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3 Collective Intimacy in Pentecostal Christianity

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Scholars have come up with a wide range of explanations for why Pentecostal Christianity has had such an extraordinary appeal over the last decades for people worldwide.[1] Some have pointed to the great importance Pentecostalism gives to the power of the Holy Spirit, which allows religious practitioners to experience and feel empowered by the immanent presence of God on earth.[2] Others have stressed that this form of experience resonates with the neoliberal *Zeitgeist*, with its emphasis on the individual.[3] Yet others have shown how the organizational forms of Pentecostal denominations and networks, their use of mass media and their readiness to embrace the sensational side of religion as well as their practices related to the (transnational) 'portability' of the Holy Spirit, add to their attractiveness.[4]

In this chapter, I propose an alternative explanation. I argue that one of the appeals of Pentecostalism lies in the specific pneumatological way in which it deals with what are imagined to be precarious and even socially dangerous forms of intimacy between humans and spirits, as exemplified by spirit-assisted witchcraft. This pneumatological approach is informed by the characteristics ascribed to the Holy Spirit, most particularly its specific ways of locating itself in and moving through space.

In anthropology, the study of human-spirit relations has often been intended to examine those modalities of human-spirit interaction that can be witnessed by at least some part of the public, for example, during ritual practices or divinatory sessions. Anthropologists have tended to concentrate on these manifestations for the pragmatic reason that they are observable, but also because this approach allows them to treat phenomena like spirit possession not as a psychological but as a thoroughly socio-cultural affair. Yet, what has been much less acknowledged are the implications of the fact that "spirit idioms" (Beattie and Middleton 1969: xiii) often also involve social imaginaries about the existence of one-to-one relationships between a human being and a spirit that are often temporarily, and in certain instances even permanently, withdrawn from the social realm. For example, in the case of witchcraft, human-spirit relations are entertained in confidential exclusivity and characterized by secrecy. This implies that under normal circumstances, others only come to know of the existence

of an instance of such human-spirit intimacy through divination or when falling victim to or becoming a witness to its adverse effects. Also, certain types of spirit possession, as when a spiritual entity attacks a human being during an unexpected encounter in the wilderness, are considered to be of a purely dyadic nature in its early stages, before then being incorporated into some form of social practice, for example, exorcism by a religious specialist. These one-to-one relationships between humans and spirits, brief and transitory as they may turn out to be, are social phenomena in that they are the object of collective imaginaries and are thematized in social discourse. However, it is important to note that the latter refer to forms of human-spirit interactions which are *not* (yet) embedded in communal religious practices and are therefore thought of as dyadic and *a*social, which here is understood to mean lacking in social embeddedness.

I suggest that these local imaginaries should be taken seriously by anthropologists because of the ways in which they inform people's efforts to shape their relationships with the spiritual world. More particularly, with a view to empirical constellations like the Zambian case explored below, I argue that religious practitioners tend to find it difficult to assess the specific repercussions such one-to-one human-spirit intimacies might have in the social realm (see also Kirsch 2013a).[5] Depending on the religious tradition concerned, dyadic human-spirit relations can be appreciated as heralding beneficial effects for others, as in the case of the temporary withdrawal of neophyte shamans from the social realm. However, in many other ethnographic contexts, such as those in which the danger of spirit-assisted witchcraft is constantly on people's minds, dyadic human-spirit intimacies are assumed to be potentially harmful to others, so that instances of them occurring are felt to be ambivalent, if not outright suspicious. After all, *a*social human-spirit relations can easily turn out to be *anti*social.

A widespread approach to addressing this uneasiness with dyadic human-spirit intimacies is to make them part of communal religious practice, thus socializing them. Below I outline a number of strategies to achieve this, one of which consists in ritually reestablishing the boundary between the spiritual and the human realms, while another aims at domesticating dyadic human-spirit relationships by integrating them into the public fold of ritualized interactions.

My argument is that Pentecostal Christianity has developed a markedly different approach from the above. Using the example of southern Zambia, I show that Pentecostal Christians conceive of the Holy Spirit as a partible entity with a flexible morphology that can multiply itself and thus manifest itself in different spatial locations at the same time in a self-identical manner (see also Kirsch 2013b). This understanding of the Holy Spirit, which is reflected in how Pentecostalists experience their interactions with it, enables them to entertain one-to-one intimate relationships with one and the same spiritual entity, both synchronously and as a collective. In a manner of speaking, this approach allows Pentecostalists to have their cake and eat

it too. By collectively experiencing individualized human-spirit intimacies with one and the same spiritual entity, namely the Holy Spirit, they ward off general suspicions of dyadic human-spirit relations, described above, while at the same time making the latter a central and highly valued feature of their religious practice.

The present chapter builds on the existing body of research in the anthropology of religion that deals with notions of personhood and processes of subject formation in Pentecostal Christianity in Africa (e.g., Coleman 2011; Haynes 2017; Klaits 2011; Marshall 2009; van Dijk 2001, 2005; Werbner 2011). It departs from this work by arguing that analyses of Pentecostal Christianity should consider what practitioners in this religious field conceive to be the essential morphological characteristics of the Holy Spirit. Doing so helps us acknowledge the role of this spiritual entity in the paradoxical production of what I call 'collective intimacy'.

The remainder of this chapter begins with a general discussion of human-spirit relationships, in which I also introduce the heuristic distinction between 'dyadic' and 'triadic' constellations of spirit possession. Turning to my ethnographic case study from Zambia, I will then examine the different practices associated with human-spirit relationships in a plural religious field, which in the final sections of the chapter will allow me to carve out the pneumatic specificities of the Pentecostalist approach to them.

Human-Spirit Relations

When spirits manifest themselves, the flow of everyday life is suspended and infused with qualities of the extraordinary. For human beings bearing witness to this, a spirit that reveals itself allows one a glimpse into an otherwise invisible world, to sensuously experience or even embody what is perceived to be a potent yet normally latent sphere of power.

The ways in which spirits become manifest to human beings take different forms.[6] In some religious traditions, spirits interact with humans during ritual events, partly by taking over the bodies of human hosts, thus overriding their personalities, be it partially or as a whole (see Boddy 1994; Bourguigon 2004). In the ensuing possession trance, spirits publicly reveal and perform their identities, divulge secret knowledge, give voice to specific concerns, and interact with those attending the ritual. In other cases, people understand certain phenomena in the human realm, such as misfortune or bodily afflictions, as involving spiritual powers. This also means that if compared to the revelatory nature of the possession trance, the latter type of spirit manifestation is indirect, since here the interactional influence of a spiritual entity can only be inferred from the effects and resonances brought about by it in the human realm, a conclusion that can often only be drawn through divinatory practices.[7]

What these forms of spirit manifestation have in common is that they make palpable the ontology and agency of spiritual entities. For religious

practitioners, witnessing or experiencing spirit manifestations serves as evidence that spirits are forces to be reckoned with (see also Koss-Chioino 2010). At the same time, interactions between the human and the spiritual realms give rise to specific forms of socio-spiritual relationships that are often based on a composite set of contrasts between the actants involved, such as "spiritual agency/human patiency" (see also Lienhardt 1961) and, depending on people's interpretations of the identity of the spirit concerned, 'healing force/those to-be-healed' or 'source of danger/those endangered'. Many of these relations are embedded in what in a previous publication I have called 'socio-spiritual communities', that is, "religious communities constituted by human beings and their interactions with spiritual entities" (Kirsch 2013b: 34). In these communities, there exist shared ways of dealing with human-spirit relations so as to steer interactions with the spiritual powers concerned into safe waters, such as by hedging them in through ritualization.

Yet, as noted above, in the literature on human-spirit interactions one also finds the idea of (temporary) one-to-one relationships between a human being and a spiritual entity, as in the aforementioned case of spirit-assisted witchcraft or during the early stages of an afflictive spirit possession that has not yet been diagnosed as such. In this dyadic form, human-spirit interactions are not (yet) part of a communal socio-religious practice but remain confined to a two-party relationship. For example, the secrecy surrounding spirit-assisted witchcraft is seen to be its essential and most dreaded characteristic. Also, it is commonly assumed that afflictive spirit possession begins with a troubling dyadic attachment between a human being and a spiritual entity that, once it has been detected by others, has to be controlled by involving it in triadic socio-religious relations that comprise some wider public.

My distinction between dyadic and triadic human-spirit relations is inspired by Michael Lambek's (1980) classic work on spirit possession as a system of communication. Drawing on field notes from his research among Malagasy speakers of the island of Mayotte, Lambek describes the communicative acts during a woman's possession trance with a spirit called Mze Bunu as follows:

> A (the spirit, Mze Bunu) wishes to send a message to B (the host, Mohedja). Instead of doing so directly, A passes the message to C (in this case, the anthropologist) who, in turn, passes it on to B. Thus, instead of A -> B, we have A -> C -> B. What is remarkable about this … is that A and B are actually the same 'person'. Thus, the process observed is one of 'autocommunication', and the transmission by way of C seems entirely unnecessary. But in the Mayotte view, of course, A and B are separate, discrete individuals.
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> (Lambek 1980: 321)

Lambek calls these kinds of triangular human-spirit interactions "triads", which he conceives to be "the irreducible, minimal structure of possession"

(ibid.) that encompasses "the host (the subject out of trance), the spirit (the subject in trance), and the person or persons with whom the spirit converses" (ibid.).

Building on Lambek's terminology while expanding it, I understand human-spirit attachments such as that between A (the spirit) and B (the host) as 'dyadic' in so far as they are based on one-to-one interactions from which third parties are excluded. Of course, by their very nature, such dyadic relationships cannot be witnessed either by other practitioners in the local religious arena or by anthropologists. However, as noted, in ethnographic contexts like the one explored below, these dyadic human-spirit intimacies are the object of social imaginaries and discourses, and therefore ought to be taken into account as an aspect that informs people's meaning-making and actions in the world. In brief, and in contrast to Lambek's perspective (1988: 321–322), I deem it heuristically useful for anthropologists to acknowledge the existence of local spirit idioms in which human-spirit relations are not necessarily triadic in nature but can also be confined to a dyadic relationship, if only temporarily.

In the plural religious field in rural Zambia explored in the following sections, dyadic attachments between a spirit and a human being are often felt to be suspicious. It is true that under certain circumstances, some religious traditions in this region ascribe a positive value to dyadic human-spirit interactions in the wilderness. However, this appreciative attitude is limited to encounters with spiritual entities who, in the further course of their interactions with humans, can be integrated into communal religious practice in socially beneficial ways, for instance, by enabling a spirit medium to prophesize or heal the sick. At the same time, assessments of this kind are expected to be possible only in retrospect. This is due to the assumption held by local religious practitioners that it always takes some time to be certain about the true identity and character of a spirit manifesting itself. Also, people presume that depending on the context and the nature of the spirit's relationship with its host, one and the same spiritual entity can effectively be benevolent *or* malevolent, which reflects a concept of power as something quintessentially ambivalent, as is widespread in southern Africa (see, for example, Ashforth 2005; Ellis and Ter Haar 2004).

Yet, whatever beneficial or destructive quality a given human-spirit relationship eventually turns out to have in the longer run, people in the area of my research routinely react with distrust when they come to know of a person's prolonged stays in the wilderness, solitary strolls through the uninhibited bush land at night, or even the seemingly innocuous habit of spending an unusual amount of time behind closed doors within one's home during the daytime. Since a person's withdrawal into privacy could involve clandestine transactions with a spiritual entity (Kirsch 2015), they fear that any intimate attachment that ensues between the two might pose a danger to the wider social realm if the spirit has a malicious character or is made perfidious use of by its host, as in the case of witchcraft.

It is this ambivalence between being appreciative of the beneficial effects that can arise from dyadic human-spirit relationships and the simultaneously existing anxieties about the possible dangers associated with them I will now deal with in ethnographic detail. I examine how socio-religious actors in southern Zambia, in particular in the Gwembe Valley (see also Colson 1960, 1971, 2006), address this ambivalence. My analysis thus focuses on the tensions between the spirits' habits of intimately attaching themselves to individual humans and the vexing question of how dyadic human-spirit relationships of this sort can be hedged in and domesticated in the social realm.

Forging Human-Spirit Relations in the Gwembe Valley

During my extensive periods of fieldwork in southern Zambia, I never encountered any local person who doubted the existence of spirits.[8] Certainly not all of my interlocutors were equally interested in, knowledgeable about, or practically concerned with the spiritual world. Several people I met did not spare much thought for spiritual entities except for those specific situations in which they or their relevant others experienced problems in their everyday lives for which purely mundane explanations did not promise solutions.

Likewise, there were marked differences in people's knowledge about the spiritual world, with members of the older generations often having a much more differentiated view and vocabulary when talking about the different types of spirits, their particular characteristics, and the recommended ways of dealing with them. For the majority in the younger generations, the latter issues and even the basic classification of spirits were not normally discussed outside of people's occasional participation in religious events, during which questions like these were accepted as vital if the interaction with spiritual entities was to be a success. Thus, similar to what Edward E. Evans-Pritchard famously noted about witchcraft among the Zande in Sudan, "it is possible to extract the principles of their thought from dozens of situations (but)... their philosophy is not formally stated as a doctrine" (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 23).

In southern Zambia, formulating such a doctrine about the spiritual world would be impossible for a variety of reasons. For one thing, people are aware that the identity of a spirit that manifests itself is not self-explanatory but requires interpretative work by those who are undergoing spirit possession as well as those who are witnessing or managing it (Irvine 1982: 257). Given the varied pantheon of spiritual entities in this region, determining the identity of any spirit that manifests itself is a challenge for those charged with this task, and even people within one and the same situation of religious interaction do not always come to a unanimous assessment about it. This is because the various types of spirits that manifest themselves are not unambiguously distinguishable from each other in terms of

their phenomenological appearances and impact on the human realm (see also Colson 2006: 59–61; Kirsch 2002).

For example, non-members sometimes questioned the claims made by the leaders of Pentecostal-charismatic churches that the spiritual powers they employed are actually the Holy Spirit (*muya usalala*). Instead, they suspected that these forces were satanic forces (*muya mubi*) merely pretending to be Christian. Also, the process of becoming a church leader often involves the experience of falling sick and then being healed by the power of the Holy Spirit as mediated through a Christian church. From that time on, the experience of being healed of an illness through the Holy Spirit can form the legitimizing basis for one's vocation as a Christian healer. Yet, the same principle applies to the career of a *masabe* cult leader, discussed below. *Masabe* spirits usually have ailing effects until their existence is accepted by the afflicted through the latter's regular participation in the meetings of a cult group. Taken together, when seen from the vantage point of Pentecostal Christians, the ailing physical condition of a person who is assumed to be possessed by a spiritual entity cannot serve as a monosemic criterion whereby others can determine the moral identity of the person concerned.

What is more, the plural religious field in the Gwembe Valley is characterized by a great degree of fluidity. While one finds many attempts to establish new focal points of socio-religious practice, whether as an independently working healer, in the form of cult groups, or as a church in the Christian spectrum, not all of them are successful in attracting and retaining people for long periods of time. Religious practitioners in this region are extraordinarily flexible when it comes to the question of which religious community they are affiliating with. Over the course of a person's life, changing one's religious affiliation repeatedly, if often only temporarily, is the rule rather than the exception, and many, moreover, are simultaneously affiliated to more than one setting of religious practice. As a consequence, the difficulties involved in determining the identity of a spirit that manifests itself, noted above, are exacerbated by the fact that the social composition of the religious practitioners who gather to deal with this question keeps changing over time, thus also engendering different assessments.

These specifics of the religious field in the Gwembe Valley have to be kept in mind when we now turn to the most common strategies in dealing with the ambivalence about dyadic human-spirit relationships described above. Due to a lack of space, my discussion of the different religious traditions has to be selective and synoptic.

Ancestral Spirits

The spirits of ancestors (*plural: mizimu; singular: muzimu*) are said to promote high moral standards and to take care of welfare and reproduction in the family and the matrilineal kin group. More than any of the

other types of spirits, discussed below, they are thus associated with the domestic realm. Overall, their relationship to human beings follows genealogical principles and does not involve intimate personal bonding, except for the rare cases when a *muzimu* decides to endow one of its descendants with extraordinary skills, such as those of a 'traditional' herbalist healer (*mun'ganga).*

Upon a death, the inheritor of the deceased person's 'shade' is selected from among its relatives. By ritual means, the *muzimu* is then 'attached' (*kwanga/kuanga*) to the inheritor and is thought to stay permanently close to this person's back without ever entering his or her body (Colson 1960: 122ff). From that time onwards, the inheritor of the deceased person's shade assumes certain duties and responsibilities previously held by the deceased. Moreover, *mizimu* are handed down from generation to generation so that they always remain associated with a specific matrilineage, providing a certain degree of continuity (see also Lambek 1988).

If a *muzimu* feels neglected or takes offence at certain behavior on the part of its descendants, it can cause harm to them, for example, by inducing illness. Yet in cases where the therapy managing group (Janzen 1978) concerned with an individual's ailment has come to the conclusion that the agency of a *muzimu* might be responsible for it, the members of this group have no immediate knowledge about which ancestral spirit in particular needs to be appeased. Therefore, a ritual is conducted by the responsible family member who addresses a number of ancestors in turn, asking them for help (see also Colson 1955: 59–60, 1960: 123, 157ff, 2006: 122–135). If the afflicted person shows signs of recovery after this invocation, it is assumed that the afflicting *muzimu* must have been among the names uttered.

In general, *mizimu* thus manifest themselves only indirectly by producing effects that are palpable for their descendants. When they do so, the boundary between the spiritual and the human realms is transgressed. In reaction to this, rituals of appeasement are enacted that perform a double gesture. On the one hand, the boundary separating these realms is reestablished in order to shield the afflicted relative from the castigatory influence of the *mizimu*; on the other hand, the general social relevance of ancestral spirits is acknowledged, and it is asserted that their demands will be met by the collective henceforth.

Spirits of Deceased Affinal Relatives

It is not only the ancestors from one's matrilineage that can cause a calamity – the ancestral spirits of affinal relatives can also do so. In the latter cases, people often approach 'traditional' healers (*plural: ban'ganga; singular: mun'ganga*) for help. For example, several years ago, I witnessed the visit of an elderly woman to a *mun'ganga*, during which she complained

about being haunted at night by the spirit of her recently deceased husband and to having been beaten and sexually molested by him, which, according to her, regularly made her feel emotionally downcast and physically weak the next morning. In determining through divination what had made this spirit commit these malevolent acts (involving spiritual intimacy in the most literal sense of the word), the *mun'ganga* placed his hands in a mortar containing dark-colored medicine (*musamu*) mixed with water. Then, he looked at his drenched hands in a gesture that resembled the act of reading a book and started to reveal his findings. During the subsequent healing session in the privacy of the healer's home, the spirits of two dead people were summoned which the *mun'ganga* described as his regular spiritual intermediaries and whom he asked to dissuade the spirit of the diseased husband from continuing to commit these troublesome nightly acts.

The main aim of this treatment was to sever the dyadic relationship between the husband's spirit and his widow. Yet it is important to note that the effort to achieve this drew on intimate relations between the *mun'ganga* and his spiritual aids, whose existence, in their turn, made many people in the wider public wonder whether or not the healer should actually be considered a witch (*mulozi*). That there were good reasons for distrust came home to me when the *mun'ganga* took me aside one day and offered, for a 'financial compensation', to cause the death of a person of my choosing. Furthermore, in order to demonstrate to me his personal spiritual capacities for doing so, he suggested that he would begin free of charge by deliberately inducing an illness in someone. Both suggestions left me utterly speechless, and I subsequently avoided contact with this particular *mun'ganga*.

The above case illustrates the frequent ambivalence of the quest for healing with the help of *ban'ganga*. On the one hand, my interlocutors felt that the healers' ability to tap into the agency of the spirits was helpful and even essential for detecting the cause of an affliction as well as for one's recovery. On the other hand, for patients this meant personally becoming involved with someone whose secretive intimate relationship with a spiritual entity might unwittingly draw them into dangerous spiritual attachments themselves. Rumors thus circulated that a therapeutic consultation with certain *ban'ganga* could turn patients into witches.

Spirits of the Forgotten

The spirits of the dead that people associated with the *mun'ganga*, in the example above, belong to the category of spirits called *zyeelo*. For the most part, these are ancestral spirits (*mizimu*) who have been forgotten by their descendants and are consequently no longer inherited by anyone. Usually thought to roam around aimlessly in the wilderness, *zyeelo* are known for their immorality and for maliciously trespassing into the human realm, where they possess people in order to slowly kill them or where they enter

into illicit transactions with witches (Colson 1960: 123). In this way, *zyeelo* pose a comprehensive and socially indiscriminate danger for potentially anyone (see also Colson 2006: 54–57).

More recently, the practice of inheriting ancestral spirits has decreased, among other things because of the teachings of Christian churches. And, as Neil Price and Neil Thomas note, even the sequence of inheritance has declined:

> In the past, when the inheritor died the shade [i.e., the *muzimu*] was passed to another member of their lineage, and after two generations the shade would be forgotten. Nowadays, transfer rarely extends beyond the first inheritor, meaning that the cult of the shades now concerns the dead who are usually only one generation, and at most two generations, from the oldest living members of society.
>
> (Price and Thomas 1999: 521)

Given this contraction of genealogical remembrance, members of the older generations complain that compared to previous decades, the number of *zyeelo* has substantially increased, thus making life more unsafe than before.

What contributes to the latter perception is that *zyeelo* are feared in their role as the spiritual collaborators of witches (*plural: balozi; singular: mulozi*). Witches are commonly depicted as solitary figures who engage in their malevolent craft in secret, particularly in their private homes and at night (Kirsch 2015). Rumor has it that a witch's intimate relationship with a *zyeelo* is in some cases the product of an economic transaction, whereby the *mulozi* purchases the soul of a deceased, often murdered person like a socially alienated commodity, henceforth becoming its owner and using it as a spiritual agent in witchcraft activities.

However, *zyeelo* are not only dangerous to human beings whom they randomly attack or for the victims of witches who purposefully employ their spiritual agency for perfidious ends, they are also a danger to the witches themselves. A clandestine dyadic relationship with a *zyeelo* provides the witch with occult means to prosper economically, to strengthen his socio-political influence and stealthily to take his revenge on enemies. At the same time, these transactions are based on a Devil's contract (see also Mahlke, this volume) because *zyeelo* need to be constantly sent on errands. If a witch fails to entertain it, a *zyeelo* will turn against its own master and kill him or her. Besides fear, my interlocutors therefore voiced a certain amount of *Schadenfreude* and occasionally even a modicum of emotional compassion when talking about witches. The idea was that once you get entangled in a transactional relationship with a *zyeelo*, you are stuck with it unless you get rid of it by handing it down to the next generation or, more usually, are freed from this troubling situation through exorcism, even if that might be against your professed will.

Spirits of the Wild and the Outside World

In several regards, *masabe* are an entirely different type of spirit than those explored above. They are ritually dealt with in local cult groups that meet at irregular intervals and that are formed by a healer and the individuals affected by *masabe*, who are mostly women. Historically, this form of possession cult was adopted by the Gwembe Tonga in the early 20th century from neighboring regions, and it has been continuously transformed ever since.

Over time, the pantheon of the *masabe* has come to comprise a vast array of different spiritual entities, each which is said to have its own typical characteristics. There are *masabe* who represent "alien humanity" (Colson 1969: 71), that is, Europeans and people from neighboring ethnic groups; others are spiritual incarnations of foreign cultural practices and technologies, such as bulldozers and planes; yet others, such as the theriomorphic spirits of hippopotamuses, elephants, and lions, stand for the wild (Colson 1969, 2006: 57–59; Luig 1993a, 1993b, 1994).

Apart from the nowadays rare case of it being handed down from one generation to the next, a person's affliction by a *masabe* normally begins with an illness. At this point in time, the identity of the spirit is not yet known; it only gradually reveals itself through the patient's visions and dreams, and above all, during the sessions of *masabe* cult groups. In the course of these sessions, which are supervised by a healer and attended by relatives and neighbors of the afflicted person as well as other members of the cult group, drummers and singers form a circle around the patient and intone a repertoire of songs. Once the patient shows bodily reactions to one of these songs, such as particular ways of dancing, the identity of the spirit can be inferred because each *masabe* is associated with one specific song to which it reacts in ways that are characteristic of it (Colson 1969: 79, 2006: 136; Luig 1992: 116).

From that time onwards, the patient's lasting recovery can only be achieved if she accepts her intimate attachment to the *masabe* in her everyday life. The latter entails the afflicted person having to fulfill the *masabe*'s demands if she wants to remain healthy. For example, the *masabe* of one of my interlocutors, called *chelele*, expected her to possess white and red cloth as well as beads in white, black, and red. In addition, patients are required to dance *masabe* regularly so that the spirits can manifest themselves in public spaces (Luig 1993a: 344).

Over time, the intimate relationship between the afflicted person and the *masabe* thus culminates in reciprocity. For the human host, temporary incorporations of the spirit promise protection against affliction and provide her with expert knowledge about songs, dances, and herbal medicine, which, in the longer term, empower her to act as a *masabe* healer herself and to establish her own cult group if she wishes to do so.

In the anthropological literature, *masabe* possession cults have been interpreted as representing a local reaction to troublesome forces from the

outside world. Yet, these external influences are not pushed back but, on the contrary, incorporated into the bodies of individuals and allowed to manifest themselves in a ritually controlled manner in the local realm. In doing so, the outside world is domesticated in the literal sense of the word. At the same time, and most importantly for my argument in this chapter, the religious practices concerned with identifying and integrating a *masabe* convert the dyadic intimate relationship between spirit and human host into a triadic relationship by providing it with a socio-religious space in which to manifest itself publicly and thus to be witnessed and dealt with by others.

Interim Synopsis and a Caveat

Summarizing the findings of the preceding sections, we can identify three different non-Christian approaches to dealing with the troubling ambivalence of dyadic human-spirit relationships, as outlined in the introduction to this chapter. The first is deployed in relation to ancestral spirits (*mizimu*) and consists in reestablishing the boundary separating the spiritual and the human realms while at the same time the great and enduring relevance of the ancestral spirits for the social collective is acknowledged. The second approach, which is adopted in the case of the spirits of the forgotten (*zyeelo*) and of deceased affinal relatives, seeks to disconnect the spiritual entity permanently from its intimate relationship with a human being and makes no attempt to maintain any kind of relationship with it. Finally, the third approach, exemplified by the *masabe* possession cults, means accepting the spirit's personal relevance for its host while simultaneously hedging in this dyadic intimacy by integrating it into the public fold of ritualized spirit-human interactions.

As we will see below, possession by the Holy Spirit among Pentecostal Christians in the Gwembe Valley in certain respects resembles possession by *masabe* spirits. In both cases, the aim is to integrate the spirit actively into the everyday life of its host(s). In contrast to the *masabe*, however, the Holy Spirit is understood by Pentecostalists as fighting other spiritual entities forcefully. This takes the form of exorcisms where all other types of spirits are expelled (see also Colson 2006: 14) – or actually replaced – by the Holy Spirit, which is said to occupy the respective person's body thereafter.

Before examining this practice in detail, I should mention that the strategies described above are not always successful. One of the homesteads where I used to stay during my fieldwork in the Gwembe Valley was also the home to a young woman who was a member of my host's extended family and who was known for occasionally engaging in what was frowned upon as odd behavior. Roughly every three to four weeks she became emotionally agitated, started to express herself in an incomprehensible language, and once in a while publicly divested herself of all clothing. It was explained

to me that these were symptoms of possession by a *zyeelo* and that her family had approached various 'traditional' and Christian healers to heal her affliction. When all these efforts had failed, the interpretation gained acceptance that the woman was the victim of an unknown witch in the neighborhood who every month secretly tapped her menstrual blood by spiritual means in order to physically strengthen his own cattle. From that time onwards, the woman was basically left to her own devices. It was felt to be impossible to detach the *zyeelo* from her, to replace it by the Holy Spirit, or to integrate her human-spirit intimacy into a cult group. In other words, people ruled out the possibility that the young woman's dyadic relationship with the spirit could be domesticated by means of triadic relationships.

Pentecostal Spirituality as Collective Intimacy

During the time of my research, a considerable number of churches co-existed in the Gwembe Valley in mutual competition for members. The African-initiated churches among them have historical roots in Pentecostalism and belong to the spectrum of "prophet-healing churches" (Turner 1967), meaning that their religious practices center on the "life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit" (Hammond-Tooke 1986: 157). By tapping into the power of the Holy Spirit, so it is asserted, spiritually gifted church elders are capable of divining, healing afflictions, detecting witches, and exorcising demons. Furthermore, in these churches, a Manichaean world view prevails, in that all different types of 'traditional' spirits are subsumed under the category of 'demons' (*muya mubi*). In their turn, these are said to be entangled in an eternal battle between Satan and God, as represented on earth by the Holy Spirit (*muya usalala*). Similarly, while my interlocutors stressed that *muya usalala* can manifest itself in different ways, as in the form of differently distributed 'gifts of God' (*cipego caleza*), they consistently talked about it in the singular, thus depicting it as one spiritual entity and one alone.

Charging and Discharging the Battery

Among Pentecostal Christians in the Gwembe Valley, the Holy Spirit is considered to be associated in part with particular non-social realms. Short periods of fasting and meditative seclusion in otherwise unpopulated bushlands are an important element of religious practice. Church elders and prospective church leaders are expected to spend some time regularly in spatially and socially remote areas in order to strengthen or, if they are said to have become spiritually weak, reestablish a privileged relationship with *muya usalala*. When they return from the wilderness, these religious experts are thought to have become exceedingly powerful in spiritual matters. Some of my interlocutors metaphorically compared the newly spiritualized state of the Church elders to a 'battery' that had been 'charged'

during seclusion and that can be 'discharged' later on through engagement in the spiritual activities of the community. Such activities, in turn, serve for the spiritual empowerment of others: through healing, preaching, laying on hands and praying, the religious experts bring the laity into close association with the Holy Spirit. In the terminology used in the present chapter, this movement from a secluded to a socially embedded spirit-human interaction can be described as the conversion of a dyadic into a triadic human-spirit relationship.

Yet since in this region one person's prophet is another person's witch, this practice of retreating into the wilderness is not always seen positively by everyone, for the most part because the "bush … stands for matter out of human control, danger and evil … (and) illicit activities" (Colson 2006: 92). Going into seclusion for most church elders means traveling to the scarcely populated hilltops in the escarpment of the Gwembe Valley, sleeping rough, and for the most part doing without personal body care. Also, what is sought there are altered states of mind and personal spiritual encounters, as made manifest by glossolalia. For the people living in these hilltops I talked to, the strange demeanors and ragged outward appearance of the church elders were thus difficult to distinguish from what they imagined dubious characters to look like, witches among them. As a consequence, they sought to keep their distance from them.

Even among church members, there was sometimes a lingering anxiety that their elders might have had an inadvertent encounter with evil spirits during meditative seclusion. After all, *zyeelo* are known to stroll freely around in the wilderness, potentially attacking anyone. Given these anxieties, the 'discharging' of the returning church elders' spiritual powers through prophetic and healing activities in the community appears in another light: it is also a public test of spiritual efficiency by providing palpable evidence of whether or not the church leaders have actually been in contact with the quintessentially benevolent powers of *muya usalala*.

The Morphology of the Holy Spirit

The form of triadic human-spirit relationship that develops during communal Pentecostal practice is markedly different from those found in other religious traditions in the region, such as *masabe* cult groups. In order to understand why this is the case, we must examine how Pentecostalists experience the morphological characteristics of the Holy Spirit, that is, the 'forms' and 'shapes' it can take.

To start with, it is important to note that the Holy Spirit should not be conceptualized in analogy to anything resembling an invisible human being. Instead, *muya usalala* is "capable of pervading space within and outside the body" (Comaroff 1985: 200), and most importantly, it has a changing morphology. Though invisible, it comes in various sizes and shapes, sometimes concentrating its beingness on the most minuscule location,

at other times expanding its perimeters over large spatial areas. Of the different morphologies that characterize *muya usalala*, I will now discuss the two that are most relevant for the analysis being pursued in this chapter.

One of these morphologies involves self-multiplication. In the Pentecostal churches in the area of my research, church services entail, among other things, different types of prayers, singing, and dancing, a series of sermons as well as divination and healing sessions. An important motivation for churchgoers to attend these services lies in the striving to achieve direct experience of God in the form of *muya usalala*. Most activities during the service can thus be described as attempts to prepare oneself for personal interactions with *muya usalala*, or as actually enabling such interactions. If successful, these efforts turn the religious practitioner into a Christian 'dividual' (see also Marriot 1976; Mosko 2010, 2015; Strathern 1988) because "by entering into an exchange relationship with God one becomes part of Him, and He becomes part of oneself" (Hess 2009: 294).

With a view to the emergent quality of this communal religious practice, it is interesting to analyze how contact between *muya usalala* and churchgoers develops in the course of the interactions. *Muya usalala* usually makes its initial appearance by inspiring one of the church elders, following which other church elders also exhibit symptoms of spirit possession, occasionally giving rise to an atmosphere of collective effervescence, with impassioned dancing and a blaring cacophony of glossolalic voices filling the church building. It is at this point in the ritual interaction that *muya usalala* starts manifesting itself among members of the laity, a process that can be inferred *ex negativo* when witnessing what are considered to be symptoms of a demonic possession that is triggered by the presence of *muya usalala*. All in all, *muya usalala* can thus be said to self-multiply in the course of church services, starting with one of the church elders, then bringing its influence to bear on some of the other co-present elders, and eventually on selected members of the laity attending the service (see also Campos 2014). In this process, *muya usalala* manifests itself not in a contiguous socio-spatial area but in distributed form, that is, here and there throughout the ritual space, with those located in interstitial spaces remaining unaffected by its spiritual powers.

The second morphology of *muya usalala* of relevance here is what I call spiritual 'scaling'. This concerns those moments during ritual interaction when collective efforts by churchgoers lead to a situation in which *muya usalala* is felt to be present in such an extraordinary intensity that everyone entering the ritual scene is automatically affected by its power. On such occasions, similar to what I described above, *muya usalala* makes its initial appearance by inspiring one of the church elders. However, in contrast to spiritual self-multiplication, this initial inspiration does not affect only selected individuals positioned at a spatial distance from each other, it also leads to a self-expansion of *muya usalala* so that its beingness pervades the entirety of the physical ritual space and sometimes even stretches beyond it.

Then again, if the churchgoers' collective efforts to appease the Holy Spirit lose their strength, *muya usalala* decreases in size by self-contraction and sometimes even retracts in its entirety from the ritual space.

Collective Intimacy in Pentecostalism

We have seen above that similar to what can be found in other religious traditions in the region, the Pentecostal practice of seeking spiritual empowerment through solitary seclusion in the wilderness is commonly felt to be ambivalent, even causing suspicions. When returning from the wilderness, dyadic human-spirit relationships are therefore converted into triadic relationships by integrating them into communal religious activities. Yet, the specific way in which this is accomplished is informed by how Pentecostal Christians experience the morphological characteristics of *muya usalala*, most particularly its practice to diffuse itself in social space by self-multiplication or spiritual scaling.

For members of the community, this diffusion of *muya usalala* is much sought after because it is the prerequisite for interactions with and the personal experience of empowerment through this spiritual entity. At the same time, all individual instances of a dyadic human-spirit intimacy that emerge in this process relate to one and the same *muya usalala*, that is, to a spiritual entity that remains self-identical, even when it is distributed in space and among people. It is in this sense that the spiritual intimacies that develop in these churches are at the same time individual *and* collective. They are embodied and thoroughly personal human-spirit encounters, and they are a form of human-spirit intimacy that is shared with all the others who are concurrently having this experience with the same spiritual entity. It is thus paradoxically a case of collective intimacy.

One of the main reasons why dyadic relationships with *muya usalala* are sought after is to counteract possession by evil spirits (*muya mubi*). In many cases, the latter dwell latently in the body of the afflicted, sometimes without the knowledge of the person concerned, until it is confronted with the presence of *muya usalala* in communal religious practice. In this process of confrontation, the evil spirit is violently expelled and replaced by *muya usalala* (see also van de Kamp 2011) so that one kind of dyadic human-spirit relationship (with a demon) is substituted with another (with the Holy Spirit). Yet, the crucial difference between the two is that the intimate relationship with *muya usalala* is not just dyadic but simultaneously brings the religious practitioner into the fold of the Pentecostal collective intimacy described above.

Conclusions

My argument in this chapter is based on the notion that local imaginaries about what I call 'dyadic' human-spirit relationships should not be

dismissed as irrelevant for anthropologists. Instead, they provide a useful heuristic entry point for exploring the ways in which socio-spiritual communities address the anxieties associated with what are imagined to be socially harmful one-to-one human-spirit intimacies.

Discussing a varied range of non-Christian religious traditions in southern Zambia, I have shown that one of these approaches seeks to reestablish the boundary separating the spiritual and human realms while at the same time acknowledging the fundamental social relevance of the former for the latter. Another aims at the permanent disconnection of spiritual entities from their human hosts. Yet another tackles the potentially problematic nature of dyadic human-spirit intimacies by domesticating them through their regular integration into triadic constellations of ritualized interactions.

When comparing it to the above, the specificity of the Pentecostal Christian approach can be identified. For Pentecostalists, intimate relations with the Holy Spirit are highly valued because they are the prerequisite for one's personal empowerment through it. Yet, given the Holy Spirit's morphological dynamics of self-multiplication and spiritual scaling, as described above, all individual instances of a human-spirit intimacy that emerge in this process pertain to one and the same spiritual entity. As a consequence, the human-spirit intimacies aimed for in Pentecostalism are simultaneously individual and collective in nature.

I have argued that this form of collective intimacy can contribute to explaining the recent proliferation of Pentecostal Christianity. For one thing, it resonates with scholarly attempts to accommodate the world-spanning ramifications of Pentecostalism with the fact that there also exists a myriad of highly localized forms of Pentecostal thought and practice (e.g., Coleman 1998; Marshall-Fratani 2001; Robbins 2004).[9] My notion of collective intimacy provides a clue to addressing this seeming paradox. The pneumatic orientation in Pentecostalism allows local religious practitioners to entertain a personal intimate relationship with God. Yet, by also positing that all instances of such divine intimacy pertain to *the* Holy Spirit (in the singular), individual relationships with it are presumed to be identical in essence with all the others that can be found in the community of the divinely ordained, ranging from co-religionists in one's own congregation to Pentecostalism at large. This constellation enables Pentecostalists to experience their innermost religious selves as connected to wider realms of pneumatological Christianity. What is more, by collapsing the distinction between dyadic and triadic human-spirit relationships, the collective intimacy of Pentecostal Christianity helps religious practitioners overcome their anxieties about socially harmful forms of one-to-one relationships between humans and spirits. It short, it neutralizes these anxieties by subsuming dyadic human-spirit intimacies of the pneumatic variety under the framework of a collective experience of divine intimacy.

Notes

1 See Anderson 2004; Jacobsen 2011; Robbins 2004; for the African continent, see Meyer 2004a; Lindhardt 2015
2 See Coleman 2000; Csordas 1994; see also Comaroff 1985.
3 See Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 2000; Haynes 2012; Meyer 2007.
4 See Brahinsky 2012; Kirsch 2008a, 2008b; Krause 2015; Meyer 2004b, 2010; Pype 2012; Robbins 2009; Vásquez 2009.
5 My use of the word 'intimacy' follows Tracy Luedke's understanding of it as an exchange-based "bodily and social confluence that invokes the most familiar of interpersonal relationships (spouses, parents and their children)" (Luedke 2011: 155).
6 In the following, I will concentrate exclusively on those forms which involve direct human-spirit interactions.
7 This distinction should not be mistaken as being coextensive with that between "spirit possession" and "spirit mediumship" (Beattie and Middleton 1969), which, broadly speaking, refers to afflictive forms of spirit possession in the former case and to divination and prophecy in the latter. Instead, the main difference I am pointing out here concerns the transparency or opacity of spiritual manifestations.
8 Fieldwork in southern Zambia was conducted intermittently between 1993 and 2015.
9 Another topic these insights speak to, but that cannot be dealt with here due to lack of space, is the controversial question of whether the person in Pentecostalism should be described as an individual, a dividual, or both at the same time (e.g., Daswani 2011; Mosko 2010, 2015; Werbner 2011).

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