

IFRA

Les Cahiers

n° 20

**The Local Roots of the Kenyan
Pentecostal Revival:
Conversion, Healing, Social and Political
Mobility**

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* The author is an anthropologist, based at the Graduate Institute of Development Studies, Geneva. The paper was first published in, A. Corten & A. Mary, (eds.), *Imaginaires politiques et pentecôtisme; Afrique/Amérique latine*. Paris: Karthala.

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“The customary dichotomy of pre-colonial/colonial/post-colonial distorts conceptions of religious change. [...] The point is much more that through all these periods African religious movements were flexible and responsive, reflecting a great variety of aspirations and interests, and engaged both in micro and macro politics?” (Ranger, 1986: 49).

The political imagination, which sees in invisible forces one of the causes of the wealth of the powerful and of the misfortune of the needy, has its local roots among the Kikuyu. This origin helps to explain the current conversion to Pentecostalism. It is from this point of view that the success of the Pentecostal movements in Kenya, which claim to manipulate the occult forces to hasten the return of God’s kingdom and heal the faithful is interpreted. It takes into account the conversion to Pentecostalism within the worlds of sorcery and healings that ‘explain’ success and misfortune. This perspective allows us to question the faith of the believers and the meaning they give to their conversion. The millenarianist expectation of the Second Coming of Christ is at the heart of the conversion process and of the interest that sustains Pentecostalism. On the other hand, the political interpretation of the millenarianist expectation is succinctly addressed since it is the subject of another publication (Droz, 1997). It suffices to show that conversion is embedded in the social reproduction of pre-colonial societies. This helps to explain misfortune in the context of occult ‘powers’, and by doing so, promote the well being of the nation.

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Outlining the major traits of the introduction of Christianity in Kenya seems necessary in order to understand the meaning of conversion to Pentecostalism (the Christian ‘re-birth’) and its current political usage. This history is illustrated with the case of Central Kenya and of the Kikuyu people.¹

Pentecostalism and Independence in Kenya

Let us trace the numerous forms that religious movements take today in Kenya. Three main streams of Christians played an important role in the evangelisation of central Kenya: Catholics, Protestants and Anglicans². However, this division needs to be clarified, because the term “Protestant” embraces a great diversity.

Superficial religion

Superficial religion is suspected of being allied to ancient Kikuyu religious practices. This is the image of the Catholics—inspired by puritan Protestants—among rival Christian groups. Catholics are suspected of practising a nominal or sociological Christianity and are somehow scorned by other Christian faiths. Each of these claims to possess the entire purity of faith. In the same vein, members of the East African Revival consider Catholicism as concealing some ‘satanic’ activities. Social aspects of the catechism, like parish activities, teaching and health-care, greatly contributed to the development of Catholicism, and continue to do so today. This would still be so, even if Catholic schools were not reputed to be among the best in the country. Moreover the nationality of Catholic Fathers (French and Italian) allowed them to take an independent stance from the colonial government while imposing upon them an extreme political caution. This particularity of Catholics contrasts strongly with the Anglican and Protestant position tainted by political compromise and often suspected of supporting the Settlers. The almost marginal political position of Catholicism, within a colony of Anglican obedience did not pass un-noticed in the eyes of future converts, because

¹ Kenya is made up of 4 very different regions: Central Kenya of the high plateaux and a part of the Rift Valley, the Coast, where the imprint of Arabs and Muslims contributed to create a Swahili identity, the West and the lake Nyanza entering into the sphere of the Great Lakes and the sparsely populated desert regions of the North and the East. For an African perspective on Christianity, see Gifford, 1998.

² This article neither considers Islam nor the Indian religions, because they are only marginally represented in Central Kenya.

“Christianity that guarantees material and economic benefit is not the Catholicism of Italian missionaries, but the religion of the coloniser. What attracts is the ‘most powerful’ religion, the religion of those who rule, who control the situation and who manifest their superior power” (Neckebrouck, 1978). In view of these observations, the relative success of Catholicism is surprising (it currently covers a third of Christians) and, it seems to properly resist the exodus of the faithful affecting other religious denominations. One must seek an explanation in the careful control and the few scandals affecting the hierarchy—contrary to other streams of Christians. The commitment of Catholic missionaries on the ground, as well as the Papal prestige also helps to explain this achievement. Catholicism can also be described as the religion of ‘the most powerful’, the Pope.

Church of the British Empire, the Church of the Province of Kenya (CPK³) remained the church of the Settlers and was suspected of conniving with earthly power. It is true that the role played by this religion during the Civil War left painful scars behind. This role opened the old wounds on the controversy over clitoridectomy of 1929–30, during which the church maintained a moderate position⁴. Today, it is still associated with a conservative position, even as it distances itself from government positions by adopting—in concert with the Presbyterian Church (PCEA)—a very critical outlook on politics (Benson, 1995). In 1972, the Anglican Church (CPK) counted barely 8% of Christians in the Kenyan assembly. This figure is only the double of, for example, the Orthodox African church affiliated to the Greek Orthodox Church since 1946.

Protestant churches form a small third of Christians in central Kenya. The most important among these is the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) an offshoot of the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM). Scottish Protestants of the CSM thus represent the Presbyterian component (PCEA), while the many Pentecostal churches form another very active component. In contrast to Anglicans, these two streams of Protestants consider alcohol and tobacco consumption as a sin. Both restrictions confirm the rigidity of the doctrine advocated by the faith of these churches and offers some elements of explanation for the so-called laxity of Catholics.

³ Which became the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK)

⁴ The attempt to forbid clitoridectomy among the Kikuyu came up against a very strong resistance which incited the Kikuyu people to found a movement of independent schools and numerous Churches. See Murray, 1974; Neckebrouck, 1978; Sandgren, 1989; Strayer, 1978.

Independent churches

Independent churches arise from Anglicans, and especially Protestant churches⁵. As in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, the missionary churches had to face up to the breakaway process, which led to the establishment of the Independent African churches. These were formed following the controversy on clitoridectomy and on the quality of education (1929–1938). In central Kenya, these churches have the same number of affiliates as the Protestants who remained in the bosom of the missionaries. The multifaceted movement towards religious independence—equally stimulated by colonial racism as by political activism—occurred simultaneously with the East African Revival (1936–38), originating in Rwanda⁶. It is therefore relevant to consider this correlation as a reaction of the missionary churches to the exodus of the faithful towards the Independent churches:

“movements of independence almost swept the mission churches away. There was a rallying by African mission Christians. In many places movements of revival from within the mission churches, led by African Christians and expressive of the dynamic values of popular Christianity countered independence. Often these mission revivals were as enthusiastic as any prophetic movements, sweeping across wide areas like wild-fire and giving the colonial authorities the same anxieties as the Zionist and Apostolic movements?” (Ranger, 1986: 35).

This is exactly what happened in central Kenya where the East African Revival opposed a powerful alternative to religious Independence. Revivalism and Independence are thus the two faces of one coin, which offers new perspectives of therapeutic conversion, and more generally, of social mobility aiming at one’s self-realisation (Droz, 1999; Dozon, 1995).

Indeed, the links that unite these two religious streams do not stop at the driving motivation towards conversion, as we will see. They are equally found in numerous points of doctrine, in the emphasis placed on an emotional expression of faith, as well as at the institutional level. Even if certain ‘pagan’ aspects appear to characterise independent churches, the organisation of these churches often respond to the same structures: for example, parochial independence or active participation of the believers in religious services.⁷

⁵ I speak here of the religious Independent movements coming from Christianity. See Neckebrouck, 1978: 353–359; Neckebrouck, 1983: 92–96; Barrett *et al*, 1989.

⁶ It concerns a Protestant revival movement which developed very rapidly in neighbouring countries: Mambo, 1973; Neckebrouck, 1983 ; Welbourn, 1961.

⁷ Personal communication; Hervé Maupeu, 24 December 1999.

Moreover, historically, these streams developed in tandem until Independence. Thus, in the 1920s and 1930s, Pentecostalism was confined to restricted circles, often made up of Settlers, because this expression of Pentecostalism came from the North-American ‘White’ fundamentalist environment, which was distinct from the ‘Black’ American Pentecostalism. At the arrival of the East African Revival (EAR), the Pentecostal movement takes off because,

“...in putting emphasis on the experience of conversion rather than on religious instruction, [the East African Revival] makes itself more accessible to the illiterate and the poorly educated. Even more, its hymns (and notably the tukutenedereza song that gave the East African Revival its local name) gather tremendous success and are often integrated in the ceremonies of other churches. The third factor of its success depends on the fact that the EAR accords the layman an authoritative position (especially women) who are freely elected to manage the group. At first sight, this stream has developed affinities with the Pentecostals, whose founders are largely influenced by the Oxford movement and above all by Keswick, who constitutes one of the doctrinal foundations of Pentecostalism.” (Maupeu, 1998b).

One can distinguish a second period in the development of Pentecostalism in Kenya that began in the 1960s. This was the time when the Independent churches seemed to acquire a significant growth consecutive to the end of the Mau Mau civil war. This phase is characterised by the arrival of foreign preachers, generally originating from the American continent, who find fertile ground in Kenya, as the development of the Assemblies of God shows. In Nairobi, the number of Pentecostal churches doubled between 1972 and 1986, following the example of mainly Pentecostal missionaries present in Kenya. Thus, *“the American pastors are generally posted to the Kenyan branches of western religious organisations. They also spread their ideology by canvassing the clergy of small churches (not necessarily Pentecostal) and by sponsoring their training to the general areas of Swaggart in Springfield, to the Rhema Bible College of Oklahoma or any other Pentecostal university. They have thus converted a number of independent churches to the “born-again” theology but these churches lack supervision and teaching support”* (Maupeu, 1998b).

In Kenya, a connection is seen today between Pentecostalism and evangelical Protestants, as well as a certain fluidity between Independent churches and Pentecostals. Believers or churches can easily cross from one stream to the other. This connection and the somehow chaotic situation appears during the numerous crusades (Osborne, Bonnke, Cho, Paul, Cerullo, etc) which are held in Kenya and whose attendance is not restricted to Pentecostals. Indeed, members of various religious affiliations meet there. Thus, *“Kenyan Pentecostalism appears these days as an amorphous group with relatively vague outlines. On*

the other hand, Pentecostalism in terms of organisation and institution seems relatively weak. It advocates the idea of the fellowship of believers; it exists at the level of the parish but beyond that, it is inconsistent, which invalidates the possibility of mobilising its populations”(Maupeu, 1998b). According to the rare statistics available, this amorphous group accounted for close to 10% of the Kenyan population and several 100s of churches.⁸

The attempt to classify the different religious streams (Catholic, Evangelical, Anglican, Independent or Pentecostal) does not account for Kenyan religious practices, since a good number among them correspond to a form of ecumenism, or even syncretism. The same case applies in the ‘religious gleaning’ of certain believers who do not hesitate to ‘try’ different religious affiliations before choosing one for a period of time. As a result, some families have members with three or four different religious affiliations, without any apparent problem of unfriendliness; as it is with certain conversions where, the change of religious affiliation seems to respond to healing reasons more than to a call to the ‘true’ faith.

The roots of religious conversion

In order to understand the passion for Pentecostalism, two elements should be underlined. First, religious conversion considered as subscribing to the entire Christian doctrine or as a work of missionary acculturation does not correspond historically to the process of the introduction of the Christian faith in Kenya. It matches even less with the experience of the Pentecostal Revival. Indeed, Christianity found itself placed in rivalry with Islam and the prophetic movements, which cropped up in the XIX century⁹. Thus, the outcasts of the refugees of the Great Famine formed the majority of the first converts. The conversions at the beginning of the century often followed the rhythm of atmospheric rainfall: they grow after the rains and then dry up in periods of drought or vice-versa. Indeed, membership or conversion to Christianity depended then on the anti-witchcraft powers or on the ‘rainmaker’ skills of the evangelisers (Strayer, 1978). This observation still applies in the conversion to Pentecostalism that promises mountains and marvels, health and wealth, and

⁸ One has to remember that these assessments are uncertain and the figures are no more than an order of size. Indeed, the last statistical survey held in Kenya dates back to 1972, while the most recent survey (1986) limits itself to Nairobi. The results of the 1999 census are needed to get a correct idea of the number of Pentecostals.

⁹ For some examples of Kenyan prophetic movements, refer to Ambler, 1995; Lonsdale, 1995.

especially, protection from Satan and his acolytes. This protection endows the faithful with an anti-sorcerer shield.

The second element is closely linked to the preceding one, for it concerns the healing aspects of conversion among the Kikuyu. Religious conversion can be assimilated to an extreme case of traditional ‘healing conversion’—in reality a “*change of ritual affiliation*”¹⁰—supposed to cure persistent ills. The ‘religious’ conversion, or at least the pragmatic change of rituals, sacrifices and ceremonies, was thus not unknown in the Kikuyu society, since it was used to fight against ill-fated events. Therefore, to cure a sequence of misfortunes, a family could carry out a symbolic migration, instead of a real relocation, which formed the most common procedure. Symbolic migration was carried out as a ritual to change of guild¹¹ where the entire family presented itself prepared for a long journey at the spot where the ceremony would take place; then the family returned to its home, with its weapons and personal belongings (Neckebrouck, 1978).

In addition to the change of guild, conversion could also take the form of an ethnic shifting or of a change in religious practice. This was the case when a family moved to the Maasai territory. The Kikuyu were often integrated within a section of the Maasai; or when the Kikuyu adopted the Ndorobo way of life on the pioneer frontier (Routledge & Routledge, 1910; Droz, 1999). The healing use of conversion corresponds well to a spatial migration¹², since it procures the same beneficial effect: “[...] *the change of residence is conceived here as a process meant to bring remedies for ills that afflict humanity [...]. This behaviour implies a certain glorification of the healing properties of the new location, of the previously uninhabited place, of an environment non-contaminated by illness and wounds contracted elsewhere. We are in the presence of the mysticism of migration*” (Neckebrouck, 1978). Thus, the geographical setting constituted by the mission stations becomes a new and pure symbolic place. In this manner, the Kikuyu perceived religious conversion in the perspective of changes in ritual affiliation practices—or change of guild—which existed earlier.

¹⁰ Valeer Neckebrouck points out that strictly speaking, it does not concern a religious conversion and that “the Kikuyu speak of ‘a change of ceremonies and sacrifices’ (*kirira ne magongona*), which does not have an equivalent in our ‘religion’” (letter of the 12th July 1996). However, the principle of modification of religious practice, if it does not imply a ‘true’ conversion, was effectively present among the precolonial social practices.

¹¹ The Kikuyu society was divided in two halves often called guilds or religious affiliations (Droz, 1999 : 143–144).

¹² This spatial move is an essential part of several rituals (see van Genneep, 1909).

This association between the symbolic move and the conversion to Christianity is important in order to understand the meaning of conversion to the new religious movements developing today. Indeed, in the wake of this first transformation of ritual conversion—the change of guild or ethnic group—the therapeutic process transformed into a change of religious affiliation within Christianity. Thus, the passage from one Christian church to the other was supposed to imply beneficial gain for the family that abandoned its former unhappy state for a bright future reserved for the ‘true’ believers in the Advent of the Saviour (Neckebrouck, 1978). One can consider that the brutal rupture of social relations implied in the first conversion—with the reclusion in the missionary stations separated from the Kikuyu society—repeated itself in the case of Pentecostal movements, among those touched by the hand of God. Indeed, this intimate knowledge of God that lies in the filling with the Holy Spirit is held as the ‘true’ conversion, supposed to remedy the transgressions of the so-called first conversion. This can sometimes lead to the rejection of certain members of one’s own family, who are suddenly considered ‘pagans’ by the true converts.

However, one must not consider this pragmatic use of religion in a purely economic or healing perspective, because it comes from the ‘traditional’ conception of religion embedded in social practices¹³. This conception, as other ritual practices, measures up to its concrete daily efficiency¹⁴. Thus when Kikuyu religion no longer responds to the expectations of the faithful, when it shows its weakness in face of colonial strength, the rate of conversions increases, in order to match the Whites on equal terms.¹⁵

The symbolic effectiveness of conversion is akin to a context where the question of the ‘reality’ of conversion, of which the Pentecostal movements are fond, has no meaning. Indeed, questions on the purity—or on the ‘truthfulness’—of faith will only appear in a Christian world where transcendence and individual choice have meaning. Religious practices have for a long time been embedded—in the sense that Karl Polanyi gives to that

¹³ Of course, such traditions do not remain static through time. Indeed, the ‘traditional’ religion is a construction—an invention, according to Thomas Ranger—created by anthropologists, in particular Louis Leakey (Leakey, 1977), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenyatta, 1960) and Valer Neckebrouck (Neckebrouck, 1978 ; Neckebrouck, 1983). See Droz, 1999; Droz, 1998 for a critical perspective on the creation of the so-called Kikuyu ‘traditional’ society.

¹⁴ This is pointed out by Laurent for the Assemblies of God in Burkina Faso (Laurent, 1998).

¹⁵ See the recurring theme in autobiographies or Kenyan novels, of fighting with the pen and not the sword, and also Kershaw, 1997. And, in another context, see also the analysis by Dozon (1995) on Prophet Harris of Côte d’Ivoire.

expression—in social practices. And to consider them separately, speaking of faith as ‘true’ conversion is to artificially create a group of peculiar practices isolated from the other social practices. In other words, the world of religious practices had been deeply modified and rendered relatively independent from other social practices during half a century of colonisation. Nevertheless, it remains heavily influenced by representations that do not belong to the religious domain, in the Christian sense of the word.

Hence, some aspects of Kikuyu religion are found in the doctrine of majority of the Independent churches, such as the *African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa* (AIPCA) or the various *akárinú*¹⁶ religious movements. The insistence on dreams, the origin of prophecies and of messages from God is one example, the notion of *thabu* (ritual stain) that explains the isolation in which certain *akárinú* persist in, is another, as is the rejection of all things European. Thus, if the Pentecostal movement today is vivacious in central Kenya, it is due to the link that it maintains with pre-colonial religious practices. This link intensifies the spread of Pentecostalism among Christians and partly accounts for its success in Kenya.

The example of conversion (being filled with the Holy Spirit), that is at the heart of the Pentecostal doctrine, illustrates the traditional roots of this process. The confession of sins is a very common element in traditional culture. In particular the traditional equivalent of conversion, *guciaruo úkabi* entails as a constituent element a ‘confession’, a rite of purification, of re-making of the impure ‘old person’, *gotabekia*. But beyond these elements purely concerning confession, we begin to perceive that from the study of tradition emerges a sequence of events (A) [*Kwerira, Gotabekia, Kubonoka*] corresponding point by point to the chain of experiences constituting evangelistic and Pentecostal conversion (B) [Repentance, Confession, Salvation] (Neckebrouck, 1987). As for the first conversions to Christianity associated with social mobility and personal purification, the experience of the ‘true’ faith fits into the same pattern. It simultaneously concerns a mode of purification (miraculous healing) as well as a claim to social mobility (material reward).

However, to overestimate the traditional aspects of Pentecostalism would be to ignore the essentially Christian properties of the movement, as in the Independent churches. When he presents the founder of a Pentecostal movement, Neckebrouck (1978) states:

¹⁶ For the former, refer to the extensive study of Neckebrouck, 1978; and for the latter and their various churches: Githicya, 1999; Morovich, 1997.

“It is his firm conviction that Jesus will come back to the world, that this return is imminent and that it will be as visible and as real as His death was. He will be accompanied by thousands of His Saints, and He will come to inaugurate a kingdom of peace and abundance that will last a thousand years, during which the devil will find himself shackled and prevented from accomplishing his harmful work. As according to scriptural testimony, the advent of the reign of 1000 years will be preceded by great tribulations. At the end of the reign, God will judge the living and the dead according to their works. Those who are saved will go to heaven, while the condemned will be pushed into hell. The good of some and the evil of the others will be equally permanent. Then, this current world, which has been polluted by sin, will be over for good and God will create ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ where His justice will reign forever”(p.54).

We could search in vain for aspects of pre-colonial Kikuyu religion in this millenarianist picture. It is the insistence on millenarianism that clearly distinguishes East African Pentecostalism from the other Christian movements of Eastern Africa. Thus, ‘traditional’ social practices and puritan Christian faith are interwoven. This particularity which characterises the Pentecostal movement as well as the Independent churches, does not mean that they will become pagan¹⁷. Pentecostal as well as Independent churches declare a literal commitment to the Bible, and read it—more specifically in the independent churches—searching for links to Kikuyu practices. This original claim, which could associate the Kikuyu with one of the lost tribes of Israel (Kenyatta, 1960; Neckebrouck, 1983) encouraged the spread of these religious movements as early as the 1930s, when the other mainstream Christians actively participated in the colonial venture. Thus, missionaries rejected pre-colonial religious practices and sought to impose a Victorian morality which legitimised the colonial hierarchy (Callaway, 1993). Independent churches were then able to claim a pure Christianity, coming directly from the ‘biblical times’, taking into account the egalitarian aspiration contained in biblical texts to contest the Colour Bar. Besides, it is this original claim, which came from a mythical tradition to biblical Christianity that justified the dissent from political and religious domination. In the eyes of the faithful, the missionaries, the Settlers and the administrative staff were paradoxically considered as miscreants who do not respect biblical teachings ... contrary to the ‘pure’ Kikuyu.

¹⁷ See on this theme the excellent work of Meyer (1999).

Millenarianism and ostentatious wealth

The impression—common in Kenya today and which goes across the Pentecostal movements—of living in economic and political purgatory, while waiting for the Last Judgement Day gives credibility to the millenarianist perspective propagated by numerous preachers. It suffices here to cite one of our informants who clearly shows the tribulations that the Kikuyu migrant of Laikipia plateau experience today:

“Today, you will see even a man of 40 years marrying a child in school and they call them ndogo ndogo (small small). You will also see a man of 19 years marrying a woman of his mother’s age. Also women of today are marrying younger men as they have enough money. But this is not their wish—it is the world ending and money has also spoilt them.”

If mature men marry children, while considering them as such, if the young men marry women of the same age-group as their mothers, which is a form of incest, it is a sign that the world is close to its end. The return of Christ is then felt as imminent and its actions are wished for in all its fullness: punishment of Satan’s henchmen and tangible reward for the faithful (Droz, 1997; Droz, 1999). This is precisely what Neckebrouck affirms when he describes the expectation of the millennium by the Pentecostal Kikuyu:

“The millennium is eschatological, situated in the future. It is given rise to by God and centred on his Messiah, Jesus Christ. But at the same time, contrary to classical eschatology, his accession inaugurates a terrestrial reign of the Messiah where those who would have believed will be blessed, happy and prosperous. The immediate gratifications that the Pentecostal Kikuyu expect from the Spirit are also constitutive elements of a postponed millennium?” (Neckebrouck, 1983: 342).

These millenarianist tendencies are perhaps not expressly present in the ancient Kikuyu religious practices¹⁸. Nonetheless, from the beginning of the evangelisation of Kenya, they animated the protestant missionaries and have strongly tainted the introduction of Christianity among the Kikuyu. *“Faith Missions such as the Africa Inland Mission had a feeling that ‘the time was short’ before the coming of the Lord, and God’s agents should not heavily involve themselves in education.”* (Anderson, 1997). Associated to the arrival of the East African Revival, these sentiments informed the religious practices throughout evangelisation, more

¹⁸ Neckebrouck asserts: “The characterised millenarianist tendencies seem to have been absent from the traditional Kikuyu culture” (1983: 343).

specifically during the period of the Civil War, while the ‘revival’ preachers reverted to the old Mau Mau to make of them fervent propagators of the Christian millenarianism (Maloba, 1993).

Today, in addition to Pentecostal religious services, preachers also win converts in markets or in municipal parks, calling out in loud voices, or sometimes with loudspeakers. They announce either the end of the world, or the imminence of the reign of God or of the *millennium*, and encourage the gathering to publicly give testimony in order to be saved and receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Following the tradition of the ancient Kikuyu prophets, armed with passages from the Bible, some predict future events or ‘explain’, extraordinary accidents, wars, crimes, or natural catastrophes. The humble preachers are sometimes transformed into founders of new religious movements and gather tens or hundreds of believers, the core of new Churches¹⁹.

The following description presents the development, or the surge at the national level, of a religious movement with Pentecostal tendencies. Notice that nothing is guaranteed to succeed, since, in all likelihood, the main protagonists of these events ended up under lock and key, and the movement vanished into thin air.

“Woman comes back to life from the dead”, announces the Daily Nation three days before Christmas 1993²⁰. She is supposed to have survived three days at the City Mortuary, where she was taken after a civil servant issued a death certificate. 200 believers of the *Robo* church (Pentecostal), a split from the Legio Maria, gathered at the mortuary where the founder of this religious movement was finally allowed to enter, to pray and call the young woman by name. To the general surprise, a weak voice answered from one of the cold rooms and the woman came out, very weak, but truly alive. In the days that followed, the police expressed doubts on the legality of the death certificate, and then issued an arrest warrant against the leader of the small church. He hid for a few days, then finally gave himself up to the police, after speaking to the editor of the newspaper, to give his own version of the event. He claimed to be “as old as Jesus”, to be able to “telephone” God and to have the gift of speaking in tongues (English, French, Latin and “many other languages”) when inspired. He will be

¹⁹ The analysis of Neckebrouck on the subject of the Apostolic Faith of Africa (AFA) gives some examples of these preachers, such as the founder of the movement or different members expelled or who seceded. In addition, he underlines the numerous similarities between the religious splits and the constitution of the new lineage (Neckebrouck, 1983 : 368–372).

²⁰ See this daily between 22/12/93 and 4/1/94.

accused of theft, of heading an illegal association (the church was not officially registered) and of causing a breach of peace. Indeed, the daily newspapers had devoted their headlines to this new resurrection all through the Christmas period. The small church had suddenly acquired a national audience and its leaders became martyrs for the faithful, while considered by earthly powers as common crooks. With this turn of events, the ex-dead woman reaffirmed her faith in the leader of the religious movement, considering him as Jesus Christ, and certified that she had truly died ...

Beyond its incredible aspect, this example refers to the miraculous healings that the Pentecostal preachers perform as a sign of the power that God has granted them. The blind see, the lame walk and the dead are resurrected: the *millennium* thus seems to be near. Indeed, according to the scriptures, it will be preceded by miracles similar to those of Christ and these wonders will indicate the Second Coming. The credibility given by the daily newspapers to this matter—divided between incredulousness and the temptation to believe it—clearly show the extent of the expectation of the millennium that characterises these new religious movements. This expectation can moreover take violent forms when deception follows hope of miracles. Such was the case of Jackson Makau, who having attended a week of miraculous healings, had to return home still an invalid. The police then had to intervene to prevent him from attacking the other attendees at the week of prayer, which was to culminate in miraculous healings.²¹

This atmosphere of exalted expectation of the Second Coming also expresses itself in the numerous Pentecostal publications sold in the streets, around the many Pentecostal churches with evocative names: *Maximum Miracle Centre*, *Universal Church of the Kingdom of God*, *Jesus is alive Ministries*, *Jesus exploits Ministry*, *Glory of Christ Ministry*, etc. These publications announce coming 'crusades' and spread rumours, which are also signs of the end of time—The Antichrist lives among us and tempts the faithful using false prophets; the computer 'Y2K' bug shows that the strength of God remains superior to the technical miracles of Man; the barred codes spread the figure of the Beast, because if one looks at it closely and proceeds with certain numerological calculations, one obtains the famous 666; dead children are revived after having been touched by the hand of the valorous preachers; the 1998 attack of the American Embassy in Nairobi is an attempt by Satan's henchmen to weaken the soldiers of Christ; the inauguration of a Hindu temple is a sign of the strength of idolatry.

²¹ Nation 25/1/94 p. 5.

In brief, many are the Kenyans who live in a re-enchanting world fascinated by the apocalyptic predictions of the Pentecostal movements. Such rumours are legion and are not confined, purely speaking, to Pentecostals since a wide range of religious movements shares them. It suffices to mention the case of the Mungiki movement in order to be convinced that the healings are not the only explanation of the attraction of new religious movements, be they Pentecostal or Independent. Indeed, the Mungiki movement conceals a Kikuyu political element and explains the constitution of a political counter-power (Maupeu, 1992). Thus, it appears relevant to expose the existing link between political affiliation and the religious streams. In Kenya, President Moi plays with his conversion to Pentecostalism, to ensure the support of the Pentecostal movements and to contest the legitimacy of prelates of other religious denominations (Gifford, 1994). At the same time, political protest expresses itself in the voice of the established churches or by the creation, or reactivation of Independent churches as the Mungiki example shows us (Benson, 1995).

Indeed, if in the 1980s the president took control over the evangelical African Inland Church by ‘purging’ its hierarchy of Kamba elements—potential protestors—and in strengthening Kalenjin prelates, today he seeks the support of Pentecostal churches by encouraging foreign and local preachers. Thus, as a loosely-defined group, the Pentecostal movements encourage their followers to respect secular political power, because this power would have been endorsed by God during the 1992 and 1997 elections won by Daniel arap Moi. Even though “*the Pentecostal churches do not express or express little in the political Kenyan debates. Their inclusion in the public arena is to be found beyond their discourses.*” (Maupeu, 1998b). Indeed, religious services or crusades are opportunities to reaffirm the necessity of obeying political authorities—because their mission is legitimised by divine wishes—or to distinguish religious matters from political ones. If Pentecostalism does not intervene in the public arena, it operates in the imaginary domain of invisible forces that offer wealth to the powerful and abandon the infidel to their lowly estate.

Some preachers, ‘international’ evangelists, such as Reinhard Bonnke, K.A. Paul, Don Double, or T.L. Osborn attract great crowds in the Pentecostal crusades using audio-visuals worthy of the greatest pop-music groups (Gifford, 1987). Some of them are accused of ‘stealing’ believers from small Independent churches or of integrating the hierarchy in order to ‘prove’ the value of their evangelical work to European, South African or North American associations. The founder of a Pentecostal church sharply criticises these preachers.

“[he] points [...] towards the activities of the white missionaries, representative of minuscule Anglo-Saxon Pentecostal groups, perhaps the same as Free Evangelists, who to continue to benefit from financial support from their base in their country of origin, must at the same time prove that their proselytic zeal was not in vain. Now, to pull away a section of an already existing Pentecostal church apparently represents a much faster and simpler way to attain this end than the alternative, consisting in an evangelisation campaign as an aim to win over new converts” (Neckebrouck, 1983).

This frenzied quest for believers reinforces the break-away process intrinsic to Pentecostal and Independent churches. Some of their dignitaries allow themselves to be tempted by the seductive perspective of creating a new church. One is thus no longer an eminent member of a church, but the founder of a new religious movement, and hopes to see his name inscribed in a worthy place in the history of the church. In addition, if this temptation to break away or the hijacking of a movement has a pecuniary dimension, many cross the Rubicon and found new religious movements, which only differ from the original movement on minor points of doctrine. Thus, the possibility of ‘selling’ their faithful for financial assistance for the construction of a new church building, or to add a certain pomp to religious services, increases the break-away process.

The example of these dignitaries, greedy for wealth and personal recognition, furnishes arguments to the interpretation, which sees social mobility as the reason to found a religious movement. Thus, some Kikuyu migrants from the Laikipia plateau are particularly articulate when underlining this aspect.

Most of the people who change from one established church to another established church are people who have been leaders in their former churches. They have ‘eaten’ church money and when questioned, they run away from that church to another. Some also have been caught doing evil things like stealing, prostitution and when caught, they run away to another church.

Others leave one established church to another, hoping that when he/she joins the next one, he/she will be given a post like chairman, secretary, treasurer and will earn money which will be brought by the church members mbecha cia mihothi. This might be due to standing for a post and failing to get it. So they leave that church and join another church, thinking that it is very simple for them to get a post in that church. Others change thinking that they will become a pastor or bishop in that church, or thinking that they might be appointed preacher at that church.

Some people change to new religious movements [or established church] for various reasons. Some change due to dissatisfaction with the churches that they are in (spiritual). Others due to lack of leadership posts in their old churches. Others due to disagreement

with other church members. Others in order to attract aid from western countries. They would like to attract the donor and the aid comes through them. Others due to denial of some important church ceremonies, e.g. baptism of their children. Some are condemned people in their own churches.

In her thesis, Abbot (1974) points out that the followers of Pentecostalism belong to a relatively comfortable class of the community that she describes. Observations in the Laikipia plateau (Droz, 1999) allow us to confirm this trend. The domestic units declaring themselves *saved* show external signs of wealth that make one think that they belong to a relatively comfortable class within this disfavoured community. Even more, the believers of the Pentecostal movements of Nairobi exhibit the same external characteristics²². It seems that Pentecostalism preferably calls up individuals endowed with some financial strength, but without belonging to the generally Anglican or Presbyterian middle or well-off class (Maupeu, 1998b). Nevertheless, the meagre resources of the faithful do not offer them assurances for the future; they do not safeguard their children against the blows of fate, be they political, economical or ecological. Anxiety about the future, linked to the conviction of the Second Coming are common characteristics of the Pentecostal faithful.

The lure of profit, internal conflicts, hierarchical covetousness and embezzlement of funds or of believers are also elements that allow explanation for the frequent religious conversions—or change of affiliation—which occurs among the Kikuyu. However, I would not want to limit these elements to pecuniary aspects, because it seems to also correspond to practices in vogue in the Kenyan administration, which does not limit itself in an undue accumulation of wealth. Indeed in both cases we have an attempt of one's own social accomplishment, certainly dependent on financial means; but which goes beyond this materialistic perspective. It concerns the ultimate aims of any Kikuyu—obtaining the status of *mūramatī*²³.

The followers of Pentecostal movements are not oblivious to the ostentatious display of wealth of their church, which, in their eyes, justifies the affiliation to a faraway foreign church. This attraction to riches inscribes itself

²² It is just a trend. Indeed, the urban Pentecostals seem rather to belong to the lower middle-class, composed mainly of civil servants and poorly paid employees. However, some believers dress in rags, while others appear at religious services covered in sparking jewels.

²³ An accomplished man is a man who, having responded to various social expectations and acquired the respect of his peers, occupies positions of prestige. For a description of the women's expectations and the importance of gender relations in acquiring the status of *mūramatī*, see Droz Yvan, 2000.

directly in “the theology of prosperity” specific to the present North-American Pentecostals (wealth is a sign from God, just as poverty is a sign of sinfulness) or to some Cameroonian, Nigerian and Ghanaian Pentecostal streams (S raphin, 1999). However, in the present case, the relationship between opulence and religious faith is reinforced by the Kikuyu ethos of the accomplished man and its redistributing aspects. Lonsdale (1992) describes it in his discussion of the ethos that presides over the acquisition of riches. Riches reward good men, those who prove their compassion (*tha*) and redistribute their goods to attract numerous dependants. The counter-example is egoistical wealth, which brought accusations of sorcery, because it was immoral and could only come from occult sources. In the case of the Pentecostal churches, the display of wealth seems to root itself in the intimate links that bind material wealth and moral integrity within the Kikuyu ethos²⁴.

For Pentecostals, ‘true’ faith must logically be accompanied by ostentatious luxury—because poverty of true believers is not pleasing to God—as the *m ramati* exposed its opulence as a sign of morality. It would be erroneous to consider the breakaway process—and the motivation of the leaders of the new religious movements—under the sole angle of the lure of profit, because the symbolic connotations of wealth overtake its purely pecuniary aspects and present moral aspects which lead to self-accomplishment.

Finally, the Christian ethic of poverty is opposed to the opulence that suits the accomplished man or the elders of a religious movement. However, it is sometimes paradoxically evoked to explain the sudden poverty of a church, interpreted as a test of faith for the believers, as an episode of the Tribulations that precede the Second Coming of Christ. It can also be held as a subversive critique of the corruption that undermines the Kenyan political and economic world (Kibwana, Wanjala & Okech, 1996). It is another sign of the ambivalence that prevails in the reinterpretations of Christian practices by the Independent or Pentecostal religious movements. The imagination, in which Pentecostalism is now embedded, sees in occult ‘forces’, be they beneficial or stemming from sorcery, an explanatory principle of the world where ambivalent wealth functions as an indicator—or a symptom—which allows them to be highlighted. If, the political world and, in the smallest measure, the ecclesiastical world attempts to instrumentalise this imagination in order to conserve or obtain earthly power (Maupeu, 1998b), one must remember the ambiguity that characterises it and makes its ‘usage’ uncertain and potentially

²⁴ See the detailed analysis of the reappropriation of Christianity by the Kikuyu during the colonial period and the links between conversion and “moral ethnicity” (Lonsdale, 1999).

dangerous for those who dare to risk it. It may easily backfire: the ‘true’ faithful reveal themselves to be Devil worshipers.

To conclude, let us summarise some elements. First of all, conversion to Pentecostalism is not a novelty since it corresponds to a *traditional* therapeutic practice. Secondly, the ambivalence of the Pentecostal interpretations of the socio-political situation authorises the sudden reversal (wealth as sign of God or as a Satan’s reward), and this makes its political usage uncertain. Finally, the ‘truth’ of faith or of conversion cannot be disembedded from ‘traditional’ practices and understandings of social mobility and therapeutic process. To seek to understand conversion without these aspects is to impose an occidental conception of faith on polymorphous social practices, which do not deserve it. In other words, it is to mutilate the social reality of Pentecostalism²⁵.

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²⁵ The author is sincerely grateful to the following; the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA) for hosting the research period; André Corten, André Mary, Hervé Maupeu, Gilbert Rist, Éric de Rosny, Todd Sanders and Gilles Séraphin. However, any inaccuracies and shortcomings the article may contain are solely his responsibility.

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