Christian Independency and Global Membership: Pentecostal Extraversions in Malawi
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CHRISTIAN INDEPENDENCY AND GLOBAL MEMBERSHIP: PENTECOSTAL EXTRAVERSIONS IN MALAWI

BY

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ABSTRACT

Recent scholarship on Pentecostalism in Africa has debated issues of transnationalism, globalisation and localisation. Building on Bayart’s notion of extraversion, this scholarship has highlighted Pentecostals’ far-flung networks as resources in the growth and consolidation of particular movements and leaders. This article examines strategies of extraversion among independent Pentecostal churches. The aim is less to assess the historical validity of claims to independency than to account for its appeal as a popular idiom. The findings from fieldwork in a Malawian township show that half of the Pentecostal churches there regard themselves as ‘independent’. Although claims to independency arise from betrayals of the Pentecostal promise of radical equality in the Holy Spirit, independency does sustain Pentecostals’ desire for membership in a global community of believers. Pentecostal independency thus provides a perspective on African engagements with the apparent marginalisation of the sub-continent in the contemporary world. Two contrasting cases of Pentecostal independency reveal similar aspirations and point out the need to appreciate the religious forms of extraversion. Crucial to Pentecostal extraversions are believers’ attempts to subject themselves to a spiritually justified hierarchy.

Introduction

The idiom of Christian independency, while contested by scholars on historical and analytical grounds, animates the religious imagination of African Christians themselves. It underlies attempts at secession and the formation of new churches, even if outright spiritual and social isolation is hardly ever on the agenda. Scholarly engagement with Christian independency in Africa, on the other hand, has led to the conclusion that many of the so-called African churches have been offshoots of mission churches (Hastings 1994: 493-539). Scholars have also taken issue with the apparent ‘syncretism’ (Sundkler 1948: 55) of these churches, again emphasising their links to mission Christianity (Maxwell 1999). Moreover, Christian independency has not necessarily supported secular
political independence, with many independent churches being politically acquiescent (Schoffeleers 1991). Further scholarly insight has accrued when the focus of critical inquiry has turned on the extent to which independent churches value African traditions. It has been observed that in some cases their approach to ‘pagan’ customs has been more hostile than that of foreign missionaries (Hastings 1979: 9).

Scholarship on Christian independency in Africa has played an invaluable role in nuancing our understanding of religious transformations overall. Yet, as some of these scholars are careful to note, the various historical and analytical challenges levelled at the notion of Christian independency cannot dissipate its appeal as a popular idiom. The study of Christian independency as an idiom is in many ways an enterprise rather different from its scholarly critique. The approach is ethnographic, attuned to uncover the religious and social practices that the idiom inspires in specific settings. A major aim of this article is to explore the appeal of the idiom in a religious movement whose adherents often take pride in its far-flung networks and its disregard for congregational and church boundaries. Pentecostalism, as has often been noted in the literature (see, for example, Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001a; Martin 2002), is an example of such a movement, consisting of persons who are as likely to emphasise their common identity as born-again Christians as their membership in distinct churches. How does the idiom of independency befit such a movement?

In Malawi, the Chinyanja idiom for independency is *kuima payekha*, to stand alone, to stand on one’s own. The same idiom is used for independency in both religion and politics, for example when a pastor detaches his or her congregation from a central church, or when a politician contests elections without a party political affiliation. Among Christians, the idiom is evoked across denominations and exists with and against a variety of other idioms. The study of ‘vernacular Christianity’ (James and Johnson 1988) in Africa is yet to provide systematic accounts of the uses of such idioms and lexical items in Christian lives. While this article has more limited objectives, it is possible to note at the outset how different idioms appear salient in different political and historical contexts. Indigenousness, rather than independency, appeared as a central concern in the early stages of the growth of ZAOGA as a major Pentecostal movement in Zimbabwe (Maxwell 2001: 508 and 2002: 317). The assertion of the movement’s universal credentials followed this initial emphasis, largely erasing white people’s agency from the movement’s history (Maxwell 2001: 512). Yet by highlighting African agency the movement also retained a sufficient measure of indigenousness.
to avoid outright confrontations with Zimbabwe’s nationalist ruling party. In Malawi, where postcolonial politics have been much less racialised, the idioms of indigenousness and authenticity have not been conspicuous in the religious field. Although colonial Malawi provides a dramatic example of the desires for political and Christian independency combining in a single revolt (see Shepperson and Price 1958), the independency that is described here seeks no secular political transformation.

Within the transnational connections of Pentecostal movements, however, the assertions of independency may appear as political, contesting the authority of specific leaders and churches. This article describes variable understandings of Pentecostal hierarchies, understandings that regard leaders’ prominence variously as a result of exclusive external connections or as a sign of their special spiritual anointment. Both understandings sustain assertions of Christian independency and invite analysis of the variations that the same idiom of independency expresses.

This complexity can be made to address the issue of transnationalism—and the place of Africa in globalisation more broadly—that has preoccupied much recent writing on Pentecostalism in Africa. Significantly, all the recent authoritative works on the subject draw on Bayart’s insights (1993; 2000), particularly on his insistence that external connections represent an indispensable resource for the internal dynamics of African polities (see, for example, Gifford 1998; Maxwell 2000a and 2000b; Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001b). Bayart’s key concept is extraversion, understood as a mode of action whereby ‘far from being the victims of their very real vulnerability, African governments exploit, occasionally skilfully, the resources of dependence which is, it cannot be ever sufficiently stressed, astutely fabricated as much as predetermined’ (1993: 25-26). The notion of extraversion challenges, in other words, the view that sub-Saharan Africa is generally in the throes of being marginalised by the contemporary process of globalisation. In the scholarship on Pentecostalism, as is discussed below, this challenge has provoked debate on the extent to which the discrepancies in resources between African and Western congregations allow for the ‘localisation’ of Pentecostalism. It is from such discrepancies, experienced as spiritual and existential dilemmas, that attempts at independency arise.

In order to understand the conditions under which the idiom of Christian independency expresses both criticism of and allegiance to foreign and Malawian church hierarchies, this article begins with a brief description of an impoverished township, the site of my fieldwork for eighteen months between 1996 and 2001, and the material and moral difficulties that pastors face in leading their congregations there. The
desire for connections beyond Malawi is virtually universal among the township’s Pentecostals. This observation leads to a focus on the strategies of extraversion, informed by a perspective that stresses the religious forms of extraversion as opposed to its secular forms that have been the focus of attention in Bayart’s work and even in those studies on Pentecostal independency in the township demonstrate the variable ways in which the idiom of independency underlies attempts at Pentecostal extraversions. By focusing on particular pastors and their relationships, this article is able to show in detail how impoverished African Pentecostals refuse to be marginalised by globalisation.

**Reasons for Independency**

A central contention of this article builds on the insight in David Martin’s studies (for example 1990; 2002) on Pentecostalism in Latin America and elsewhere. Whatever the political and cultural transformation that Pentecostalism occasions, the transformation, Martin argues, must be understood in the light of its specific religious content. As other scholars have also noted, despite Pentecostals’ baptism in the Holy Spirit, the figure of the Devil remains almost as crucial as the Holy Spirit in their religiosity (see, for example, Meyer 1999). According to Pentecostal Christians in Chinsapo township of Malawi’s capital, ‘the world down here’ (dziko la pansi in Chinyanja) knows no earthly boundaries. It extends from the poorest townships to the most affluent suburbs, and from Africa to the rest of the world. It is a world ruled by the Devil (mdyerekezi or mdyabulosi), also known as Satan (satana), a world united by the Devil’s incessant effort to entice people into sin (ichimo). Pentecostal Christians in Chinsapo township survey the signs of sinful acts with a certainty about the distinction that really matters—the one between this world and the world above, ‘in heaven with the Lord’ (ku mwamba kwa Ambuye). Every person in this world is exposed to the same evil machinations, and, regardless of his or her wealth, complexion and position in a church, the born-again Christian must remain vigilant against such temptations. As for scholars, the challenge is to understand how this religiosity informs Pentecostals’ pursuit of independency and their strategies of extraversion.

Chinsapo township is a location where the Pentecostal teachings about the omnipresence of the Devil appear to find empirical evidence in the everyday experiences of its residents. Although the villages that were on the site had already begun to transform into a township in
the 1970s, in tandem with Lilongwe becoming the new capital of Malawi, Chinsapo has witnessed the most dramatic influx of migrants from the early 1990s, and now has some 30,000 residents (see Englund 2002). Some of the migrants have been enticed to move by the rhetoric of the neo-liberal government that came into power after the re-introduction of multiparty politics in 1993, promising increased opportunities for prosperity through small-scale businesses. Considerable numbers of township residents also lived in older high-density areas in the capital before moving to Chinsapo in the hope of finding more space. The amenities in the township have not kept pace with the numbers of newcomers. City and state authorities consider the area an unplanned ‘squatter’ settlement, beyond the orbit of communal services. The sponsorship for basic facilities like water points and primary schools is left to foreign donors and non-governmental organisations. Sewage systems remain non-existent, most houses are without electricity and piped water, and most areas of the township are congested with houses, built with little regard for the need to have access roads. Congestion makes epidemics common, children their immediate victims. As self-employed traders, semi-skilled labourers and low-ranking civil servants, the majority in the township are particularly vulnerable to the vicissitudes of Malawi’s ailing economy, their dreams of prosperity frequently dashed.1

From an early colonial period until the postcolonial era in the 1970s, Malawi was a major labour reserve in Southern Africa (Chirwa 1996). The country’s own economy witnessed negligible industrialisation and urbanisation, and after Kamuzu Banda’s autocratic regime had stopped the recruitment of Malawian labour to South African mines in the mid-1970s, migration continued within the country to rectify labour shortages on agricultural estates (Christiansen and Kydd 1983). Although political and economic liberalisation during the 1990s has enlivened urban areas, many Malawians lament the restriction of their opportunities to migrate. Travel by air to the regional centres in South Africa and Zimbabwe is beyond the means of the majority, while travel by road is likely to be a major, if not a prohibitive, investment. International migration, moreover, has increasingly been restricted by national governments, in Southern Africa as elsewhere (cf. Crush and McDonald 2000). Under such circumstances, the Pentecostal insistence on the insignificance of earthly boundaries resonates with widespread desire for spatial mobility.

Pentecostalism is not, of course, the only religious movement that appears to offer solace under these bleak circumstances. Chinsapo is a setting of extensive religious pluralism, its dwellers including migrants...
from all 25 districts of Malawi and even abroad, ensuring that virtually every denomination found in Malawi is also represented in the township. Pentecostalism is, nevertheless, conspicuous in this religious field, and new Pentecostal churches appear when existing ones become divided and when Malawian pastors align themselves with new missionaries. A common pattern whereby a new Pentecostal church is established is that an active member of a congregation, usually a man who has been in some formal position in the church, disagrees with his pastor and begins to conduct church services elsewhere with some members of the pastor’s congregation. In some cases the new leader may have made preparations to bring his flock to another church, while in others a period of independency will test the viability of the new congregation.

According to the records of the secretary for the Pentecostal pastors’ association in Chinsapo township, the following churches had an active congregational life in the township in 1999:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of church</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apostolic Church of Great Britain</td>
<td>Foreign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apostolic Faith Mission</td>
<td>Foreign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assemblies of God</td>
<td>Foreign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End Times Pentecostal Church</td>
<td>Malawian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith for Healing Life Church</td>
<td>Malawian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Assemblies of God</td>
<td>Malawian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Gospel Church</td>
<td>Malawian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Waters Church</td>
<td>Malawian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jerusalem Pentecostal Church</td>
<td>Malawian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Testament Assembly of God</td>
<td>Malawian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal Church</td>
<td>Foreign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal Holiness Church</td>
<td>Foreign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redeemed Christian Church of God</td>
<td>Foreign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River of Life Pentecostal Church</td>
<td>Malawian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time for Deliverance Church</td>
<td>Malawian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Pentecostal Church</td>
<td>Foreign</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the sixteen Pentecostal churches registered by the pastors’ association in 1999, half had their origins in Malawi. The fact that a church had been established in Malawi did not mean that its founders and doctrines were confined to the local Christian scene. Although the ‘Malawian’ churches in the above table would deny that they are offshoots of foreign churches, the historiographical qualms about Christian independency apply here as elsewhere. Their founders often have exten-
sive experience as members and leaders of congregations with trans-national connections, and some have gained these experiences as labour migrants in foreign countries. Nor is independency a means of separating congregations from far-flung Pentecostal networks. Many such congregations and their leaders are engaged in constant attempts to attract wealthy sponsors, both Malawians and foreigners. The postal addresses to churches and pastors in foreign countries—especially in the United States, Europe and South Africa—are treasured by virtually all active Pentecostal Christians in Chinsapo township. Access to those addresses is often a matter of intense competition, while the tracts, audio-tapes and other items which may be obtained through them, or from visiting evangelists and missionaries, sometimes arouse jealousies that precipitate the break-up of congregations.

Underlying these desires and jealousies is the perception that the spiritual progress of a church and its members is inseparable from enhanced material security. The distinction between security and prosperity gospels, while valid in a broader theological perspective, has limited value in describing Pentecostals' ideas of spiritual progress in Chinsapo township. The notion of prosperity, as Hackett (1998: 264) has remarked in another context, assumes different content for Pentecostals with different socio-economic backgrounds, and the sharp theological distinction between Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal, or 'charismatic', movements must be qualified with empirical observations on religious lives. Moreover, scholars have also noted that the emphasis of faith gospel on health and wealth, despite its evident association with a particular materialist spirituality widespread in the United States, can hardly be transported from one historical setting to another without some modifications (Hunt 2000; Gifford 2001). Even when strongly influenced by American ministries and missionaries, Christians who subscribe to the faith gospel do so in the context of their existing beliefs and the needs specific to their socio-economic situation. When Chinsapo's Pentecostals pursue their particular form of prosperity, strictly material interests do not inspire them to strive for Christian independency. Frustrated by what their religious environment can offer, independent Pentecostals seek alternative ways of connecting with representatives of their global movement. Independency therefore sustains extraversion, contributing, with the context-specific understandings of prosperity and security, to the diversity of the Pentecostal movement (cf. Droogers 2001).

Before one considers in more detail the interplay of security and prosperity in Pentecostal independency and extravagations in Chinsapo township, the practical arrangements in the administration of churches
and congregations must be understood. Even those pastors who belong to mission churches from abroad can seldom count on continuous support from their foreign benefactors. In fact, of the sixteen churches mentioned above, only the Assemblies of God and Living Waters Church are able to pay their pastors in Chinsapo a salary. Other pastors, whether in mission or ‘independent’ churches, depend on support from their members, or, as is the case in the majority of ‘independent’ churches, are part-time pastors who earn their living from other activities. Pastors collect money from their flock during Sunday services in a practice known as ‘tithing’ (chakhumi), but because most Christians’ income is rarely known and is likely to fluctuate, the exact amount is given at their own discretion. Pastors also receive support in money and in kind as ‘gifts’ (mphatso) whenever a member feels compelled to give something, especially on the occasion of a funeral or illness in the pastor’s house, or when the pastor has been deemed to have successfully healed a person through prayer. When receiving such tokens of gratitude the pastor reduces the risk of jealousy by insisting that the gifts are destined to God, not to himself.

Despite the intense desire to affiliate township congregations with well-established churches, preferably with a foreign base, Pentecostal pastors in mission churches are often just as much afflicted by poverty as their ‘independent’ counterparts. Most, if not all, of the Pentecostal churches with foreign origins have one or more missionary representative of foreign nationality in Malawi. Common to their own understanding of their mission in Malawi is the task to ‘plant’ churches, which, after they have been established with their own church buildings and pastors, are expected to be entirely self-supporting units. Pastors in Pentecostal churches with missionaries in Malawi have time and again complained to me how unsatisfactory this policy of ‘planting’ churches is. Money and hand-outs from the congregations may be enough to support the pastor’s own household, but they rarely permit investment in, for example, instruments to play music that attracts more people. Many pastors therefore consider church consolidation and expansion as virtually impossible tasks when missionaries decline to assist beyond the ‘planting’ of their churches.

Among Pentecostal pastors in Chinsapo township, personal security is rarely substantially enhanced by links to churches abroad. When a missionary sponsors the building of a church and its pastor’s house, the agreement is that the residence is attached to the position of the pastor, not to the incumbent pastor who lives there. When the pastor leaves this position, he is also obliged to vacate the residence. For pas-
tors who have lived most of their lives in urban areas, supported by urban congregations, investment in their rural areas of origin may have remained negligible, making a return there unlikely. This insecurity of housing is compounded, as mentioned, by the fact that the income the pastor receives almost never permits investment or savings. In some mission churches, pastors are also expected to make monthly contributions to various funds in the central church. These often include a regional fund for such running costs as transport and stationery, and a pension fund for retired pastors. The benefits of these funds are largely invisible to pastors in Chinsapo township, who complain, among other things, that pensions are paid only to elderly people, not after 15 years service as in the Malawian civil service. The pension itself is very small, its monthly amount being equal to a day’s supply of relish in an average-sized household. Also common is the burial fund, whose contribution to a pastor’s funeral is usually sufficient only for condolences, not for buying a coffin. In the opinion of most pastors, these financial difficulties make it an unduly severe challenge not only to expand or improve existing church buildings but also to attract new Christians who are relatively well off. Especially in urban areas, successful entrepreneurs and formally employed urbanites expect their church to ‘look good’ (kuoneka buvino). Before choosing their church in the city, they are also often sophisticated enough to make inquiries about the constitution of the church, or to find out the pastor’s own educational and financial credentials.

Such challenges contribute to an ever-present critical discourse on missionaries’ conduct in Malawi. In other words, Pentecostal Christians in Chinsapo township are as critical of their foreign missionaries as they are eager to pursue links with them. The expectation among Pentecostal Christians in Chinsapo is that the radical equality of human beings before God translates into an equal distribution of wealth among the brothers and sisters in Christ. When this expectation is frustrated time and again, the most extreme—but by no means uncommon—view among Chinsapo’s pastors maintains that foreign missionaries want to keep local pastors as their ‘slaves’ (akapolo), who live in perpetual fear of expulsion from the church. Such fear, pastors argue, keeps them docile while missionaries indulge in misconduct and personal aggrandisement. Another threat that missionaries can issue against critical pastors is that they will leave Malawi, depriving local churches of their external connections. One pastor in a major Pentecostal church explained to me that ‘we are taken to be brainless’ (timatengedwa ngati opanda nzeru). In spite of their self-proclaimed task to ‘plant’ churches for autonomous
growth in Malawi, missionaries seldom relinquish the de facto responsibility for administering the church at the regional and national levels in Malawi.

For critical and frustrated Malawian pastors, their missionaries’ condescending attitudes are betrayed by this lack of trust. Although pastors in mission churches are aware that the mission has a bank account in Malawi, very few of them ever see how much money it has, or for what purposes the missionary draws money from it. Pastors are also haunted by doubts about the proper purpose of the facilities that missionaries commonly possess in their own residences. Missionaries often explain that personal computers and fax machines are necessary for communicating with church members in other countries, but no local pastor has direct access to them. Only by cultivating a close relationship with a missionary can a pastor be granted the privilege of sending personal electronic mail or faxes from the missionary’s residence. More often, pastors’ external contacts are closely monitored by Malawian-based missionaries, who receive all the foreign visitors to the church and select the local pastors who have the honour of meeting them.

There are numerous stories of visiting evangelists and missionaries who befriend particular pastors and congregations during their visits to Malawi, while their gifts to these congregations are later abused by the resident missionary. For example, in one rather typical case, a German evangelist was so impressed by the musical performances of a local choir that, after his return to Germany, he organised the electronic instruments necessary for this choir to become a band. However, the resident missionary who acted as the intermediary between the choir and the evangelist seized the equipment and selected individuals from different congregations to make up a new band. Rather than being associated with any particular congregation, this band was sponsored by the missionary and performed at various Pentecostal and interdenominational festivals. In a similar case, a South African visitor had sent a car and a substantial sum of money to his favourite Malawian pastor. The gifts never reached the pastor because the resident missionary decided to keep them. His explanation was that, because Malawians are prone to be envious, other local pastors might try to kill their fortunate colleague.

In the midst of such frustrations and inequalities, pastors in Chinsapo township are often eager to assess the success of their missionaries. One long-established Pentecostal church, for example, has had the same missionary in Malawi for about 20 years, but during his entire period in office no Malawian pastor has reached the stage where he could pur-
chase a motor-bike, let alone a car. The missionary, by contrast, has regularly changed his cars for newer models during those 20 years. Faced with such inequalities, pastors in Chinsapo, even those who enjoy relatively smooth relationships with their missionaries, assert that most of the missionaries ‘are not honest’ (amasowa chilingamo). Some of the stories about missionaries’ misconduct have such a great entertainment value that they circulate widely among township dwellers, but for Pentecostal pastors they give disconcerting evidence of the Devil’s presence in their own churches. For pastors, the most disturbing stories concern the deplorable means by which missionaries deceive their foreign sponsors into sending money. For example, one American missionary is said to have taken his camera to open-air beer parties, but, before taking any pictures, he asked the drinkers to put their beers aside and to raise their hands like born-again Christians. After photographing them, he bought them more beer as a token of his gratitude, and the pictures were sent abroad as evidence of large numbers of Christians who did not have church buildings in which to pray. Not only did the missionary appeal dishonestly to foreign well-wishers, he also collected his ‘evidence’ on one of those sites where people succumbed to Satanic temptations.

Such stories about moral failure are not new in the relations between African Christians and foreign missionaries; nor is the moral high ground permanently occupied by one of the parties. It is important here to recognise that being a trickster—one of Bayart’s key figures of extraversion (see, for example 2000: 259-260)—is not a prerogative of the disadvantaged side in an unequal relationship. Pastors’ critical discourse insists that Pentecostal Christians need to be on their guard not only because of the Devil’s subjects outside their churches, but also because of the disgraceful moral standing of the people who pose as their mentors and benefactors. Nevertheless, the very inequality that gives rise to this critical discourse also reproduces the need for external contacts. All pastors condemn enrichment for its own sake, but, when material insecurity is as pressing as it is among the residents of Chinsapo township, the success of a church is seldom inseparable from the extent to which it seems to offer material prosperity. Widespread poverty retains the importance of extraversion, but the complexity of spiritual forces in ‘the world down here’ also undermines the possibility of one uniform strategy of Pentecostal extraversion. In order to explore variations in Pentecostal extravagations, it is necessary to clarify the conceptual framework within which those variations can be appreciated.
Disconnection and Extraversion

These observations reveal that Pentecostals in Chinsapo township grapple with the same this-worldly inequality as other low-income migrants. Pentecostalism promises radical equality among the brothers and sisters in the Spirit, a promise that is constantly challenged by vast discrepancies in opportunity. As Gifford (1998: 314) has noted, the disparity of material resources between African and Western churches and evangelists is such that a single congregation in the North may sponsor an entire denomination in an African country. In Malawi, for instance, the Assemblies of God could hardly have played a prominent role in the country’s born-again revival if it had not been ‘adopted’ by a congregation in the American state of Oklahoma (see Englund 2001: 243). Such examples of disparity and adoption would seem to render Pentecostalism a vehicle of current globalisation in which sub-Saharan Africa has the role of the poor relative, forever the passive recipient of hand-outs from the more advantaged parts of the world. The question, however, is whether the specific religiosity of Pentecostalism provides fresh insights into the ways in which Africans themselves engage with their apparently dismal condition.

Bayart’s work on extraversion, as mentioned, contains ideas that can be usefully applied in the study of Pentecostalism in sub-Saharan Africa. Combined with, for example, Ferguson’s (1999) critique of Africa’s marginalisation in the contemporary world, the notion of extraversion offers an innovative set of questions. The starting-point of Bayart’s and Ferguson’s interventions is the claim that the economic, political and diplomatic marginalisation that the disparity between sub-Saharan Africa and the West appears to sustain should not be mistaken for Africa’s lack of ties to the rest of the world. Marginalisation is, rather, a process whereby social and geographical membership and privilege in global capitalism are constituted—they presuppose ‘a category of absolute non-membership’ (Ferguson 1999: 242). Disconnection is, therefore, a relation, not the pristine condition of a society awaiting its entry into the world (Ferguson 1999: 238). Both Bayart and Ferguson are careful to historicise this unequal relation, pointing out how it has taken new forms from early colonial plunder to the modernist views on development in the post-independence era. Bayart’s notion of extraversion is an important effort to discern enduring African agency in the unequal relation. Building on Foucault’s insights into subjection—the ways in which people can be ‘subjects’ in both senses of the term—the notion of extraversion enables us to see how subjects may actively participate in keeping themselves ostensibly powerless (for example Bayart 2000:
219; see also Werbner 2002). Disconnection and marginalisation are not, in other words, the whole story of sub-Saharan Africa’s position in globalisation; attention needs to be given to those Africans for whom dependence is a means of connecting with the rest of the world.

Differences in emphasis, if not in methodology, appear to generate debate in the studies of Pentecostalism that apply the notion of extraversion. For example, Gifford (1998: 321-322), while admitting that Christianity in Africa is an African creation, highlights the constraints of that creativity in the present situation of deepening discrepancy between African and Western opportunities. The question for Gifford is the extent to which ‘a standardised foreign form’ of worship (Gifford 2001: 77), especially apparent in the faith gospel and deliverance theology of many Pentecostals and charismatics, takes over, or leaves space for, spiritual and social concerns that are specific to different categories of African Christians. Maxwell (2000b), on the other hand, regards in-depth studies of particular Pentecostal movements as the best answers to the methodological challenge of understanding extraversion. These studies, Maxwell argues, disclose ‘African creativity’ in, for example, setting localised agendas, if only because dependence on external sponsorship does not dictate who controls the evangelistic work. In this view, external sponsorship may be appropriated to consolidate local power bases (see also Fiedler 1999: 36).

While the argument for empirical in-depth investigation is irrefutable, more can be said about the way in which the notion of extraversion is to be applied in the study of Pentecostalism. What is surprising about the recent works on Pentecostalism and extraversion in Africa is that, for all the authors’ knowledge of the theology of Pentecostalism, their analysis of extraversion often proceeds with little explicit regard to the fact that religion is at issue. The politics of Pentecostal expansion, it would seem, builds on power bases and material accumulation in a fashion akin to secular domains. Admittedly, Bayart’s own work, focusing largely on secular politics and ‘governmentality’, offers few clues as to how to study religious forms of extraversion. Bayart by no means ignores religion—he recognises, for example, that religion is a principal means by which sub-Saharan Africa integrates itself into the international system (Bayart 2000: 262)—but his analysis of ‘the grammar of extraversion and dependence’ (for example Bayart 2000: 254-264) has little to say about the impact of subjects’ various beliefs on their strategies of extraversion.

The study of religiosity in Pentecostal extraversions should not obscure the fact that opportunism may also guide some Pentecostal Christians’
engagement with transnational connections. It is, in fact, precisely in relation to worldly opportunism that Pentecostal religiosity provides a striking form of critique in current globalisation. The first step in appreciating the differences between secular and religious strategies of extraversion is, I submit, to realise that the former deploys strategic inferiority.\(^5\) Secular strategies of extraversion play upon ‘underdevelopment’ and ‘poverty’ as moral justifications for requesting more foreign aid. When dependence is, as Bayart maintains, ‘astutely fabricated as much as predetermined’ (1993: 26), inferiority plays a strategically crucial role. It is not, of course, inferiority about cultural and intellectual capacities; insufficient economic growth or hitches in the consolidation of democracy, for example, are enough to prove inferiority that obliges the ‘developed’ world to assist Africa.

Pentecostal Christians, on the other hand, are less likely to advance any form of inferiority as a ploy to cultivate external links. When they draw wealthy missionaries’ attention to their material poverty, they do not envisage themselves as perpetual poor relatives but as wealthy missionaries’ relatives in the Spirit whose poverty is a scandal in an otherwise equal relationship. In Ferguson’s (1999) terms, membership in a global community is not a dream; it is a reality, albeit one that is constantly put at risk by the Devil’s machinations. The belief in the omnipresence of the Devil is, when combined with the belief in one’s own salvation, a source of formidable social critique. It dismisses conventional terms of social critique—wealth, complexion, nationality, gender—as irrelevant and replaces them with unflinching confidence in a sharp distinction between God and the Devil. If it is true, as Martin argues, that in Pentecostalism ‘there is scant chance of some hierarchy of religious (or temporal) power canalizing the flow of energy and controlling it for its own ends’ (2002: 170), then at least part of the explanation must be sought in the specific religiosity of Pentecostalism.\(^6\) Pentecostal extraversion secures membership in a global community as much among the donors as among the recipients of assistance.

The self-confidence and lack of an inferiority complex that Pentecostal religiosity sustains should not, however, be mistaken for individualism, as if ‘independent’ Pentecostals voluntarily moved between local and transnational networks in order to satisfy their individual interests. Pentecostals may be averse to hierarchy in a bureaucratic sense, but their religiosity does entail a process whereby their subjectivity, in Marshall-Fratani’s words, is ‘consecrated to a higher power’ (1998: 286). Every committed Pentecostal seeks to make his or her unity with the Holy Spirit complete, and those individuals who appear especially gifted
spiritually are the obvious conduits for pursuing this desire. Understood as this-worldly distribution of spiritual gifts and powers, hierarchy is not only acceptable but actively embraced.

Association with a man or woman of God carries the promise of growth in one’s own Christian life. Such a view on hierarchy is difficult to gauge in conventional secular terms, because it does not presume that all power is potentially negative and in need of restraint by various democratic institutions. While the Pentecostal view on hierarchy has this-worldly consequences, it is not, strictly speaking, of this world. As Lehmann observes, ‘Pentecostals trade in absolutes’ (1996: 154). This world is merely the stage where the absolute distinction between the subjects of God and the Devil is performed. Yet the world hardly favours trading in absolutes, and the emergence of independent Pentecostal churches provides one perspective on the actual consequences of belief in global membership. The following two cases show how Pentecostal extraversion assumes different forms even when it ostensibly builds on similar practices of Christian independency. The differences concern primarily the ways in which the Pentecostal strategies of extraversion variously undermine and celebrate the hierarchy of spiritual powers.

**Strategies of Pentecostal Extrusions**

**Satanic Hierarchies**

Born in a rural area of Lilongwe district, Alaston Kamera had already settled in the city in his early adolescence. Various petty businesses, crime, beer-drinking and smoking marijuana (chamba) filled his turbulent youth, his destitution chasing him from Lilongwe’s long-established high-density areas to Chinsapo township in the early 1990s. Another young man, Kamera’s relative from the village, also lived in Chinsapo and invited him to the Pentecostal Holiness Church in the township, a church whose origins are in the United States and which has several congregations in different parts of Malawi. Its pastor in Chinsapo was Rodrick Chithunzi, a charismatic healer and passionate preacher. Kamera took a vague interest in the church, somewhat intrigued by its uplifting songs and the fierceness of its members’ attacks on witchcraft. It was only after he had fallen ill that he realised the need for the second birth. He had continued to drink beer despite his participation in the church services, but when his physical condition deteriorated he was disturbed to find that, wherever he opened the Bible, it always seemed to tell him about his own life. This was most
disconcerting (*kussowetsa mtendere*), and he asked Chithunzi to start praying for him. After several intensive prayer sessions at Chithunzi’s house, he finally experienced the departure of the evil spirits (*ziwanda*) from his body and the arrival of the Holy Spirit in their stead. Ever since, only one ambition has guided Kamera’s life—to devote himself to spreading God’s word as a pastor in a Pentecostal church.

Kamera has never been able to realise his ambition in full. Although Chithunzi took a keen interest in his spiritual development and soon sent him to the Bible school of the church, the congregations led by Kamera have been too poor to sustain him as their full-time pastor. After graduating from the Bible school, he has earned his income as an itinerant milkman and, more recently, by selling women’s second-hand clothes in the streets of Lilongwe’s Old Town. He is, however, a popular pastor, his lack of formal education compensated for by his enthusiasm for pastoral work and by his engaging personality. Yet his lack of English has made him dependent on others in the strategies of extraversion, gradually convincing him that external contacts in pastoral work are as much subjects of corrupt and dishonest dealings as they are indispensable.

Kamera’s growth in prominence as a pastor initially emerged from his association with persons whom he considered to be men of God. However, deep disappointments taught him to be wary of people who claim such a status. Chithunzi, backed by the American missionary Bill Jenkins, assigned Kamera to be the pastor in Kamera’s home village in the mid-1990s. After months of tireless commuting between Chinsapo and the village, Kamera could boast impressive church growth in an area where Pentecostalism had no previous presence. At the same time, Ted Wilson, an American missionary in the Pentecostal Holiness Church stationed in Mozambique, paid a visit to Kamera’s church and was greatly encouraged by his performance. He started to send gifts to Kamera, always through Chithunzi who was the highest Malawian official in the church hierarchy. Kamera soon found reason to suspect that Chithunzi kept some of the gifts to himself, and their deepening rivalry culminated in Kamera’s excommunication from the church in 1997. Also underlying this drastic action was Kamera’s conflict with Jenkins. After a thunderstorm had partly destroyed Kamera’s church, he had asked the missionary to provide funds to repair the damage. Chithunzi answered on Jenkins’ behalf that Jenkins was in Malawi only to plant churches and that the congregations were expected to meet the costs of maintaining their churches. In the ensuing correspondence, Kamera spoke plainly when expressing his frustration with Chithunzi and Jenkins. After
claiming that the church’s constitution was ‘witchcraft’ (*ufiti*), Kamera experienced Jenkins’s wrath and was excommunicated.⁸

The humiliating excommunication began a process of Kamera oscillating between a condemnation of foreign missionaries and an equally fierce criticism of Malawian Pentecostal leaders. Jenkins’s role in the excommunication made him generalise about foreign missionaries’ deplorable conduct, and for a while he pursued a purely independent congregation. He continued to subscribe to familiar Pentecostal doctrines and methods of worship, but his ambition was to ‘stand on his own’ (*kuima payekha*). Because the church in his home village belonged to the Pentecostal Holiness Church, he decided to avoid further skirmishes and founded a new congregation in Chinsapo township. The discouraging beginning tried the limits of his and his wife’s faith. The first Sunday services attracted only four people: Kamera, his wife, their recently divorced neighbour whose apparent barrenness had made several men reject her, and a young unmarried man who made his living by selling newspapers and whom Kamera had invited on his way to sell milk elsewhere in the city. It was clear to Kamera that the growth of his congregation depended on active proselytising, and he and his wife spent virtually all their spare time preaching and singing at various sites in the township. After a few months and only three more couples in the congregation, Kamera yielded to the demand by his wife and her mother that he join forces with Sylvester Moyo, his wife’s cousin and the founder of the River of Life Pentecostal Church.

Moyo, who lived in a different high-density area in Lilongwe, had assumed a position of authority in the family of Kamera’s wife, although he was related to her through her father. The wife’s mother’s brothers, the usual guardians of matrilineal kin-groups, were unavailable for this position, and after her father died Moyo heard all the disputes involving family members and was the person whose advice others in the family were expected to respect. He had moved to Lilongwe in 1968, and, after working in mines in South Africa, became an itinerant preacher in Malawi. Through another Pentecostal preacher elsewhere in Central Malawi he met a visiting Australian evangelist, who encouraged the two preachers to establish branches of the River of Life Family Church which he represented. Moyo, however, was soon expelled from this co-operation. The other Malawian pastor had written to the evangelist in Australia that Moyo had pocketed the money intended for the church in Lilongwe. In 1991, Moyo changed the name of his congregation into the River of Life Pentecostal Church, leading some one hundred Christians in the high-density area where he lived.
When Kamera recalled his early conversations with Moyo about their possible co-operation, he told me that Moyo had talked to him like a man trying to court a woman. Moyo had described his excellent contacts to various *azungu* (white people) who assisted his church, while the conduct of the church was firmly in Malawian hands. He also talked about his plans to plant more churches in order to create a country-wide network in Malawi. In fact, the church appeared to be more successful in Mozambique and Tanzania, where the branches far outnumbered those in Malawi. As Kamera was to realise later, this growth of the church in the neighbouring countries had little to do with Moyo’s own efforts. For example, in the early 1990s, after Moyo’s visits to camps occupied by refugees fleeing the war in Mozambique, the church started to gain a foothold among Mozambicans. After their repatriation in the early 1990s, they established over one hundred congregations in Mozambique before the end of the decade. Even in Malawi church growth appears to have built more on local pastors’ work than on Moyo’s efforts. Many congregations have been affiliated, as in the case of Kamera’s congregation, to the church after a period of ‘standing on one’s own’.

Kamera’s doubts about Moyo’s claims to be a man of God began to mount when Moyo seemed uninterested in visiting his congregation in Chinsapo township. Worse still, soon after his agreement with Moyo, Kamera lay ill at his house for two weeks, but Moyo did not come to see him. When the Christians in Kamera’s congregation became impatient over the lack of assistance from the central church, Kamera also began to take a closer look at Moyo’s dealings. Kamera had expected—and had shared this expectation with his congregation—that a proper church building would be erected in Chinsapo to replace the shack which he rented for his congregation’s Sunday services. It became obvious to Kamera that Moyo was ‘clever’ (*ochenjera*), a ‘briefcase pastor’, a term that Kamera had heard the American crusader Ernest Angley using for preachers who were only interested in making money. Moyo was in frequent correspondence with well-wishers in the United States, Europe and South Africa, and he made Kamera and his wife fill in a form to be sent to his contacts abroad. After waiting in vain for some benefits, Kamera became convinced that Moyo diverted funds to himself, as he had done with the money sent by the above-mentioned Australian. Kamera appealed to his wife and her mother to urge Moyo to assist his congregation, but they declined to intervene. Undeterred by the breach he might cause within the family, he told Moyo that he no longer considered his congregation a part of the River of Life Pentecostal Church. Moyo appeared to accept his announcement with-
out grudges, but insisted that Kamera returned the two Bibles that he had given to him. They were, indeed, the only material support that Kamera’s congregation had received from Moyo.

Kamera, who named his congregation Independent Pentecostal Church, discarded categorical statements about foreign and Malawian Pentecostal leaders and kept an eye on visiting evangelists for contacts and support. Disgruntled, he grew wary of suggestions for an amalgamation of his and other pastors’ congregations. The level of a person’s material wealth, he explained to me, did not determine whether he or she was God’s subject, and every new contact with Pentecostal leaders, whether Malawian or foreign, had to be monitored before entering into co-operation. Yet Kamera and his wife struggled not only to feed their household but also to keep their congregation together. Although both Kamera and I made clear to the congregation that I was not a missionary, my appearances in the church and friendship with some members of the congregation undoubtedly contributed to their expectation that Kamera, as a man of God, would attract support from affluent Pentecostals. Some in the congregation took the initiative to look for partner congregations in the city. One of them discovered a church with black South African missionaries in another high-density area, but Kamera, pointing out that the church was not Pentecostal, refused to join it. The member defied Kamera’s opinion and left the congregation, attracted less by the doctrines of the South African church than by its missionaries’ promise to take him to South Africa. In the midst of such uncritical attempts at extraversion, Kamera’s reluctance to make hasty decisions indicated his commitment to spiritually justifiable strategies, a commitment that had been deepened by his realisation that the Devil’s subjects could disguise themselves as men of God.

Salvation through Subjection

Struggling to lead a congregation of some dozen Christians, Alaston Kamera could hardly be a more different ‘independent’ Pentecostal than Joseph Gama, another resident in Chinsapo township. Gama is a pastor in the Living Waters Church, possibly the most prominent of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches that have been established by Malawians during the country’s born-again revival. Living Waters Church is led by Apostle Stanley Ndovi, who founded it in 1985 after being the leading Malawian in the Apostolic Faith Mission (Fiedler 1999: 33). By the end of the 1990s, the church had several tens of thousands of adherents in Malawi and engaged in missionary work abroad. Ndovi’s
personal contacts to Pentecostal and charismatic luminaries ranged from Ezekiel Guti in Zimbabwe to Ulf Ekman in Sweden, with other important contacts in Norway, Australia, the United States and several African countries. The teachings and physical appearance of the church’s top leaders were textbook examples of what upwardly mobile middle-class Christians might be expected to appreciate. Yet a major constituency of the Living Waters Church are not Christians like these, whose opportunities to pursue a prosperous middle-class life-style appear to be decreasing in Malawi, but impoverished urban and peri-urban dwellers in places like Chinsapo township.

Gama experienced the second birth in 1993 but accepted his pastor’s calling only in 2000. In this respect, he was unlike Kamera, who started to harbour ambitions to lead a congregation at a very early stage of his life as a born-again. Gama enjoyed the modest benefits of an employed person, achieving the status of an elite night-watchman in 1996 when he was recruited by a British corporate executive to guard his residence in one of Lilongwe’s most exclusive neighbourhoods. Although Gama’s devotion to Pentecostalism was strong from the start, Bible study and proselytising filling his time at both work and home, this relative material security may have contributed to his reluctance to become a full-time pastor.

Another factor has been his membership of a small Malawian church, the New Jerusalem Pentecostal Church. After almost a year’s stay in Chinsapo township, Gama was introduced to Pentecostalism through a non-denominational fellowship, and his membership in the church grew out of friendship between four families in the township. This church attempted to maintain itself by entirely Malawian support, with considerable autonomy delegated to its branches, most of which were in the city of Lilongwe. While its members were free to attend the meetings of foreign crusaders, its founder often warned them to be wary of foreigners who might try to woo them with dubious promises. The founder’s standard example was the Catholic Church, which, he said, had a contingent that posed as born-again Christians in order to infiltrate Pentecostal churches and sow confusion in them. The founder’s aversion to foreigners may have derived from his personal experiences, but it also influenced Gama to deny any particular need to consider contacts to foreign missionaries as indispensable to church growth.

Gama’s profession as a watchman was another source of his scepticism about foreigners. After making his living as a smallholder in his village in Lilongwe district and his wife’s in Dedza district, followed by a short period as a tenant on a tobacco estate in Kasungu district, all
in Malawi’s Central Region, Gama found employment in the city as a watchman. By the time he was employed by Graham Putnam, the British executive, Gama had worked as a watchman for two other expatriate employers. From 1996 until 2000, on six days a week, Gama walked or cycled the nine kilometres between his house in Chinsapo and Putnam’s residence. Gama’s scepticism about expatriates, whether missionaries or not, did not focus on discrepancies in wealth. As a night watchman, he had ample opportunity to observe the life-style of wealthy expatriates. He found it particularly disturbing that Putnam had told him that he was a born-again Christian, and yet his life-style had obvious deficiencies. Putnam sometimes arrived home late at night, his unsteady steps betraying drunkenness. His expatriate peers who frequented the Lilongwe Golf Club occasionally attended noisy parties at Putnam’s residence. By contrast, his private bar was carefully hidden in a cupboard when friends from a Pentecostal church in Lilongwe paid him visits.

On the basis of his observations, Gama was able to draw certain conclusions. People like Putnam, he said, attended church services as if they were social events, entertainment on otherwise dull Sundays. Such people lacked seriousness in their faith. They were not seeking the salvation (*chipulumutso*) that true born-again Christians desired. Gama did not doubt the true source of Putnam’s success and prosperity. It was Gama’s prayers that prevented Putnam’s worldly behaviour from damaging his happiness. Gama was assisted by two other employees at Putnam’s residence, the cook and the gardener, both of whom were also born-again Christians belonging to Pentecostal churches. The three men sometimes prayed together, asking for God’s forgiveness when Putnam misbehaved and seeking blessings for the family’s continued happiness. Putnam’s prosperity, and the three men’s own employment at his residence, provided tangible evidence for the power of prayer.

Unlike Kamera, therefore, Gama experienced his spiritual growth in a setting where, for both material and spiritual reasons, external contacts were not valued uncritically. Whereas Kamera grew spiritually in a church where white American missionaries personified power and assistance, Gama has lived his Pentecostalism in churches that are ostensibly independent of foreign missionaries. While Kamera’s perspective on whites in Malawi’s economy has been confined to observing their affluence from a distance, Gama has had the opportunity to confirm through experience that not all whites deserve admiration for their wealth. Their contrasting involvements in Pentecostal independency also lay bare the contrasting ways in which Pentecostals can assert their membership in a global movement.
Although Gama did not harbour plans to become a pastor, his eagerness to discuss aspects of his faith soon earned him a reputation as a ‘teacher’ (mpunzitsi) and an ‘instructor’ (mlangizzi). His network of friends in the city included born-again Christians from various Pentecostal churches who often found his interpretations—of dreams, events, passages in the Bible—both entertaining and instructive. The pastor of his branch in the New Jerusalem Pentecostal Church was not, however, entirely comfortable with this articulate zealot in his flock. When disputes over interpretations arose between him and Gama, the latter could not always contain himself, and would refuse to accept the pastor’s views. Gama, telling his closest friends that he was not a member in the church in order to argue with people, began to attend fellowships and prayers in the houses of various township dwellers. It was during one of these fellowships that he met Daniel Kamwendo, the pastor of the Living Waters Church in Chinsapo.

When Kamwendo was first introduced to Gama in early 1998, he was himself new in the township, fresh from his training as a pastor in Blantyre.\textsuperscript{9} Impressed by Gama’s commitment to his faith, Kamwendo soon made him a home cell leader in the township.\textsuperscript{10} Another important influence was Blessings Chapo, the highest church leader in Lilongwe, who was clearly enhancing his prominence through such committed Christians as Gama and Kamwendo, soon becoming the second to the founder of the Living Waters Church, Apostle Ndovi. Gama felt mounting pressure to accept his calling when Kamwendo, Chapo and a prominent female member in the church had all repeatedly dreamed of him as a pastor. No one doubted the divine content of these dreams. In the meantime, Putnam announced his return to Britain and made Gama uncertain about his employment as a watchman. Despite his misgivings about Putnam’s spiritual outlook, Gama asked him to pay his fee at the Bible school as a farewell gift. Putnam’s acceptance of the request sealed Gama’s decision to become a pastor. His move to the Bible school coincided with Chapo’s rise in prominence—Chapo received the title Prophet and established his Prophetic Office at the headquarters of the church in Blantyre.

In February 2000, Gama travelled, for the first time in his life, to Blantyre and began his studies at the Wings of Eagle Bible School. He graduated in September the same year, prepared for his duties also by the ‘practicals’ he performed during his vacation, involving door-to-door proselytising in the townships of Blantyre. The stay at the Bible school deepened not only his faith but also his sense of belonging to the Living Waters Church. While the various modules in his course
nourished his quest for understanding more about born-again Christianity, important also were his observations on the transnational reach of the church. The Bible school had students—men and women—from abroad, particularly Zimbabwe and South Africa, and during the stay of Gama’s cohort, Apostle Ndovi was reported to have visited his well-wishers in Sweden and Egypt. The students were also flattered by the fact that Ndovi found time to teach them a module called Miracle Ministry. His inspiring and charismatic teaching urged them to actively seek miracles by believing in God’s omnipotence instead of passively waiting for things to happen. Ndovi, always in a smart suit and elaborate coiffure, often used himself as a proof for the reality of miracles.

Armed with new insights into born-again Christianity and with contacts to his fellow students and church leaders, Gama returned to Chinsapo township as an assistant pastor. Kamwendo had been transferred to lead a rural congregation in Southern Malawi, and Gama began the obligatory one-year stint as an assistant pastor, the congregation now meeting as one group for Sunday services in Chinsapo. The Living Waters Church pays a salary to those pastors and assistant pastors whose congregations are too poor to guarantee a sufficient income. In 2001, Gama received the monthly salary of K4,000 (US$66), which compared favourably with the K2,500 (US$38) which was his end salary as Putnam’s watchman. In addition to the regular church salary, he received gifts and variable sums of money from his congregation in recognition of his work as their leader in spiritual matters. The salary and these tokens of gratitude—together with the small-scale business in scones, tomatoes, onions and cooking oil which Gama’s wife pursued at their house—provided the family with an income that could be as much as K8,000 (US$122) per month—more than the average salary of secondary school teachers in government schools. Upon his return to Chinsapo, Gama had also moved into the house previously occupied by Kamwendo. Although this iron-roofed and spacious building was the best he had ever had, he expected to move soon into a house with electricity.

Discrepancies in church members’ wealth—and in their access to external contacts—are, however, obvious to outsiders, if not to the less privileged in the church. The Sunday services of the Living Waters Church in Lilongwe’s town hall are by no means gatherings of well-dressed and affluent worshippers only: barefooted women and men in rags mix with people wearing expensive suits and dresses. The emphasis on prosperity among the leaders of the Living Waters Church is, however, unmistakable. Already as a leader of the church in Lilongwe, Prophet Chapo, for example, looked like Apostle Ndovi with a mobile
telephone in one hand and the Bible in another, an immaculate designer suit and chic hairstyle finding their poorer replicas in the appearances of many subordinate pastors. After establishing his office at the headquarters in Blantyre, Prophet Chapo became the proud owner of a Toyota Camry, a type of vehicle associated with Principal Secretaries in the Malawi government.

When asked to comment on such examples of worldly comforts, Gama readily defends his superiors in the church by equating prosperity with spiritual growth. ‘God gives differently’ (Mulungu amapatsa mosiyana), he often explains, adding that what Ndovi and Chapo have achieved is a result of their belief in giving rather than receiving. Their own initial poverty and self-sacrifice, often recounted during church services, serves as evidence for divine guidance, while biblical passages, such as Proverbs 11:24, expound the apparent paradox of enrichment through generosity. Taking his own life as an example, Gama is also able to find evidence for his spiritual growth in the improvements in his material conditions. When I first met him in 1996, he is pleased to remind me, he lived in a small grass-thatched house where guests had to be seated on a mat because he did not possess chairs. Now, after accepting his calling as a pastor, he lives in an iron-roofed and fully furnished house, confident that a house with electricity will soon become affordable to him.

While the fortunes of Kamera and Gama have been clearly different, the ways in which they have pursued their Pentecostal religiosity have had much in common. Far from being a means to carve out a distinct religious community, Christian independency has provided a position, a standpoint, to claim membership in the global community of Pentecostalism. The two cases reveal similar aspirations underlying the disparate fortunes. Kamera was pushed into independency by a conflict in an established mission church, only to struggle to keep his congregation linked to networks that offer spiritual inspiration and material assistance. For Gama, on the other hand, external networks have never been a major preoccupation in his religious life. His experiences in both the church and formal employment have made him sceptical about uncritical desire for external contacts, the top leadership of the Living Waters Church radiating, in his view, an indisputable combination of prosperity and security. Herein lies the clue for understanding both cases of Christian independency—both men aspire to become ‘consecrated to a higher power’ (Marshall-Fratani 1998: 286), to become linked up with persons and relations that truly serve as conduits between them and the Holy Spirit. Pentecostal extravagances are, therefore, less
about transnationalism and globalism than about being subjected to these conduits that enable one to combat the Satanic machinations in this world. Pentecostal extraversions are forms of subjection in which inferiority plays no role. ‘Men of God’, those who have been specially anointed, embody the promise of a radically equal relationship, an unbounded union with the Holy Spirit. Anointment, however, is an issue to be contested, sometimes to the point of declaring Christian independency. Yet even the most scandalous exposé of the Devil’s presence in a church cannot annihilate the imperative of reaching out for external contacts. Pentecostals, independent or not, can pursue salvation only through relationships.

Conclusion

The apparent marginalisation of sub-Saharan Africa in world diplomacy and trade seems to be countered by such religious movements as Pentecostalism. Their adherents have a whole range of religious media products at their disposal to imagine their belonging to a global community, and the visits by foreign evangelists and other religious dignitaries seem to bring the whole world within reach. Scholars, on the other hand, have found reason to discuss wider issues of transnationalism, globalisation and localisation in their work on Pentecostalism. While such issues are undoubtedly pertinent, this article has stressed the need to focus on popular idioms and concerns in Pentecostals’ desire for external connections. Those idioms have been thrown into relief by a further clarification in the focus of the article. Independency, despite cogent reasons for dismissing it as an analytical notion in the study of Christianity in Africa, has provided a perspective on the actual idioms and concerns of impoverished Pentecostals in Malawi. The findings from fieldwork in a township show that half of the Pentecostal churches there regard themselves as ‘independent’. Two contrasting, and yet effectively similar, cases have indicated why ‘independency’ should be appealing among Pentecostals, and how, when the idiom and its associated practices are examined, it continues to link conglomerations to far-flung Pentecostal networks.

The radical promise of equality among Pentecostals is inseparable from the similarly radical critique that their faith entails. Poverty makes it unusually difficult for Pentecostals in Chinsapo township to forget that their pursuit of salvation takes place amid this-worldly inequalities and afflictions. The declarations of Christian independency in such circumstances are often prompted by the need to create some distance from
those who in the guise of pastors and missionaries promote the Devil’s agenda in the church. After a fresh start as an independent Pentecostal church, its leaders and laymen alike feel more entitled to claim membership in the global community of believers. Among Pentecostals in Chinsapo township, the Devil’s machinations are often revealed in the exclusive use of material wealth, bringing this-worldly inequality to the realm of the righteous. The idiom of Christian independency thus not only expresses critique but also claims to a global membership.

This article has drawn upon Bayart’s work (1993; 2000) on ‘extraversion’ as an intellectual tool to think beyond the appearances of Africa’s disconnection and marginalisation. If external links have long been resources for the internal dynamics of African polities, ‘extraversion’ refers to processes in a wide range of domains. It is the substantial discrepancies between these domains that have led, in this article, to revise Bayart’s insights. In contemporary Africa, little justice is done to the concerns of Pentecostals if their strategies of extraversion are conflated with those of state officials. Even if in some cases one is the same as the other, the religious and official domains of the person’s life are not, and the attendant popular critique of conduct in the two domains is likewise different. The evidence in this article supports a focus on the religious forms of extraversion, of which Chinsapo Pentecostals’ insistence on radical equality in a global community may be only one variation, to be complemented by studies on Pentecostalism and other religious movements in other settings. Another way of expounding the specificity of Pentecostal extravagations is by recognising their particular mode of subjection. Here persons seek to associate themselves with the anointed ones in the hope of achieving radical togetherness in the Holy Spirit. Their desire for being subjected contrasts with the strategic inferiority of trickster-politicians who seek to turn relations of dependence and inequality into resources. At any rate, Christian independency among Chinsapo’s Pentecostals demonstrates African efforts at dismantling patterns of dependence and inferiority.

NOTES

1. Although Malawi never followed a socialist path of development, Kamuzu Banda’s autocratic regime imposed restrictions on smallholder agriculture in favour of an estate sector which was controlled by a small elite (see e.g. Mhone 1992). After nearly three decades of one-party rule, the United Democratic Front, with Bakili Muluzi at the helm, took over power in the 1994 multiparty elections and embarked on an unmistakably neo-liberal path of reform. The new government encouraged private entrepreneurship
and lifted restrictions on the cultivation of tobacco, the main cash crop, while ending subsidies for agricultural inputs. Increasing difficulties in sustaining rural livelihoods without urban incomes have resulted. At the same time, the rate of inflation has reached unprecedented levels: over 100 percent in the mid-1990s, and between 20 and 30 percent ever since (Banda et al. 1998).

2. Every Pentecostal pastor is expected to belong to this association in Chinsapo township. The members have meetings to discuss largely administrative issues pertaining to the welfare of the pastors. It makes contributions when a pastor has a funeral or serious illness at his house.

3. Writing about rural Nsanje in the far south of Malawi, Schoffeleers (2002: 245-246), in an essay originally published in 1985, also noted that many Christians in the so-called new churches had joined them after a period of membership in older mission churches.

4. Part-time pastors consider themselves first and foremost as pastors, and various commercial activities are merely ways of surviving when poor congregations cannot support them. Many of these pastors in Chinsapo township make their living as traders of second-hand clothes and food items in town, complaining that this leaves little time to attend to pastoral work among the congregation. The situation is better for those pastors who can work at home as, for example, carpenters or tailors and so be available whenever members of their congregation want to consult them.

5. My notion of strategic inferiority is inspired by ‘strategic essentialism’, a notion developed by some feminists and postcolonial critics to refer to a form of identity politics in which the subject is aware of the falsity of his or her proposition but advances it for strategic purposes (see e.g. Spivak 1987).

6. As Martin goes on to acknowledge, hierarchies and bureaucracies do emerge in Pentecostal churches, with leaders who wield considerable power to define what is and is not desirable. However, such bureaucracies cannot arrest the dynamic of the movement as a whole, because the doctrine never completely erases the possibility of critique.

7. With the exception of Apostle Ndovi and Prophet Chapo of the Living Waters Church, all individuals in these cases have pseudonyms.

8. For a more detailed account of the events leading up to Kamera’s excommunication see Englund (2001).

9. Blantyre is Malawi’s commercial centre and has long been considered the country’s primary city. During the colonial period, however, the capital was Zomba, and after becoming the new capital Lilongwe has steadily narrowed the gap between itself and Blantyre in population numbers. The 1998 population census recorded 433,964 persons in Lilongwe city and 478,155 in Blantyre city (Malawi Government 1998: 18-19).

10. Gama consolidated his reputation as a man of God when his prayers appeared to heal the child of his neighbours. This family was Catholic, and they decided to join the Living Waters Church after the child had recovered from illness.

11. According to some observers, the Living Waters Church is at the forefront of the ‘charismatic’ revival of born-again Christianity in Malawi (see Fiedler 1999). These observers find it useful to distinguish ‘charismatic’ churches and movements from the ‘Pentecostal’ ones, ‘charismatics’ being seen as more successful in attracting middle- and upper-class Christians. Although the distinction may make sense theologically—and Apostle Ndovi does frequently use material prosperity as an index of spiritual success—ordinary members may see one continuous field of born-again Christianity. Gama, for example, denies that any change took place in his spirituality when he moved from the New Jerusalem Pentecostal Church to the Living Waters Church. When I confronted him with the apparent theological difference between the two churches, he commented that professors of theology ‘should not fool you’ (asakananamizeni). He continues to attend fellowships in Lilongwe, maintaining friendships with born-again Christians who are members in a whole range of Pentecostal churches.
REFERENCES


Pentecostal Extraversions in Malawi


