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## Ngoma & Born-Again Fundamentalism

### *Contesting representations of time in urban Malawi*

Rijk van Dijk

Anthropology will survive in a changing  
world by allowing itself to perish in  
order to be born again under a new guise.

(Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 126)

### Introduction

Janzen's 1992 book on *ngoma* is an attempt to define, describe and analyse a particular socio-religious phenomenon of healing – one we could identify as a musical ecstatic cult – for a wide area in the Southern African region. This attempt at regionalization of a particular religious phenomenon falls squarely within an anthropological tradition that seeks to explore the possibilities of uniting roughly similar, but still quite diverse socio-religious expressions which exist within a wider geographical area, into one conceptual framework. Similar attempts can be found in the work done on Southern African divination systems (Devisch 1985, Van Binsbergen 1995), the role of diviner-healers (the *nganga* paradigm as formulated, for instance, by Schoffeleers 1989), the role of the so-called territorial, trans-national cults (Werbner 1977, 1989; Ranger 1973; Schoffeleers 1979) and the spread of spirit-healing movements and churches over the Southern African region (Ranger 1993).

Janzen also effectively pulls together in one conceptual framework roughly similar expressions of drumming and healing rituals from an area ranging from Zaire to the Cape and from there to Nairobi (Janzen 1992: 10-50). Basically, the ground for this regionalization is a format concept that is comparable to Devisch's praxeological approach (Devisch 1985). This format is determined by a set of 'formal properties' (Janzen 1992: 174) in which overcoming misfortune, affliction and misfortune through transformation of the sufferer into a healer and through dealing with the spirit world are essential elements. These formal properties in Janzen's interpretation operate as a 'calculus', as a form for which the contents are created during the process; something like an empty building in which the interior walls, infrastructure, ceilings and decoration are invented and put in place while occupying the space available. *Ngoma* is the calculus (see also Janzen's analysis of *ngoma* in these terms: 1992: 79, 1995: 159) and in 'doing *ngoma*' the participants fill the contents of the healing process and its related practices through a process of creativity, experiment and exchange with the outside world. The end-goal is what Janzen prefers to refer to

as a state of self-realization in which the individual through the ngoma calculus has been able to sort out his or her idiosyncratic 'solution' to the problems of life. Because of being a 'shell', ngoma can be considered fluid, mouldable and therefore easily transferable to all sorts of places and circumstances; or in Janzen's terms: 'It is a process that may address any type of situation in which the form is servant to the content' (Janzen 1992: 176).

Janzen thus presents a number of distinguishable features that create the space in which all ngoma forms that are found in the region can be represented. They offer the ground and context for the regional coherent existence of a variety of ritual expressions in widely differing places, times and circumstances, of which, as Janzen states, local healers and clients are usually only vaguely aware.

In addition, the calculus format allows ngoma to be represented as an undisputed institute in each of the respective societies in which the phenomenon was analyzed. The high level of adaptability of ngoma as a calculus through time and in a variety of places and circumstances, as emphasized by Janzen, may easily lead to the conclusion that its existence remains undisputed, a reality taken for granted in Southern African society over which no ideological battles are fought. If it is supposed to exist as an empty form which individuals are allowed to fill with rituals, dances, songs and other practices to their own liking, conflicts are unlikely to arise.

This chapter, however, aims to show that an interpretation which emphasizes the unproblematic, uncontested existence of a healing format, because of its extreme adaptability, is hardly conceivable in reality. Rather, this contribution intends to show that the development over time of what in Foucauldian terms could be described as a specific 'discipline' comparable to that of Western psychology, is beset by contestation and conflict from alternative regimes of power and knowledge (Foucault 1988). The questions then become: how and in what terms is its existence as a 'discipline with a specific genealogy' being disputed; what are the limits of its discourse; and by what is it confronted. These problems may be clarified by comparing Janzen's notes on ngoma with other healing movements in the same area. The comparison this chapter proposes is with a religious-healing movement which is relatively new in the field, namely that of the American-inspired Christian fundamentalist and charismatic grouping, known as the 'Born-Agains' that have emerged in the wider Southern-African region. The reasons for a comparison with a healing movement of this particular type are manifold, but let me start by saying that I do not aspire to an analytical level whereby the full geographical scale of the so-called Born-Again phenomenon will be included. On the contrary, I will limit such a comparison to a number of thematic keynotes that have been derived from the study of a small Born-Again grouping in an urban centre in Malawi. The legitimation for this at first sight 'unequal' comparison is that when addressing thematic issues, such as for instance the meaning of healing or the notion of spirits etc., the geographical scale as such does not improve, per definition, our understanding of these conceptualizations.

What I therefore propose to do is to compare format with format, problems with problems. The basic terms of the comparison between the ngoma proposition and the Born-Again movement in Malawi include the extent to which ideas on (evil) spirits and witchcraft are involved, the significance of healing the individual, the meaning of singing and dancing, the authority structure of leadership and the effectiveness of both religious-moral programmes. At the centre of the comparison,

however, are the temporal representations that are made in both religious expressions. Here, this chapter will argue, the most interesting differences between the two formats can be found; and it is on this ground that ngoma is disputed and contested at a profound level by the very same Born-Again movement. It is not ngoma's distinguishable features as proposed by Janzen (1992: 174), which lie at the basis of this contestation, but rather its specific invocation of time and the representations of time in its operation. Janzen did not pay attention to the central importance of evocations of past time in ngoma's embodiment of ritual and spiritual power. The new healing movement in Malawi, however, is essentially different in its temporal orientation and, as this contribution intends to show, constructs specific representations of time that purposefully contradict those of ngoma.

In order to be able to tell what the differences are in the temporal conceptualizations we need to have an independent reference system, in the same way that differences in length can be indicated only by referring to an external measure such as the metric system. The first section of this chapter deals with this issue of establishing such a guide. The second section will implement this guide in order to be able to deduce the differences between the ngoma format and the Born-Again format. It will show how the study and interpretation of ngoma falls within a tradition of religious anthropology in Southern Africa in which a mnemonic or nostalgic paradigm was emphasized. Such interpretations primarily showed how religious movements and cults of affliction were dealing with pasts, with memory, by evoking it in new (predominantly urban) contexts, recreating references to a past as a way of coping with misfortune and difficult social circumstances. The outcome of this comparison is then used to shed some further light not only on temporal orientations in ngoma, but also on the anthropological study of these healing movements in the context of the development of an anthropology of time (see Pocock (1967) for some of the early remarks on this issue in anthropology).

### Representing time

The first question to be tackled before one can start comparing two regionally expanded forms of healing, is by asking what exactly the basis of comparison will be. Apples and pears cannot be compared unless there is an independent standard, such as for instance a measurement of nutritional value, that allows a comparison to take place. Furthermore, the comparison which is proposed here is meant to highlight basic structures, concepts and principles on which, in this case, the formation of healing forms appear to rest. This may shed light on the question why these 'disciplines' prove to have a prolonged existence in different societies and seem to have a salient appeal to substantial numbers of people.

In Janzen's work on ngoma three key-words are underscored: transformation, representation and self-realization (see Janzen: 1995). Difficult experiences in life are presented to an audience in a ritualized form. Surrounded by a group of drumming, dancing and singing people the person to be 'appeased' by ngoma presents his or her problem to persons who may be called either 'investigators' or 'interpreters'. A verbal trial and error play subsequently develops whereby an investigator probes into a person's life and circumstances while an interpreter unravels the links this play indi-

cates with the spirit world. What thereby occurs is a process of reformulation of the difficult experiences into an idiom that leaves room for the manipulation of spiritual power. The problem – say unemployment – is idiomatically transformed into a problem that concerns the relationship of that person with a specific spirit or a number of spirits. This boils down to an awareness that coping with day-to-day circumstances is related to coping with (at first) unidentified spirits. The ngoma thereupon develops into something that could be called a seminar, a workshop, on how the coping and appeasement directed at the spirit world should be dealt with. It creates a very comforting situation in which the initiand to ngoma may take many years to develop a deep-seated, affective-emotional bond with a spirit or spirits on a strictly personal basis. Janzen writes:

The ngoma text [the interpretation and articulation of the person's 'difficult experience'] is created over the course of many months and years and finally is presented formally at the time of the sufferer-novice's emergence as a fully ready healer.

(Janzen 1992: 110)

In the process of overcoming harsh daily experiences the initiand is gradually taught how to use the spirit(s) as a vehicle for reaching a state in which a sense of control over one's circumstances is regained. The spirits are a royal route to self-realization and self-control.

Janzen uses the image of a crab moving from land to water to exemplify this process (1991: 297; 1995: 147). This image is well-chosen as the land may be seen as the place of woe and lamentation, whereas the water is usually seen as the place where spirits reside. The crab stands for the initiand-within-the-ngoma-shelter who is taken from the land into the water and resumes his position on the land again after having been replenished by the water. At the same time it is a movement from inertia to fluidity, from harshness to softness, from a 'dry' state to a 'wet' state. As Pels (1993) has indicated for a specific area in Tanzania, the word ngoma indicates an essential change in the rhythm of life. To use the metaphor of the crab again, ngoma guides and accompanies the process of changing from the rhythm of the 'land' to the rhythm of the 'water'. In this sense all the ritual elements that accompany the change of rhythm are indicated with the term *ngoma*, and these elements may range from initiation rites of various sorts to various dances, but also to Christianity and even sports events for that matter. At the same time Pels clearly indicates that funerals and births certainly are not accompanied by the term ngoma as they do not signify a change in the rhythm of life.

In all these representations, described by both Janzen and Pels, that annotate ngoma it is rather clear that there is no vested, established control of form and content at stake. Rather, the calculus called *ngoma* deals or attempts to cope with, at some times more successfully than at others, the basic problem of control of time in periods of change that affect both the individual and/or society. While being such a calculus of form and content, ngoma offers a sacred, meaning 'ritually separate', invocation of time to empower and transform the person. Crucial here is that ngoma not only operates with the flow of time 'as it is' but also creates its own temporality in which the past is represented as a source of empowerment. A conceptual frame is established in which it is crucial for the process of transformation and healing of the individual and the community to perceive and to represent a past in such notions as ancestral spirits, former kings and important strangers, previous experiences, incantations, songs and rhythms.

Moving one step further in this line of reasoning we need to recognize and appreciate the fact that the evocation of the past in specific mnemonic or nostalgic forms

makes up one temporal orientation and representation. As I have noted elsewhere (see Van Dijk 1998) present theorizing about such temporal representations in society proposes analytical differences in types of nostalgia. Strathern distinguishes two modes of nostalgia, each of which can be recognized in the way societies, or groups within societies, foreground specific evocations of the past (Strathern 1995: 110). She distinguishes synthetic nostalgia from what she calls substantive, but I would prefer to call syncretic, nostalgia. The former mode of nostalgia betrays a yearning for a past which is found lacking in the present. The past is closed and has no further bearing on the present, but at the same time a process of estrangement from the present state of affairs can be recognized in expressions of nostalgia. The second form of nostalgia is of more importance to the purpose of this contribution as it actively seeks to create a sense of tradition and social memory which has a bearing on the present. In this form of nostalgia, mnemonics are involved in how societies or groups deal with their present predicament, how certain claims of power and interests are substantiated, and how certain subjective identities are realized (see also Battaglia 1995: 93). As can be argued for religious syncretism as well, syncretic nostalgia, the blending of older and later representations, signs and images, may be viewed as opening up trajectories of personal and social empowerment. Syncretically blending the evocation of the past, of its memory and its experience, with present social reality creates a specific route of empowerment (see for instance the work of Werbner (1991, 1995, 1998). Such syncretism may, for one thing, counterpoise movements which instead emphasize the utopian or the millenarian. On the other hand, and elaborating on Strathern's notions, future ideals, the utopian and the millenarian, can be seen to inform present social action. Future ideals may blend syncretically with present ideas and images as a route of empowerment counterpoising nostalgic projects.

Therefore, in this 'politics' of time, I would like to propose to distinguish two perceptions and representations of time: a mnemonic moment by which the past is stressed and a prognostic moment in which the future is represented. This being a matter of emphasis, rather than a distinction in kind, the question becomes how, in religious discourses and practices, a politics of time is played out. In dealing with and accompanying changes in the rhythm of life ngoma offers sacred time to deal with representational moments of time. For instance, Pels (1996) describes how prior to the Second World War the involvement of Waluguru boys and young men in urban life, trade and traffic led to a feeling of urgency among Waluguru elders to create and promote a ngoma in which the nostalgic and the prognostic were present in order to constitute the Waluguru representation of the modern world. The various ritual forms of initiation, such as *Jando*, that entailed an attunement to the 'outside' world, in a sense prepared Waluguru boys for what they might enter on leaving the closed Waluguru society. *Jando*, so to speak, provided the time to tune in to representations of the outside world and within this 'empty' time frame allowed the Waluguru to 'play' with representational moments. By this playfulness I mean to say that the specific *Jando* that arose at a particular moment in Waluguru history was the result of a creative but nonetheless specific 'mixture' of represented elements from the past and a likely future.

In order to understand the importance of temporalities in 'disciplines' of healing and transformation one has to see that representation is also, equates to, alienation and is therefore prone to power relations. When the past is represented in mnemonic ritual, specific perceptions ('things' of the past) are uttered or produced in text, in physical performance (dance, song), through objects (pictorial presentations) and in

other expressive ways. The individual is no longer owner of his or her mnemonics, nor of prognostics for that matter. They are placed at the mercy of the outer social world and its power relations. Sacred time on the other hand provides the opportunity for escape, together with a 'safer' environment for the production of representations; it may thus safeguard and protect the process of alienation that goes along with it. In other words although within sacred time the alienating effect of the production of mnemonics and prognostics cannot be reduced, the working of power relations on these representations can be controlled. Among the Waluguru the elderly clearly controlled the shuffle of temporal orientations that Jando entailed. This sacred time was intentionally used by the elderly to reinforce mnemonic representations to repress a more forward-looking one. That is to say, a process of mnemonicization took place whereby particularly the prognostic representations of the outer world by the younger generation were gradually incorporated in perceptions of the past by the elderly and were referred to the sacred time of initiation. In other words representations of experiences by the young men concerning styles of behaviour, dress and so on were represented again in mnemonicized form, as if they belong and belonged to the rhythm of Waluguru society.

In the healing phenomena for which Janzen tends to reserve the term ngoma, the importance of temporality is clearly detectable. In the ngoma usually the sick patient in the end comes out of the process of self-realization (again the notion of sacred time!) as a ngoma-healer. Self-realization in these cases rests heavily upon the process of mnemonicization; that is such as the individual or the group realizes itself in a difficult situation by fostering mnemonic representations, 'then and then I became ill, became an initiand to the ngoma (mnemonics) and now I am a healer like many others'.

At the same time the question that needs to be answered is whether in all cases in which people seek individual or collective realization in going through difficult periods mnemonicization plays such a crucial role. The relative positioning of mnemonic versus prognostic representations in sacred time, as matters of 'political' emphasis, probably varies according to circumstances, power relations and ideological strongholds in society. First of all, the fact that Jando vanished completely to be replaced by Christianity among the Waluguru suggests that this relative positioning indeed may change over time. Second, within the healing spectrum itself it is rather clear that the variety of 'healing programmes' carried out by the various institutions in the field (such as independent churches, prophetic movements, herbalist organizations, etc.) suggests that the emphasis on mnemonicization may differ substantially.

What is therefore proposed in this section is to use the relative positioning of representational moments, of the construction of temporalities (nostalgic versus prognostic) as the key to a standard of comparison. Independently of any of the healing institutions in the area, including ngoma, the question can be asked how does each relate to the relative 'strength' of each of the representational moments.

### Mnemonic comfort

Now that we have established a rough guide for comparing healing movements on the basis of their representational power and the power relations involved, we may proceed by turning to the social and ideological implications of represented time.

In order to be able to explore this question from the African perspective we need to analyze the conception of time in African society and how this is reflected in anthropological literature in the first place. It was not until the ground-breaking study of Evans-Pritchard on the 'Nuer Time Reckoning' (1939) that Western notions of 'primitive time' as analysed by Levy-Bruhl (1923) were seriously contested. Whereas in such and similar early sociological studies the African was considered deficient in conceptualizing time, Evans-Pritchard showed that in Nuer social life a number of temporal structures and 'planes of rhythm' were recognized that influenced the daily, seasonal and ecological activities of ordinary people profoundly. In subsequent studies by Bohannon (1953), Beidelman (1963), Bourdieu (1963) and for other areas Lévi-Strauss (1966) the anthropological insight gained importance that temporalities were to be considered products of culture and environment rather than products of intellectual capacities. It was not until the work of John Mbiti (1969), however, that a theory which situated time as central to African cosmology was developed. Mbiti expounded the notion, very central to the argument that is developed in this contribution, that African time, contrary to Western time, was non-linear and was basically constructed on the basis of events in the past. As African time and its cosmological representation is event-time there is no sense of future and an explicit orientation on the past is omnipresent. Mbiti explains:

The linear concept of time in Western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinite future is practically foreign to African thinking. The future is virtually absent because events which lie in it have not taken place, they have not been realized, and cannot, therefore, constitute time.  
(Mbiti 1969: 21-11)

Representations of the past, such as the ancestors being considered the living dead in the present, reflect therefore a profound orientation towards the past as potential time for the now. In other words the future is moving 'backward' and does not allow for linear progression.

In a number of more recent anthropological studies the insight has gained momentum that the lack of prognostic orientation has to be linked with specific socio-economic power-structures 'on the ground' (Comaroff and Comaroff for Botswana (1991: 146, 234-6), Mazrui and Mphande for Kenya and Malawi (1994), Mudimbe (1988) for Africa in general), and with the specific rhetoric of academia in which time perceptions were used as an instrument in the 'othering' of the anthropological object (Fabian 1983, 1991). In the first series of studies the presence or absence of prognostic orientations is linked with the pre-capitalist or capitalist modes of production and social organization. In the pre-capitalist, largely agrarian societies, due to the cyclical nature of the ecological rhythms, the sense of time was organic and the construction of temporalities was therefore set within the framework of human activity that responded to such cycles (Adjaye 1994: 3-4, Van Binsbergen 1996).

In the advent of the capitalist and colonial modes of production a commoditization of time for the exploitation of human labour took place. Labour time was no longer conceived in a response to nature, the agrarian cycle, but became computed by the hour on the basis of a process of alienation of labour from the human body. The central challenge that faced colonial capitalism in its early phases in many African societies was the establishment of a work relation based on the 'voluntary' sale of one's labour power, a commodity that would be prized by the hour (Mazrui and

Mphande 1994: 103, see also Cooper 1992). This process required the conquest of the social body and its reorientation from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist time frame. In this time frame a sense of future was inscribed on the body, usually through harsh methods of labour discipline. Punctuality, strict organization of time, planning ahead for the optimal use of available time and planning ahead for making ends meet between what could be gained by selling one's labour power and labour time and what one was obliged to spend within the new colonial order on taxes, school-fees and the like, became imperative. Mazrui and Mphande show in great detail the extent of violence that was used by the colonial rulers to mould the African body into a time frame that would prevent the African from lapsing to 'primitive idleness' which was considered rife in village life by colonial officials. Only through time discipline would Africans be able to uplift themselves from their primitive state. Male labour was preferred to female labour as it was considered less subject to the unruly rhythms of nature.

What this type of analysis, including that of Mbiti seems to emphasize, however, is that a prognostic orientation within African societies and their cosmologies was only established at and through the inception of capitalist socio-economic relations. In other words 'from within' the African society such prognostic orientation could never emerge unless capitalist relations were introduced. This proposition can and should be seriously questioned and it opens the road to any research that would be able to refute this thought by exploring prognostic orientations that were in existence in pre-capitalist times. Although the reconstruction of prognostic views and representations in African pre-capitalist cosmologies is beyond the scope of this contribution, I would certainly like to register the view that absence of prognostic orientations must be considered a specific, cultural, spatio-temporal construction. In specific times, at specific places and in specific social, political and economic circumstances prognostic orientations seem to be absent while in others they are strongly present (see Worsley 1957, on the Melanesian cargo-cults). Only through detailed cultural analysis can we begin to understand the construction of such temporalities and their representations in signs, images, bodily discipline and the like.

Furthermore, differing discourses in society may reflect differing constructions of temporalities in which the body social is constituted. Discourses on healing seem particularly to reflect specific constructions of temporalities, as Dossey has shown for Western culture (Dossey 1982). In twentieth-century Africa a wide variety of healing discourses have emerged of which – as Vaughan has been able to show, for instance – the colonial medical discourse became very influential *vis-à-vis* existing and more indigenous healing systems (Vaughan 1991 see for a critique Van Dijk 1994). The point I want to make here is that healing regimes do not, obviously, only differ in their practices but in how these practices relate to specific constructions and representations of time (Antze and Lambek make a similar point in relation to the linkage between memory and therapy in different societies, see Antze and Lambek 1996). The adage 'time heals', therefore, is not an element of pan-human wisdom but rather a culture-specific, spatio-temporal construction.

Regarding ngoma I have tried to indicate in the previous paragraph that this calculus predominantly leads to a mnemonicization of represented time. The invoking of representations, carried out idiosyncratically for each and every single initiand, leads to a mnemonicization of experiences. As Janzen indicates, a period

of eight years or more for a full initiation process into ngoma's secrets is no exception. Spierenburg (Chapter 5, this volume) highlights the significance of the recitation of long genealogical lines that are to be carried out by the initiand-medium and the relating Mhondoro spirit in Zimbabwe before an acknowledgement of the new status of the initiand can take place. A second result of the ngoma calculus – particularly for those ngomas and initiands confronted with the predominantly modern contexts of life – is that it provides new variations of perceived old themes that are intended to provide a mitigating, emotional gratifying, comforting environment.

This process of creating a comforting mnemonic model has already been well-described for urban healing churches in particular (see most recently the work of Devisch 1996) and not so much for ngoma (the question arises whether Janzen has familiarized himself sufficiently with the urban context). The explosive growth of all sorts of urban healing movements and churches that has been witnessed in Southern Africa, of which ngoma according to Janzen has been part and parcel, is generally associated with the increased rate of urbanization over the last decades (Sundkler 1961: 80–85; Daneel 1974: 55; West 1975: 4; Kiernan 1981: 142; Comaroff 1985: 185, 186). In general terms the healing churches/movements are seen and interpreted by these authors as adequate and apt vehicles for the adaptation and adjustment of the rural-to-urban migrant confronted with a confusing, anarchic and fragmented social reality. Basically the healing churches/movements provide in this view for a comforting rural-to-urban transference of a stock of religious symbols and conceptualizations, authority structures and, of course, of ways of coping with illness and misfortune. Daneel even goes as far as to say:

It would be a valid conclusion that the urban Zionist and Apostle Churches are in the first place extensions of the rural congregations and act as a spiritual harbour for those members who occasionally live in town.

[Their] sermons deal with rural problems or with urban problems from a rural point of view.  
(Daneel 1974: 23, 24)

What Daneel in fact observed was a mnemonicization of urban ritual which, as Dillon-Malone stressed for the Masowe communities he studied, provides a secure setting for the preservation and continuation of traditional styles of life and religious beliefs (Dillon-Malone 1978: 129–30). West notes how this process is linked largely with gerontocratic relations, as he indicates that the success of this process depends on the possibilities the healing churches/movements offer to the elderly to resume their influential position in the new, urban environment. It is rather unusual for a man under fifty years of age to hold any position of authority within these healing churches (West 1975: 55).

Comaroff in her 1985 publication takes one step further along this path as she indicates that the process of mnemonicization first of all pertains not only to symbols, beliefs, authority structures and the like but also, and most significantly, to the spatial organization of the rhythms of life. Second, she argues that the mnemonic model that has been developed by urban Tshidi Zionist groups serves the purpose of political protest as well. In the border town of Botswana and Bophutatswana, Mafikeng, a large number and variety of Zionist churches are found. In her view these churches, wherein healing plays a major role, were engaged in a highly coded form of resistance against the apartheid system by applying and resorting to age-old Tshidi elements, symbols and practices (Comaroff 1985: 169, 194–99). The churches do not strive for a

direct return of the traditional concepts per se to a modern, urban setting, but opt for a transformation of these concepts in order to mediate between the one (Tshidi tradition, perceived past) and the other (apartheid, perceived present). The question is how this transformation occurs and how it is maintained.

Comaroff's answer is that we should focus on the exploration of the placing of the individual in a specific spatio-temporal organization (ibid.: 220, 213–17). In this analysis the importance of spatial organization – in the sense of buildings and areas, and the positioning of everyday practices therein – needs to be stressed. Symbols, signs and images thereby act as a social memory, a mnemonic scheme that is inscribed in the body personal, for instance through rituals of initiation, in order to place the individual in his or her rightful location and position in life. Tshidi indigenous culture had a tripartite locational structure that was of paramount importance to the position the individual occupied in social life (ibid.: 55–7). The tripartite structure, which consisted of the chiefly court, the house and the wild areas/fields, focused on the house as the elemental unit in symbolic space. The front of the house faced the chiefly court and the middle ground in between the house and the court was the male domain of ritual and political action, the domain strictly closed to women. The back of the house faced the wild areas and fields and was primarily the domain of women, where cultivation and other productive activity took place. The house, therefore, mediated between the two areas, but in itself held paramount reproductive importance as all sexual activity and food consumption would take place there. At initiation boys would be taken from the house to spend some time in the wild before entering the public domain at the site of the chiefly court, by which again the mediating position of the house was made clear.

In Comaroff's view, the position of the Zionist churches in the present-day South African context are serving a very similar specific mnemonic scheme:

Zionists are what Zionists do: and their primary mnemonic is lodged not in Scripture but in the physical body and its immediate spatio-temporal location. (Comaroff 1985: 200)

In other words, Zionist churches under modern conditions reflect and resemble the 'house' and its important symbolical and structural functions for the individual in traditional society. The secluded Zionist meeting places and symbolical repertoire have the same mediating position that the house has with regard to the spatio-temporal arrangements between the chiefly court and uterine wild areas and fields. Signs, colours, dress and style are taken over from the traditional into the urban setting; they simultaneously retain their earlier significance and acquire new meanings within the Zionist Church (ibid.: 219–26). Comaroff warns us not to view this process of what I would like to call mnemonicization as a retreat into 'romantic nativism' (ibid.: 227). Rather it is a dynamic, wilful reconstruction meant to express distance both from the subordinated traditional world and from the predicament of apartheid which so deformed everyday experience. Therefore, the individual in modern oppressive capitalist labour relations who becomes a member of a Zionist healing church does not find himself re-integrated into a 'precolonial Eden' which would no longer suit his needs; the churches, like the urban migrant, have been irreversibly transformed by experiences outside the traditional setting. The Zionist church offers newly constructed, though mnemonicized, initiation and healing rites, meant to re-integrate the individual into the collectivity of Zion. Healing rites, baptisms, special attire, rituals, dances and songs are aimed at withdrawing participants into a collectivity, away from both the oppressed traditional scene of existence and the modern, afflicting conditions of life.

The mnemonics in this situation, as provided by these healing churches, serve a clear purpose of adaptation to stressful circumstances. In response to these circumstances ngoma also lays out a programme that attunes the behaviour of the initiand to a 'premeditated' world of spiritual forces. For Janzen this spirit world is both the intervening and intermediary party in accommodating the social circumstances. Ngoma is in this sense very similar to the Zion churches that like the Tshidi house intervene and mediate between the everyday social-political circumstances and the wilderness where the spiritual forces reside. Ngoma also relates both to modern (urban) conditions and to the history of contact with spirits and the practices of approaching them. Pels's statement that ngoma is the sort of programme that allows people to tune into modern conditions in such a way that a discussion, comment and response become possible is only partially true. Neither ngoma, nor a number of the healing churches for that matter, 'plan ahead', that is they do not provide a weather forecast on what future adaptations require from adepts in the present. There is no social programme for 'tuning ahead', so to speak, that would enable those involved in the sort of retrospective practices that are outlined by ngoma to be in the forefront of what society demands of their members under modern conditions. There are no future-oriented role models, no prognostic scenarios of what the society of tomorrow will look like, no ideology receptive to those global trends in practices and ideas that inform people of social states of mind in tomorrow's world.

The clearest examples that anthropology has offered of the prognostic ideologies that I discuss can be found in the so-called millenarian cults of native American Indians and the 'cargo cults' of Melanesia. Both entailed 'social programmes' not only for the individual lives of adherents concerning the aspirational future but also state of society. Although dealing with both types of movement is beyond the scope of the present chapter, it is safe to say that the 'programmes' of these cults have never been analyzed on the level of the existence of their politics of time, expressed in a prognostic healing ideology. It is therefore very difficult to relate the construction of temporalities by these movements to that of ngoma and similar healing institutions. Some may argue that the fundamental conservative impetus in healing practices as such prohibits the development of a prognostic programme in ngoma and its institutions, and that, the other way round, the absence of healing practices in other movements may definitely contribute to their prognostic capacities.

Instead, I would like to argue that the absence of prognostic thought needs to be problematized and not taken for granted on two levels simultaneously. First, the absence of prognosticism needs to be problematized on the level of anthropological theory, in the sense that anthropology seems to have failed to develop a paradigm, a method of analysis for exploring the field of prognosticism, the writing of scenarios and other future-oriented constructs.

Second, on a more basic level and remaining within the limited field of religiously inspired healing practices, it can be pointed out that there are movements that combine healing with a prognostic appeal. By their very existence these movements seem to problematize the absence of prognosticism within ngoma.

Comparable to ngoma groups and a number of Zionist churches is the Born-Again movement, the *abadwa mwatsopano* as they call themselves, of Malawi. It operates mainly in an urban context but, unlike ngoma groups and Zionist churches, does not thrive on mnemonicization. They have been studied by Van Dijk (1992a, 1992b,

1993a, 1993b, 1995) largely within the context of Malawi's largest city, Blantyre. The intricate relationship between healing and prognostic power as it is maintained in this religious movement is explored in the following section.

### Prognostic power

A starting point in the analysis of modern African healing practices which do not rely on mnemonical relations, but instead seem to represent more prognostic notions, can be found in the work of Bauman (1993). He reaches the conclusion that in modern relations of time-space compression temporalities are linear and vertical rather than horizontal and cyclical (as opposed to Mbiti's conclusions, see page 139). Modernity, he argues, creates specific time-space conceptualizations, through processes such as conversion to Christianity, whereby 'before' means 'lower' and 'inferior' while the future is represented as 'superior'. A battleground thus emerges between the superior future and the inferior past whereby in this arena superiority is tested and proved in victory; inferiority in defeat (Bauman 1993: 226). Influenced by modernity, therefore, superior power in present-day society usually has a strong future orientation.

In this section I intend to show how Christian fundamentalists, Born-Agains as they are usually called, claim superior healing power by rejecting the past. By renouncing the experiences of one's 'inferior' past the road is opened to attaining Born-Again status and to obtaining 'superior' healing powers. These healing powers 'stretch out' into the imminent future as they are perceived to constitute the individual independently from an identity that relates to the family and its immediate cosmological relations. They are meant to 'seal off' (*kutsirika*) the individual Born-Again from those evil powers and influences that may 'erupt' from a person's former social environment and experiences. In this sense Born-Againism, as will be explained below, strongly presents a dichotomous view of past versus future, inferior versus superior, low versus uplifted. The social formulaic of these dichotomies, interestingly, is one in which the young position themselves *vis-à-vis* the old. The Born-Again movement in Malawi is very much a movement of the young; those who presently experience the social contradictions entailed in modernity.

Since the early 1970s Malawi's urban centres have seen the rise of a number of Christian fundamentalist groups and organizations led by young itinerant preachers, varying in age between nine and thirty (see also Van Dijk 1992a, 1992b, 1993a). 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*, 'sayers', as they call themselves) who were the first to take up their '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. These preachers can be called the 'part-timers' as they were and still are involved in preaching activities only 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: one way or another, their preaching activities were and are supposed to provide them with a livelihood.

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 at the altar call 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 mwat-sopano*).

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 a 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* offers 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.

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, to find paid employment and to pay for health services; and where because of 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 set up by cooperating preachers should be seen as a 'security circle', a safe environment, that is guaranteed by *malilime*. Through *malilime*, in a concerted effort of all participants at the Born-Again meetings, a defensive 'wall' against outside evil forces is erected. Within the niche

malilime is a clear identity marker. This is unlike other puritan movements in that an encirclement as such does not exist in a materialized form in the sense of a closed community, compound or anything else of that sort. The Born-Agains do not need such encirclement; on the contrary, in an urban setting – with its mobility and its continuously changing sets of social relationships – it is only in abstract terms that an encirclement serves a clear purpose. Every 'true' Born-Again is the carrier of the spiritual, defensive circle, irrespective of the many sets the individual might get 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.

It is in this context that power is related to prognosticism, and not to mnemonics as we have seen in the case of other healing and purification movements. Two discursive practices within the Born-Again ideology and its ramifications indicate this emphasis on prognosticism rather strongly. First there is the emphasis placed on the 'instant', the immediate experience, in the entire ritual sphere which serves as a starting point for further development and 'growth', without an invocation of a person's past and its cosmological notions of ancestors and the like. Second, there is a discourse on the rejection of a person's past and all that relates to the construction of social position and authority within a perceived past.

To start with this last mentioned element of emphasizing prognosticism, one has to note that a most 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 of 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, not least Born-Again preachers, is prone to the suspicion that he sought support from malicious, dark forces. In fact *kukhwima* here 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 *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.

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 evil 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 'the past'. It is this perception of a past in which the elderly of today have played their roles which contributes specifically to the outright rejection of important parts of

Malawian traditions. 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 'past' that has to be both repudiated and forgotten.

In the Born-Agains' model of conversion there is no room for a conversation with a perceived past that would involve a recollection of a person's engagement in traditional rituals of any sort, or his or her engagement in activities considered sinful. The Born-Again experience presupposes a total rejection of a person's past life as a new and above all purified individual is expected to arise out of the experience of the 'infilling' with the *Mzimu Woyera* (the White Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit). In healing through 'infilling' no drums are used, while the very moment of possession by the Holy Spirit is not accompanied by rhythm, but by speaking in tongues (malilime) alone. This then serves as a clear boundary marker between the past and the present, as drums and rhythm no longer play the role of invoking the past in its mnemonical representation, as is common with ngoma.

The mnemonics in the form of objects, inscriptions on the body and ritual experiences that relate to the past are viewed as being controlled by and large by the older generation, who are suspected of having been able to put all sorts of bonding magical powers in place. They are, for instance, accused by the preachers of being responsible for keeping magical, esoteric objects which are capable of extending their powers from the past into the present. These objects therefore may haunt certain people long after their initial owners have died. Long, binding threads have been woven by the older generation through their dealings with evil powers that affect the activities of relatives in the present. The iconoclasm as presented by the preachers certainly includes the confiscation and subsequent destruction of objects of this type.<sup>1</sup> It thereby enables both the Born-Again preacher and the aspirant Born-Again member to cut off these long and binding harmful relationships laid down by the fabrication and usage of esoteric objects. To become Born-Again and thereby to become purified means to get rid of a past wherein all sorts of harmful influences may have been concocted.

In order to do so the young preachers present an ideology that is highly de-mnemonicized, that is to say an ideology in which the past is made 'powerless' but the future is presented as the main source of inspiration. Contrary to almost all of the independent churches in Blantyre and elsewhere in Malawi, the elderly have a minor role to play within the Born-Again groupings. They do not preach, they do not organize meetings, they do not enter into speaking of tongues. Neither are members of the older generation, not even those who lead the Pentecostal type of independent churches, the ones that come the closest to the Born-Again ideology, considered role models for the way in which a preacher is supposed to act. The ridicule which the older generation meets at Born-Again meetings provides a hostile environment to any notion of copying certain styles of behaviour from the older generation as far as religious conduct is concerned. In this way the process of de-mnemonicization also entails a full rejection of those experiences, primarily related to initiation or dealings with the traditional healers (*asing'anga*), that led an individual into the realm of the older generation. Secrets that relate to the relatively 'hidden' process of initiation (*chunamw'wali*) are therefore easily and mockingly disclosed, restrictions and obligations related to funerals are openly neglected and mocked, the Nyau secret society to which initiated men belong in the Central and Southern regions of Malawi branded as devilish, and so on. Thus cutting the threads with the past certainly entails a wide

variety of possible points of conflict and tension between relatives, and usually involves an escape from the immediate circle of family members by the new Born-Again.

This cutting of threads with the past and tradition becomes salient in another aspect of the Born-Again ideology. This is to do with the emphasis put on the 'instant' experiences of a number of key-note elements in becoming a Born-Again. First is the notion that one is instantly 'saved' in becoming a Born-Again by an on-the-spot transformation of one's life, one's social, religious and moral attitudes, and the like. In other words, unlike other religious groups such as the missionary and some of the independent churches, Born-Again groups require no period of catechumenate, neither is a period of training and initiation presupposed, as happens in some of the non-Christian possession groups. By rejecting their past a person can be turned instantly into a full member of the Born-Again circle. Once entered into the circle every affliction and misfortune that affects the Born-Again can be coped with by instant healing. Again this notion of instant healing deviates in very clear lines from the diagnostics, aetiology and patient histories that are the centrepieces of the healing practices of both the traditional *nanga* system as well as those of the majority of spirit-healing churches. The Zionist Churches in Blantyre, for instance, are known for members acting as 'X-rays' capable of penetrating an afflicted person's soul and history in order to 'see' what the main causes of the troubles are. Within the *abadwa mwatsopano's* healing practices, however, there is no diagnosis, no probing into a person's life history, no examination of one's social environment. There is only the instant experience of the healing powers of the *Mzimu Woyera* through the laying on of hands by one of the preachers, and no questions asked.

Again, there is also the notion of the instant sealing off (*kutsirika*) of a house or any other place from all sorts of outside evil, devilish powers. Once the preacher, or any other Born-Again for that matter, has entered the phase of speaking in tongues and the walls are touched, nothing evil enters the place anymore or will be cast out. The long preparations by a *sing'anga* that are required to seal off a house in the traditional way are no longer needed and are even ridiculed.

This process of de-mnemonicization, which puts the entire Born-Again movement in a different perspective from a large number of other urban religious movements, seems to be balanced by a strong future-oriented impetus in the religious ideology. The preaching and sessions of speaking in tongues seem to be geared at a future, ideal end-state of society. Beyond the salient eschatological notions on the imminent return of Jesus Christ and the final Day of Judgement that will see the wrath of God extend to every sinner, there is a noticeable striving towards the advance reordering of society. This aspect of the Born-Again ideology is comparable to certain elements found in the cargo cults. Preparing for the cargo to come, the cult members created a future-oriented ideology by which social relations, role models, leadership structures and even the physical outlines of entire villages were reshaped according to what the expected wealth would require (Worsley 1957). Instead of a diagnostic line of thinking (what is wrong with our society?) this religion set out a prognostic line of thought and practice which focused on the expected incoming wealth from another society (as evolved out of their contacts with the American war economy).

Likewise the young preacher's role models and authority styles, as well as their end-goal of an entirely purified Malawian society, are profoundly based on what they

see as coming to Malawi in the context of increasing globalized contacts. Important role models to the young preachers are the world-famous Pentecostal/revival preachers such as Billy Graham, Jimmy Swaggart and Reinhard Bonnke – mainly in the ways they operate, their dress and style, their effective ways of getting their groups organized, the identity they assume, the success and prosperity they seem to represent. The influx of this type of Anglo-American Pentecostalism (Reinhard Bonnke visited Malawi in 1986, bringing with him truckloads of equipment for his gigantic revival meetings) provided the preachers with an extraneous source for new religious ideas, modes of organization, dress, style and general identity (see Gifford 1987, 1991, 1993 on the spread of Pentecostalism in the Southern African region). These were, and still are, omens of a society wherein the gerontocratic control, manifest in all sorts of 'daily' and 'nocturnal' manipulations, does not maintain any relationship to the level of success, prestige and socio-economic standing that one can attain by relying on inspirational power. The end-state of society perceived by the preachers is one in which the real source of power and authority lies beyond its own perimeters and therefore beyond the clutches of tradition and its gerontocracy.

As the inspirational power of the Holy Spirit is perceived to reside outside society, those who are able to bring in this source, as the famous Pentecostal preachers did in Malawi, are welcomed with great awe and respect. The young preachers themselves on many occasions, brought, this line of power that provides instant healing from the urban areas into the villages. The focus on the creation of a religious Utopia, purified of all sorts of contaminating evil influences, implies assuming an 'outsider' identity and gratifies the idea that being a Born-Again in fact means to become a stranger to one's immediate relatives, friends and peers. As this is accentuated by dress and style (some preachers only speak English at their meetings, which is then translated into Chichewa by an interpreter) their meetings are considered safe havens in which the new puritan order is already effective. Men and women, freely intermixing, all claim that powers from the past world, mainly in the form of witchcraft and politics, are here on the spot abhorred and discarded. So in the rural places islands of the 'righteous' are created by the young preachers that reflect and pre-empt what they have perceived on a much wider scale of puritan efforts directed at the nation, or even at the wider world for that matter.

Once the individual has stepped into such a circle a programme unfolds that entails a 'training' in establishing the link with the outside residing purifying force provided by the *Mzimu Woyera*. The programme includes the mastering of speaking in tongues as this is the most clear and expressive sign that the purifying force has been 'contacted' and has set about doing its work on the individual and the social environment. In other words, the more people are involved in speaking in tongues, the purer society becomes. The end-goal for the programme is thus set, while the training itself – joining the Born-Agains, engaging in their healing and sessions of speaking in tongues – turns every member into a preacher. The programme is aggressive and assertive in the sense that every Born-Again is expected to share vicariously in the task of preaching in increasingly bigger social circles (one of the Born-Again groups in Blantyre, tellingly, was called The Aggressive Christianity Mission Training Corps). The religious agenda is thus set for reaching ever higher levels of purity; an agenda heavily influenced by incoming doctrinal material in the form of Jimmy Swaggart's videos, Billy Graham's booklets and Reinhard Bonnke's taped speeches.

The future-oriented programme, to conclude, has led to a strong impetus in the Born-Again movement to ridicule important aspects of the symbolic repertoire as well as those who are considered the guarantors of ritual practice and power; the elderly, the local traditional healers (asing'anga) and the local traditional authorities. On many occasions this process of de-mnemonicization resulted in hilarity and laughter as preachers proved to be artists in mimicking such local authorities and their ritual behaviour while conducting their meetings. The process of de-mnemonicization therefore can be understood as an assertive and vivid form of protest against gerontocratic authority; contrary to Comaroff (1985), it is not a mnemonic scheme that has fuelled this form of protest in an urban setting.

### Conclusion

Although 'make a complete break with your past' is an oft-heard cry among many Pentecostal, Born-Again groupings throughout various parts in Africa (see Meyer 1998 for Ghana, Van Dijk 1998), each of these Pentecostal movements requires in terms of scrutiny the future-oriented programme it presents. Pentecostalism in countries such as Ghana and Malawi speaks a language of modernity in which the past represents the bondage of a person to 'evil' life styles, to the ways of the ancestors and the worship of the elders, which are to be denounced and regarded as inferior. It would, however, be a mistake to think that Pentecostalism is becoming popular in Africa only because it is able to reject an individual's past and declare it inferior to a superior present. Severing the ties with the past, thus turning the person from a 'dividual' locked eternally within the bonds of the (ancestral) family into an individual, is cast within a wider social programme. It is this social programme, focusing on an immanent future moral reordering of society, which puts the entire movement of Born-Agains, with its notions of superior individuality, in a very different perspective as compared with earlier religious movements. Modernity prompted young people not to long for a 'pre-colonial Eden' but to seek a type of healing that engages in prognostic activities, foreseeing a near future and delivering 'weather forecasts' on the society to come. The force of ideology, certainly a fundamentalist one, is important – but the cultural exploration of the temporal orientations that come into play when religion is creating a rupture with the past, and a rapture into the future, certainly contributes to anthropology's understanding of what modernity's impact is on African societies today.

The next question to be answered is what are the social limitations of the production of 'futures' and ideological scenarios? In his seminal paper of 1981 Appadurai states that every society in creating and discussing 'pasts' can only do so by referring to a set of 'parameters' that set the contours or framework within which the creative process finds its limitations. He identifies four basic parameters or minimal dimensions – *authority, continuity, depth and interdependence* – concerning which, he claims, all cultures must make some substantive provision. For each of these four dimensions some sort of consensus has to be reached, without limiting or predetermining the substantive outcome of the 'content' of the constructed past, as to what is credible and permissible in creating a past. On each of these the dimensions some consensus has to be reached on what, respectively, can be considered credible sources, acceptable linkages in time, perceivable time-depth, and genuine

relationship with other constructed pasts (Appadurai 1981: 203). As Appadurai shows for the writing of pasts at a Hindu temple in Madras City, once consensus is reached along these dimensions pasts are not produced in infinite variety by the various groups that visit the temple.

The question that needs to be answered in view of a process of de-mnemonicization, is whether such or similar parameters can be identified that guide the creation of 'futures'. In other words, does the future-oriented programme arise out of a context of unbounded variety by which futures can be constructed, or are there clear demarcations as to what should be answered, discussed or allowed for?

As has become increasingly clear in recent anthropological studies (among others Wallman *et. al.* 1992) much still has to be unravelled as to how futures are constructed in societies under the weight of (specific religiously charged) ideologies (see also Boissevain 1992). In a rough sense certainly the future-oriented programme laid down by the Born-Again movement seems to fulfil the requirement of discussing the indicated parameters. If, for the sake of brevity, we limit ourselves to the question of the credibility of *authority* it is clear that the future is linked to a type of religious authority that still falls within the consensus of what power actually is, by what sort of extraneous sources a person may become empowered and to what extent this commands both 'daily' and 'nocturnal' forces. There is consensus on what the credible source of authority is that sets the agenda for the future, as becomes evident in the importance of malilime. As such the content, or substance in Appadurai's words, of the parameter of authority that produces statements on the future is being discussed (malilime instead of kukhwima, purification instead of power-strongholds in the nocturnal world) and not the parameter itself. It is the substance of the notion of purity that links up, for instance, with the dimension of *depth*. As to this dimension, the future is probed in the context of a clear eschatology which leaves no doubt as to at what point in time the purified level of society will be fully attained. Again, the notion of depth in Malawian society – what, for instance, religious/magical acts might mean over a longer period in time (magical objects produced in the past still being considered active in the present) – is not contested, but given substance according to the preacher's religious ideology. The future constructed by the young preachers on these dimensions still seems to fall within what the society's framework for the representations of time allow for – although more research is needed within the context of an anthropology of the future. Despite its programme of breaking with the past, the constructed future is not the result of an unlimited, unbounded social experiment.

Appadurai's remarks on the construction of pasts certainly inspires an agenda for an anthropology that is capable of deciphering both the basics and the conditions of the relationship between modernity and prognosticism in society.

### Notes

Portions of this article, specifically the last two sections, draw on Van Dijk 1998.

- 1 Of particular significance here, as I have shown elsewhere (Van Dijk 1995) were the nation-wide actions of Linley Mbeta, a preacher in her mid-twenties, who after a mystical recovery from death, claimed to be able to see a hand coming down from heaven pointing out to her the 'sinners' among her audiences who could be suspected of possessing such 'devilish' objects.

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## Afterword

John M. Janzen

### 'Doing scholarly ngoma'

Kofi Agawu wrote recently about John Blacking that 'given the range of subjects that interested him, it would have been a miracle if he had managed to avoid taking contradictory positions' (1997: 491). This is the position I find myself in after reading the excellent chapters of *The Quest for Fruition*. Many aspects of my 1992 book *Ngoma* are carefully scrutinized, their tendencies toward contradiction illuminated, in this careful work backed up with rich ethnographies and histories based on extensive fieldwork on particular aspects of ngoma by a range of authors.

Yet, what a pleasure it is to have one's work gone over so thoroughly! Seven critical scholars actually read and studied my book! They held a seminar on it. How gratifying! I had hoped that my work on *Ngoma* would serve as a catalyst. *The Quest for Fruition* has done this most successfully. I recall discussions with Professor Schoffeleers in Provo, Utah and in Satterthwaite about the political dimension of ngoma and healing. I should have known his queries would not simply dissipate. The direction of his curiosity is now evident. I welcome this critical effort. I sincerely thank all the participants. *The Quest for Fruition* is the ultimate review. It is also a monument to the excellence of Dutch anthropological training and adequate fieldwork budgets for students and senior scholars.

This volume has a lot in common with the critical process that is used by the journal *Current Anthropology*. Comments are solicited from a variety of authors on the article that has been submitted. Once these comments are in hand, the original author then has the opportunity to reply to his critics. Both comments and rebuttal are published along with the original article. An important difference between the CA format and the present project is that here the critics met to hold a seminar on the work to be discussed, and then they wrote entire chapters that include a presentation of their own extensive work. This of course invites the original author not only to respond to the critiques of his work, but also to offer review and critique of the mirror studies that the chapters represent.

Now that I am in the midst of writing both commentary of the collected critiques of my book *Ngoma* as well as offering critiques of the substantive essays, the thought has come to me that I am going through an exercise similar to that to which we subject PhD students. In the 'comprehensive written examination' the student not only reviews the work that has been studied, but must answer new questions that challenge him or her to synthesize these readings around salient themes in the field of study. Professor Schoffeleers and his students or former students must feel ironic enjoyment in the realization that I am doing this 'written comprehensive' on *Ngoma*.

Yet there is another obvious exercise to which this scholarly procedure might be compared right at the heart of the subject matter to which it is addressed. In a sense