

Fundamentalism and its Moral Geography in Malawi

The representation of the diasporic and the diabolical

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Introduction

In a number of recent studies of anti-witchcraft movements in Africa the enchantment of the interaction with the modern, globalized world is indicated as the major force in the social production of such and similar purificatory actions. In the work of Fields (1985), Geschiere (1989), Fisiy and Geschiere (1991), Auslander (1993) and Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) the interaction of village society with an estranging and at the same time enticing outside world is seen as resulting in the production of communal anxieties and fantasies which easily translate into witchcraft crazes and eradication movements. As the witch transgresses borderlines between the daily and the nocturnal world, between what is socially acceptable, understandable and productive to what is unethical, hidden and devastating, and between what is produced through hard physical labour and what is consumed through esoteric, evil concoctions and manipulations, this figure is the most powerful emblem for any interaction with partially apprehended social worlds of production and consumption. On a deeper level, as the work of Boyer and Nissenbaum (1974), Taussig (1980, 1987), Thoden van Velzen and van Wetering (1988, 1989) and Thoden van Velzen (1990) has been able to indicate, the production of social anxieties and fantasies that take the form of all sorts of symbolic representations, rituals, artifacts and the like results from an intricate and delicate dialectic process in popular culture, a tension between what is experienced and perceived as enticing, alluring and enchanting in the contact with the modern world and what is reviewed as threatening, evil and incomprehensible in the very same contact. In a later study, Taussig (1993) has shown how in 'first contact' situations the dialectics of this field of tension are overcome in a positive, rewarding sense by what he calls the

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mimetic faculty. By mimicking, elements of the other's behaviour and its cultural expressions are appropriated and used to establish a common, comprehensible, transparent ground of interaction. In most cases, however, such common ground cannot be established, as the dialectics of the contact with the modern world remains profoundly unequal, leaving members of the village communities only limited means and opportunities for penetrating into the modern systems of power, control, knowledge and production.

As the basic structures and dynamics of the modern world's social organization remains largely a closed book, these communities are often found producing all sorts of enchanted, collective fantasies (Thoden van Velzen and van Wetering, 1988). Examples abound. Plantation labourers in Columbia secretly establish pacts with the demon of the sugar cane, the Great Reed, in order to assure themselves of access to the sources of wealth that the cane seems to produce for a very limited number of absentee landowners (Taussig, 1980). In Cameroon, zombies are reported to work the fields of imaginary agro-industrial plantations at night, serving, again, the 'daytime' labourers and new entrepreneurs with unexpected richness (Fisiy and Geschiere, 1991; Geschiere and Fisiy, 1994). In Malawi, traditional healers are found who use self-designed telephones constructed out of horns, bead-strings and wild-cat furs to communicate with the spirits on matters of diagnosis, treatment and, most importantly, payment.

The recent studies of anti-witchcraft movements suggest similar lines of interpretation for their rise and popularity. By referring to modern means of diagnosis, treatment and disciplinary measures such as 'injections' and 'house-inspections', they work upon the dialectics of the crossing of borderlines between the village and the external threatening and, at the same time, enticing world. What all these studies seem to have in common is that the village and its limited microcosmos is taken as the vantage point. It is from this position that the interaction, the artifacts and personifications of travel and exchange to and within the outside world (such as the 'tarmac road' in Auslander's work) become the substance of symbolic representation, enactment and ritual. Rural to urban labour migration is the major force that fuels the rise of anti-witchcraft movements as a means of checking the crossing of borderlines in a ritualized form.

This article, however, intends to turn its eye on a Christian fundamentalist movement that operates specifically from urban areas in its attempts to curtail the activities of witches as well as to curb the salience of witchcraft-related attacks. The movement that forms the centre piece of this contribution is the movement of Born-Agains, which is mainly led by

young itinerant preachers who are all living in the three larger cities of Malawi (van Dijk, 1992a, 1992b, 1993). Revival meetings are organized by zealous young preachers and the audiences are directed to repent and refrain from their sinful activities, among which involvement in witchcraft of any kind is seen as the most serious offence. Witchcraft-related esoteric objects are confiscated and burnt while their owners are openly exposed to the public as 'sinners'. Most interestingly, within this Christian fundamentalist ideology the notion of the 'crusade', of spreading out into the rural areas with this sort of puritan activity, is prominent. The dangers of the nocturnal, evil forces at work in rural places are often discussed while, nevertheless, a sense of enticement is never absent. Eagerly, 'crusades' are being organized by the young preachers while they hold the older generation living in the villages responsible, at least in general terms, for the nocturnal dangers they encounter on these travels.

This article therefore attempts to indicate that the argument about the dialectics of the interchange with the outside, urbanized modern world which are represented by the anti-witchcraft movements can be turned upside-down. For the urban young preachers, it is the village-world which is largely strange and estranging, only partially comprehensible, threatening but nevertheless enticing for the anti-witchcraft actions that can be undertaken. This article argues that pointing at the effects of globalization and of increasing engagement in the modern world by villagers in explaining the rise of anti-witchcraft movements usually falls short of taking into account the fact that other points of departure, for example starting from the urban world, are also revealing.

The moral geography of anti-witchcraft campaigns

A striking feature of anti-witchcraft campaigns, cross-culturally, has been the significance of younger generations in starting the witch-finding activities and in maintaining such activities for an extended period of time. The witch-finding activities of the teenage boys and girls in Salem (in New England, in 1692) and Mora (in Sweden, in 1668) have been extensively described and analysed (see among others, Ankarloo, 1971; Boyer and Nissenbaum, 1974; Thoden van Velzen and van Wetering, 1989). In Malawi and Zambia too, the younger generation has been extremely active in witchcraft-eradicating activities. In the so-called *Mchape* witch-cleansing movements that swept through these countries in the 1930s and through southern Tanzania in later years (see Fields, 1985; Marwick, 1950; Ranger, 1972; Richards, 1935; Ross, 1969; Willis, 1968) members of the younger generation took an active role in eradicating witchcraft in

gerontocratically controlled villages. Time and time again the older generation saw itself confronted by the demands of the young witch-finders, leaving them no other option than to obey, embarrassingly, the young men's orders. Much of what happened during the visits of the witch-cleansers has been described by Richards in an eye-witness account (1935), and some of the colonial administrators also kept such accounts (see Fields, 1985).

The *Mchape* witch-finders (*kuchapa* = to wash) toured village by village in groups and brought with them some specific instruments and concoctions (the 'medicine') that would cure the visited village of witchcraft. Sometimes with the support of local village-headmen, at other times without such consent, the villagers were lined up for 'inspection' as if a white man was taking a census. One by one the villagers had to pass a witch-finder who, by catching reflections in a mirror, saw who was to be accused of witchcraft. Each culprit would then be given a number, written on his body, that would indicate the quantity of concoction to be drunk in order to wash the body clean of witchcraft. Thereupon a hut inspection would take place and all the paraphernalia relating to witchcraft that was uncovered under thresholds or under thatched roofs, etc. was piled in heaps and subsequently burnt. A signpost would then be erected at the entrance of the village indicating that it had been cleansed. A network of cleansed villages was thus established in which it was safe to travel. In later stages, this geography of safe places and safe 'corridors' of travel was copied by the itinerant preachers and baptizers of the Watchtower movement and the array of Zion churches that was introduced from South Africa in the 1940s and 1950s. In the eyes of the local populace these preachers indeed acted on the same basis of eradicating evil from society and in some cases the difference between a visiting *Mchape* cleanser or a Zion or Watchtower preacher was not at all clear.

In an historical perspective, the *Mchape* movement in southern Malawi effectively had been able to replace the *mbisalila* – the individual, itinerant witch-finder – who usually cleansed villages on the instigation of headmen and chiefs. This depended on and at the same time bolstered the authority of these traditional leaders which, to the contrary, was weakened by *Mchape*. As Ross (1969) shows, the older type of *mbisalila* witch-finding was revived after former president H.K. Banda came to power in the years 1960–4 when Malawi gained its independence. Banda set out on a project to reinstate gerontocracy and this time, as the *mbisalila* witch-finders were invited again to bolster up traditional forms of authority, younger members of village-communities and of new types of organizations such as the Youth League or the Boy's Brigade, became targets. Anti-witchcraft

campaigns in Malawi, in other words, have formed over a longer period of time an essential element in generational politics at village level.

In the interpretation of the rise of these and similar movements over the southern African region, Ranger (1972) as well as van Binsbergen (1981) and others primarily stress the effects of labour migration to the southern African mining areas and industrialized zones in which the younger generation was engaged to a large extent in the first half of this century. As has been shown for the *Mchape* movements in particular, it was young returning labour migrants who became involved in touring the villages as cleansers. The diasporic movement of crossing the southern African region in search of employment had become an integral element in the younger generation's attempts at evading the authority of the older generation and the claims and obligations the elderly were able to put forward. The matrilineal societies of southern Malawi and eastern Zambia in particular saw a major and massive involvement of young men in the process of labour migration precisely at those times and instances that the coercive claims on their labour power by the older generation was on the increase (Mandala, 1990: 113–53).

The diasporic movement provided the opportunity to escape from the traditional obligations (elderly women seemed to be particularly active in exerting such claims; see Mandala, 1990: 30), while it still held the promise of revenue being sent home. The structural position of a young man was such that working the fields of his (future) wife's matriclan (*mbumba*) or of his wife's mother's brother (*malume*) was imperative, and the opportunities for influencing one's fate as a young man were very limited. Working in itinerant labour groups (the so-called *nomi* societies; see Schoffeleers, 1973), by which the young offered their joint labour-power to villages, was one way of enhancing one's chances of a more independent way of existence, but labour migration with the promise of cash revenues was surely an even better one.

Upon return, however, after the labour contract was ended, the 'recapturing' into the elders' system of labour in the fields of the (future) matriclan loomed large. In the 1930s, a massive return migration emerged as a result of the worldwide crisis in trade and the loss of an independent way of life, a deprivation of the independent means of existence fed into the younger generation's notions of the good and bad in their evaluation of life in the villages.

In this interpretation, it is the articulation of village society and its basic socio-economic structure with the larger, modern industrialized society and its structures that sees the need for renewed cosmological schemes, symbolic practices and ritual that would be able to cope with the

opportunities and chances, but also pitfalls and dangers, of these sorts of contact between two systems. As the young men primarily accused older members of the village communities of witchcraft, and as they developed ritual forms to cope with the threat of witchcraft that were partially organized through practices and instruments copied from the modern world, they hoped to secure their newly won independent positions in society. As in the history of witch crazes in the Western world, evidence has been presented by Boyer and Nissenbaum and others of the fact that in Mora, the young witch-finders were primarily accusing those members of village society who gradually had become involved in new, mercantile and largely urban forms of production and consumption of wealth. However, the 'decoding' of the symbolic contents of the imaginative world that is created by witchcraft-eradicating activities in this interpretation has remained a problem.

Recently Auslander (1993) has added another important element in the interpretation of the witch-cleansing movements led by members of the younger generation. In addition to the elements of generational politics (young versus old) and gender bias (young men accusing elderly women) which are commonly found in these movements, he established that in a recent anti-witchcraft movement among the Ngoni of eastern Zambia the symbolic notion of travel, of crossing borderlines, of the road (the 'tarmac') connecting the rural world with the outside modern world featured prominently in how the cleansing was organized and symbolically represented. The young men's cleansing actions took the form of a roadblock at which every villager was checked carefully, and given a 'pass' whereby the longer the series of numbers indicated on the 'pass', the more likely the person was suspected of being involved in evil dealings. Being 'stamped' actually meant that the numbers were incised on the body and would therefore remain visible long after the cleansers were gone. Those who passed the 'roadblock' with a short series of numbers were admitted to the cleansed area of the village, while those of whom witchcraft was suspected would be violently searched before being declared 'safe'. After the cleansing was done, many young men stated to Auslander that their villages now looked different, and they could more easily traverse their environs now that their huts, fields and pathways were free of noxious witchcraft substances. The 'landscape' had altered and this is why Auslander speaks of the implementation of a new moral map, a moral geography improved by the younger generation, as an attempt to regulate and control the older generation's power in daily and nocturnal flows of persons, substances, capital, and so on. The most important reason for Auslander to interpret witch-finding by the younger generation as a

representation of a security checkpoint in these flows is that the 'tarmac' is a focus point in the representation of structural inequalities in Ngoni society. The 'tarmac' crystallizes the possibilities and opportunities of getting access to wealth and prestige. Auslander (1993: 182) writes:

Village-based Ngoni men and women of all ages express endless fascination with the road: with its informal economy of large and small-scale transport operators, its smugglers and black marketers, prostitutes and con artists, shebeen queens and beer gardens. As the virtually bankrupt state ceases to be the supreme source of wealth and power, popular mythology has increasingly come to portray the tarmac and the world through which it courses as a nearly magical pathway to wealth.

The road, however, is also a symbol of danger in the sense that thugs and bandits make travelling a risky business and because the road is the primary trajectory by which more or less mystical diseases such as AIDS enter the village and illicit trade takes place. For the young in particular, however, participating in what the 'road' may bring in terms of prosperity and wealth is largely blocked by the elders through their control of the means of production and usually the means of transport. Moreover, itinerant preachers and witch-finders frequently warned that the wealth that could be generated was passing the villagers by, as witches stole their crops and flew off to the Copperbelt and elsewhere on nocturnal celestial highways (Auslander, 1993: 170). As we will see below, the witch in popular culture is juxtaposed, by travelling in the dark to places where he or she can indulge in immoral activities, to the preacher who travels in the 'light' to where a puritan attack on immorality can be waged. The 'roadblocks' that were constructed by the young in the execution of witch-cleansing rituals in Auslander's interpretation were, therefore, an attempt at establishing a moral geography that would block the manipulations of the elderly both in the daily and nocturnal worlds, while on the other hand shaping the circumstances and social environment that would open up opportunities for gaining access to fabulous external wealth. The ritual space that was created in the witch-cleansing activities allowed for the search of the 'enemies within' that were blocking the avenues to these sources of prosperity and socio-economic autonomy.

The major advantage of Auslander's approach to the interpretation of the younger generation's involvement in anti-witchcraft practices is that it underscores the importance of the symbolic representation of labour migration, travel and diasporic movement in popular culture. By applying the term 'moral geography', he is able to indicate that representations of good and evil spaces and places, of daily and nocturnal travel and

transgression of borderlines, are subject to power relations and ideological positions in society. Different moral geographies may be constructed and may even clash, subsequently leading to different definitions of safe and evil places, of good and evil 'travellers' and good and bad intentions and so on. As young itinerant preachers, such as those of the Born-Again movement in Malawi, and witch-finders engage in the same business of creating moral geographies, a comparison between the two groups may shed further light on the varying strength of ideologies and varying salience of structural inequalities that influence the construction of these sorts of representations. The *Abadwa Mwatsopano* (Born-Agains) of Malawi create moral geographies from the ideological position of Christian fundamentalism and thereby come to a number of different conceptualizations of what the good and evil spaces and places actually are and how they can be established.

The young Born-Again preachers

From the early 1970s, Malawi's urban centres saw the rise of a number of Christian fundamentalist groups and organizations led by young itinerant preachers, varying in age between 9 and 30 (see van Dijk 1992a, 1992b, 1993).¹ These young people began to attract crowds by conducting large revival meetings at which, in fire and brimstone sermons, they strongly denounced the sinfulness and evils of everyday urban life. The preachers (*alaliki*, 'announcers', as they call themselves) who were the first to take up the 'call' to preach, belonged to an urban class of rather well-educated college and university students. The high level of education allowed them to take up higher-ranking jobs in urban society. They can be called the 'part-time' preachers as they were and still are involved in these sorts of activities in their spare time. Later on, in the early and mid-1980s, a second group of preachers stepped in who generally had been able to receive only a few years of primary schooling and certainly did not belong to a young urban elite. These preachers usually started to conduct their activities on a full-time basis and in one way or another their preaching activities were and are supposed to provide them with a livelihood. To date, these itinerant young preachers can still be found promulgating a doctrine characterized by strict morality. In strong terms, the use of alcoholic beverages, cigarettes and drugs is denounced, and they fulminate against adultery, promiscuity, violence and theft. Furthermore, the satanic habit of frequenting bars, hotels and discos is condemned, as these are understood to be places of utmost moral depravity.

In addition to these negative injunctions, clear demands for a rejuvenated morality are put forward in an atmosphere of religious excitement and emotionalism. While the audience is urged to sing and dance, sinners are commanded to kneel in front of the young people, who then insist that evil objects such as knives, tobacco, stolen goods and above all magical, esoteric objects be handed in. Those present are urged to step forward to the altar in order to receive the 'infilling' of the Holy Spirit, which is stressed as the single most important way to become cleansed of worldly, defiling forces. Only after living through a mystical rebirth by experiencing this 'infilling' is a person considered to be born again (*kubadwa mwatso-pano*).

Speaking in tongues (*malilime*) is the central element of worship, ritual and symbolic practice within the Born-Again movement. No meeting can be held without a session of religious ecstasy that accompanies speaking in tongues. This is usually displayed with great energy and force: people are found grovelling on the ground, sweating profusely while shouting all kinds of incomprehensible sounds. Going through such an ecstatic Born-Again experience is compulsory before one can be considered Born-Again. Thereafter, *malilime* functions as a check on the level of purity maintained by the individual believer. The general view is that by becoming Born-Again a line is established with benevolent, heavenly powers. In this process *malilime* becomes the absolute assurance that one has succeeded in tapping into superior power which purifies, protects one's day-to-day existence, and heals any sort of more or less mystical affliction which may even include witchcraft (*ufiti*). *Malilime* grants the true believer the possibility and power to withstand evil forces of witchcraft and various malign spirits. As one preacher told his audience, the Born-Again who feels attacked by witches, which during sleep try to take people away to nocturnal orgies where human flesh is consumed, may counter them by *malilime* which holds witches trapped and paralysed 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 and when they lay their hands on such devilish objects and related practices.

One of the best-known preachers of the group of thirty that I studied in the city of Blantyre was a young woman of 24 years of age, named Linley Mbeta,² who claimed that she could see a hand coming down from heaven to indicate to her sinners among her audience. She became a national figure, known for her effective cleansing and purification methods after a literal rebirth she experienced in April 1985. Having been sent back to Earth by God, from that moment onward she claimed to possess special

powers that enabled her to detect witchcraft and the witchcraft-related esoteric amulets called *zitungwa* (singular, *chitungwa*). Because of her cleansing-powers and her strong calls for confession and conversion, her preaching sessions are much in demand nation-wide. In many places her conduct causes resentment among the elderly because, as is common in the entire movement, she openly holds this generation responsible for the existence and salience of witchcraft in society. At one of her sessions she stated:

Where do you think you shall go with those charms (*zitungwa*) which were left 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!

Besides combating these threats from a nocturnal world, *malilime* also addresses the predicaments of modern urban society where it is difficult to obtain or complete education, find paid employment, pay for health services, and where, owing to overcrowding in the townships, social tensions easily arise. 'Counselling' provided by Born-Again preachers is meant to overcome these problems, and at such sessions both preacher and 'client' are invariably expected to begin speaking in tongues together.

In this sense, the network that has arisen out of the many, weekly Born-Again meetings and the small organizations that have been set up by cooperating preachers should be seen as a 'security circle', a safe environment, that is guaranteed by *malilime*. Through *malilime*, by the concerted effort of all participants at the Born-Again meetings, a defensive 'wall' against outside evil forces is erected. The second important aspect of *malilime* is that the rigid puritan order which is impressed on the individual and his/her social environment also entails a rejection on the way the elderly are generally believed to become 'ripened'. A person is considered to be *kukhwima* (ripened, empowered) if he has been able to build up a position of considerable influence in almost every sector of daily life. He is supposed to be wealthy and prosperous thanks to successful business schemes; he is expected to have an influential position in one of the bigger mission churches, as well as in his home village in kinship affairs, and even in political affairs a 'big man' should have been able to secure a powerful position. In being *kukhwima*, every person is prone to suspicions, not least from Born-Again preachers, that he sought support from malicious, dark

forces. In fact, here *kukhwima* has the primary connotation of having been able to master the forces that lie in witchcraft and its related objects which can be applied, strategically, to one's own ends. The Born-Again preachers, however, stress the experience and empowerment of *malilime* instead of that of *kukhwima*. Success in the daily world, freedom and protection from any kind of affliction and misfortune, can only be reached and acquired through *malilime*, which in its turn requires maintaining a purified and unsullied status for the individual. On the other hand, being *kukhwima* almost by definition entails impurity and involvement in practices not meant for public scrutiny. *Malilime* thereby opposes the authority of the elderly as no allowance is made for the generally respected source of their powers.

The ideological programme proclaimed by these preachers, focusing on a purification of an ever-widening circle in social life, in this sense can be interpreted as a modern transformation of earlier puritan movements in Malawi. Puritanism, present in Malawi since the early 1930s in the form of various anti-witchcraft movements, provided the means and the basis for the younger generation to confront the gerontocratic authority of the elderly both in political and religious terms (the so-called *Mchape* movements, see Fields, 1985; Ranger, 1972; Richards, 1935).

In modern urban conditions the younger generation again seems to present a puritan ideology that assertively seeks to contest the gerontocratic mode of political and religious control in Malawian society which was still paramount in the 1970s, 1980s and early part of the 1990s. By presenting a Christian fundamentalist ideology crammed with notions of high morality, sin and redemption, obedience to leadership and so forth, the preachers were able to prevent the coercive Malawian regime regarding this movement as being subversive and a threat to the nation's 'peace, calm, law and order'. The young preachers obtained room for manoeuvre, a niche in the social fabric of heavily supervised life in Malawian society, which they used to set up organizations, large revival meetings, 'crusades' and even meetings of a more secretive nature that were and still are held at night in the townships or on top of certain hills. Within the niche, *malilime* is a clear identity marker and, unlike other puritan movements, an encirclement as such does not exist in the materialized form of a closed community, compound or anything else of that sort. The Born-Agains do not need such a type of encirclement; on the contrary, in an urban setting with its mobility and its continuously changing sets of social relationships, an encirclement only in abstract terms serves a clear purpose. Every 'true' Born-Again is the carrier of the spiritual, defensive circle, irrespective of the many sets the individual might be

engaged in. A real breach of the circle occurs when the channel of inspirational power from the heavenly forces is either not maintained, or denied or exchanged for a different and/or contesting line of power.

In this sense, the elderly are excluded from the niche as they represent the involvement in other lines of power such as witchcraft and politics; the two are comparable in the level of evilness involved. The exclusion of the elderly, however, extends in a cultural sense beyond the boundary of age, but refers also to a range of symbolic repertoires, styles and rituals that equally fall within a perception of a moral environment, a moral geography. The Born-Again ideology includes the perception that those symbolic repertoires in which the elderly still play a dominant part, in fact belong to a moral milieu that has to be both repudiated and forgotten. The 'crusade' is therefore the focal point in the representation of the young preachers' attempts at creating and establishing their moral geography. (One of the first and certainly one of the most important young preachers' organizations is tellingly called the Pentecostal Revival Crusade Ministry, led by the famous Madalitso Mbewe; see also Gifford, 1987, 1991, 1993 on the significance of crusades in other African fundamentalist groups.) The elderly are the prime targets in the 'crusades' and are excluded from its organization. It is here that we find a major point of comparison between the activities of the young preachers and members of contemporary fundamentalist groups and those of the young generation involved in the anti-witchcraft movements in the past, as will be further elaborated below.

The representation of the diasporic and the diabolical in a moral geography

As already explained, the young preachers do not create isolated pockets of puritan communities within the perimeters of the larger Malawian urban areas. This is quite contrary to what other religious groupings with a similar puritan 'programme' reportedly have been doing in some of southern African cities, such as the Zion churches in Durban (Kiernan, 1976, 1977) and Mafeking (Comaroff, 1985) or the Masowe Apostles in Zimbabwe (Dillon-Malone, 1978). Rather, in the cities the young preachers create a spiritual encirclement against evil diurnal and nocturnal powers which is maintained by the individuals' moral capacities and behaviour. On the one hand, within cities such as Blantyre, specific no-go areas are identified – bars, discos, hotels – which are seen as places of utter moral depravity. On the other hand, venues are set aside for specific meetings to which every true Born-Again believer is supposed to pay a visit (prayer meetings on top

of mountains, vigils held at specific houses of firm Born-Again believers, cleansing and healing sessions, lunch-hour meetings at schools, shops, factories and hospitals in town, and so forth).

Fluidity is maintained by the movement, but is once again strengthened by the fact that from these 'safe' and 'cleansed' occasions and venues the travel, campaigns and crusades by itinerant preachers are organized and supported. Linley Mbeta, in one of the first contacts I established with her, boasted that she had been able to visit 'all twenty-four districts of Malawi' since she began preaching. Spreading out into the rural villages and remote places is the aim of the young preacher activities. In many stories the heroic nature of this form of religious travel was stressed. The rural villages are viewed as places where the dangers of bewitchment and of evil powers loom large and as the places whence these evil forces emanate and are brought into the city environment primarily by the elderly migrants. In an atmosphere of excitement the young preachers therefore organize trips into remote areas to conduct revival meetings at markets, local courts, schools and so forth, or to search for places where funerals or weddings are held so that larger crowds, invited or uninvited, can be addressed.

It is usually during such religiously inspired travels that witchcraft and other evil forces are encountered and individuals, their houses and properties are cleansed and purified. It is from such trips that Linley Mbeta brings home to Blantyre real trophies of her crusades, the magical amulets (*zitumwa*) uncovered and confiscated at her preaching sessions. As the villagers have become aware of the possibilities that are offered by the young preachers for getting rid of witchcraft afflictions, the young preachers are sometimes straightforwardly invited to come and cleanse. The following story was recounted to me and underscored with 'visible' evidence of the cleansing activities during one of Linley Mbeta's travels.

Blood in the bedroom

In May 1989 Linley's 'prayers' had been requested by a woman to help alleviate a serious case of affliction by witchcraft in the small village of Chaone. In July of the same year Linley made a 'follow-up' visit to the afflicted woman to see what the prayers had effected during the intervening two months. I followed Linley on the second trip to find out more about this consultation. The case of the afflicted woman was related to a problem of barrenness that was believed to be caused by witchcraft. The problem was explained as follows:

In 1985 Ester C. married her present husband and took up residence in his village (Chaone), contrary to what might have been expected according to

the matrilineate, as her husband was the owner of a local shop. By the end of 1986 problems had begun to arise. It was discovered that she was unable to conceive, and strange things started to happen in and around the house. Every night as the couple went to bed rain would pour down only in their bedroom leaving, most shockingly, bloodstains on the sheets. (Ester showed me the blood-stained sheets as evidence of their prolonged predicament.) They tried to put an end to the rains by making an improvised ceiling, but to no avail. In addition, Ester started to experience great difficulties during her menstrual periods and every night the sound of an owl [a witch-familiar] could be heard from the rooftop.

In 1987 the couple decided to consult a traditional healer (*sing'anga*) who prepared them a strong medicine which contained a piece of human flesh. When the couple took the medicine home gruesome things started to happen to the medicine itself. The piece of human flesh started to bleed and when put in a vessel the container would fill with blood overnight. The couple became very much afraid of using the medicine and decided to destroy it.

In 1989 it was announced that Linley Mbeta was going to visit Chaone. Ester made sure that on the day in May she was able to approach Linley with her still persisting problems. Linley immediately prepared herself to 'cast out all evilness' from the house and went down with Ester for a cleansing house inspection. While everyone else remained outside, Linley went inside in a state of speaking tongues and came out later claiming that she had discovered four small, humanlike creatures (*ndondocha*) hidden under the bed of the couple and that she had been able to destroy them. Each of the creatures carried a name on its back of the person who allegedly had been trying to bewitch the couple. Linley stated that she never revealed names in such situations, because she was there to release the powers of the Holy Spirit in order to cleanse rather than to cause further conflicts within the village and/or the family.

During the months after Linley's consultation Ester's menstruation periods became normal and she expressed the hope that she would soon be able to conceive.

The key element in the 'crusading' activities of the young preachers is the notion of interception. Witches travel; witchcraft-related esoteric objects such as the *zitumwa* also purposefully travel with the intention of bringing wealth and prosperity by immoral means to their owners; the witches' helpers, the zombies called *ndondocha*, are also involved in making secret trips for their owners and are able to enter houses to steal and destroy just as witches do themselves. In other words, witchcraft is primarily seen as involving all sorts of esoteric flows of people and substances not meant for public scrutiny. The person who wants to find an easy road to wealth and prosperity can get involved in witchcraft that would demand dealing in all sorts of practices of a highly immoral nature, such as dancing the witches' dance at night (*kutamba*) during which human meat, found by opening the

graves of recent burials, is consumed. Such wealth in a sense is a diabolical pact which makes the person prosperous, but which sucks him or her into all sorts of immoral practices. A shop-owner trying to get rich by these means once wrote to Linley Mbeta that wealth is like the 'tail of a rat', meaning that once the tail is pulled, the rat is likely to appear, bringing with it sickness, disaster and finally death.

The purpose of the religious diasporic movement of young preachers into rural areas is to intercept these esoteric flows of persons and substances. Amulets are confiscated, witches at night are held 'paralysed at the doorstep', *ndondocho* once discovered are burnt, and houses and fields are 'sealed off' from further evil influences by ecstatic prayer and speaking in tongues. Those who are held responsible for the existence and salience of witchcraft and its related artifacts – the elderly and the traditional doctors (*asing'anga* singular, *sing'anga*) – are usually mocked and ridiculed by the young preachers and a programme of spiritual healing and cleansing is offered to the villagers so that the *asing'anga* increasingly lose their clientele.³

An event in which a powerful traditional doctor successfully was 'intercepted' and prevented from settling in the city of Blantyre by the Born-Again has been recorded in van Dijk (1992b) and provides another example of how attempts at curbing the esoteric flows and the establishment of moral geography actually work. In short, radiating from the city, an intensive level of preaching activity is developed that seems to be fuelled to a large extent by a notion of enticement and by a notion of having superior powers at their disposal that may curb the nocturnal flows of persons and substances.

In a major sense, it is the 'village' that as a symbol to the young preachers brings together in a dialectical way a world that entices but at the same time is experienced as threatening and dangerous, a world that is partially known through occasional visits and contacts with relatives, but at the same time remains incomprehensible through its many esoteric rituals and forces; and a world where the elderly are in control and need the labour power of the young, but at the same time 'expel' the young to work in the urban areas or to obtain some sort of education. For many of the urban young preachers, the 'proper' initiation rituals (*chinamwali*) conducted in the villages for young men and women remain a secret, something they never experience themselves in full and are surrounded by all sorts of dark and mystifying stories. Forcefully, the young preachers proclaim the view that a true Born-Again is never to become engaged in the rituals of the 'village'; is never to participate in initiation rituals at coming of age, marriage, child birth and so on; and is never to be actively engaged in

'home-bringing' rituals of the spirits of the deceased (usually conducted several months after a burial).

Although the 'village' is branded as the place where devilish powers are present and where the elderly deal in manipulations with these forces, it is at the same time the place where the true Born-Again preacher and believer can show and 'test' his or her strength in faith. Being able to preach and even to confiscate witchcraft-related amulets in this environment more than in an urban context is a real test of having developed continuous abounding contacts with spiritual heavenly forces. One's status and prestige, such as that of Linley Mbeta, is certainly influenced by the fact of having been able to engage in successful crusades into rural areas. Second, having gone to the villages also means that one has been daring enough to confront the gerontocratic authority of the older generation which is still paramount in these places. As with Auslander's observations, generational politics are involved here. The young preachers certainly share the fear of their urban contemporaries, not only when it comes to the mystical powers of the elderly, but also when it comes to the coercive demands and obligations they can put on the young. There is always the danger for the young urbanite that by losing one's job, losing one's access to education or running out of medical options for curing one's sickness, a return to the village of one's parents or relatives becomes inevitable. Being forced to work as a 'D-7 tractor' (see Mandala, 1990: 31) in the village under the authority of an elderly relative and the matriclan is a frightening prospect and something to be avoided at all cost. From the perspective of the old, the young who leave the village for the urban places to participate in labour migration and educational opportunities are engaging in a diasporic movement that requires all sorts of measures to be taken to ensure that the obligations that rest on the young be fulfilled (occasional return visits to the village would certainly be a major element in the fulfilment of such obligations).

From the perspective of young preaching urbanites, however, 'crusading' works upon this diasporic movement and the obligations towards the elderly it represents. Crusading, so to speak, is a counter-diasporic movement meant to redress the generational political condition. Therefore entering a village with a puritan programme in which a finger is pointed primarily at the elderly and in which village headmen in most cases are unable to prevent this form of disrespectful behaviour represents a victory for the young. Similarly, when at revival sessions in the urban areas witchcraft paraphernalia is discovered and confiscated, these objects are viewed and represented as the threads by which the elderly still try to control the activities of others in the urban diaspora. They link the

traditional world of the village, with its gerontocratic control, with what is happening in the city, and signify the ritual practices that are meant to hold sway over the young urbanites' lives (such as initiation). 'Kudula', to cut the cord that keeps the witchcraft amulet to the body, was a recurring cry at Linley Mbeta's preaching sessions in Blantyre. 'Crusading' as a religiously-inspired diasporic movement is an attempt to counterbalance the diabolical forces of witchcraft emanating from the 'village'.

Conclusion

When we compare the witch-finding activities as described by (among others) Auslander with the activities of the itinerant young preachers, we may notice that moral geographies are constructed from quite different vantage points and ideological programmes as well as working upon quite diverse sets of relationships between the traditional and the modern, the young and the old, the diasporic and the diabolical. The vantage point from which the witch-finding activities and their symbolism can be understood is the village, and the moral geography that is constructed can be interpreted as a way of coming to grips with the complexities of access from the village to a partially apprehended modern world. Within this moral geography, the road to modern wealth is perceived to be blocked by evil means and the witch-finding activities are geared to destroying the powers of those, the enemies from within, who are obstructing access. The young preachers, on the contrary, are already fully engaged in the modern urbanized world, and although they definitely engage in even wider, and thus partially apprehended, globalized contacts (mainly through global Pentecostal networks by which a number of the young preachers have also been preaching at Amsterdam Central Station!), the world they find great difficulty in understanding is that of the village. Most of them have lived in the city all their lives and the minimal, occasional contacts with the 'home village' have surely estranged them from deeper knowledge and experience of ritual symbolic representations and from the delicacies and 'techniques' of dealing with the power of the elderly. 'Crusading' has become a rewarding method of trying to curb what comes from the 'village', as well as the ritual obligations that are put forward by the elderly, which are defined and branded as devilish and dangerous. Concomitant with these ritual obligations, it is clear that the gerontocratic reign of religious terror (Meilla-soux, 1981: 12, 45, 82, 87) is strengthened by the obligations in terms of labour and revenues that are also stressed by the older generation.

So, it is not the 'tarmac' leading to the urban world which is the symbol of hope and despair for this younger generation, but the esoteric objects such

as the *zitumwa* that lead back to the village-world that are seen to jeopardize their frail independent positions in town. As a counter-attack upon these evil forces emanating from the 'village', the 'crusade' becomes a way for the young to work upon the apprehension of the 'village' and the generational power relations that are contained by it, in religious terms. Within their moral geography, it is not modernity and its malcontents (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993) that form the basis of their 'puritan landscaping', but 'traditionality' represented by gerontocratic authority and its malicious ritual practice residing in the remote Malawian village.

NOTES

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1. Other fundamentalist groups which were introduced in Malawi at a much earlier date, some even dating back to the turn of this century, include the Church of Christ, Seventh Day Adventists, Brethren Church, Jehovah's Witnesses/Watchtower (expelled from the country by the Banda regime in the early 1970s), and those relating to a more pentecostalist type of fundamentalism such as the Assemblies of God and the Full Gospel Church. Although much more can be said about the differences, the present article intends to focus on those groups that originated in the course of what became known as the second 'pentecostal wave' in Malawi (see Schoffeleers, 1985) and which were not introduced from elsewhere, but developed locally. The groups discussed here, furthermore, only in exceptional cases develop into fully-fledged churches that require membership and the like. Usually these groups operate in the form of more loosely organized 'ministries' and 'fellowships' (for a fuller discussion of the historical transformations of fundamentalism in Malawian society, see van Dijk, 1992a).
2. Linley Mbeta claims to have been resurrected from death after she suffered a fatal illness at the time. A similar resurrection experience was also reported in the 1930s for the founder leader of the Mchape movement in Malawi, a Kamwendo of Mulanje (see Richards, 1935, and page 181 of this paper).
3. The term *sing'anga* is commonly used to denote a range of specialists in dealing with healing therapies and occult powers that include diviners, herbalists, soothsayers, spirit-mediums and witch-doctors. As such, the role of the *sing'anga* in society is ambiguous, varying from a person who acts on behalf of social good to somebody who might be involved in concocting substances that very much relate to the field of witchcraft. The *asing'anga* take a pivotal position between, on the one hand, herbalist therapy and, on the other, including all sorts of substances for fabricating objects, such as the *zitumwa*, that are perceived to

be empowered by nocturnal forces. As the one (herbalism, healing through medicine [mankhwala]) relates to concocting magical, esoteric substances (also called *mankhwala*) within the *nganga*-paradigm, the young preachers rigidly denounce the entire category of traditional healers.

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