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Modernity's Limits

Pentecostalism and the Moral Rejection of Alcohol in Malawi

Rijk van Dijk

One bright, sunny afternoon, a large gathering of people assembled at Mpemba, a small village near Blantyre, Malawi's main commercial and industrial city. Addressing them from a platform overlooking the crowd was a young woman dressed in a flowing white robe. Much to the amazement and shock of many, after singing a few Christian songs, the young lady exploded, crying, screaming and stamping her feet. Most insultingly, she pointed her finger at members of her audience, lashing her listeners with one insult after another totally out of keeping for a woman of her age and stature. Calling her audience drunkards more interested in nocturnal orgies where witches (*afiti*) indulge in eating human flesh and enjoy dancing naked (*kutamba*) than in praising God, she angrily rebuked them:

> You, you are clapping your hands (in praise of God) as if you have thorns in your hands! But when we see you in the taverns you are active, clapping your hands with force for the devil. I tell you *dzidakwa* (drunkards): when Jesus comes, some of you will be caught red-handed, spilling *kachasu* (local distillate) from the big bottle to the small cup that you use when drinking! (Linley Mbeta, Mpemba Jama, 8 April 1989)

The crowd's shock turned to hilarity. The young woman's mimicking of the shaky movements of a drunkard trying to fill a cup with the local distillate provoked embarrassment-by-recognition of the effects of alcohol on the body. The laughter ended abruptly when the woman addressed her audience as *nthakati* (experts in sin and malice). Such drinking harms others and

disrupts society. Such evil comes from the earth and *za kunthaka* (powers beneath the earth's surface), while redemption from such evil, the woman proclaimed, comes from heaven and from *ku lapa* (repentance to God).

The young woman in question here is Linley Mbeta, the leader-founder of the Redemption Voice Ministry, one of the many born-again Christian fundamentalist groups that have sprung up in Malawi's urban areas since the late 1970s. Linley Mbeta is one of the best-known preachers of the group of thirty that I studied in Blantyre (van Dijk 1994, 1995). She became a national figure, known for her effective anti-witchcraft campaigns following a rebirth she experienced in April 1985. At the time of this sermon she was twenty-three years old. Her group has flourished and, after democratic changes in Malawi dating from 1994, came to be known as the *Dzimvere* (Obedience) Ministry (Kaunda 1995). Like many similar groups, fellowships and emerging churches belonging to this new Pentecostal movement that have swept through the country, its membership is drawn particularly from among the young and in some cases educated urbanites. The striking feature of this born-again charismatic Pentecostalism is its rigid insistence on a strict moral ideology and a denunciation of alcohol. The rejection of alcohol falls within a wider moral spectrum of activities, objects and rituals that these Pentecostal groups denounce while recommending other positively valued activities and rituals.

This chapter investigates the rejection of alcohol in Malawi's Pentecostal moral order from two perspectives: first, against the backdrop of developments in Malawi's Independent Christianity movement, and second, in relation to the modernist debate that this type of Pentecostalism represents. Paradoxically, the rejection of alcohol presents an image of being "modern" and therefore refraining from being a part of "traditional" Malawian culture. In anthropology, the emergence of Pentecostalism is generally believed to represent a specific variety of what generally can be termed "Christian fundamentalism," albeit Pentecostal groups offer extensive room for the expression of religious emotionalism which many other fundamentalist groups lack.

Christian and Muslim fundamentalism is widely explored within the theme of the ever-tightening grip of expansive, modern capitalism (Marty and Scott Appleby 1991; Caplan 1987; Gifford 1991). In anthropology this interpretative framework has been further developed by Taussig (1980) in Latin America and the Comaroffs (1991, 1993) in Africa. Their work has imparted a deeper cultural dimension, demonstrating how local societies interpret and negotiate the encroachment of modern forms, modern market relations, and commodities through the prisms of local representations of fear, danger and anxiety. An extensive anthropological literature has emerged in which local debates about witchcraft, demonic forces, threats and immorality are explored and explained in terms of modernity's malcontents (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Fisiy and Geschiere 1991; Geschiere and Fisiy 1994). Several authors—Meyer for Ghana (1995), Marshall for Nigeria (1993) and Maxwell for Zimbabwe (1998)—have situated Africa's new Pentecostal movements within this conceptual framework.

This chapter explores the extent to which Malawi's Pentecostal movements offer individuals the means of coming to terms with modernity and of dealing with its inherent dangers, in this case alcohol, by offering spiritual protection and seclusion. In the first section, the Pentecostal modernist moral order is explored in view of the development of Independent Christianity in Malawi. In the second section, more information is presented about the born-again movement, their ideology and their rejection of alcohol. In the final section, some conclusions are drawn with regard to the central place of this rejection in their ideology. The most important basis for these conclusions will be the acknowledgment of the fight of the born-agains against gerontocratic power structures.

POWERFUL LIQUIDS IN MALAWI'S COLONIAL PAST

The Pentecostal movement is the latest stage in the development of Independent Christianity in Malawi (MacDonald 1970; McCracken 1977; Chakanza 1982; Langworthy 1985; Schoffeleers 1985; van Dijk 1992b). Its moral views on alcohol should therefore be placed in the context of an understanding of how independent churches have developed in Malawi, and more specifically how they have placed themselves between two cosmological orders. One order was that of precolonial, "traditional" cosmology, its symbolism and ritual practice. The other order was that of mission Christianity, which arrived in Malawi in the second half of the nineteenth century. During the 1870s, Scottish missionaries started preaching a moral regime and cultural logic of orderly conduct, containment of body and soul, and abstinence from lustful violations of moral integrity.

Following the work of Akyeampong (1996) on alcohol in Ghana, one can trace the arrival of modernity in Malawi through the missionaries' insistence on a mode of inspection and supervision of what may be called the powerful liquids: blood, alcohol and water. In line with the missionaries' prohibitions against "paganism," indulgence in alcohol

was condemned and its ceremonial presence at various "heathen rituals" rejected. Interestingly, the missionaries never denied the relationship between alcohol and the world of the unseen. After all, during Holy Communion, wine symbolizes the relationship among God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Instead, in Christian ritual, missionaries introduced a sense of "inspection" of one's internal, moral world before wine, the Blood of Christ, could be consumed.

This relationship between in(tro)spection, alcohol and blood was further developed and represented by colonial medical practice. As Vaughan (1991) argued for Malawi and Zambia, the inspection of an individual patient's blood for the diagnosis of disease echoes local onlookers' understanding of modernity. The missionaries' moral inspection of the person through the doctrinal association between blood and wine bore similarities to the colonial medical practice of treating diseases, disinfecting and cleaning wounds by inspecting blood and administering alcohol. Both symbolized a new, modern notion of embodiment.

Water became a third powerful liquid domain of modernity through Christian baptism. Missionaries introduced water as the *madzi wa moyo*, the water of life, representing a transition from life to death to renewal of life through which eternity could be reached. Writing about the moral politics of water, the Comaroffs quote an early London missionary in Tswana who wrote, "Here vast moral wastes must be watered by the streams of life. Rainmakers are our inveterate enemies, and uniformly oppose the introduction of Christianity amongst their countrymen to the utmost of their power" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 207–08). In time, water would become a major symbolic feature of syncretist and Africanized Christian movements. Baptism demonstrated the power of this liquid, representing the resurrection to life from the deep, dark waters of death. Before any baptism could take place, the person was subjected to inspection and ran the risk of being rejected if he or she had not renounced all heathen activities.

The colonial administrative and medical system introduced techniques for the inspection of water to prevent contamination. Colonial records indeed show how these measures facilitated the separation of black and white residential areas in emerging urban areas such as Blantyre, to prevent "contamination." The regime engaged in a seemingly hopeless battle to convince local populations to use only safe and pure drinking water. As Vaughan (1991) demonstrates with an element of irony, the colonial educational campaigns showed the local populace, on big cinema screens, how germs would multiply in contaminated water. This provoked disgust, anxiety, laughter and, above all, confusion.

In many instances the missionary and colonial ideological orders confronted and encroached upon existing cosmologies in which these three liquids carried deeply rooted symbolic meanings related to rituals of ancestral veneration, life power (*mphamvu*), spiritual forces, healing, and marriage and funerals. Alcohol played and still plays a significant symbolic role in the libation ritual (*nsembe*) whereby the first few drops of an alcoholic drink are poured in honor of ancestors in moments of consultation, rainmaking and secret dances. There are two generic distinctions in alcohol: *mowa* and *kachasu*. The first refers to alcoholic beverages that are beers produced by brewing, while the second refers to distilled beverages, although in both types maize and sugar are the raw materials. *Mowa* generally takes a prominent place in ancestral veneration in this pouring of libation (*ku tsira mowa*). *Kachasu*, on the other hand, is dominant in the strengthening of social relations, for instance between relatives at certain festivities such as marriages. At "beer parties" it is common to see *kachasu* being served, although it is not technically a brew. In general terms, alcohol plays a dominant role in the strengthening of ties with family ancestors and in the creation of mutual ties and obligations within the extended family. It is seen as a substance that binds the person to his family and keeps his identity "dividual," that is, eternally locked in social relations. Alcohol signals the presence of ancestral spirits (*mizimu*), which are mollified to release their benevolent powers onto the life of their descendants. Thus alcohol plays a role in constituting the subject as a dividual rather than an individual, a person whose well-being, protection, healing, future, coming into adulthood, marriage, death and funeral are directly located within the family and its *muzimu*.

INDEPENDENT CHURCHES AND DEMON ALCOHOL

Around the turn of the century independent churches emerged in Malawi presenting a syncretist cosmological order that combined elements from precolonial symbolism and ritual with selected elements from missionary teachings and colonial ideology. Malawi's independent churches evolved under the influence of black American religious communities originating from Illinois, and Pentecostal, Apostolic, Zionist and so-called Ethiopian churches offering religious revivalism, enthusiasm and ecstasy (Chakanza 1983; Fields 1985). These were soon recognized by the local population as places where there was room for acknowledging

powers and spiritual experiences that the already established Christian missionary churches denied as mere superstition. Instead of negating the power of evil and ancestral spirits, affliction, and misfortune caused by witchcraft, independent churches incorporated elements of African cosmology, including the means for healing individual and social bodies as well as a toleration of polygamy. From the 1920s onwards, independent churches proliferated into hundreds of different churches usually led by one founding prophet. They occupied the middle ground between a range of traditional religious practices and notions, on the one hand, and the formal but foreign doctrine of missionary Christianity, on the other (Chakanza 1983).

In this middle terrain of independent churches, the moral inspection of individuals by powerful liquids remained a crucial undertaking. Ritual practices of the Zionist independent churches focused on the purifying application of water (Sundkler 1961; Daneel 1974; Kiernan 1981; Comaroff 1985). Holy water, blessed by the healing prophets, could be taken home for the ailing in bottles, and baptisms in streams of water were turned into grand and colorful events.

Representing an extremely wide range of moral programs, the location of alcohol in the independent churches' paradigm of powerful liquids was ambiguous (Schoffeleers 1985). In Zionist churches, for example, alcoholic beverages were strictly prohibited. Their production, however, was not, nor was trading in alcohol or its use in settings that required it to fulfill social obligations, for example at weddings and funerals. Although prophet leaders in these churches would ensure they were personally not involved in practices that would directly require them to apply alcohol, church workers' purposeful avoidance of social obligations where alcohol was involved was virtually impossible.

Most of these churches consisted and still consist primarily of women. Women are central to the production and redistribution of alcohol, and as such play an important role in the social relations that are maintained through its application (Englund 1996). Outright rejection by independent churches like the Zionists of any dealing with alcohol would deprive many committed members of additional income, of arranging social affairs and relational ties, and of structuring the male-female power balance that dictates control over resources commanded through alcohol. A strict prohibition on dealing with alcohol would alienate many women who produce alcohol to earn cash. The membership of independent churches would be jeopardized by a ban on alcohol, thus undermining the stature, influence and efficacy of the church.

The move of many independent churches from rural areas into the cities in conjunction with increasing rural-urban migration in the period just before and after World War II also influenced attitudes toward alcohol. Although Malawi is still one of the least urbanized countries of southern African (11 percent of the total population as opposed to 55 percent in Zambia), its urban areas began to expand rapidly after 1945 (van Binsbergen 1981). Independent churches played an important role in the migration process by providing a "home away from home" for the urban migrant (van Dijk 1998). The churches offered an array of comforting symbols and rituals derived from a rural cosmology.

The urban setting triggered a reorientation of people's leisuretime pursuits. Drinking gained importance as a social pastime because alcohol was more widely available than in rural areas. Factory-produced beer was on hand for those who could afford it, with Carlsberg having one of the biggest beer-producing plants in the region in operation in Blantyre. The informal sector supply of home brews, which dwarfed factory-produced beer, was geared to those with more limited purchasing power.

Most independent churches soon abandoned attempts to prohibit the use of alcohol and adopted an ambiguous position similar to the lukewarm rejection that the missionaries of established churches preached from their pulpits. Only those independent churches such as the Johane Masowe Apostles representing Puritanism in its "pure" form were able to establish closed communities that successfully kept urban life with its beer parties, taverns and pubs at bay (Dillon-Malone 1978).

Other churches faced difficulties supervising alcohol consumption that became more and more Western in style over time. The consumption of industrially produced beer and other alcoholic beverages figured prominently, especially among the young. In the 1980s, young urban couples were eager to indulge in conspicuous consumption at their wedding ceremonies by serving South African champagne. Older people were incredulous at the expense, labeling their behavior "K.T." (*katanghale*). This term refers to the conspicuous consumption of urban businessmen and "wheelers and dealers" that appalled the thrift-conscious first generation of urban migrants. In newspaper cartoons, a "K.T. man" is usually depicted with rows of empty beer bottles around him, indicating a lifestyle of indulgence if not gluttony.

In short, in the context of modern life, the independent churches reenacted rural rituals related to powerful liquids, especially water, but largely sidestepped the issue of alcohol and its association with new social roles, lifestyles and forms of consumption. Urban economic occupations like beer

brewing evolved amid a sense of ambiguity about the place of alcohol in the social fabric of relations and balance of power. In urban areas the inspection, supervision and purification of "water" as well as "blood" for healing remained a strong paradigm within these churches. Alcohol, however, slipped beyond their control to lurk as a major source of impurity, defilement and temptation in the minds of the faithful.

BORN-AGAIN RIGIDITY, ALCOHOL, AND GENERATIONAL CONFLICT

In the mid-1970s, teenagers and secondary school and university students suddenly took to the streets of Malawi's main urban areas to proclaim a moral reordering of society based on Christian fundamentalist notions. A whole array of Pentecostal groups and organizations emerged, led by young itinerant preachers varying in age from nine to thirty (van Dijk 1992b, 1992c, 1993). These young people attracted crowds by conducting mass revival meetings with fire and brimstone sermons denouncing the evils of everyday urban life. To a large extent the movement represented a new stage in Malawian Independent Christianity, part of an ongoing process dating back to the first decade of the twentieth century (Schoffeleers 1985). The purpose of their actions was unlike earlier forms of Independent Christianity and certainly did not present a nostalgic retreat into rural romanticism.

The type of Pentecostalism that these young preachers espoused mirrored the "charismatic" Christianity reported recently in many other countries (Gifford 1994; Marshall 1993; Meyer 1997; Maxwell 1998). It exemplified a high level of religious emotion and ecstasy related to the search for healing, protection and fortune. The preachers focused on spirit-healing, prosperity gospel and individual conviction, by "working upon the Holy Spirit" (*Mzimu Woyera*). Their followers rarely embraced first generation rural-urban migrants. Instead, second or third generation urbanites proved to be more receptive to their preachings.

Of the thirty *alaliki* (preachers or literally "sayers") I studied in Malawi, those who were the first to take up their call to preach belonged to an urban class of well-educated college and university students. Their education permitted them to occupy higher-ranking positions in urban society. These preachers can be called "part-timers," because they were, and still are, only involved in preaching in their spare time. Later on, in the early and mid-1980s, a second group of preachers came to the fore, most of whom had no more than a few years of primary schooling and in no way belonged to the young urban elite. They conducted their activities on a full-time basis and, in one way or another, their preaching activities provided them with a livelihood.

In the doctrines they preach, conversion is perceived as a process of dying so that a new person can emerge. At the altar call, the congregation is urged to step forward to receive the "infilling" of the Holy Spirit as a way to become cleansed of worldly, defiling forces. Only after infilling can a person be considered to be born again (*kubadwa mwatsopano*).

This born-again experience takes place in an atmosphere of intense emotionalism and must result in a person's rejection of his/her past life in all social, communal, ritual or cultural respects. Preachers of the *Abadwa Mwatsopano* (Born Again) movement stress the need for the person to reject any immediate social life and call for a rejuvenated morality in which the "satanic habit" of frequenting bars, hotels and discos is condemned, because these are understood to be places of utter moral depravity. As I witnessed many times myself, while the audience is exhorted to sing and dance, sinners are commanded to kneel before the young people, who then insist that all evil objects such as cans of beer (*chibukhu*), knives, tobacco and stolen goods and all esoteric, magical tokens be surrendered.

In addition to breaking with one's immediate social life, the preachers also demand a complete break with the past, which relates to a much deeper understanding of how "immorality" may ruin a person's life (Meyer 1997). Here ties with one's ancestors are considered of tremendous importance, or rather of immediate danger. It is through one's ancestors that magical, esoteric powers are perceived to control a person's life and destiny, which could cause a person to experience misfortune and no advancement of prosperity in ordinary daily existence. These ties are related to the powers of witchcraft (*ufitii*). Evil spirits are perceived to run counter to the benevolent powers of the Holy Spirit, which manifests itself in ecstatic speaking in tongues (*malilime*), whereby people lie groveling on the ground, sweating profusely and shouting incomprehensible sounds.

By being born again, a line is established with benevolent, heavenly powers. In this process *malilime* is the physical sign that superior power is at work protecting one's day-to-day existence and healing any spiritual afflictions, even witchcraft. As one preacher told his audience, the born-again who feels attacked by witches trying to abduct people to nocturnal orgies where human flesh is eaten may counter them through *malilime*. In so doing, witches are trapped and paralyzed at the door of the house. Some born-again preachers even feel empowered to detect witchcraft and

related harmful objects, and are convinced that nothing will harm them if they destroy them.

The aim of this inspiration is *kutsirika*, the sealing-off of the person from their immediate social environment and former lifestyle and their ties with the family and its ancestral powers. Conversion narratives of new born-agains emphasize how one's involvement in certain rituals (initiation, healing, funerals, ancestor worship) or in certain kinds of social behavior (drinking, violence, etc.) can be repudiated by becoming a born-again and by speaking in tongues. The individual born-again is protected by being "sealed off" from the outside world, from its bonds and ritual obligations. One way the born-again preachers create a sense of protection is by organizing as many prayer sessions as possible where people are requested to enter into lengthy and highly ecstatic periods of speaking in tongues. The intense involvement in born-again religious occasions minimizes the time one can devote to meeting obligations toward the family, and the authority of its elders. In this way a person gains distance from his or her origins.

The ritual application of the three powerful liquids—alcohol, water and blood—is deeply resisted and condemned by young born-again preachers. Contrary to the practices of most of the independent churches, water is rejected as a means of moral purification of the soul, as a way of consulting the spirits, and as an object in the ritual healing of a person. The young born-again preachers do not engage in baptisms, as there is only "baptism in the Holy Spirit." Openly and mockingly the application of water in other churches is ridiculed and condemned as "superstition which will invoke the powers of Satan." Likewise the symbolic reference to blood as a means of protecting the body and sealing off its porosity from outside malicious influences, as practiced in many Zionist and Apostolic churches, is branded as superstitious, and people are encouraged to hand in their red cords, beads, headbands and the like for destruction by the preachers (van Dijk 1992a).

The same strictness applies to alcohol, which is viewed as a demon in itself. But, like Bacchus, this demon has two faces and combines threats on two accounts. First of all, the rejection of alcohol must be understood as a debate within modernity and as an attempt to establish a moral reordering of present-day society. The line that is established through *malilime* with heavenly powers should not be jeopardized by enticement into modern styles of consumption which "decenter" the person. As a total program, the moral power and authority of this fundamentalism are meant to directly approach the center, the heart of a person, unmediated and undisturbed. Hence alcohol is portrayed as a modern demon luring people into disorderly conduct and threatening the moral order of society.

The born-agains, therefore, resist settings where alcohol is pledged to the ancestors, such as traditional initiation ceremonies at childbirth, coming into adulthood, and marriage, and prefer to target funeral ceremonies in their "crusade" against immorality in society. As a born-again, one is to be sealed off (*kutsirika*) from one's family and bondage with ancestors so that individuality can be constituted. Gerontocratic authority, which is reflected symbolically in the pouring of alcoholic libation (*nsembe*) to the ancestors, is rejected. At a symbolic level, the brewing of beer resembles the process of "ripening," of becoming *kukhwima*, which is acquiring a powerful position in various political, economic and religious dimensions of life. At a social level, born-again ideology directly opposes the authority of older people. Elders are perceived by the born-agains to represent involvement in other lines of power such as ancestral veneration and politics, pursuits that are considered comparable in the degree of evil they involve. They are excluded from positions of authority within the born-again groups, in contrast to the practices of established mission churches and Malawi's urban independent churches. They may not preach, organize meetings or speak in tongues. Preaching to the elders of an independent church in one of the townships of Blantyre, Linley Mbeta reflected on this notion by saying:

> Have you ever seen the injured help the injured? Do injured people help injured people? Do patient and patient inject each other? If it is heard, nowadays, that people are unable to come to Jesus, it is because the Deacons and Elders are also drinkers, Christians who are also drinking! Patients do not help each other! (Linley Mbeta preaching at the African International Church, 18 December 1988)

A hostile tone is adopted toward any inclination to copy behavior from older people as far as religious practice is concerned. Elders are also not considered as role models for how a born-again should behave. This exclusion of older people reaches further to a rejection of symbolics, styles and other phenomena related to "the ritual past." The older generation is being held responsible for sinful symbolic repertoires connected with initiation or dealings with the traditional priests and healers (*asing'anga*). Secrets related to the relatively "hidden" process of initiation (*chinamwhali*) are readily and mockingly disclosed by born-agains. So too are funeral ceremonies targeted by born-again preachers to fulminate against ancestral veneration, the pouring of libations and the use of alcoholic drinks.

Linda Mbeta, for example, has provoked resentment among older people because she openly holds them responsible for the existence and salience of witchcraft in society. At one of her sessions she rebuked them by saying:

> Where do you think you will go to, you fools, with those charms (*zitumwa*) that were left you by your grandparents? You, *you* are learners today. It takes you hours to bewitch somebody, but you still cling to your witchcraft (*ufiti*), just because your forefathers handed the charms down to you. . . . You fools, if these charms were things that could lead someone into the Heavenly Kingdom, I doubt if your grandparents could have left them to you, but because they lead somebody to hell, that's why they handed them over before they died. Only to increase the number of people accompanying them on their way to hell!

Such rejection extends beyond contesting the power of the older generation to an outright rejection of central elements of Malawian cultural traditions. Ruptures with a perceived cultural past generate conflict and tension between relatives, and usually entail the departure of new born-agains from their immediate circle of family members.

It can be concluded here that the rejection of the use of alcohol by the born-again preachers coincides with a deeper generational conflict. This has had ramifications since it emerged in the context of the Banda regime that relied on gerontocratic power structures. In the urban areas where the first born-again groups became active, the salience of this gerontocratic structure was felt on a daily basis as local party chairmen of the sole governing Malawi Congress Party worked hand in hand with elders in their capacity as local chiefs (*mfumu*) and religious authorities. Against this background one can argue that the debate about alcohol was, and still is, a modernist one, a discourse that allows for the moral rejection of things and structures emerging from the impure and threatening "past." According to born-again Christians, the modern moral individual does not indulge in smoking or drinking, or in what the "cultural" or the "traditional" may provide.

ALCOHOL, MORAL REORDERING AND THE UTOPIAN PARADIGM

In the born-again ideology, alcohol has been turned into a site of contestation. Moreover, it pits the power of authorities in the daily existence of young urbanites in Malawi's major cities against each other in a variety

of ways. First, the rejection of alcohol turns the ordinary daily life of many urbanites into an area of immorality by prohibiting the common practices of visiting beer halls, beer parties, discos, bars and other public places. In effect, this prohibition serves the purpose of controlling young urbanites' leisure time. Time saved in the evenings and weekends is redirected to born-again meetings, an antidote against the "idleness" of visiting bars and getting drunk. The rejection of one's past lifestyle and social life can be regarded as a profoundly effective form of discipline.

The second area of contestation is that of rejecting the power of other independent churches as the ones who fail to discipline their membership and who hypocritically proclaim that they are against the use of alcohol while not enforcing their teachings. A similar sort of criticism is voiced against the established missionary churches that are considered "lukewarm" in their proclamations against alcohol indulgence. The born-agains stand out in their intolerance of the consumption and local production of alcohol.

At a third and deeper level, where the balance of power between the younger and the older generation is concerned, the rejection of alcohol plays a crucial role for born-agains in severing their links with the past. The born-again discipline entails a rigid rejection of the cultural traditions and practices that would bind the young to the authority of their elders. This is primarily understood as "breaking" with the ties of the past, the threads by which ancestors would be able to hold sway over a person's life. In this perspective, alcohol is seen as the most powerful liquid signaling the presence and continuing importance of ancestor worship. To reject alcohol therefore is to reject one's cultural past. This aspect of the born-again ideology removes the firm believer from the cultural ties with the family and its social and cultural obligations. Furthermore, it precludes the creation of a mnemonic scheme whereby the born-again movement would represent or reflect deeper social and cultural structures.

This process of "de-mnemonization," as I have called it elsewhere, puts the entire born-again movement in a different perspective from the salient political and religious organizations in the urban areas which, through their practices, aim to preserve the moral order of the past (van Dijk 1998). In earlier independent churches, the elderly enjoyed meaningful positions that could then be re-created in an urban setting.

In the born-again ideology, however, this is contrasted with a strong future orientation of religious ideology in the group. The preaching and speaking in tongues are geared to the achievement of an ideal society. Beyond the eschatological doctrine that every sinner will incur the wrath of

God with the imminent return of Jesus Christ and the final Day of Judgment, there is a marked striving toward a perfect reordering of society. The born-agains propose a prognostic program for a thoroughly purified Malawian society. In this utopian imagery, alcohol has become the substance most despised and condemned. Progress (*chitikuko*) can only be attained by the avoidance of the worldly temptation of alcohol and the bondage of a cultural past that alcohol symbolizes.

Focus on the creation of a religious Utopia, purified of all sorts of contaminating evil influences, implies the adoption of an "outsider" identity. Being a born-again necessitates becoming a stranger in one's "home village," to one's immediate relatives, friends and peers. This is accentuated by dress and style; some preachers speak only English at their meetings, which then is translated into Chichewa by an interpreter. Born-again meetings are envisaged as safe havens where the new puritan order is already in effect and where alcohol has no place.

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PART V
Conclusion