Pentecostalism, gerontocratic rule and democratization in Malawi: the changing position of the young in political culture

Dijk, R.A. van; Haynes J.

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Rijk Van Dijk

INTRODUCTION

In May 1993, a month before a national referendum was held in Malawi, when the population was asked whether the country should change its political system from a single-party state to a multi-party democracy, a small incident took place in Chiradzulu district, just north of the country's main city of Blantyre. As was the case elsewhere in the country's Southern region, the campaigns of single-party advocates versus those of the multi-party option were intense. Throughout the Chiradzulu district those marching with the symbol (the black cock) of the ruling Malawi Congress Party (MCP) were confronted with those marching with the 'lamp', the icon of the multi-party opposition. That particular day a car showing the MCP's insignia forced a car belonging to the United Nations international observers' team – including the current author – to stop at the side of the road and a neatly dressed elderly gentleman jumped out. Trembling with anger he screamed at the observers: 'In this country we teach respect for old age! What have you been telling those boys at the registration-office down there? That they should act disrespectfully? This is how we dress in this country! Those boys cannot tell a "father" how to behave!'

Though the observers were stunned by the anger of the old man, a little later a more coherent story was revealed to them. The man was the local MCP party chairman who by profession was accustomed to

wear a party tie. On entering the nearby registration office, however, a number of young men in their twenties, belonging to the local opposition monitor group had bluntly refused him access to the office, justifying their decision by pointing to his tie. 'No propaganda-material is allowed within a full circle of 100 metres around the office', they explained, 'these instructions have reached us through the international observers who visited this office ten minutes ago'. Thus the elderly gentleman had set off to chase the observers, blaming them for the young men's 'irresponsible' behaviour.

In a recent article, Schatzberg (1993), draws attention to the metaphor of the 'father' in African political culture. In this metaphor a model of political leadership is conceived in which notions of gerontocratic rule, respect for old age and a promise of nurture and parental care are brought together. The notion of leadership is placed in discourses of relational ties which at the same time indicate limits on the execution of power. The discourse of the 'father' formulates these limits in terms of what care is expected, to what extent the father 'feeds' and is allowed to 'eat', how long his reign should last and how he should treat dependants, particularly women and the young (Schatzberg, 1993: 451–3). In short, for Schatzberg, gerontocratic rule is commonly perceived in many African societies in the context of its procreative functions.

However, Schatzberg does not explain how processes of democratization might influence the meaning and representations of the father-metaphor in political leadership in Africa. In this chapter I want to explore the relationship between the father-metaphor, gerontocratic power, democratization and religion in the context of a changing Malawian political culture. Insignificant as the incident described above may seem to be, it is in fact extremely indicative of the dramatic transition in generational power relations that occurred in part as a consequence of the democratization process in Malawi.

The two-stage process of democratic change in the country (in June 1993 a national referendum, in May 1994 multi-party general and presidential elections) has so far mainly been studied from the point of view of national politics and the different elites – political, religious and ethnic – who became important players (see Venter, 1992; Cullen, 1994; Chirwa, 1994; Newell, 1995; Van Donge, 1995; Kaunda, 1995; Kaspin, 1995) Few authors have taken a different approach to the study of the democratization process, either by looking at local understandings and perceptions of what the political changes really meant to the populace (see for instance Englund, 1996, for a welcome

exception) or by looking at the role of non-elite religious groups in the process (see for instance Fiedler, 1995, and Van Dijk, 1998a).

What has been striking in the scholarly debate about the democratization process in Malawi is the marked absence of attention to the role and position of the younger generation. To this writer, democratization appeared to signal a change in the nature of the dominant gerontocratic power relations and to give the young an opportunity to escape from their tightly circumscribed socio-political space in what for 30 years had been a highly supervised society. For three decades the 'father and founder' of independent Malawi, Dr H. Kamuzu Banda, had developed a type of leadership structure that skilfully combined the socio-cultural values of a) respect for old age; b) gerontocratic rule; and c) the basic tenets of what he considered 'Chewa-cultural traditions'. The Chewa is the country's largest ethnic group, to which Banda claimed affilitation. The point is that the political-leadership model, from independence in 1964 onwards, held the youth captive, in terms of both discourse and practice.

This peculiar leadership model was not so much that of a 'father' in the sense described by Schatzberg, but rather that of the *nkhoswe*, the mother's brother in Chewa culture. Former president Banda was referred to in Chichewa (the language of the Chewa) as Nkhoswe Number One, while, strikingly, in this context the name of father in the vernacular (*'Bambo'* or *'Atate'*) would certainly not apply. The reference to *nkhoswe* for the state leadership made clear the implications this model held for the structurally subservient position of the younger generation in society. On the level of national political culture the young was forced into a highly subservient role *vis-à-vis* local party structures dominated by elderly people. MCP rule effectively replaced traditional authority on a supra-local level and designated the young to act as a coercive force in state formation and as an implementing agency of the party's power in every corner of social life.

With the advent of democratic changes, for considerable numbers of the younger generation this role of subservience was no longer acceptable. They not only rallied *en masse* to the new opposition groups that emerged after the Catholic bishops published their first-ever dissenting Lenten Letter in March 1992. They also became, as I witnessed many times, the *de facto* organizers of local support groups and monitor groups (also within the MCP !) which eventually evolved into an intricate network covering over 2000 voting centres. Writing from his experiences in Dedza-district in Malawi, Englund states:

> As was the case apparently in many other areas of Malawi, it was the youth, particularly young men, who were the first to adopt the multiparty cause ... as the most vocal and visible supporters, 'youngsters' (*anyamata*) were perceived by many villagers as epitomes of *matipati*' [multiparty in the vernacular] (Englund, 1996: 120).

When the government started to react harshly and violently to the demands for democracy and to the writers and bearers of the Lenten Letter, it sparked off unprecedented demonstrations by secondary school and university students in Malawi's main cities, in defence of the newly won freedoms (Newell, 1995: 253). As was demonstrated by the fierce reaction of the political leadership to these protests, the young appeared to be able to contest the grounds of legitimation for the execution of power by those who belonged to the circles of the ruling party's hegemony.

Since the opposition came to power (the newly formed United Democratic Front or UDF led by the present president Bakili Muluzi gained victory in the May 1994 elections) the question remains to what extent gerontocratic rule and legitimation of power, as they were perceived to be linked with Chewa political traditions, have changed as well. In other words, did the position the younger generation took during the process of democratic transition represent a change on a much more profound level: that of gerontocratic power structures, in place since pre-colonial times?

Bayart has noted the coincidence of generational politics and democratic structural changes in Africa. He writes that youth is the one social category to resist as they have nothing to lose in their struggle to survive under the heavy-handed authority of their elders (Bayart, 1986: 119). The question is whether in the Malawian context democratization has been able to penetrate into and subsequently change the structures and root paradigms of hegemonic authority and power. This contribution intends to address the question whether, as has been the case for the anthropological study of symbolism, ritualism and power (see Arens and Karp, 1989), a shift within democratization studies from 'structure' to 'meaning' should be employed in order to interpret the changes at a deeper level of political culture.

This chapter propounds the view that in political culture a change in the meaning of root paradigms precedes and prepares changes in the structure of political systems. Although the structure may remain the same, the nature, quality and meaning of social-cultural values such as respect for old age and gerontocratic rule might change. The

socio-political meaning of gerontocracy and the subsequent position of the young has gone through a number of changes in Malawi of which democratization forms the latest stage. Religion in general, and 'born-again' Christianity in particular, played a significant role in changing the meaning of the crucial root paradigm of gerontocracy in Malawian political culture. In examining the changes in the deeper layers of Malawian culture this contribution shows that, contrary to what is usually stated, Christian fundamentalism-cum-pentecostalism and its apparently conservative ideology can in fact be interpreted as a significant socio-political factor in the process of democratic transition in Malawi.

By the late 1970s 'born-again' (often pentecostal) groups appealed to many in the younger generation because of their attacks on the gerontocratic principles of both religious and political models of leadership. Pentecostal youth groups, originating in Malawi's main urban areas in the 1970s and 1980s, created a discourse in which the powers of the elderly were seen in moral terms and denounced as evil. These groups up to the early 1990s did not reshape the manifest gerontocratic *structures* of society, which had become interwoven with the fabric of social life, but they daringly reformulated the *meaning* that on a deeper level was attached to these forms of power. Basically what they attacked were the mystical connotations of gerontocratic power, the 'religious terror', as described by Meillasoux (1981: 12, 45, 82, 87), that belonged to the realm of authority of the elderly. The pentecostalism propagated by the young was a force that slowly began to demystify and desacralize these ground-layers of gerontocratic rule. This process became manifestly political by 1992 when the young started to support massively, by 'leg-work' at the grass roots, the process of democratic transition.

This chapter also intends to show that the position adopted by such religious youth groups was the outcome of a 'struggle for youth' that Malawian society had faced by rival, competing power domains since colonial times, in which religion played a highly significant part. In so doing it proposes to deconstruct and redefine the so-called 'conservative nature' of Christian fundamentalism-cum-pentecostalism, and calls for an in-depth study of its significance for the change of meaning of political root paradigms.

COOPTATION OF THE YOUNG IN A POLITICAL TRADITION: THE NKHOSWE MODEL AND THE STRUGGLE FOR YOUTH

At the end of the nineteenth century the Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and Anglican churches began to engage in what can be called a struggle for the control over the younger generation in what would become known as the Nyasaland Protectorate, later independent Malawi. As Carmody showed for the East-Zambia border area in great detail, the establishment of schools was used as a strategy to mark off areas over which a particular denomination had gained influence not only *vis-à-vis* other denominations, but also in relation to particular traditional authorities (Carmody, 1988: 204). Schools became a device in the hands of the missionaries to limit the control of traditional authorities and the elderly over the young. They were also useful in creating a youthful, able local work force for training in – bureaucratic, trade and commercial – jobs required in the formation and development of the colony.

During the early decades of the twentieth century the older section of the Protectorate's population became increasingly worried by the social changes set in train by the coming of the missions. Being sent to boarding school not only meant absence from the village – in the sense of not being able to offer one's labour force for agricultural produce – but also experiencing a cultural conversion in which the backwardness of village life, particularly in its moral and ideological aspects, was underscored (McCracken, 1977: 118–21; Fields, 1985: 40–3). From the mission schools came the 'new men', those who would no longer be submissive to gerontocratic, village-based authority, who would have independent means of livelihood and who would acquire a different ideological apparatus. Some would even start independent churches, stressing further their autonomy. Contesting the schooling programmes of the churches and further claims on the youth by the formative colony, the elderly in many parts of the Protectorate tried to strengthen their claims on youthful labour power. Although the precise practice varied throughout the Protectorate, it is clear that the young – especially young men – held subservient social positions, a situation which the mission churches sought to explot in order to gain converts.

On a political level the search for autonomy by the young via the mission educational system led in the 1950s to the formation of the nationalist movement which later evolved into the Nyasaland African

Congress (NAC). The young leaders of the movement, some of them in their early twenties, searched for a prominent Malawian who would be able to head the struggle for independence. In Ghana they found a medical practitioner, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, persuading him to come to Nyasaland to fight the inclusion of the Protectorate in a Federation with North and Southern Rhodesia (see, for a detailed account, Lwanda, 1993). Banda succeeded in fighting the 'stupid federation' and led the NAC to independence in 1964. By then, however, it had become painfully clear to the young leadership of the independence movement that they had helped a new gerontocratic ruler to power. In the so-called Cabinet Crisis of 1964 the resistance the young party-leaders and ministers were mounting against Banda's rule was violently crushed (see for a review of this period Williams, 1978; Lwanda, 1993: 69).

From the inception of his rule Banda referred to himself as the 'Nkhoswe Number One', that is to say the symbol of the whole of the Malawi nation, thus allowing him to call his new Cabinet ministers *anyamata anga*: 'my boys'. From this time, Banda continuously referred to Chewa cultural values and traditions and took the Chewa models of authority as the ideal for the new political culture of independent Malawi. 'As a cultural broker for the Chewa, Banda had a broader vision, however, than merely formulating an ideological statement for his ethnic group alone. He instead equated 'Malawianness' with 'Chewa-ness', depicting the Chewa as the very soul of the country (Vail and White, 1989: 182). Chichewa, the language of the Chewa, became in addition to English the national tongue.

Chewa rituals, such as those belonging to the Nyau secret society, included dances elevated to the status of national festivities (see Kaspin 1993), and the young, it was felt, had once again to be brought back under proper gerontocratic control. The younger generation in Banda's view had to be turned into the nation's 'workhorse', the 'spearhead of progress' in a position structurally similar to what it had been in the Chewa *Chikamwini* model. Consequently, two national youth organizations were formed: the paramilitary Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP) and the political wing of the sole governing party, the League of Malawi Youth (*Ayufi* in the vernacular). The MYP, clothed in khaki uniforms, was explicitly given the task of introducing agricultural innovations from their training bases. The *Ayufi*, clothed in red shirts and green trousers or skirts, were given the job of assisting the organization of the public functions of the party and its local party chairmen.

Within a short span of time Banda developed an extremely tough, hardened and above all loyal youth body that pledged an oath of allegiance to the 'father and founder' of the Malawi nation, the Nkhoswe Number One. As Banda placed himself on top of the traditional authority hierarchy, likewise local party leaders placed themselves above local village headmen and group village headmen. These local party chairmen had an instrument at their disposal which the local traditional authorities simply lacked: the local branches of the MYP and the League of Malawi Youth. At the local level both youth bodies developed into the most deeply feared instruments of control and coercion (Van Dijk, 1992a: 134–55, see also Englund, 1996: 118). Party membership was compulsory for all adult Malawians and the Youth Leaguers (especially the *Ayufi*) were frequently used to check the possession of party cards and compulsory attendance at party meetings. Entering a market, hospital or bus-station was only allowed after showing a party card to the member of the *Ayufi* blocking the entrance. Members of the youth organizations would mingle with local sports groups, visitors to bars and restaurants, gatherings at funerals, and the like to record any form of dissent and protest against the regime's increasingly tight supervision and intolerance. The youth groups and their related secret bodies had become so effective that by the end of 1980s Malawi had turned into one of the most supervised countries in Africa. State power was represented in almost every corner of society through an intricate network of informants, training camps, teachers, roadblocks and checkpoints which was almost beyond imagination in its effectiveness for such a country, one of the ten poorest in the world.[2]

The means and opportunities for the mission churches to gain direct access to the younger generation in Malawi steadily diminished after independence in 1964 and the Amendment Act the following year. The mission youth organizations, such as the Scouts and the Brigades, were forbidden (Lamba, 1985). The mission schools were placed 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 formal youth bodies, the MYP and the Youth League. Christian student and Christian workers organizations were heavily controlled regarding the political content of their activities. The mission churches were explicitly forbidden to intervene in important Chewa rituals such as the *Gule Wamkulu*, the 'big dance' of the Chewa Nyau

secret societies. Neither were they allowed to desacralize the important Chewa initiation rites. Consequently, such churches rapidly lost ground in their attempts to win the 'hearts and minds' of the Malawian younger generation. The outcome was that, compared to their pre-independence position, they were losing the struggle for youth.

RELIGIOUS INTERVENTION AND MOBILIZATION

In March 1992 the Roman Catholic bishops published a Lenten Letter in which they, for the first time in post-independence history, protested against the repression, poverty and harassment of political opponents that had become the trademark of 30 years of Banda's dictatorship (Cullen, 1994; Newell, 1995; Nzunda and Ross, 1995). As elsewhere in Africa at this time, church leaders were calling for a democratization of the political system (Diamond, 1993; Witte, 1993; Joseph, 1993). The political elite reacted violently and, as they did at all other instances when dissenting voices could be heard, deployed the MYP to intimidate Catholic clergy and church members and to install a general reign of terror against all who wanted to take protests further. Locally the Nyau society, sometimes in collaboration with the MYP (Englund, 1996: 117), established a reign of terror in an attempt to influence and curb the growing popularity of religious and later secular opposition groups (Kaspin, 1995: 617).

Through the intervention of the Vatican, after some months of confusion, talks were opened between the bishops and the MCP government in which the Presbyterian churches joined (with the exception of that group of churches, the so-called Nkoma-Synod, belonging to the heartland of the Chewa-speaking region from where Banda originated and where he still held a position as church elder.) The churches established the Public Affairs Committee (PAC), providing an umbrella to the opposition groups slowly emerging in various parts of the country at this time. The PAC began to negotiate the terms for an eventual democratic transition with the Presidential Committee on Dialogue (PCD) and by November 1992, at the so-called 'Kwacha-Conference', an understanding was reached. A national referendum was to be held on the issue of changing from a single to a multi-party system. The country's opposition was allowed to form itself into pressure groups, given liberty to present its views in public and to run campaigns. In reality, however, intimidation by the

two political youth bodies was rife. It proved to be extremely effective in closing off entire districts from the activities of the opposition (Englund, 1996: 116–19; Kaspin, 1995: 617). Two opposition groups, the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) with a stronghold in the Northern Region and the United Democratic Front (UDF) with a power base in the South, eventually gained victory in the general elections.

As the pressure groups were rather weak in both structural and financial terms, the Roman Catholic and Presbyterian churches effectively ran aspects of the multi-party campaign. They were active in negotiating a free and fair process, in mobilizing massive support from the youth, in distributing civic education material, in monitoring the registration and voting centres, and in reporting cases of intimidation and harassment (see for various aspects of the churches' involvement on various levels Cullen, 1994; Newell, 1995; Nzunda and Ross, 1995). Suddenly the churches were able to move back again into a central position where youth was concerned; even in the most remote places youth were included in the PAC programmes. It became extremely fashionable to wear and show the insignia of PAC, a mixture of Christian symbolism of the cross, the rosary, and the *nyali* – the lamp as the sign of the light that multi-partyism would bring. As I witnessed many times, PAC youth spent many hours on civic education, explaining to the elderly people in the villages that 'matepatty' was not just another party but an entirely different system that would allow greater participation in the political running of the country. AFORD and UDF rallies were usually opened by young PAC representatives who in prayers and songs would request the benevolent heavenly powers to lend support to their just cause. A number of younger Presbyterian and Catholic priests joined the ranks of the opposition groups, one of them being the well-known Reverend Peter Kaleso who in the mid-1980s had been a supporter of the Born-Again movement in Blantyre (Van Dijk, 1992a: 140).

The churches' success in mobilizing the young on such a large scale for the 'leg-work' of the national referendum can certainly in part be attributed to the fact that up to a week or so prior to voting day, rallying publicly behind the pressure groups was in many parts still a dangerous thing to do.[3] It was safer to support PAC as a representative of the churches as they enjoyed considerable room for manoeuvre in Malawian society.

While the National Referendum of June 1993 gave a victory to PAC and the united opposition groups, it did signal the importance of

regionalism with the political marginalization of some ethnic groups in the country[4]. In sum, however, the Northern and Southern regions of the country voted massively in favour of a change to multi-party-ism, while the Centre, heartland of Chewa culture and the home area of Banda, still clung to single-party MCP rule.

During the following months, negotiations between the opposition and the government took place, concerned with the organization of the general election. The opposition groups attempted to broaden their support base into the Central region, while the MCP tried to do the same for the other regions. During the second half of 1993 however it became increasingly clear that the MCP youth organizations were a stumbling block to any real change in political power relations. In particular, the heavily armed elite sections of the MYP were viewed as real threats to the opposition groups in their attempts to reach the public through campaigning. However, in December 1993, the power of the MYP was finally crushed in an unprecedented – and violent – action by the army against MYP camps located near the cities of Lilongwe in the Centre and Mzuzu in the North. The camps were demolished after three soldiers were killed in a fight between soldiers and MYP members of the Mzuzu base. In the operation – known as *Bwezani* – thousands of MYP cadres were chased, disarmed and sent home. Their barracks, headquarters, cars and trucks were set ablaze (Van Donge, 1995: 9).

The formerly important role of political youth in the supervision of Malawian society ended here. All sorts of Victorian and puritan laws and regulations concerning dress and behaviour in public were soon abolished and the MCP's capacity to supervise the everyday life of Malawian citizens was significantly reduced. The MCP engaged itself in a process of internal reorganization, without however changing the gerontocratic significance of power in its circles. The 94-year-old Banda remained in power. In the run up to the general elections of May 1994, the intricate relationship between local party leaders and local traditional leaders remained intact, manifestly within the Chewa Central region, and in a more covert way in the Northern and Southern regions.

However, the 'purification' from youth supervision in the course of the general election campaign also led to damage to the status of several of the opposition's leading figures. The two most important leaders of UDF, the prospective president Bakili Muluzi and his most effective campaign leader Aleke Banda, had been prominent leaders within the MCP party structure in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Van Donge, 1995: 258). The same was true of some prominent members of AFORD. But in the media the role the top UDF men had played in earlier years was in particular critically and extensively discussed, the fear being that soon after the expected victory by UDF in the general elections new coercive, state-sponsored youth bodies would be formed.

The May 1994 general elections saw a diminished role for youth, organized on a religious basis, in the monitoring and logistics of the registering and election process. The role of PAC was greatly reduced as the opposition groups were not only able to move independently but also able to organize the masses of young supporters under their own jurisdiction. Moving their attention away from the political field, the churches were redefining their role in society: now it was in terms of a kind of national 'watch dog', keen to ensure the durability of the newly acquired democratic rights. Support was given in particular to a number of the new human rights organizations, to the process of constitutional reform and to the activities of a Commission of Inquiry, established to deal with the most serious incidents of MCP-inspired political violence.

Concern with the human rights record in Malawi led in early 1995 to a number of arrests of prominent persons, including, amazingly, that of the former life-president Dr Banda, on a charge of being involved in the assassination of political opponents in 1983. A more profound demystification and desacralization of power could not have taken place. Just a month earlier, Banda had been proclaimed for his 'exceptional rain-making powers' in the press still favouring the MCP. A report in a Malawian newspaper of 29 November 1994 proclaimed: 'Kamuzu Excels as Rains Finally Come'.[5] Now, however, the denigration of the form of authority he stood for was clear. To understand this we need to take a closer look at some of the changes – including the important role of Christian fundamentalism – in the ritual significance and connotations of gerontocratic power in Malawi society.

PENTECOSTALISM AND POWER

Since the early 1970s Malawi's urban centres have seen the rise of a number of Christian fundamentalist groups led by young itinerant preachers, varying in age between nine and 30 years (see also Van Dijk, 1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1995, 1998a).[6] These young people attracted

crowds by conducting large revival meetings at which they, in fire and brimstone sermons, strongly denounced the sinfulness and evils of everyday urban life. The activities of this movement of born-again pentecostals (the *Abadwa Mwatsopano* as they were and are called in the local language) soon caught the attention of the authorities, but the local party leaders did not seem eager to curb it. This may have been because the born-again preachers did not attack the general supervisory model of Malawian society, nor did they openly criticize the subservient position of the younger generation in society, watched over by the cadres of the MYP and Youth League organizations. Rather, their activities dealt with attaching new meanings to power and authority as a social commentary on what gerontocratic power in society stood for. This they attained by providing alternative trajectories for gaining power, trajectories that were (and still are) phrased in religious terms and thereby were able to escape from the political gaze of the authorities in the 1970s and 1980s.

The allegedly conservative political nature of fundamentalist-cum-pentecostal movements in Africa and elsewhere has reached the level of an almost undisputed fact, a taken for granted reality in the social science studies of religion (Gifford, 1991; Marshall, 1993). The quietist attitude of these movements is either attributed to the importance of personal healing in their religious discourse (Schoffeleers, 1985) or to a conservative religious imperialism for which North American evangelical churches are held responsible (Caplan, 1987; Gifford, 1991; Marty & Scott Appleby, 1991; Deiros, 1991). Those studies that underscore the manifestly acquiescent nature of the movements fail to acknowledge the latent elements of resistance that can also be found if a method of obtaining data is followed that allows for the incorporation of meanings attached to signs and practices, muted discourses, dress and style. Those who (limiting myself to the African context) adopted such an approach to fundamentalist movements clearly came up with a rather different view of the socio-cultural significance of these movements in terms of covert protest and hidden transcripts (Comaroff, 1985; Ojo, 1988; Marshall, 1993; Van Dijk, 1993, 1995, 1998a)

In this paragraph I will argue that the born-again movement in Malawi was not acquiescent in a cultural sense, but attacked the single most important root paradigm of political culture and thereby acted as a precursor of democratic changes. The first born-again preacher-leaders (*alaliki*, literally 'announcers', as they called themselves) to take up the 'call' to preach belonged to an urban class of

rather well-educated college and university students. Later, in the early and mid-1980s, a second group of younger preachers emerged who, in contrast, had generally been able only to receive a few years of primary schooling. Such people certainly did not belong to a young urban elite. Many of these second-generation preachers conducted their religious activities on a full-time basis, contrary to the earlier ones. The aim of the former was that, via their preaching activities, they would aim to provide themselves with a livelihood. More generally, their born-again movement very much belonged to what is known as the 'second pentecostal wave' which swept through Sub-Saharan Africa from the early 1980s (Schoffeleers, 1985). This movement transcended the earlier missionary-based pentecostalism, already established in Africa from the first decades of the twentieth century.

In the late 1990s these itinerant young preachers could still be found promulgating a doctrine characterized by strict morality. In strong terms, the use of alcoholic beverages, cigarettes and drugs was denounced. They also fulminated against adultery, promiscuity, violence and theft. Furthermore, the 'satanic' habit of frequenting bars, hotels and discos was condemned: all were understood to be places of utmost moral depravity. Demands were also expressed for a rejuvenated morality, put forward in an atmosphere of religious excitement and emotion. While the audience was urged to sing and dance, sinners were commanded to kneel in front of the young preachers, who insisted that evil objects – such as knives, tobacco, stolen goods and above all, magical esoteric objects – be handed in. Those present were urged to receive the 'infilling' of the Holy Spirit, 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' was a person considered to be born again (*kubadwa mwatsopano*).

Speaking in tongues (*malilime*) was a central element of worship, ritual and symbolic practice within the born-again movement. No meeting could be held without a session of religious ecstasy: people grovelled on the ground, sweating profusely, while shouting all kinds of incomprehensible sounds. Going through such an experience was compulsory before one could be considered born again. The general view was that by becoming born again a line was established with benevolent, heavenly powers. In this process *malilime* became the absolute assurance that one had succeeded in tapping into a purifying superior power, protecting one's day-to-day existence and healing

various 'mystical' afflictions, even including witchcraft. In sum, *malilime* offered the true believer the possibility and power to withstand evil forces. Born-again preachers felt empowered to detect witchcraft and related harmful objects, convinced that they could not harm them when they came into contact with devilish objects and related practices.

One of the best-known preachers of the group of 30 that I studied in the city of Blantyre was a young woman of 24 years of age, named Linley Mbeta, who claimed that she could see a hand coming down from heaven to indicate to her the sinners among her audience. She became a national figure, known for her effective anti-witchcraft campaigns, after an allegedly literal rebirth she experienced in April 1985. Because of her cleansing powers and her strong calls for confession and conversion her preaching sessions nationwide were and are much in demand. Often, however, her conduct caused resentment among the elderly, because she openly, as is common in the entire movement, held this generation responsible for the existence and power of witchcraft in society. At one of her sessions she stated:

> 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!

An important aspect of *malilime* is that the rigid puritan order advocated by the preachers entails a rejection of the way the elderly are generally believed to become 'ripened' or 'empowered' (*kukhwima*). A person is considered to be *kukhwima* if he has been able to build up a position of considerable, wide ranging influence in society. Such an individual will very often be wealthy thanks to successful business schemes. He is not only expected to have an influential position in one of the bigger mission churches, as well as in his home village in kinship affairs, but also to have secured a powerful political position. But in being *kukhwima* every such person is also likely to incur some people's suspicion, not least from born-again preachers, that he has

sought the support of malicious forces. *Kukhwima* has the primary connotation of having been able to master the forces that lie in witchcraft and its related objects, applied, strategically, to one's own ends. In fact *kukhwima* is the single most important element of the powers and authority of the elderly, the chiefs and anybody else who acts as a surety to the well-being of the kin-group. Without being 'ripened' through dealings with the powers of day *and* night no surety (the *nkhoswe*) is able to exert his influence and protection over the kin-group.

The born-again preachers, however, stress the experience and empowerment of *malilime* rather than that of *kukhwima*. Success in the mundane world, as well as freedom and protection from any kind of affliction and misfortune, can only be acquired through *malilime*, which in its turn requires individuals to maintain a purified and unsullied status. 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 the earlier puritan movements in Malawi. Puritanism, present in Malawi since the early 1930s in the form of various anti-witchcraft movements, thus 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 Richards, 1935; Ranger, 1972; Fields, 1985).

In modern urban conditions some young people also presented forms of puritan ideology, assertively seeking to contest the traditional gerontocratic mode of political and religious control in society, still paramount, as discussed above, in the 1970s, 1980s and into the 1990s. By presenting a Christian fundamentalist ideology filled with notions of morality, sin and redemption, obedience to leadership, and so on, the preachers were able to outflank the Banda regime in its desire to portray them as subversive, a threat to the nation's 'peace, calm, law and order'. Instead, the young preachers managed to obtain a niche in the social fabric of the heavily supervised life in Malawian society. Consequently they 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 circle of young preachers *malilime* is a clear identity marker. But a serious 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 as they represent the involvement in other – undesirable to the born-agains – lines of power such as witchcraft and politics. The exclusion of the elderly, however, extends in a cultural sense beyond the boundary of age itself, also referring to a range of symbolical repertoires, styles, rituals, and so on, that in addition fall within a perception of a moral environment, a moral geography. The born-again ideology includes the perception that those symbolical 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.

This 'crusade' became the focal point of the young preachers' attempts to establish their own moral geography. It is worth noting that one of the first – and certainly one of the most important – young preachers' organizations was tellingly called 'The Pentecostal Revival Crusade Ministry', led by the famous Madalitso Mbewe (Van Dijk, 1995; see also Gifford, 1987, 1991, 1993 on the significance of crusades in other fundamentalist groups in Africa). The elderly are the prime targets in the crusades and are excluded from its organization (Van Dijk, 1995: 186). The young preachers' crusade flouts the power that *ankhoswe*, *malume* and mother-in-laws wield over them when it comes, for example, to marriage. Some of the older 'young' preachers sometimes even take over the ceremonial functions of the *nkhoswe* as a marriage surety thereby once again diminishing the influence of gerontocratic control.

The movement became highly successful among urban youths in the 1980s, spreading into schools and colleges, and provoking occasional clashes with staff. Strangely, however, the political authorities in Blantyre and elsewhere seemed to tolerate the movement. The reason for this later became clear: in the period preceding the democratic changes certain MCP officials tried to coopt important members of the movement for their own ends. For example, in 1992 Linley Mbeta was invited by the official 'State Hostess', Mama Kadzamira, to become the personal healer of President Banda at his Sanjika Palace in Blantyre (see Van Dijk, 1994). Faced with growing opposition after the publication of the bishops' Lenten Letter in March 1992, Linley Mbeta was asked by President Banda to address all parliamentarians at the ceremonial opening of the new parliamentary year in Zomba in

August of the same year (Malawi's *Daily Times*, 10 August 1992).[7] Another preacher involved with the MCP was a 12-year old, Ethel Phiri, active in Lilongwe. During the general election campaign of 1994 the press reported that Phiri, who had become the personal protégée of Cabinet minister Katopola Phiri in Lilongwe, was being used by party cadres to conduct large open-air revival meetings in the mostly opposition squatter settlements of Ndirande Township.

What the movement, despite these cases of cooptation by the regime, conveyed to many of the younger generation was that the significance and meaning of the authority of gerontocratic rulers such as party chairmen, chiefs and elders could be apprehended in different if not contesting ways (further evidence of this mode of contestation can be found in Van Dijk & Pels, 1996). Although the structure of society remained the same the born-again movement made it clear – especially to many young people – that religion could be used to create autonomous fields of organization, in effect to institute non-gerontocratic forms of authority, that would be well received by ordinary people.

This notion of self-organization was of particular interest for the youth of the main churches, among which the born-again movement was gaining increasing support by the late 1980s and early 1990s, much to the discomfort of the (often elderly) leaders of the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches. Such figures feared that their control over church-going youth was slipping from their hands (for a discussion of this issue, see Van Dijk, 1992b). The influential Student Christian Organisation of Malawi (SCOM), represented in almost every secondary school and university college throughout the country, became increasingly controlled by the born-again groups which in many places took over leadership of local SCOM branches. Beyond the control of the churches and other authorities, SCOM meetings were turned into meetings of uncontrolled behaviour, ecstasy and proselytism (Van Dijk, 1992a: 73). In the years prior to the democratic changes many schools reported many such incidents to the mission churches and local authorities. Combined with more obviously politically oriented protests, many elderly leaders of the churches also became increasingly worried about the 'indiscipline in schools', as it was referred to in the Bishops' Lenten Letter (see also Newell, 1995: 261).

It is difficult, as Fiedler (1995) has also noted, to establish as a matter of fact what the position of born-agains was during and immediately after the election process. However, in my view, the youth-led

pentecostal movement formed a first stage in the mobilization of the younger generation for a deeper-than-superficial democratic transition in Malawian society. At least up to 1994 their influence pertained to the level of ideation and discourse, but was not 'transmitted' into manifest political action. In the first quarter of 1995 this picture changed with the founding of the Christian Democratic Party (CDP) – the first in Malawi's history (*Daily Monitor*, 17 February 1995). The CDP party was initiated by Eston Kakhome, an early born-again preacher and former leader of the youth-led Gospel for All fellowship (see Van Dijk, 1992a: 71). The party, however, had apparently had very little impact on Malawi's political configurations – and by extension, its political culture – by the late 1990s. Contrary to the situation in Zambia where the state president, Frederick Chiluba, a born-again Christian, declared the country a Christian nation in early 1992, in Malawi, the born-again ethos did not at this time seem to have inspired political leadership. I return to this issue in the final section.

The intervention the established churches undertook in 1992 to change the political structure of the country, was in its intricacies of micro-power in the end dependent on the massive mobilization of the young for the democratic transition. Probably inadvertently it also promoted a changing meaning of gerontocratic power in society – the pentecostal youth groups represented an important example in this regard. On the other hand, one could also argue that the result of the 1994 general elections did not clearly indicate the importance of the shifts in the cultural and political constructions of gerontocracy. The MCP did not receive full support from the elderly in every region of the country; furthermore, a 63 per cent vote in favour of the MCP in the Central region indicates that at least some among the younger generation must have been voting for the party candidates, although Kaspin (1995: 617) suggests that support for the MCP was often engineered through coercion.

It is clear that opposition parties received support from older people, particularly in the Southern and Northern regions, indicating that the MCP had lost its appeal to many that formerly had been included in its gerontocratic hegemony. However, as the conclusion will suggest it is in fact a mistake to think of the opposition groups as being against the elderly. Quite to the contrary, the opposition groups have remained dominated by older people; there has been no quantitative tranfer of power to the younger generation. But what *has* changed is the meaning and representation of gerontocratic power, albeit without diminishing its efficacy. Voting for MCP or any of the

opposition groups therefore was a matter of preference for leadership *style*, as well as an issue of allegiance in terms of personal leadership *qualities*. It was not a question of a demand for programmatic change in the root paradigm of political power. The representation of the leadership style was important, but certainly did not undermine the continuation of gerontocracy.

CONCLUSION AND INTERPRETATION: FROM NKHOSWE TO MLANGIZI

Returning once more to Schatzberg's father-metaphor in understanding African political cultures, it needs to be emphasized that he does not relate this root metaphor to a number of historical processes that captures this discourse in the development of generation-political power balances and the position of the subject *vis-à-vis* religiously and magically determined perspectives on power. As we have just showed in the Malawian case, Banda's metaphor of being the Nkhoswe Number One was highly related and vested upon generational politics, while pentecostalism gave his young Malawian subjects the ideological means to discredit the gerontocratic basis of authority. Banda's approach of the root metaphor of Nkhoswe in fact points at the position of the institutional protector and surety, which in historical Chewa society is not occupied by the biological father of a subject, but rather by the classificatory uncle. It is the maternal uncle who takes over from the biological father the obligation to provide for security, access to land, food, shelter, heritage and marriage and it is the father who has a similar regulating position *vis-à-vis* his sister's children. As many folk tales in oral tradition show it is important for boys and young men that the protecting and ensuring role of the Nkhoswe is felt the strongest as the matri-kin underscores their subservient position in society.

This emotional element of protection in socio-political life was also felt at a national level, strongly addressed by Banda in his claims of being Nkhoswe Number One. For a long time the ritual implications of being Nkhoswe for the nation were underscored by the hierarchy of traditional authorities who attributed rainmaking-powers to Banda and placed him at the top of their organizational structure. In 1992, when the first negotiations between government and opposition groups took place, traditional chiefs queued up at Sanjika Palace several times to pledge their allegiance to his rule, despite the fact

that they had lost so much of their effective controlling powers (*Daily Times*, 12 November 1992). Although President Muluzi announced immediately after coming to power that he would reinstate their positions in society, it is doubtful whether he received the full support of the younger cohorts of the UDF for the move. The present state of generational politics is such that Muluzi in electoral terms is dependent on the support of the majority of the younger generation and is no position to claim a status *à la* Banda as a Nkhoswe, father and founder of the nation. The new postcolonial generation, the 'Born Free's' as they are called in Malawi, have no emotional ties with the political elite that brought independence over three decades ago.

NOTES

1. The author wishes to express his gratitude for the critical coments and suggestions he received on an earlier draft of this chapter from Peter Forster, Jan-Kees van Donge and participants of the ECPR workshop on 'Political Culture and Religion in the Third World', Bordeaux, April 1995.
2. Here I do not mean to equate supervision with violence. Other regimes in Africa have been notoriously violent while they lacked the level of supervision over the entire society that clearly was the case in Malawi. Medard writes, mockingly: 'Kamuzu Banda à réussi à imposer a son pays le plus haut degré de discipline en Afrique: les voitures s'arrettent meme au feu rouge. Cette discipline, qui fait l'admiration des experts en tout genre, rend l'atmosphere singulierment triste, étouffante et oppressante' (Médard 1991: 99). ['Kamuzu Banda has succeeded in imposing on his country the highest degree of discipline in Africa: cars stop at red lights. This discipline, which has the admiration of all kinds of experts, renders a singularly sad, stifling and oppressive atmosphere.'] – translation by editor.
3. As a core-group member of the Joint International Observer Group (JIOG/UNDP), I have been personally involved in the investgation of the harassment of opposition-group members in a number of places (specifically, Mchinji, Mponda (Ntcheu) and Blantyre). Details of the most serious of these cases are also kept by the ICRC office, Blantyre.
4. See Foster (1994), Chirwa (1994), Kaspin (1995) and Van Donge (1995) for analysis of the intertwined ethnic and regional dimensions of the election results.

asked clergymen from the Nkhoma Synod of the CCAP to pray to Almighty God for rains, a wish which materialised only 12 hours later'.
6. Other fundamentalist groups introduced into Malawi at a much earlier date, some even dating back to the turn of the twentieth century, include the Church of Christ, Seventh Day Adventist, Brethren Church, Jehovah's Witnesses/Watchtower (expelled from the country by the Banda-regime in the early seventies), 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 chapter focuses on the groups that originated in the course of what became known as the 'second pentecostal wave' in Malawi (see Schoffeleers, 1985). They were not introduced from elsewhere, but developed locally. The groups discussed here, furthermore, only in exceptional cases developed into fully fledged churches. Usually these groups operate in the form of more loosely organized 'ministries' and 'fellowships' (see for a fuller discussion of the historical transformations of fundamentalism in Malawian society Van Dijk, 1992a).
7. A special service of worship was held at the main hall of Chancellor College in Zomba with the theme of 'Blessed are those who do the will of God'. It was the first time such an event happened and President Banda was thanked for allowing parliament to break for the service, which according to all present was 'unheard of in other countries' (thanks to M. Schoffeleers for this information).

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