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*Christian Fundamentalism
in Sub-Saharan Africa:
The case of Pentecostalism*

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1. Introduction.

The ongoing appropriation of Christianity in Africa has been accompanied by the spectacular growth and spread of one particular subtype of what in general terms can be called Christian fundamentalism. This specific type of Christianity substantially draws its appeal from the ways in which it mediates, negotiates and mitigates modernity. The type, which I would prefer to call charismatic Pentecostalism, and which can in a very real sense be considered a religion of modernity itself, has been growing at an unprecedented pace in Sub-Saharan Africa (there is now an extensive literature documenting the spread of Pentecostalism in Africa and even beyond its boundaries - see Gifford 1993, 1994, 1998; Hackett 1998; Marshall 1991, 1993, 1998; Maxwell 1998; Meyer 1992, 1995, 1998; Ojo 1988; Ter Haar 1994, 1995; Van Dijk 1992, 1993 1995, 1997, 1998, 1999)¹. In English-speaking Africa in particular, there is no country that has not been affected by its rise; in some cases it has even started to influence state policies in a very direct sense, as in Zambia, which was declared a Christian nation in 1992 by President Chiluba, who professed to be a confirmed Born-Again Pentecostal believer (for Ghana, see Toulabor 1994).

I will address the growth and spread of charismatic Pentecostal churches as a fundamentalist turn in African Christianity, describe its basic features and analyse some of its essential ideological parameters. Of particular interest is the Pentecostalist fascination with the modern, with modern styles of and appetites for consumption, with new technologies and with achieving a dominant location in the modern sectors of everyday life. Its ideology appears, as this article aims to show, to be profoundly inspired by an anti-nostalgic paradigm,² a politics of time in which 'tradition' and the 'past' are turned into suspect, if not immoral, sources of political and social power. One of the questions we have to look at is whether we can interpret these churches as new agents of political and perhaps even of economic development and innovation; and if we can, what are the implications of this? But first we must discuss the wider framework, and the social setting for the rise to prominence of Pentecostalism.

2. A fundamentalist turn?

It was the ROAPE, in its 1991 special issue, which drew attention within the political science study of African religious movements to the growth of what it described as new sects of the religious right in Africa. To a large extent this interest in the subject was inspired by the work of Gifford (1988, 1991a, 1991b). The issue called, with some sense of alarm, for attention to the American and South African Bible Belt interests that seemed to lie behind the growth of these sects, and welcomed contributions that would present evidence on the subject. And indeed some of the contributions talked about the links with certain conservative groups in America and elsewhere that seemed to give material and

¹. For French-speaking Africa or Luciphone Africa the literature on the spread of Pentecostalism is much less developed, although it is known that in countries such as Zaire/Congo, Togo, Burkina Faso and Cote D'Ivoire Pentecostalism has been spreading at a similar pace (for an exception in the Francophone literature on the subject, see for instance Toulabor 1994).

². I will leave undiscussed the entire study of the implications of anti-nostalgic approaches for the social sciences as a whole, as these are beyond the scope of the present article (see Robertson 1990, 1992, Strathern 1995, Turner 1994).

spiritual support to the growth of such movements in Africa. There were in fact certain grounds for concern, as militant groups in certain parts of Africa, like the RENAMO rebels in Mozambique, at least appeared to be receiving moral, if not more substantial material support, from some of these groups. In Malawi, for instance, where I began conducting fieldwork in 1987 among these groups, it was known and accepted that their preachers and leaders could move freely across the border into RENAMO-held territory, and thus considered the RENAMO soldiers Christians and provided them with Bibles and other religious material. The contributions to the ROAPE issue touched on the apparent political acquiescence of these new religious groups, and talked at length about the religious inspiration they appeared to find in the messages, books and videotapes of the well-known American Bible Belt preachers of the day such as Billy Graham, Jimmy Swaggart, Oral Roberts, Benny Hinn, Reinhard Bonnke and many others. Also, they pointed out, some of these preachers were specifically targeting Africa for their missionary operations, and this would undoubtedly lead to a fundamentalization of Christianity in the areas where they encroached. A year later, Reinhard Bonnke did indeed launch his Pan-African crusade from South Africa into the neighbouring countries (see Gifford 1987, 1993), and was welcomed by the dictatorial regime of Banda with a state banquet at one of Malawi's finest hotels.

Unfortunately, the rather limited understanding by many of what was going on at the ground level of everyday life, and of why people in many African cities suddenly seemed to be turning to the new Christian fundamentalist groups that began to appear everywhere, led to distortions in its representation and interpretation. More specifically, I would like to show that the contrast of 'conservative' with 'progressive' is much too Western-based to be helpful in any way in explaining what these new movements are about (for discussions of the issue of attaching such sociopolitical labels to religious movements see Schoffeleers 1985, 1991; Gifford 1988, 1991a, 1991b, Ellis & Ter Haar 1998). I will rather argue that we need to have an eye for their social meaning, which escapes such simple attributions to the new conservative, right-wing forces in the Sub-Saharan region.

Christian fundamentalist and pietist groups have been present in Sub-Saharan Africa practically since the start of missionary activity by whites. By fundamentalist I mean in this case, and for the purposes of this presentation, groups that foster a literal interpretation of the Bible, advocate pietist and puritan attitudes and moral orientations and seek to segregate their members from secular enticements by creating communities where an other-worldly orientation can be lived out and experienced to its full potential. Alongside the established and mainline Christian churches (R.C. Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican), churches of a more or less fundamentalist orientation also started entering Africa around the turn of the century. I am thinking of Seventh Day Adventist churches, certain Baptist churches, Latter Day Saints, and last but not least the Watchtower societies and Jehovah's Witness groups, which in Africa came to be looked on with suspicion by some colonial and post-colonial regimes alike. In a country such as Malawi, Jehovah's Witnesses were severely prosecuted up to the mid-1970s by the Post-Independence regime of the dictator Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda and the paramilitary groups of the Malawi Young Pioneers, which were under his direct personal command.

In the 1920s and 1930s these churches were followed by missionary Pentecostal churches arriving in Africa, predominantly from America and England. I will come back to

their introduction and development in the African continent in more detail later.

It is important to underscore that some of the fundamentalist churches played a crucial role in the appropriation of Christianity during the first decades of this century. A plethora of African independent churches developed out of the white missionary effort to christianize Sub-Saharan Africa, an appropriation which on the one hand was led by Africans who had been trained by the white missionaries themselves, but who now felt a call to start their own churches, entirely under African leadership. On the other hand, the African appropriation of Christianity also took the form of large-scale Christian revivals that swept through parts of the colonial territories; religious revivals that usually displayed a great deal of religious ecstasy and emotionalism and in which itinerant preachers played a crucial role (see Fields 1985 for Zambia, Van Dijk 1992 for Malawi, Comaroff & Comaroff 1997 for Botswana/South Africa) . Very often these itinerant revival leaders did not stem from one of the missionary churches, but were affiliated to one of the fundamentalist churches, in particular the Watchtower and similar groups, which provided scope for such independent displays of divine inspiration and the authority to organize large-scale revival meetings. The significance of these revivals has been described in great detail in the work *Revival and Rebellion* (1985) by Karen Fields, who makes a point of distinguishing between an 'institutional' line in the development of independent Christianity (that is, with the establishment of formal church bodies under African leadership, displaying a level of syncretism), and a line based on the personal charisma of itinerant revival preachers with a more diffuse interest in institution-building.

Both paths or channels did in fact pave the way for a type of Independent African Christianity that could cater for needs that the established missionary churches chose to ignore. A whole area of dispute had emerged after the introduction of missionary Christianity, concerned with elements of the African cosmological system that the missionaries chose to ignore as 'mere superstition'. The influence of spirits, the manifestation of spirits in possession rituals, the influence of witches and other evil powers and the ritual protection and purification that were considered so essential in the life of an African individual were for the white missionaries areas of strife and dispute, elements of heathen worship and heathen anxieties that should rather be stamped out than encouraged. Missionary Christianity could not accommodate ancestors, witches and similar powers in its own religious ideology and practice; nor did it offer any substantial form of worship, protection and purification that could deal with their effects. It therefore declared an entire area of experience to be superstition, to be unreal and unworthy of serious, 'rational' attention. As a number of authors have shown, the process of conversion was in this sense a conversion to modernity, in that it bracketed and then demonized so-called 'traditional beliefs'. Whereas previously spiritual powers in society had usually been considered morally ambivalent - that is, depending on the intention and situation, they could work either for or against the common good - the conversion to modernity meant that 'witchcraft', 'spirit possession' and 'amulets' became rigidly classified as 'evil' (see a range of publications on the subject: Comaroff 1985; Comaroff & Comaroff 1991, 1993, 1997; Hefner 1993; Meyer 1992, 1995; Stewart & Shaw 1994; v.d. Veer 1996).

Many of the new Independent churches that arose during the first decades of this century provided a syncretic ideological and ritual field in which significant elements of the indigenous African cosmological system were combined with certain elements of worship

and ritual from Christianity. The single most important aspect of most of these churches was healing and protection. They combined healing, protection and purification practices that existed in society with elements of Christianity and Christian worship. In an important sense they represented cultural continuity by combining traditional forms of healing, protection and purification - their rituals, symbols, objects, vestments, medicines, herbs etc. - with elements like reading from the Bible, the singing of Christian hymns or the use of Christian names for the spirits they intended to worship or to exorcise. For many authors in the field of the anthropology of religion this entire syncretic movement and the plethora of churches in which it resulted was surprising and bewildering. The famous historian of these movements in Southern Africa, Bengt Sundkler, describing the confusing similarities between the ways in which the prophet-leaders of these healing churches and local traditional diviners would conduct purification rituals, spoke of new wine in old skins (Sundkler 1961). He and other authors stressed the strong element of cultural continuity, which to them appeared to indicate a form of religious nostalgia (for a discussion of the nostalgic paradigm in religious anthropological writing see Van Dijk 1998). After all, many of these syncretic prophetic healing churches moved during the 1930s and 1940s into the newly emerging cities; such as those of the copper belt in Southern Africa or the new ports in West Africa like Accra in Ghana. There they quickly found large groups of rural-to-urban migrants who were eager to join their churches. All the ritual, symbolic styles, objects, colours and vestments of these churches seemed to create a virtual version of the village, to refer back to the rural society they had left behind, to the cosmological framework of the village and the means of ritual protection and purification that were significant in that context of intimate social relations. Authors therefore stressed the community-building capacity of these Independent churches, which in their eyes was so highly valued in a city environment. After all, in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s the city was considered a hostile and alienating environment, not the 'natural habitat' of the village-based African, who therefore needed something that would rebuild his sense of the village-based tightly-knit community. Hence, the rapid growth of the Independent churches could be explained by their capacity to provide for a symbolic and ritual homecoming, a safe belonging, not very different from what diviners and traditional healers provide in the context of the village and its tightly-knit social relations

There is an extensive literature based on this nostalgic paradigm in the interpretation of the rise of Independent churches in the emerging African cities. In southern Africa with its large mining areas, the explosive growth of all sorts of urban healing movements and churches has similarly been interpreted as something associated with the increased rate of urbanization over the last few decades (Sundkler 1961: 80-85; Daneel 1974: 55; West 1975: 4; Kiernan 1981: 142; Comaroff 1985: 185, 186).

Particularly in the literature on the articulation of modes of production (see Van Binsbergen 1981) the involvement of many of such migrants in a search for new security in the alienating, bewildering, perplexing urban environment over the decades before and after World War II took many forms. They included not only the rise and settlement in urban neighbourhoods of many prophetic-healing churches, but also anti-witchcraft movements. In Ghana one of the best known of these was Tigare (see Mullings 1984 and Field 1960 for extensive discussions of the growth of this movement in the urban milieu with the rise of urbanization).

The symbolic process of creating a comforting mnemonic model has already been

well described for urban healing churches in particular, and as DeVisch (1996) argues, they persist to some extent in situations where urban developments lead to high insecurity and low safety. In general terms the healing churches/movements are seen and interpreted by these authors as adequate and apt vehicles for the adaptation and adjustment of the rural-to-urban migrant confronted with a confusing, anarchic and fragmented social reality.

Basically the healing churches/movements provide in this view for a comforting rural-to-urban transference of a stock of religious symbols and conceptualizations and authority structures, and of course of ways of coping with illness and misfortune. It is in this sense that DeVisch presents an interpretation of this growth as a 'villagization of the city'. Daneel, writing about the rise of urban prophetic-healing movements in Zimbabwe, likewise noted;

"It would be a valid conclusion that the urban Zionist and Apostle Churches are in the first place extensions of the rural congregations and act as a spiritual harbour for those members who occasionally live in town □ sermons deal with rural problems or with urban problems from a rural point of view" (Daneel 1974: 23, 24).

What Daneel in fact observed was a mnemonization of ritual from a village setting which, as Dillon-Malone stressed for the Masowe communities he studied, provides a secure setting for the preservation and continuation of traditional styles of life and religious beliefs (Dillon-Malone 1978: 129-130). West notes how this process is largely linked with gerontocratic relations, indicating that the success of this process depends on the potential the healing churches/movements offer to the elderly for resuming their influential position in the new, urban environment. It is rather unusual for a man under the age of fifty to hold any position of authority within these healing churches (West 1975: 55).

While this became the dominant paradigm for explaining the rise and significance of many of the African Independent churches in the emerging urban milieus in Africa, some caution is warranted here. In the next section I will show that, particularly in the postcolonial setting, the emergence of new types of Pentecostal churches cannot be interpreted along these 'nostalgic' lines. A basic reason for this, as will be argued below, is that these religious groupings did not readily follow the syncretist course of development with which many of the other Independent churches could be characterized.

3. Pentecostalism and a different trajectory in urban Africa.

Some of the Independent churches took a rather different course of development. In a general sense, these are churches that have developed initially not from white missionary but from black missionary efforts. By this I mean the missionary Pentecostal churches that arrived around the turn of the century in different parts of Africa (for studies of the history of the introduction of Pentecostalism see among others, for Ghana Larbi 1995, Meyer 1995, Wyllie 1974, 1980; for Malawi Schoffeleers 1985, Van Dijk 1992; for Zimbabwe Maxwell 1998; and for Zaire Jules Rosette 1979). Some of these Pentecostal churches originated from black American churches that had sprung up in the first Pentecostal wave in Illinois, USA, at the end of the last century. Other Pentecostal churches, such as Apostolic and Full Gospel type, arrived in Africa under white missionary leadership from England, but started turning to African leadership as early as the late 1940s and 1950s (for Ghana, Larbi 1995).

The essential difference between these Pentecostal churches and the white established churches on the one hand and the African Independent churches on the other has been that the Pentecostals tend to take seriously the powers, spirits and occult forces that the missionary churches choose to ignore; on the other hand they have refused to follow a path of syncretism in which much of the traditional ritual and symbolic styles and repertoires would be adopted. Instead, most of the Pentecostal churches have developed their ideology and practice in a way that to a great extent demonizes such powers and spirits. By taking such forces and powers seriously the Pentecostal churches have moved close to the experience of many Africans, closer than the white missionary churches ever could with their utter denial of the existence of such powers.

At the same time, however, the Pentecostal churches also created a kind of reflexive distance from the other Independent churches, proclaiming their dissociation from syncretism by rejecting a whole array of traditional practices, purification and protection rituals and symbolic repertoires. So while many Pentecostal churches rapidly came under African leadership and were inspired by African concerns about life, fortune, and misfortune, healing and protection, they resisted a type of blurring that would confuse traditional practices with those of the church. The Pentecostal churches and their many offshoots and spin-offs certainly should be classified under the wider category of the African appropriation of Christianity; but having said this, we would be making a grave mistake if we assumed that the basis of all the African Independent churches is the same. Most of the Pentecostal churches in Sub-Saharan Africa, as they developed in the 1960s, emphasized their difference from the established mission type of church and at the same time increasingly tried to distance themselves from the other African Independent churches which they came to regard more and more as involved with diabolical and demonic powers and rituals. The Pentecostals' strict abstinence from alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, their emphasis on strict morality and their disdain for all sorts of traditional elements of culture, such as traditional funeral ceremonies, weddings, birthing and initiation rituals became widely known and noticed (Van Dijk 1992, 1993, 1995).

At times the rigid pronouncements against traditional practices would lead to social unrest and conflicts, and understandably could upset entire families as they drove relatives apart. As a consequence, the Pentecostal churches became hard for scholars to interpret as communities which in a nostalgic sense wished to re-invoke village life and village rituals. After all, for the Pentecostal churches many elements of that village life were and are highly suspect, since they may involve links with traditional culture, ancestor worship, the use of alcohol, the pouring of libations etc., which in the Pentecostal ideology are regarded as demonic and diabolical (Van Dijk 1995).

Out of what we can call this 'third movement' there developed a brand new Pentecostal wave, which has been spreading throughout Sub-Saharan Africa during the last two decades. The interesting characteristic of this new wave is that it combines a lot of the features of the older Pentecostal churches with youthful enthusiasm and appeal, with personally charismatic leaders, with an explicit location in the modern sectors of life and with an explicit use of the modern means of communication: the media, video, radio and magazines (see Van Dijk 1997, Meyer 1998, Hackett 1998, Marshall 1998). Although religious elements of expression such as speaking in tongues, prayer healing, religious ecstasy and prophesying were already part of the older Pentecostal churches, in these new charismatic groups and churches they became explicit elements of highly individualized and

personalized expression. In addition, the appeal is largely based on being 'born again' - not into an age-old world but into a modern world which is open to modern African man who has been able to shake off all these cultural traditions (Van Dijk 1997, 1998, Meyer 1998). Not only did charismatic groups develop into self-styled churches; they also began to appear within the ranks of the mainline established churches where, much to the regret of the leadership, they began to call for a rejuvenation of the authority structures and the social potential of these churches.

In general terms this form of Pentecostalism manifested itself very strongly among the younger generations of society, the younger groups in the established churches and the student populations of universities and colleges. The rejuvenation of social morality, for example in the proclamations of the young street-preachers of Malawi (see Van Dijk 1992, 1995), was combined at a fundamental level with hopes and aspirations for social and economic progress that was independent of the positions of the elderly generation. The next section will explore this social message of charismatic Pentecostalism in more detail, since it involves a specific 'politics of time'.

4. The Pentecostal politics of time.

To focus on the development of charismatic churches in two countries, Ghana and Malawi teach us much about the present-day significance of this type of Christianity in Africa. In Malawi, but even more so in Ghana, it is safe to say that Pentecostalism has become the single most important religious factor. In Ghana for instance, the older Church of Pentecost has become the largest denomination in the country; also the recent charismatic churches have also been able to develop within a relatively short period into mega-congregations. As has been described in great detail, well known examples of such mega-churches in Accra have been Mensa Otabil's International Central Gospel Church and Nicolas Duncan-Williams Action Faith Ministries (see Gifford 1994, 1998, Larbi 1995, Van Dijk 1997). Primarily urban-based, with a focus on the influential middle classes of bourgeois society, these churches are able to exert an unparalleled sociopolitical and moral influence on society. Usually these charismatic churches are built around one charismatic, inspiring leader who rules over the mega-churches with a strong element of personalism. The charismatic powers that emanate from him (usually these leaders are males) are considered to accomplish much in terms of personal healing, spiritual protection, prosperity and social change.

In Ghana these churches combine an ideology of prosperity, sometimes mockingly called the prosperity gospel, with an ideological programme of development and progress. Put in simple terms, God is with those who make progress in life, and Christianity is about prosperity and not about poverty. The charismatic leaders concern themselves with the question of development and often describe tradition and culture as barriers to that development and progress. "Make a complete break with the past" is an often-heard cry from the pulpit of these churches (Meyer 1998, Van Dijk 1998), and this complete break certainly entails a break with the tradition and culture that they see as "pulling the person down". Many churches in Accra and Ghana's other cities organize so-called "deliverance hours" in which prayer is used in displays of ecstasy and emotionalism to 'break' the power of the members' personal pasts (Van Dijk 1997). At first sight the problems with which these members approach their deliverance healers usually take the form of 'I bought a new car, and since I have, accidents have started to happen. I suspect some evil demon to be behind

it'. During the deliverance session, however, the personal past, the location of that person in his kinship relations, will be explored and the workings of certain curses troubling his or her family will be explored. It is the breaking of these ties that will eventually permit the free and undisturbed use of such items of modern consumption, which is the ultimate goal of the whole breaking ceremony. Meyer writes:

"By symbolically cutting people's family ties, the deliverance procedure subverts the bonds created and protected by the collective worship of particular gods as well as the bonds between relatives. This is a distinctive feature of Pentecostalism. Whereas traditionally the fight against evil is to a large extent focused on the restoration of the bonds between people...., Christian deliverance basically unties them. The aim of the deliverance sessions is to turn people into individuals who are independent of and unaffected by family relations. Unlike the traditional gods, the Spirit of God does not bind families together but, rather, turns their members into separate individuals who are freed from the past and able to progress" (Meyer 1998: 201).

Sometimes people are requested to fill out extensive questionnaires which deal with each and every aspect of a person's past in terms of involvement with traditional healing, shrines, traditional rituals of any sort (initiation, birthing etc.), spiritual protection and illness etc. etc. In other words the fascination with the modern, with modern consumption and the use and possession of modern items is addressed by these Pentecostal churches in the deliverance hours they offer on a grand scale.

In addition, a location in development and progress also means the appropriation of the Western means and methods of knowledge and technology. One of the charismatic churches in Accra, Mensa Otabil's International Central Gospel Church, urban-based as they often are, has now opened the first private university in Ghana, which falls within a similar perspective of providing for prosperity and progress from within, now that Ghana and Africa are increasingly being marginalized by forces from without.

The development of charismatic groups and churches in Malawi took a slightly different turn in their attempts to cut themselves off from tradition and traditional culture. Very much as in Ghana, the new charismatic groups originated among the young upwardly mobile urban classes in the late 1970s, particularly among those young urban groups that had a university or college education. Later, in the mid-1980s, however, these young upward-moving middle-class leaders were joined by less educated youngsters who similarly began to call for a rejuvenated morality, a fight against evil in society, against witchcraft, evil powers, drunkenness, violence and adultery. These young leaders largely consisted of itinerant preachers who moved around in Malawi's urban areas organizing revival meetings, moving from one spot to another. Although still firmly under the yoke of the political dictatorship of president Banda, these young preachers were usually left alone by the regime's security forces to preach their message against evil, immorality and impurity in society, evils and vices for which they largely held the older generation responsible. The youngest Pentecostal preacher I met during my research in Malawi in the late 1980s and early 1990s was 9 years old. But despite his youth he was able and allowed to insult the elderly during revival meetings because of their supposed involvement in the persistence of 'sin' in society. Whereas in Ghana the new charismatic churches engaged themselves in the

dialogue between progress and poverty, and seemed to offer an arena where the engagement with modern capitalist relations and encroachment was discussed, commented on and abated, in Malawi these charismatic leaders more specifically appeared to address the issue of the prevailing gerontocratic power structures in society. The political culture was one in which the power of the elderly as well as the legitimation of that power in tradition were considered paramount, and were enshrined in the formal channels of authority of the nation-state. For more than 20 years the dictator Banda had been developing a coercive model which was partly inspired by the political culture of one specific ethnic group in the country, the Chewa; or perhaps one should say it was based on a postcolonial reconstruction by the Banda regime of the political culture of the Chewa, in which the authority of the elders and the servitude of young men under the so-called Chikamwini system loomed large. This ethnically based model for the nation's political culture had a specific significance in terms of the subservient position of the younger generation in postcolonial society.

Charismatic Pentecostalism, as it was introduced in Malawian society, was however eagerly embraced by young leaders as an ideologically legitimate way of escaping from these power relations, confronting them and reacting against gerontocratic authority by disclaiming its legitimate basis and declaring the traditional culture to be rife with demons and diabolical powers. It began by opposing, and continues to oppose the authority of older people head-on. Even today no allowance is made for them as an otherwise widely respected source of authority. They are excluded from any position of power within the Born-Again groups, since they represent involvement in other lines of power such as witchcraft and politics - two pursuits which are considered similar in terms of the degree of evil involved. In stark contrast to the position of older people in all other religious bodies, such as the established mission churches or the independent churches in Malawi's cities, they do not preach, organize meetings or engage in speaking in tongues. Nor are they considered role models for the way a preacher is supposed to behave. This even applies to the elders who lead Pentecostal-type independent churches, the ones that come closest to the Born-Again ideology. The ridicule the older generation encounters at Born-Again meetings creates a hostile tone towards any inclination to copy the behaviour of older people as far as religious practice is concerned.

In a cultural sense, the exclusion of older people reaches beyond the mere attribute of age. It extends to a range of symbolic repertoires, styles, rituals and other phenomena which directly function within the context of a perception of 'the ritual past'. It is this very representation of a past for which the older generation of today is held responsible which leads to the Born-Again's outright rejection of central elements in Malawian cultural traditions. The Born-Again ideology embodies the notion that such symbolic repertoires, in which the elders still play a dominant role, continue to constitute a 'past' that has to be repudiated and then forgotten. There is no room for any dialogue with a perceived past that would involve recollection of a subject's involvement in traditional rituals of any kind, or his or her engagement in activities considered sinful. Accordingly, the process of what I call cultural de-mnemonization also entails a full rejection of any experiences, primarily in the context of initiation or dealings with the traditional healers (*asing'anga*), which could lead an individual into the realm of the older generation. Secrets that relate to the relatively 'hidden' process of initiation (*chinamwhali*) are therefore readily and mockingly disclosed, while the Nyau secret society, to which initiated men in the Central and Southern Region of Malawi belong, is branded as demonic. Funeral ceremonies are regularly targeted by Born-Again preachers

who fulminate against the veneration of ancestors, the pouring of libations and the use of alcoholic drinks - thereby further opposing the power of the older generation.

Mnemonic items in the form of objects, inscriptions on the body, and ritual experiences that relate to the past are also seen as things controlled to a large extent by the older generation, who are suspected of being able to exert all sorts of binding magical powers. They are accused by the preachers, for instance, of being responsible for keeping magical, esoteric objects which are capable of extending their powers from the past into the present (the so-called *zitumwa*, singular *chitumwa*). These objects may therefore go on haunting certain people long after their initial owners have died. Long, binding threads are seen to have been woven by the older generation through their dealings with evil powers, which still affect the activities of relatives in the present. The iconoclasm envisaged by the preachers will certainly include the confiscation and destruction of such objects³.

Such a rupture with a perceived cultural past certainly generates a wide variety of possible points of conflict and tension among relatives, and it usually involves the departure of new Born-Againists from their immediate circle of family members. However, in Malawi's postcolonial setting this ideological position also immediately took on political significance.

From the inception of his regime, the president, Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda, called himself the 'Nkhoswe Number One' (that is, the nation's matrilineal uncle) and embarked on a social programme that was to bring youth back under proper gerontocratic control. In Banda's view the younger generation had to be made into 'the nation's workhorse', 'the spearhead of progress' - a position that would not be much different structurally from what it had been in the Chewa Chikamwini model. In the system of Chikamwini every young man is obliged to provide labour service upon and after marriage by cultivating a garden belonging to his wife's matri-kin; the group of married women living together known as *mbumba*. The young man's position in the wife's village remained weak and was subject to continuous exploitation from three potential sources: the male guardians of the matri-kin, called *ankhowse* (sing. *nkhoswe*), the wife's brother (*malume*) and the mother-in-law. The inferior position of a young, incoming man in village society made him no more than a 'workhorse' or a 'D-7 tractor'. Young men were equated with certain elite goods and objects of exchange between villages, and were viewed as alienated workers and mere assets in agricultural production. Should a young man displease the *nkhoswe*, the *malume* or the mother-in-law, he could be returned to his natal village with nothing but a blanket, regardless of the amount of work he had done⁴.

³. One of the best-known preachers of the group of 30 that I studied (Van Dijk 1992, 1995) in Blantyre was a young woman of 24 named Linley Mbeta, who claimed she could see a hand coming down from heaven to point out to her the sinners among her audience. She became a national figure, known for her effective anti-witchcraft campaigns, following a rebirth she experienced in April 1985. Owing to her cleansing powers and her adamant calls for confession and conversion, her preaching sessions are much in demand nationwide. In many places her conduct has provoked resentment among older people, because, as is common in the entire movement, she openly holds this generation responsible for the existence and salience of witchcraft in society.

⁴. The position of the young in political culture, particularly that of young men, in the Northern patrilineal societies such as the Tumbuka was slightly different. Although young men were certainly controlled by gerontocratic power relations through which their labour power was exploited, membership of the same fraternal interest society meant that their prospects of eventually achieving an autonomous position were better.

Two youth organizations on a nationwide scale were set up: the paramilitary Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP) and the political wing of the sole governing party, the League of Malawi Youth (Ayufi in the vernacular). Banda brought both youth organizations under his direct command, turning them into instruments of control and coercion with unprecedented freedom of action. In 1965 Banda announced the Malawi Young Pioneers Amendment Act, which placed this youth organization, with a secret-service wing, above the police and gave it immunity from arrest. In all 24 districts of Malawi, MYP training camps were established from which innovations were to be introduced in adjacent rural areas. Their purpose was to ensure, as in the age-old Chikamwini system, that the young would once again support agricultural production. Each year thousands of secondary school students and volunteers were recruited to the camps to be taught innovative agricultural skills as well as basic paramilitary training. Those who made it to the standing MYP elite troops via the brief introductory training programmes received extensive benefits, and after some time they were returned to society as 'civilians' in jobs that were kept vacant for them on a compulsory basis in trade, industry, and government services.

Within a short span of time Banda developed a hardened and above all loyal youth body that had pledged an oath of allegiance to the 'father and founder' of the Malawi nation, the Nkhoswe Number One. Just as Banda placed himself at the top of the traditional hierarchy of authority (ascending from local village headmen through group village headmen to traditional authority [chief]), local party leaders placed themselves above local village headmen and group village headmen. These local party chairmen had one instrument for extending their powers which the local traditional authorities lacked: the local branches of the MYP and the League of Malawi Youth. At the level of local society, both youth bodies succeeded in developing into deeply feared instruments of control and coercion. Party membership was compulsory, and the Youth Leaguers (Ayufi) in particular were frequently used to check on the possession of party cards and compulsory attendance at party meetings. Entry to public places like markets, hospitals and bus stations was permitted only after showing a party card to the Ayufi member blocking the entrance. Members of these organizations would mingle in civilian clothes with local sports groups, visitors to bars and restaurants, and mourners at funerals to record any form of dissent or protest against the regime's increasing supervision and intolerance. The youth groups and their related secret bodies had become so effective that by the late 1980s Malawi had been transformed into one of most highly supervised countries of the African continent, with state power represented in virtually every corner of society through an astoundingly intricate network of informants, training camps, teachers, road blocks, checkpoints and party membership whose effectiveness in a country that was still among the ten poorest in the world was beyond imagination.⁵

Other bodies, such as the mission churches, were no longer allowed to organize young people in independent youth organizations, and their opportunities to gain direct access to the younger generation in Malawi steadily diminished after independence and the

⁵. Here I do not mean to equate supervision with violence. Other regimes in Africa have been notoriously violent, but they lacked the level of supervision over the entire society that was so evident in Malawi. Medard has written, mockingly:

"Kamuzu Banda à réussi à imposer à son pays le plus haut degré de discipline en Afrique: les voitures s'arrêtent même au feu rouge. Cette discipline, qui fait l'admiration des experts en tout genre, rend l'atmosphère singulièrement triste, étouffante et oppressante" (Medard 1991: 99).

1965 Amendment Act. The mission youth organizations, such as the Scouts and the Brigades, were disbanded. The mission schools were put under the direct control of the government, which decided on the intake of pupils and the appointment of teachers. All other matters concerning youth and youth organizations were referred to the Ministry of Youth and to the commanders in charge of the two official youth organizations MYP and the Youth League. The political content of the activities of Christian student and workers' organizations was closely monitored.

This was, in brief, the political state of affairs in the early 1970s when the young preachers began to appear on the streets proclaiming born-again fundamentalism and organizing their adherents into small fellowships and ministries. In his capacity as Nkhoswe Number One, Banda reflected a model of gerontocratic authority which, even at the local level in the cities, was strongly endorsed by party officials and the political machinery. However, it would be a mistake to overshadow a whole world of postcolonial innovation, of which Born-Again Pentecostalism is a part, by using Banda's manipulation of 'tradition' alone to explain the apparent submission of Malawians to the Nkhoswe model of authority (for a critical discussion of postcolonial innovation in the rural areas, see Englund 1996). Within the urban Born-Again groups the gerontocratic nkhoswe model of authority was an object of bitter scorn. Whereas continuity was underpinned by diverse nostalgic modes during the Banda era, the urban movement of Born-Againism advanced a subtle non-nostalgic critique. At the sociopolitical level, compared with other religious groups found in Malawi's cities, the Born-Again preachers proved quite exceptional in their rupture with cultural practice and its political transformation. The mission churches in particular were often rebuked for their 'permissive' or 'lukewarm' attitudes to local political and cultural practice. These churches showed respect for the local forms of authority ascribed to the nkhoswe. However, the fact that 'religion', as the preachers pejoratively called it, offered itself as an element of the national project of identity formation under Banda certainly plays a part in the born-again critique. While religious leaders were pledging their allegiance to Banda from time to time, were turning up at national festivities to open the ceremonies with prayer, or were participating in the meetings of the sole governing Malawi Congress Party, Born-Again leaders never did such things.⁽⁶⁾ While the former groups helped to create a national identity by highlighting Malawian 'national' culture and its heritage, this was not on the 'agenda' of the young Born-Again leaders. On the contrary, if someone from the Born-Again groups was appointed, even involuntarily, to one of the many political organizations (for men, women, youth or whatever), that person was perceived forthwith as an outcast: as someone who had defiled the treasure of being born again for the sake of access to political power.

The interpretation offered here is thus that in challenging the postcolonial projects of state power and established mainline Christianity in Malawi, the Born Agains did not develop a mode of political nostalgia. Neither nostalgia, nor the re-creation of communities by evoking elements of a perceived past, nor the empowerment which (as Comaroff (1985) has shown) may result from it, seems to have played a part in the development of the determined Born-Again criticism of the Banda regime. Instead, the empowerment the Born-Again movement provided for challenging the postcolonial project was derived from the model of a moral rejuvenation and reordering of society.

⁶. An important exception here is the young preacher Linley Mbeta who became President Banda's personal healer for some time.

5. Conclusion.

In essence, the articles that appeared in ROAPE proclaiming that the resurgence of Pentecostalism was inspired by right-wing, highly conservative, bourgeois ideals were wrong in their understanding of what this Pentecostalism, this form of Christian fundamentalism actually meant in a given African context. In the Malawian case, what at the public level appeared to be a conservative movement of young people, something that would certainly not threaten the official power-holders and the official and formal lines of authority in society, had quite the opposite meaning at a deeper level. On moral grounds, the young leaders rather disavowed the power of the elderly and called for a rigid moral reorientation, something they claimed the elderly were incapable of. Nor did they call for a move back to village life, village culture or village values; they rather proclaimed that the social re-ordering that urban life provided was the true Christian setting for a new society. As I have described in some of my publications (Van Dijk 1992, 1995, 1998) the ridicule the older generation met at some of the meetings these young Pentecostal leaders organized was almost beyond belief: insults, abusive language, accusations and disrespect. Linley Mbeta, a 20-year-old female born-again preacher, for instance, insultingly claimed that the elderly were responsible for the existence of harmful, witchcraft-related charms and amulets in society by saying:

'Where do you think you shall go with those charms (zitumwa) which were left to you by your grandparents, you fools? You, you are learners today. It takes hours for you to bewitch a person, but you still cling to your witchcraft (ufiti), just because your forefathers handed over the charms to you.

Fools, if these charms were the things which could lead somebody into the Heavenly Kingdom I doubt if your grandparents could have handed the charms to you, but because they are the things which lead somebody to Hell, this is why they handed them over to you before they died. Only to increase the number of people to accompany them on their way to Hell !

My conclusion is therefore that the public face of these new fundamentalist or Pentecostal movements should not deceive us as to their meaning and significance at a deeper level of social life in African societies. Although the African Independent churches as well as these Pentecostal churches have often been accused of being politically conservative, uncritical and acquiescent, such accusations may prove to be unfounded when we take a closer look at the everyday experience of them. It is widely known that the former Independent churches are losing out against these new charismatic churches, primarily because their nostalgic message of returning to tightly knit, village-inspired communities and value systems no longer works in urban settings and settings where the global engagement of modernity makes its presence felt. It is only in this sense that I claim that the independent churches are conservative and nostalgic; in political terms this does not exclude the possibility that critical, 'progressive' views towards governments can at least in theory still evolve in them. At present, however, the new charismatic churches in countries such as Ghana and Malawi have paradoxically developed into agents of change, progress and development; and fundamentally, this 'paradox' lies in the eyes of the Western beholder.

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