō Mahikari, the Japanese, or Asian cults are particularly inclined to indoctrinate youth into militaristic ideology.

One day, I attended a presentation by the dōjōchō in which she responded to a critique against her architectural reformation of the dōjō. She said that despite warnings that the torii was a symbol of the era of inferior gods, the structure she had built was different from torii. She went on to explain the differences, which seemed barely noticeable to me. I wonder whether the dōjōchō had chosen that decoration due to Orientalism, i.e. to create an aura of Asian exoticism. As many white Australians enter Mahikari due to its difference (Bouma et al.), many Brazilians enter Mahikari to either search for their Japanese roots or explore the Other’s roots.
Perhaps the critique of the torii-like structure is connected to an association of Japanese architecture with Shinto, and therefore polytheism. The Brazilian version of Sūkyō Mahikari embraces Su God as equal to the Abrahamic God, de-emphasizing other gods. I believe the fear of evil gods and spirits among Amazonian kumite has roots in religious racism against African-indigenous religions: the same way inferior gods threw beans at Su God, the devil mocks God through feitiçaria (black magic).

Besides anti-backness and anti-brownness, there was a certain grudge against white Brazilians and paulistocentrismo. In São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasília, Amazonians suffer from the same stereotypes (Dutra; Gondim; Nugent and Harris; Slater) held by most U.S. Americans. In Belém, racist stereotypes are usually of caboclos and ribeirinhos, i.e., indigenous descendants from the countryside who are deemed uncivilized, unintelligent, impolite, and badly dressed. In this context, since childhood, kumite of the urban middle class in Belém are socialized to hold stereotypes and prejudice against impoverished people of color from small towns, especially when they practice African-indigenous religions.

Amazonians are aware of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against us, so in reaction many resent the wealthy Southeast and South. In 2009, a terrible flood in

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63 Setsubun 節分 is a festival in which people perform mamemaki 豆まき, the act of throwing fuku-mame (fortune soybeans) out the door and at people dressed as oni (demon), while screaming oni-wa soto fuku-wa uchi 鬼は外、福は内 (Demons out, luck in). Yoshikazu Okada explained that setsubun referred to when evil gods threw beans at Su God in ultra-ancient history.
Santa Catarina was on the national news, and my boyfriend’s Japanese uncle commented: “Have you noticed that purifying phenomena happen in places where the people is metida a besta (full of themselves)?” This is a problem with Amazonian and Japanese-Brazilian pride: they react to Whiteness by building an Amazonian identity equally based on Whiteness, and adopting Japanese-ness. The houses destroyed and lives lost in the flood were those of the lower class, since the politicians responsible for the lack of preventive infrastructure had their mansions in safer locations. So, blaming victims for spiritual impurity ignored how filthy politicians’ souls were.

Older kumite encouraged us to practice ikebana (art of flower arrangement), chadō (tea ceremony), shodō (calligraphy), and other arts which are nowadays considered symbols of Japan, but were mostly a privilege of Edo elites. The fetishization of Japanese arts stems from self-Orientalism for the construction of a national identity in the Meiji Era, and Orientalism for absorbing a purported Asian spirituality. Following these discourses, the dōjō in Belém presented Japan as a pure homogeneous nation.

When I was kumite, older members had the responsibility to make ikebana almost every day to place a vase of beautiful flowers on the altar. One day, the teenage brown female leader of Mahikari-tai showed me how to prepare a flower offering. She took me to a small garden in the back, where we cut some flowers just for practice. I never saw anyone making flower arrangements at the temple again, but I just assumed they were women, due to a common gendered image we carry of certain Japanese arts.
I attended the Basic Course twice. One story that appeared in both was of a woman who developed a health condition that made her skin look like scales. Upon receiving a spiritual investigation at the dōjō, she found out that she had been a fish in a previous life, and her spirit could not let go of the attachment to that body.

Right after the story of the fish-woman, the lecturer followed with the example of transgender people: when a man was a woman in a previous life, or vice-versa, but could not let go of the attachment, they became the opposite sex in this life. In this logic, being transgender is not one’s fault because the feeling of being of another gender was not a conscious choice. However, failing to make a conscious effort to let go of attachments, including gender, is one’s fault. Furthermore, the transgender condition is deemed a spiritual ailment that must be spiritually treated; so, if a transgender or gender-non-conforming person knows about Sūkyō Mahikari but chooses not to receive treatment, then the ailment becomes their fault. At the time, I thought that perhaps there was a way to believe in a spiritual cause of transgenderism (although the term was unknown to me) without blaming the person. Nowadays, I am more concerned with imagining how much we could all develop spiritually if societies let us, and even encouraged us, to experiment with our genders and sexualities from an early age, free from cis-hetero-patriarchy.

Another example of gender and sexual confusion is of the woman who received a donated organ. Right after the surgery, she developed an insatiable sexual appetite that surprised her husband. Spiritual investigation in the dōjō showed that the dead donor’s personality was influencing her. This happens because each cell of our bodies has a
fraction of our spiritual, astral, and physical bodies, so a donated organ carries more than just material cells from a donor. Okiyome helped the couple keep the dead woman’s personality at bay. The pathologizing of female sexuality is problematic in this story, but it also has the potential to challenge the mind-body binary: our bodies think and feel (Anzaldúa), so what we are is not reduced to our brains. Moreover, the mixing of souls can be celebrated as queer love and a dismantling of the self-other binary: the personality from a donated organ is not an intruder, but a sister soul, or a lover soul. And because our spirit is a fragment of God’s spirit, He is inside us in a beautiful, perhaps sexual, way (Campos et al.).

I remember that in one lecture, the dōjōchō said to Mahikari-tai: “Don’t do anything that you wouldn’t do in front of your parents.” I knew she was referring to pre-marital sex, but I thought, “I wouldn’t want to poop in front of my mother, but I certainly have to poop.” In those years, my mother was upset about my lack of commitment in marrying a virgin. The Catholic disciplining of female sexuality had been imposed on me from birth by my mother, grandmothers, focolarina aunt, and almost everybody else around. It was a taboo we did not talk about, except to suppress it. I grew up feeling ashamed of my body and desires, trying to be a good girl, and Sūkyō Mahikari reinforced those feelings.

There was a kumite nikkei couple, probably in their early thirties, who was very respected in the dōjō. After a lecture about how to handle the omitama, a group of women surrounded the wife to ask if we could wear the omitama during sex. She answered that it
was totally fine, and *kumite* could always take it off in case they were sweating or
moving too wildly, so the sacred necklace wouldn’t get wet, come out of the bra, or touch
impure places. Almost anything seemed to be OK if the couple was married. Thank you,
Sūkyō Mahikari, for adding to my Catholic guilt and internalized sexism.

*Kumite*, especially those of Japanese heritage, would say that God compensated
good believers with sons to carry out the family name, whereas sinful families ended up
dying without male descendants: “In the end, they or their descendants [of people who do
not follow Su God] will fail in life or even be the last generation of their family line.”
(Youth Who Shine, part 4, ch. 1) I remember thinking, “Why would God care whether a
surname continues or not?” This topic was sensitive to me because my grandmother’s
family, from a samurai lineage, looked down on my grandfather’s family, from a peasant
lineage. When I was a girl, sometimes my grandmother’s relatives would mock me for
being poor and living in a poor city, which made me feel a mix of anger and envy. I told
myself that having a samurai surname was stupid, but sometimes I wish I had inherited it.

I wasn’t strongly pressured to proselytize, probably because I was there only for
about seven months before moving to Japan. Or perhaps I did not notice any pressure and
never pressured myself because I did not believe Sūkyō Mahikari had to be spread
everywhere to save the world. Neither did I have any desire to climb the organization’s
hierarchical ladder. I did not believe that my friends who believed in candomblé,
pajelança, espiritismo, Catholicism, Neo-Pentecostalism, or Judaism had to join Sūkyō
Mahikari to be saved from hell. Besides, I am not a competitive person.
When I was *kumite*, I asked an older practitioner: “Instead of investing in Mahikari centers, why don’t we do something for poor people?” The *senpai* answered, “Saving the body, like giving soup to the homeless, is superficial and temporary salvation. Our mission is to save souls for eternity. People who do social work are selfish, because they do it to feel good. But we do it to follow God’s plan.” I quietly thought, “What about Betinho? 64 Is he in hell?” And my heart answered, “No. If there is a heaven, there is where he is.”

When I entered Sūkyō Mahikari, the *dōjōchō* explained the spiritual definition of happiness: health, harmony, and prosperity. She said that prosperity did not mean wealth, but rather living comfortably. The speaker wrote numbers representing salaries and expenses on the board to convene that if one has their basic needs met and does not lose money, they are experiencing prosperity. I thought, “I like this! She is neither saying that poverty is good nor that wealth means happiness.” As a *kumite*, I never noticed the subtle meritocratic and business-like rhetoric of Sūkyō Mahikari.

The contradictions in Sūkyō Mahikari about prosperity suited me well, given my early-age anti-materialism and minimalism, combined with my secret desire to keep up with my cousin who studied in an English-speaking private school, and with my wealthy classmates upon being transferred from a public to a private school.

64 Betinho (*née* Herbert José de Sousa) (1935-1997) was a well-known and openly atheist sociologist and activist responsible for extensive programs to eradicate hunger in Brazil.
When I was accepted in the Master’s program, a white male kumite congratulated me enthusiastically: “How wonderful! Japan is the land of spirituality, purity, and culture! Not like here, where there is political corruption, ignorance, crime, and impunity.” I did not believe Japan was spiritually elevated over other countries, but I could not help comparing the image of modernity and tradition of my grandparents’ homeland, to the poverty I saw every day in Belém, especially given nikkei communities’ constant messages saying how superior we were to Brazilians. I was torn between my identities, and I was torn between my convictions.

Before moving to Japan, I asked senior kumite to find a temple or followers in Fukuoka, so that I could continue practicing. It took them years to answer, so my enthusiasm waned little by little. Most importantly, I was having classes in my Master’s program about Japanese imperialism; I was baffled at how similar the nationalist discourses were to some lectures in Sūkyō Mahikari! So, I decided I wanted to do research on this topic.

Although I had always doubted certain teachings and felt some practices were unfair, my classes provided me vocabulary to articulate those worries. Moreover, in Japan my rejection as a haafu from a poor country strengthened my Brazilian identity, thus diminishing to a certain degree my longing for a Japanese community. Finally, I put my omitama inside its box, the box inside its flowery purse, and hung the purse by the window, decided to give it back as soon as I visited Belém. It was a great relief to quit observing purity taboos and stop feeling dirty all the time.
During summer break, I returned my *omitama*. Differently from many *ex-kumite*, I did not want to eliminate Sūkyō Mahikari from the face of the earth. Growing up Catholic, I observed both oppressive and liberating practices at church, so I believed Sūkyō Mahikari could have both too. Many *ex-kumite*, scholars, and Christians broke *omitama* publicly, disqualified Sūkyō Mahikari as a cult rather than a respectable religion, and argued that Mahikari is sacrilegious and only Christianity can save. Given the traumas that many *ex-kumite* have experienced, it is understandable to react so strongly. Nevertheless, we should consciously avoid religious racism, secular bias, the essentializing of religions, and double standards.

I found resistance or potential for resistance in Sūkyō Mahikari: ethnic community building, alternative societies (yoko farms, hospitals, and schools), critiques of the status quo, and important lessons about love, action, and sincerity. The numerous changes in Sūkyō Mahikari rhetoric in the few years it has existed is a sign that religion is neither homogeneous nor static, and therefore it can oppress as much as it can be a catalyst for social justice.

5.2. *Memories as an ethnographer*

The present sub-chapter contains the notes I took when conducting participant observation at the *dōjō* in Fukuoka and Belém during summer 2016.
5.2.1. June 2016

I am back in Fukuoka for the International Communication Association conference. My U.S. white partner (at the time) and I take public transportation to a temple. The building is on a small street and seems to be old. We go up the stairs to a simple dōjō, with the same arrangement of the one in Belém, which is not too different from regular Japanese homes, Shinto shrines, or Buddhist temples: a shoe rack in front, a sink to wash hands and mouth, tatami floor, well-lit room with some chairs, little thin mattresses with covers for people to receive okiyome lying down, a donation box in front of the altar, and an altar with a calligraphy scroll at the center, a statue of Izumo god on the left, and ikebana.

We took off our shoes, washed our hands and mouths, and entered the room. There were two Japanese women there, who greeted us with warm enthusiasm and asked some basic questions: where we were from, whether we had ever received okiyome, how long we were staying in Fukuoka, and other small talk. My partner and I signed the control book and sit in seiza to receive okiyome. The lady who has giving me okiyome barely showed any interest in me, so we just exchanged a couple of phrases. The one with my partner, however, was lively chatting about the United States, the eight years he had lived in Fukuoka, Japanese food, baseball, and many other topics. She continuously complimented his language fluency and knowledge about Japanese culture.

The difference in treatment might have been just due to the two ladies’ different personalities. On the other hand, this disparity is too common in Japan to be attributed
solely to individual characteristics. Japanese-Brazilians speaking imperfect Japanese are not considered nearly as fascinating and admirable as Caucasian men, no matter their Japanese proficiency.

I furtively looked at the lively conversation next to me, feeling a mix of embarrassment for my low language ability, and jealousy. I wish Japanese people would treat me as well as they treat white people! At the same time, if I had white privilege, I would probably be unaware of Japanese racism against haafu, Japanese-Brazilians, Japanese-Peruvians, Koreans, Chinese, etc. Additionally, I would probably expect to receive Japanese admiration for large blue eyes, blond hair, the English language, and the Western power that these symbols represent.

Like many white men who settle down in Japan, my partner was an unpopular teenager in the United States who was suddenly showered with appreciation and women’s attention upon moving to Japan. When in his home country, he would tell me: “I miss being worshipped by the Japanese.” But, why do white men feel the need to be worshipped? Isn’t this part of the problem of white masculinity, which cause some white men to become depressed and even violent when they cannot reach the societal expectations set up for them (Katz; Wise)?

After okiyome, I bought a magazine and we left. Unfortunately, nobody else entered the dōjō while we were there.
5.2.2. July and August 2016

The temple was a little different from what it used to be. First, now it has air conditioner. Second, there was a television screen with spiritual messages (e.g., “Let’s practice smiling”), information about meetings and events, photos of natural views, etc. Third, the altar does not have a torii anymore – perhaps a response to critics who condemned torii as a symbol of the era of evil gods. Fourth, the dōjōchō and the dōshi are not the same people, and today I did not see the old dōjōchō, dōshi, or Reiko Machie Seki (the lady who brought Sükyō Mahikari to Belém).

I met Gabriela, 16 years old, indigenous heritage, Mahikari-tai. Many of her relatives are kamikumite, so she has been a member since she was 10 years old. She told me, “When I do not receive okiyome, my back gets all stiff because I am already used to receiving it, you know?”

Today I asked to talk to the dōjōchō, so after my okiyome I was invited to her office. She is a middle-aged, nikkei woman with a slight Japanese accent. The dōjōchō in 2009, who was non-nikkei, seemed more lenient, and used to publicly comment on her own initial doubts and bad practices of Mahikari until she completely converted; in contrast, the present dōjōchō seems very strict. The current dōjōchō and kamikumite also appear pushier than the people I observed in Fukuoka, but that could be just because in Japanese kumite don’t expect foreigners to join the organization while on a short trip.

The dōjōchō rarely smiled or looked directly into my eyes, and frequently compared her own virtuous practices to my bad ones: she scolded me for giving up on my
omitama and leaving Mahikari, for entering Mahikari for the wrong reason (searching for my Japanese roots), for choosing to attend my best friend’s wedding on July 22nd rather than the Basic Seminar, for missing the opportunity to expand Mahikari to the United States, and for attempting to conduct academic research on the group. We talked for over an hour, during which I said only a handful of sparse phrases.

During the conversation, the dōjōchō revealed she is from São Paulo, where she entered Mahikari to help her ill sister, who subsequently got cured thanks to Mahikari. “I did not enter Mahikari thinking of myself. I did not have time to think about myself at all.” The dōjōchō herself got cured from terrible headaches and other chronic pains. “I had been a member of Catholicism, Buddhism, and Sekai Kūsei Kyō, but only Mahikari cured me.” Thankful, she even thought that the price for attending the Basic Seminar (300 reais) was too low for the received miracles; she wanted to pay one thousand reais, but the kamikute did not let her. “I will never forget that,” she said. I wonder if she mentioned this story to prevent me from thinking that the approaching seminar is expensive. After converting in São Paulo, she became a missionary and moved to Londrina (Brazilian South), and finally to Belém.

The dōjōchō repeatedly scolded me for leaving the movement and offered many explanations to this failure: I entered Mahikari for selfish reasons, was too young, have never truly understood or practiced Mahikari, made the wrong choice when God tested my faith, and nobody can be a true kamikute before practicing it diligently for several years. “Mahikari is Noah’s Ark. Only the faithful will be saved, and not all kamikumite
either. Sukuinushisama has said that only a few *kumite* will be saved, because most are in Mahikari for selfish reasons.” Our conversation was tense and intimidating, because it felt like a threat of earthly unhappiness and spiritual damnation. “All members who gave back the *omitama* are unhappy now. Many died of cancer and many are in total bankruptcy. The teenage boy you saw outside was away for two years, consuming drugs. Now he’s back.”

The religious leader told some testimonies of miracles, such as the 88-year-old female *kumite* who was unconscious in the Emergency Room for months. “I always warn *kamikumite* to never enter an E. R. and have faith in God instead. But that lady’s relatives were not members, they did not listen. When she was unconscious, I gave her *okiyome* and whispered in her ear, ‘You cannot die now, because your grandson is going to attend the Basic Seminar soon.’ At that moment, she opened her eyes and smiled. That was really impressive! The doctor said she would die in a day, but she survived. I knew she couldn’t die in the E. R., after so many years serving God. Her grandson became *kumite* but had doubts. Now that she is better, he came to believe.” This testimony is an example of how Mahikari rejects medicine, despite simultaneously searching for validation in the field through experiments, as well as doctors’ publications and speeches.

After approximately an hour, I cautiously revealed my desire to write my dissertation on Mahikari and identity. I had gotten IRB approval, so there was a pile of consent forms, questionnaires, interview prompts, and gifts to be given to participants. The leader promptly refused. “It’s not me, it’s the whole movement. It’s prohibited
because you would thwart God’s words. This [she pointed to the Mahikari prayer book] contains God’s words in a literal way, so we just pass on the message, word by word. Many journalists try to write about Mahikari, but any divulgation must be allowed by Oshienushisama. Mahikari had a booth in Rio+20, and it had to be approved by Oshienushisama.”

“Mahikari doesn’t need you, but you need Mahikari. We don’t want *kumite* in quantity; we want quality. This is why we are not on the Internet or in the media. We call people through word-of-mouth.” I asked about the official website, and she gave me a card with the address saying it was the only approved website, but I was not allowed to analyze its content for research. Despite the *dōjōchō*’s assertion that Mahikari is not trying too hard to proselytize, the group sought visibility in the media during the 1990 Enthronement Ceremony in Japan (McVeigh 156), articles about Mahikari Day have appeared in newspapers, and news about political support are frequently divulged through their magazines and other media. The prohibition of involving the group in academic research and the media may not be solely a matter of principles, but rather a protective response after the publication of severe critiques in academic and non-academic circles.

Throughout her speech, the *dōjōchō* blamed individuals and groups for the pains they face in life. “There are no unemployed *kumite* in here. Londrina was the same thing: from over one thousand members, nobody was unemployed. Young people graduate from college already employed. We offer workshops to our youth about how to behave with positivity.” She told a couple of stories of young members who were admired at work and
even in the media for being “different from everybody else.” She attested to how the unfaithful face bankruptcy whereas the faithful are prosperous.

Besides unemployment, the dōjōchō also blamed individuals for drug abuse, natural disasters, accidents, urban violence, and other sources of sorrow. In tandem with Mahikari ideology and other religious groups adapted to the capitalist rhetoric of meritocracy and individualism, the dōjōchō did not allude to structural violence, historical inequity, or resistance for social justice. According to her, it was up to each individual to save oneself and contribute to saving humanity, and the only way to do so was through Mahikari.

More than once, the dōjōchō compared Sūkyō Mahikari to other religions. “Mahikari is the only movement that really worships only God. Catholics worship Jesus, Buddhists worship Buddha, Jews worship Moses, Muslims worship Mohammed, and so on. But those are just messengers from God. This is why we were warned to never worship Sukuinushisama in the altar. Above him, there is only God. But he is the messenger of God.” When I was kumite, I witnessed people talking about Okada with extreme devotion, like an ikigami 生き神 (living god) or a Catholic saint. Would the new dōjōchō reproach them?

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65 The worship of ikigami has been part of Japanese folk culture since ancient ages. In the 19th century, the empire was constructing a Japanese identity directly connected to the emperor as not only its spiritual, but also its political leader. At that time, when the emperor passed in his carriage through the streets, commoners still thought he was an ikigami rather than the nation-state political leader. They would compete for the pebbles
The dōjōchō mentioned how *kumite* in Somalia planted hundreds of trees. “Belém still hasn’t reached this level, but we offer *okiyome* and spread the divine teachings to a lot of people.” Mahikari magazines and the official websites sometimes publish editorials about donations and volunteering in poor countries. When I was a *kumite*, there were volunteering opportunities to offer *okiyome* at public parks, and at the time I wondered why there did not seem to be opportunities or encouragement to participate in social justice efforts. If Mahikari groups in Somalia, Angola, Peru, etc. plant trees and build schools, whereas *kumite* in Belém focus more on individual salvation, then we should question ourselves why. The reason may be in the average high level of socioeconomic, professional, and educational status of *kumite* in Belém, as well as our complicity with Whiteness and Japanese-ness. The *nikkei* middle class tends to rely more on individualism and meritocracy to explain problems and offer solutions.

My graduate course in Japan gave me knowledge to link Japanese imperialism to Mahikari ideology, and strengthened my observations about patriarchal messages. Spending a year and a half without entering a dōjō made me feel better about my own body, especially those parts below the waist considered “impure”. As I deconstructed my experiences in the dōjō, I realized that keeping *omitama* and myself “clean” and “functional” was not only hard and unpractical, but also reinforced social taboos about my sexuality, gender, and racial performances. As a spiritual person, I also reflected on above which the carriage had passed, because the pebbles supposedly had absorbed magical powers from the emperor (Fujitani 51).
how paying monthly to maintain a direct chord from my *omitama* to God stopped making sense, since divine services should never be paid for. In other words, time apart from the group and in academia gave me perspective to pinpoint and justify my uneasiness. Of course, Mahikari would see this change as a natural sinful consequence of distancing myself from God.

Despite those reasons, today I told the *dōjōchō* that I left Mahikari because I did not know about any temples neither in Fukuoka nor in Denver, and therefore could not keep up without receiving *okiyome* or frequenting the temple. This is true, although not the complete truth. In response, she admonished me for my selfishness in wanting to receive rather than give *okiyome*, for not knowing that there was a temple in Fukuoka, and for not thinking about spreading Mahikari abroad. “There weren’t any temples in Belém either. M. Reiko Machie Seki was a pioneer, and none of us would be here if she hadn’t bravely spread Mahikari in this region.”

The *dōjōchō* pressured me to attend the Basic Seminar on July 22nd, 23rd, and 24th, but my childhood friend is getting married on the first day. “You will have to choose between Man or God. I always choose God. If she truly is your friend, she will understand.” Again, the *dōjōchō* compared my failures to her righteousness. Despite the great emphasis on humbleness in Mahikari teachings, as a *kumite* I ended up witnessing some judgmental attitudes, self-congratulating, and gossip. The *dōjōchō* assured me: “Here, there is no gossip, no conflict, no impoliteness. We don’t curse or say slangs. We receive training on how to have positive attitude, because the world is full of negativity:
violence, accidents… You know what I’m talking about. You see youth having sex, using drugs…” This concept of youth is very different from Bayat’s, for whom youngsters are political agents for social justice (115). In Mahikari, teenagers are trained to obey, conform to conservative norms, and be enduring in military-like trainings, but not resistant in civil disobedience or structural concerns with poverty, war, racism, gender violence, etc.

Sūkyō Mahikari handouts and lectures talk about a “scientific” experiment in which some papers with curse words and some with nice words were attached to different cubes of ice. After a period of time, the cubes with curse words were observed in the microscope and had “ugly” or “weird” images on them, whereas the cubes with nice words had beautiful snowflakes. The experiment was repeated offering okiyome to a group of ice cubes and not to another, and the result was the same. The story about words and ice cubes is in accordance with the belief in the inherent power of words, all of which were once kotodama but humans degenerated them into other languages. However, the condemnation of curse words and slangs is related to the association of this speech style with lower-class people of color and insubordinate teenagers. Moreover, the tale implies that aesthetics is universal, when in fact different individuals and societies around the world can have different ideas of which ice images are the most beautiful.

A couple of times, the dōjōchō emphasized the uniqueness of Mahikari: “It is the only religion in Brazil that has a day. Many States now have Mahikari Day, and we’ve just got ours.” She showed me on her smartphone the document signed by governor
Simão Jatene, making the day official. I had already read that São Paulo had institutionalized Mahikari Day (Shiguti) as well as Belém (Diário Oficial do Município de Belém), but I did not know the State of Pará had also adhered. “Some politicians are kumite,” she revealed. When I was leaving the dōjō today, a kumite – who was the Mahikari-tai leader in 2009 – approached me to persuade me to rejoin the group. She showed me the same document on her smartphone.

In the last decade, an increasing number of conservative protestant politicians (e.g., Silas Malafaia, Marco Feliciano, Jair Bolsonaro) have made fortune through tithe and donations, gained political force, and pushed anti-LGBTQIA, racist, and sexist policies, laws, and public discourses (Cunha). Many are also politically corrupt, such as Eduardo Cunha. Despite the officially laic status of Brazil, oppressive religious tendencies are increasingly less like the U.S., with its subtle Christianity, and more like a Borgia family rule. Now, Sūkyō Mahikari is entering politics as well, and introduced Mahikari Day. People concerned with social justice are worried about this international right-wing push in the recent years with conservative religious discourses, the impeachment of president Dilma Rousseff, the candidacy of Donald Trump, the nationalist ideology of Brexit, etc.

Yesterday, a Mahikari-tai girl told me, “Belém is the only Brazilian capital without dōjōtai (a big dōjō that is allowed to use an official Mahikari flag).” When I asked why, she answered there are only some details missing: Belém has enough
directors, but not enough tenure time. “So, we have been trying hard and giving our best.”

Similarly, today the dōjōchō and the kumite who showed me her smartphone advised me to make the right decision: “Tem que se esforçar.” This phrase is a direct translation of the Japanese verb ganbaru, to give one’s best. It is interesting to note that although ganbaru traditionally has a selfless and collectivistic connotation of doing what is best for one’s group, in Mahikari Belém it seems to include meanings reminiscent from liberalism, i.e., that success and goodness come from an individual’s choice and effort, whereas pain is an individual’s fault for making the wrong choice.

I wish Japanese-Brazilians had the opportunity to learn about Japanese history in all its complexity, including a critical understanding of the Japanese diaspora and our invisibly hyphenated identity (Lesser, Navigating). I wish we learned about how we participate in Japanese-ness and Whiteness, and how we can contribute to dismantling them. I wish Amazonian kumite subverted Sūkyō Mahikari rhetoric to form cross-ethnic coalitions against Whiteness, Christian normativity, and capitalism by creating a new rendering of what it means to be human, and committing to social justice.
Final remarks: Summary and direction for future research

In the twenty-first century, when scholars write that “the nexus between race and religion […] seems to be at the heart of current controversies” (Fadil 2264), they are almost always referring to Islamophobia in the United States and Europe. However, I argue that race and religion are at the heart of current controversies in many other places, in vastly different ways. By investigating how power relations are embedded in a Japanese religion in the Brazilian Amazon, the present research expanded the purview of Whiteness Studies and Religious Studies, whose attention is often limited to U.S. Whiteness and Abrahamic faith respectively. 66

This study suggested the concept of Japanese-ness as a systemic oppression and a type of racism that creates an instantiation of Man (Wynter): a wajin, middle- to higher-class, cisgender, heterosexual, male, able-bodied Japanese citizen. In Sūkyō Mahikari, Man is called hito and practices sūkyō. Based on Japanese proto-racism, Western racist science, and Meiji ideology, Mahikari cosmology classifies humanity hierarchically. In an evolutionary timeline, the wajin degenerated into five races but must return to their racial origin, sūkyō degenerated into five religions but must return to their supra-religious origin, and hito degenerated into ningen but must return to their pure state.

66 On U.S.-centrism in Whiteness Studies and Communication Studies, see Blaagaard; Ware; Wiedemann, Thomas and Michael Meyen.
In whitened Abrahamic religions, the human is a white monotheistic male autonomous individual destined to exploit nature. In contrast, in Sükyō Mahikari, the human is a wajin henotheistic (one main God is above other gods) male individual dependent on and unseparated from nature. In Brazil, most kumite have a very superficial knowledge of Mahikari fundamental principles, thus rendering hito in a largely Catholic framework. Concomitantly, new generations are turning away from Japanese-ness and towards Whiteness, while keeping both systems’ racist stances against black-brown people, and ethnic capital through nikkei identity. For nikkei kumite in the Amazon, Sükyō Mahikari is a way to nurture Japanese pride, whilst for “white” kumite it is a way to find Orientalist spiritual comfort. What both groups have in common is their belief – albeit not publicly admitted – in the Japanese and Brazilian middle class superiority over lower-class, black-brown practitioners of Afro-native religions.

Contributions

This study matters to kumite in Brazil because the country has a majority of black-brown populations who mix Catholicism with African and indigenous religions, even if not everybody recognizes it. Somewhat similarly to Japan, where people practice Buddhist and Shinto rituals but consider themselves non-religious, most Brazilians jump seven waves in New Year’s Eve, keep an altar for the Virgin Mary and saints-slash-

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67 According to census IBGE 2010, 86.8% of the national population is Christian: 64.6% Catholic and 22.2% Protestant.
African gods at home, sing songs in praise of goddess Iemanjá, consult búzios, etc. but put these practices in the category of secular culture. In the Amazon, women rub their bodies in pink dolphin vagina to seduce, take banho-de-cheiro baths to get rid of quebranto and mal-olhado, buy magical perfume at Ver-o-Peso, etc.

Despite this majority, Brazil is still neo-colonized by local and international white elites. For this reason, we must be aware of our participation in the oppression of black-brown communities. Following Sūkyō Mahikari principles of love, compassion, humility, sincerity, gratitude, action over talk, and going beyond one’s comfort zone, kumite must recognize that the white and nikkei middle classes have been complicit with Whiteness and Japanese-ness at the expense of black and indigenous lower classes. I believe most practitioners are dissatisfied with the unjust situation in Brazil and want to do something about it, so their passion can be used for getting informed about systemic oppressions and fighting them, both spiritually and materially.

What I want to accomplish with my work in Belém is to reach U.S., Brazilian, and Japanese academic and non-academic intellectuals, transnational activists, Japanese-Brazilians, and kumite to expand a dialogue about the religious potential for both oppression and resistance, as well as the Japanese complicity with Whiteness in Brazil and elsewhere at the expense of coalition with black-brown-yellow communities. I hope Japanese-Brazilians can find ways to do activism like nikkei students in movements against the military dictatorship, but without denying our Japanese identity like they did (Kingsberg 89; Lesser, A Discontented Diaspora). I also hope we can learn how to create
alternative societies while consciously avoiding the reproduction of systemic oppressions there (Adachi, *Ethnic Capital*).

My intention is to avoid simplistic renderings of Sūkyō Mahikari as either neutral, inherently bad, or ideally good, which lead to imperialistic arguments such as the idea that secularization and secularism are the only solution to oppression within religions (Asad), or that the New Wave movement allows for the modern white middle-class to unproblematically benefit from old Asian spirituality (Shome, *Diana*). As the U.S. black church, Muslim feminism, indigenous activism, and other movements flourish around the world, we should reflect on how to draw inspiration, wisdom, and energy from our ancestors’ beliefs in the supernatural to change the world.

For Intercultural Communication, Japanese-ness can expand the understanding of racial supremacy by complicating Whiteness through an analysis of how a small island like Japan could invent *wajin* racial supremacy and State Shinto in reaction to European and U.S. empires. There was a time when Russia, Germany, the United States, and other empires were truly threatened by the yellow peril, just like white elites are scared that China will conquer “their” world now. Although Japanese-ness currently oppresses a relatively small population, its analysis is important for justice for that population, as well as for realizing how not everybody thinks white is the most superior race. This means that Whiteness is not omnipotent, and therefore can be destroyed.

Another important contribution is a deeper engagement with the relations between race and religion as mutually constituted social constructions. In Communication and
Religious Studies, scholars should further investigate these relations beyond Abrahamic Western contexts, although also in conversation with them when applicable. For instance, scholarship on religious ideology used for social justice work could explore more non-monotheistic religions, non-institutionalized beliefs in the supernatural, Third World, decolonial, hybrid, queer spiritualities.

The suggestion to use representation analysis, autoethnography, auto-archaeology, and ethnography together stems from my prioritizing of the topic rather than text content. Multi-methods are particularly useful when there is little or no research about a topic, so various methods can complement each other to explain it from different viewpoints.

From the methods utilized in this dissertation, auto-archaeology is the least explored in academia, and still has much room for development. Auto-archaeology combines autoethnography with object interpretation, thus allowing for the consideration of any object as media (Towns), a challenge to scriptocentrism (Madison, *Critical Ethnography* 185) through embodied writing (Madison, “Performing Theory”), and the multisensorial possibility of remembering through touch, smell, hearing, etc. (Howes) In Communication Studies and Religious Studies, we get so caught up in decoding text content that we often forget the bodies who embody what is written there.

**Direction for future research**

Some possibilities for future work are: interviews with *kumite*; the historical development of Japanese-ness in Brazil; more research on the practice of Sükyō Mahikari
in Third World countries; *nikkei* complicity with Japanese-ness and Whiteness; *nikkei* resistance and social justice work; Japanese-Brazilians’ and *kumite* participation in governmental politics; Japanese-Brazilians’ interaction with communities that practice African and native religions; Japanese-Brazilians and Brazilians in general learning about *nikkei* history; *Kumite* learning about Sūkyō Mahikari from a different perspective.

For future studies on race, I suggest further engagement with religion, considering the local and the global in a direct challenge to Euro-U.S.-centrism. Additionally, my concept of Japanese-ness could be further developed, and applied to other case studies. For future studies on religion, I suggest further engagement with race, considering anti-religious racism – or any social justice effort by religious groups, and potential for resistance in spiritual teachings – outside Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, in a conscious effort to destroy Abrahamic-centrism. In both cases, power struggles should be the guiding principle, whose exploration could begin by analyzing how people are classified in hierarchical positions in relation to other people, non-human animals, plants, rivers, mountains, and the universe. From there, we can imagine better ways of defining humanity for a better world.

*Criticizing Sūkyō Mahikari critics without redeeming Mahikari*

Many scholars, journalists, and white ex- *kumite* critique Sūkyō Mahikari in racist/Orientalist, Euro-U.S.-centric, and Abramic-centric ways: “within the framework of a ‘yellow danger’ rhetoric, Japan itself becomes demonized” (Introvigne, “A
Symbolic” 109). Despite Intravigne’s important critique that white ex-kumite often rely on Orientalism and racism to accuse the organization of brainwashing and Nazism, Greenwood is not against only Sūkyō Mahikari: on his website, 68 he writes extensively about how all religion industries are harmful, like the Catholic Church, to which he had been converted in childhood. He equally condemns secular ideologies that indoctrinate and exploit people:

A republican family will always be republican, a capitalist society will always be capitalist and likewise a socialist society will always remain so, with the default factor being the major player. What this also means is that all our thinking regarding the major fundamentals of our existence have all been carefully thought out for us. There is no need to ponder the unponderables. All you have to do is follow and keep away from the competitors. Just leave all this important stuff to those who profess to know better. How absurd. How stupid. How lazy and dangerous. (Escape the Religious Industry)

Therefore, Greenwood’s opinion is reminiscent of Marx’s and Fanon’s anti-religion stance. However, the latter were atheist and believed in the inevitable disappearance of the belief in God after the oppressed reached liberation, whereas Greenwood believes in God, but hopes for the destruction of the religious industry.

One reason for both pro-Christian and pro-secularization critiques of Sūkyō Mahikari is its classification as a cult rather than a religion. This nomenclature appears in many blogs, such as After Mahikari by Anne Broder, Mahikari Exposed by Steve and

68 http://www.escapethereligionindustry.com
Yumi Allerton, *Revealed: My Opinions and Theories about Sukyo Mahikari* by Asher Kennedy, *Spiritual Freedom: Information about the Religious Cult, Sukyo Mahikari* by Darcy, and *Amanda Elliot Shows You the Light* by Amanda Elliot. Some of these websites contain lists of what makes Sūkyō Mahikari a cult, usually without problematizing how each point on the list (e.g., having a messiah, hierarchical administration, a-critical faith) can be equally attributed to so-called world religions. Even news articles sometimes alarm readers against the cult Sūkyō Mahikari, as if it were a dangerous exception: “Whether the group is harmless or sinister, its prime digs, diverse membership and efficient organization (including a youth cadre) make it one to keep an eye on.” 69

There is no evidence that followers of new religions are brainwashed, traumatized, or exploited any more than followers of other religions (Introvigne, “Advocacy”; Melton). Common sense stereotypes cults as non-sense, manipulative, extremist, violent, brainwashing, and thus deserving of elimination. People who consider themselves to belong to a legitimate religion assume that their own religion is superior to cults for being logical, truthful, tolerant, peaceful, ethical, and deserving of expansion. This binary is often openly or sub-consciously justified by Orientalism and the capitalist presumption that big means better, i.e. that largely recognized institutions are on the right.

Sometimes called cults, these new and quite popular forms of religious life are more appropriately labeled “new religions,” for that is just what they are. Though certainly there are a few groups that brainwash vulnerable adherents, have evil intent or methods, and deserve the “cult” title—such as Aum Shinrikyo, which perpetrated the deadly gas attack in a Japanese subway in 1995—the vast majority of the 300-plus new religions in Japan want nothing more than to provide new types of religious experience not available in traditional religions. By some estimates, over one-third of the Japanese population is involved with them. (Pfeiffer, “Cults” 140)

To a certain degree, the classification of certain organizations as cults is one development of the Christianization of Europe, the Crusades, the Reconquista, and the Christian imposition for European colonization from the sixteenth century onwards, which classified non-Christians as heathens, infidels, devil-worshippers, etc., and their spiritual practices as mythology, superstition, black magic, idolatry, etc.

To counter stereotypes and prejudices against generally disapproved religious groups, Melton contests current definitions of cults, and instead corroborates the term “new religious movements” (NRMs), meaning:

groups of religious bodies/movements which, though they do not share any particular set of attributes, have been assigned to the fringe by, first, the more established and dominant voices in the religious culture and, second, various voices within the secular culture (government officials, watchdog groups, the media, etc.), and thus are basically to be seen as a set of religious groups/movements existing in relatively contested spaces within society as a whole. (Melton 75)

70 The term NRM does not in itself eliminate the derogatory idea of cults, it may even be reductive in clustering vastly diverse religions into one category, and engenders the
In agreement with the authors discussed above, I argue that Sūkyō Mahikari is neither a cult nor more dangerous than other beliefs in the supernatural. Of course, this is not to say it is harmless; in fact, the present research investigates in detail how its ideology is a vehicle for religious racism, nationalism, classism, cis-hetero-patriarchy, and ableism. However, it is to say that the terms “cult” and “religion” must be deconstructed, and potential for resistance in religiosity should be recognized, to avoid Christian normativity, imposed secularization, and the Orientalist association of Japanese new religions with brainwashing.

Not all Japanese are anti-religion, but most consider themselves mu-shūkyō 無教 (non-religious). Besides the persecution of Christians from the 16th to the 19th centuries due to political interests against Portuguese missionaries and merchants, the tendency to deny religious affiliation was a survival strategy in the Meiji Era. In this period, the empire invented State Shinto, while strictly controlling religious institutions and bodies. Nowadays, the Japanese generally consider shūkyō to be revealed institutionalized religions, especially Abrahamic, and therefore their quotidian Shinto and Buddhist practices are deemed solely cultural, not religious (Tanaka, “Limitations”).

Anti-religion anti-cult sentiment in Japan tends to cause suspicion and antagonism against Sūkyō Mahikari. The official classification of the Aum Shinrikyō attack as challenge of deciding from and until when a religion can be considered new. Nevertheless, it can be useful to challenge the religion-cult binary.
terrorist (Leheny) and bias against Japanese new movements – in the West, often with an Orientalist bias (Melton) – sometimes cause a negative attitude in the public. This attitude has not engendered physical violence against *kumite*, but stereotypes and prejudice are common.

Scholarship about anti-religion and anti-cult ideology in Japan (Clobert et al.; Introvigne, “Advocacy”; Josephson-Storm; McLaughlin; Melton; Pfeiffer, “Cults”) questions the binaries religion-cult and secular-religious, which assume that spiritual practices in Japan are not religious but solely cultural, in comparison to which both institutionalized religions and cults are deemed either irrational or rationally manipulative (brainwashing). Engagement with this literature yields some intriguing questions: Is there a racial aspect to the current anti-religion sentiment in Japan? If the anti-religion sentiment is based on nationalism, is it racial too?

Sūkyō Mahikari advertises itself as being inclusive of all religions, hence not requiring newcomers to abdicate of other religious affiliations. Moreover, many non-Japanese people are attracted to Sūkyō Mahikari due to a curiosity about and admiration for a romanticized version of Asian spirituality, and a tendency to pick and choose

71 In my Master’s thesis, I observed how many *anime* (Japanese animations) with representations of Brazil and Brazilians portrayed believers in Catholicism, *espiritismo*, and *candomblé* as naïve brown people easily manipulated by vicious charlatans: priests, spiritual surgeons, and witches. It would be worth conducting interviews with the general Japanese public to discover what image they hold of Sūkyō Mahikari and other Asian new religions, and whether this image is racialized.
aspects from various religions (Bouma et al.; de Paiva). At the same time, communities of color in the Americas are often attracted to Sūkyō Mahikari because they are already familiar with polytheism, ancestor worshipping, spirit possession, and other religious practices coming from African and indigenous roots (Hurbon; Louveau). Additionally, many kumite are professionals from fields of human-centered science. Therefore, despite Okada’s condemnation of religions, religious hybridity, science, and agnosticism, they are common in daily practice.

Most Brazilian Amazonian kumite were Catholic and felt comfort in Mahikari’s valuing of the Bible. For them/us, “other religions” and “mediums” were usually assumed to refer to Kardecist espiritismo, umbanda, candomblé, and pajelança – religions of European, African, and Native Brazilian descent. Moreover, some Brazilian kumite compared Sūkyō Mahikari to other Japanese new religions, which were very popular in nikkei communities: Seichō-no-ie, Soka Gakkai, Sekai Kyūsei Kyō, etc.

People of faith all around the world have used religion and spirituality to resist oppression. Then why haven’t kumite used Sūkyō Mahikari for activism? Does Sūkyō Mahikari inherently impede resistance? If that were true, King James’ Bible would inherently impede Christian feminism; yet, despite verses like “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Timothy 2:12),

72 On white women’s search for self-fulfillment through Asian spirituality, see Shome’s Diana and Beyond, chapter 6. On “eating the Other”, see hooks. On the privatization of religion, which allows individuals to pick and choose aspects from various religions, see Asad.
Christian groups and individuals have largely contributed to feminist, queer, communist, and anti-racist practices around the world.

One possible reason for the Brazilian lack of inspiration in Sūkyō Mahikari for activism is the fact that most kumite are middle-class and generally considered neither black nor indigenous, but rather Japanese or white. This population tends to be more conservative in the sense that, dissatisfied with financial instability and eager to climb the social ladder, they tend to blame the black and indigenous poor for social issues rather than the white wealthy. Furthermore, they tend to be more willing to save lives through okiyome or marching on the streets to impeach Dilma Rousseff, than to join social movements or criticize right-wing political corruption.

The middle class seemed to be the predominant target of Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan as well, since Okada wrote that the visibility of practitioners who were highly educated and in socially valued professions (e.g., doctors, politicians, businesspeople) created a good image for the organization, “proving” that Mahikari ideology was based on “true science”, because it was practiced by “rational” and successful people. Notwithstanding, if we believe in Stuart Hall’s “no guarantees” principle, we can imagine that just because Yoshikazu Okada was nationalist, sexist, heteronormative, etc., there is no guarantee that all practitioners interpret Mahikari within this frame.

Western scholars must avoid indulging in a double standard where dominant religions can be tools for social justice despite their problematic assumptions and practices, whereas Sūkyō Mahikari is dismissed as a manipulative cult; such attitude is ultimately
rooted in racism and Orientalism. When Christianity and Islam emerged, they had some racial assumptions, but they were only solidified and transformed from racialism to racism (Robinson) with the establishment of Western European philosophy and science in the eighteenth century (da Silva, D. F.). In contrast, Sūkyō Mahikari was founded on racism itself as a scientific construct. In this context, is Sūkyō Mahikari inherently antithetical to anti-racism? Moreover, if the modern concept of “human” is racist from the start (idem), so is the concept of “religion” (Rana). In this logic, should we conclude that religious resistance based on racist texts (e.g., Bible, Goseigen) is always self-defeating?

Most problematic critiques can be divided into three stances: deeming Sūkyō Mahikari anti-Christ, Nazi, or irrational. The anti-Christ accusations come from blogs where white Christians argue that Sūkyō Mahikari is either demonic, or wrongly worships Yoshikazu Okada instead of Jesus, or is false whereas Christianity is true. The Nazi accusation comes from the “yellow peril” discourse originated from the fear of Japanese imperialism when it was on the side of Germany until the end of WW2. The accusation of irrationality either comes from the assumption that only Christianity is rational, or that only secularized liberal democracy is rational.

The argument that only secularized liberal democracy is rational is problematic because there are no completely unproblematic ideologies, not even the most radical ones; nothing is above critique. Furthermore, the contemporary pressure for secularization often assumes that “religion is the opium of the masses” (Marx) and democracy guarantees justice. Considering religious people to be fanatic, naïve, and
extremist, but secularized intellectuals to be objective, mature, and wise reinforces elitism and patronizing, especially because the first are usually lower-class and/or people of color, whereas the latter are mostly highly educated white people in First World countries. Moreover, there is critical scholarship demonstrating how secularized liberal democracy not only fails to guarantee justice, but is probably inherently racist (Asad; da Silva, D. F.). In fact, most people risking their lives for social justice around the world are religious people of color.

In conclusion, Sūkyō Mahikari is a conduit for Japanese-ness and reinforcer of Whiteness in Brazil, but it does not have to be so. We Japanese descendants have much work to do in acknowledging our historical complicity with violence perpetrated in Asia and the Americas, and forming coalition with other religious communities of color for the destruction of systemic oppression, and building of a just world for all.
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Appendix: Glossary

**Akabito** – Red people: Native Americans, Jews, Arabs, and Northern Africans

**Eta, hinin, kawaranin, inu-jinin, sōsō-hōshi, tsurumeso, kiyome, kuma-hōshi, kōya, amabe, saka-no mono** – Pejorative terms for *burakumin*

**Aobito** – Blue/green people: pale-skinned Eastern Europeans such as Slavs

Associação Nipo-Brasileira da Amazônia – Japanese-Brazilian Association of the Amazon

**Bihaku** – White beauty

**Bunmei** – Civilization

**Buraku** – Village or hamlet. Often used to designate the neighborhoods where *burakumin* live.

**Burakumin** – An outcaste group in Japan that has been historically associated with death, thus suffering from prejudice and discrimination.

**Butsudan** – Altar for gods and ancestors.

**Caboclos** – People of predominantly indigenous descent, but often mixed with black and white. In the Amazon, this term is frequently used as a racial slur to refer to impoverished people of color from the countryside.

**Chadō** – Art of tea ceremony

**Chōjin** – Ultra-man placed after *hanjin* and before *hito* in the evolutionary timeline of humanity.
Dekasegi – How the Brazilian media and academy call Brazilians who temporarily migrate to Japan to work in factories as manual laborers

Dōbutsu – Non-human animal

Dōjō – Temples where Sūkyō Mahikari is practiced. Literally, place for training.

Dōjōchō – Head of a dōjō

Dorei – Slaves

Dōshi – The leading position in Sūkyō Mahikari below dōjōchō and above kanbu

Erabito – The chosen people

Gaijin, gaikokujin, ijin – foreigners, outsiders

Ganbaru – To do one’s best

Gohōshi – Service. There are three types: hosse is sharing religious knowledge to proselytize, gyosse is physical labor, and busse is material donations.

Goshiki jinrui (humans of five colors); goshiki-no hito (people of five colors); itsuiro (five colors); iroboto (people of color) – Expressions referring to the Sūkyō Mahikari classification of humanity into five races.

Goshintai – Scroll with calligraphy

Haafu – Term to designate half-bloods, i.e. people with one Japanese parent.

Hanchō – Adult leader of Mahikari-tai

Hanjin – Half-God and half-human people placed after shinjin and before chōjin in the evolutionary timeline of humanity.

Hi – Fire; sun; day
**Hi-no senrei** – Baptism of Fire, apocalypse

**Hiragana** – Syllabary to write Japanese words

**Hito** – Person, people. In Sūkyō Mahikari, spiritually pure humans, God’s child with a divine soul.

**Hitobito** – People

**Ikebana** – Art of flower arrangement

**Ikigami** – A living god

**Iro** – Color. Before modernity, it meant either a status group, or sexual pleasure, as in *nanshoku* 男色 (sexual pleasure between men) (Kawasaka). Since modernity, *iro* has been used to designate race and literal colors.

**Irodama** – The spiritual art of interpreting colors

**Jinrui** – Human being in the scientific sense

**Jinshin baibai** – Trading in people. In modernity, interpreted as slave trade.

**Jinshu** – Race

**Jinshu sabetsu** – Racism

**Kakkoii** – “Cool”

**Kami** – A divine being in Shinto, generally translated as “god”. The Abrahamic God is usually translated as *kami-sama*.

(Kami)kumite – Sūkyō Mahikari practitioners. Literally, people who walk hand-in-hand with God.
Kamiyo or kamunagara – The ancient divine era, the beginning of time, the ultra-ancient period.

Kanbu – The position below dōshi and above osewanin-kaichō

Kanji – Japanese writing ideogram

Katadama – The spiritual art of interpreting shapes

Katakana – Syllabary to write non-Japanese words

Kazudama – The spiritual art of interpreting numbers

Ki – Vital energy

Kibito – Yellow race: mongoloid Asians such as Chinese and Koreans

Kotodama – The spiritual art of interpreting written words

Kun-yomi – Japanese reading of kanji

Kurobito – Black/purple people from Africa, India, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia

Makoto – Sincerity, the sincere care for others’ well-being.

Meshia – Messiah

Nihon, Nippon – Japan, land of the rising sun

Nijonjin – Japanese people or person

Nikkei – Adjective describing people of Japanese descent, such as Japanese-Brazilians and Japanese-Peruvians.

Nikkeijin – People of Japanese descent, such as Japanese-Brazilians and Japanese-Peruvians.

Ningen – People. In Sükyō Mahikari, the degenerate version of hito.
Nubi, nuhi, genin, shojū, yatsuko, fudai no mono – Terms used to designate servants in pre-modern Japan.

Ōbito – How Sūkyō Mahikari classifies the wajin. Literally, kingly people.

Ohobotoke – Great men, heroes, wise men

Okiyome – The Mahikari art of emanating God’s true light through the palm of our hands.

Literally, purification.

Omitama – Pendant that transmits God’s true light to the palm of one’s hand

On-yomi – Chinese reading of kanji

Oshienushisama – Sūkyō Mahikari supreme leader. Literally, honorable teacher.

Otodama – The spiritual art of interpreting oral words

Ritsuryō – The law system based on the philosophies of Confucianism and Chinese legalism in Japan in the Asuka (6th century - 710) and Nara periods (710-794).

Romaji – Roman letters

Sakoku – Closed country isolationist policies

Sanpaku – Eyes that have visible white space above or below the iris

Seihō – The true spiritual path

Seiza – A sitting position on the floor with legs tucked below the body and the buttocks resting on the soles of the feet.

Senpai – Seniors

Shinjin – Godly people placed before hanjin in the evolutionary timeline of humanity.

Shirobito – White, Western Europeans or Caucasians with blond hair and blue eyes
Shizen – Nature

Shōdō – Art of calligraphy

Shūkyō – Religion. In Sūkyō Mahikari, the degenerate version of sūkyō.

Sōnen – Innermost attitude

Sukuiinushisama – Sūkyō Mahikari supreme leader. Literally, honorable savior.

Sūkyō – In Sūkyō Mahikari, the original supra-religion created by God.


Sūmei godō – Five major religions according to the Sūkyō Mahikari classification of faiths.

Tanebito – Seed people

Torii – The gateway of a Shinto shrine, with two uprights and two crosspieces.

Wakō – Piracy

Wajin – The predominant ethnicity in Japan. Literally, peaceful people.

Yamato minzoku – People of great peace, wajin race.

Yotoyagami – Spiritual elevation at the highest level of 48 gods