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PERFORMANCE AND THE NEGOTIATION OF CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY IN AN AFRICAN INDIGENOUS CHURCH IN ZAMBIA

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Introduction

It has repeatedly been pointed out that charisma cannot be understood as the intrinsic characteristic of a person, but only as socially attributed. With regard, therefore, to Max Weber's well-known definition of charisma as „a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Weber 1968:241), Johannes Fabian suggests that "Weber's aim was not to do the impossible, that is, to formulate a sociological theory of charisma as a purely personal, 'mystical' quality" (Fabian 1979:18). Rather, charisma has to be socially "made" (Blasi 1991), "constructed" (Wallis 1982) or "manufactured" (Glassman 1975), to mention just a few of the terms used. But despite this widely held position and the various attempts to explain the emergence of charismatic leadership, the interactional and situational basis of charismatic authority has been rather neglected up to now. There exist more studies of social constructions of charisma in contexts of a wider societal scale than of those in face-to-face interactions, which nevertheless usually stand as inceptions to whatever development the respective charismatic authority might take.[1]

Against this background, the following case study of an indigenous prophet-healing church among the Gwembe Tonga in Zambia aims to describe a particular form of attribution of charismatic authority.[2] Understanding charisma to be an essentially social phenomenon, I would like to show how charisma is socially negotiated, constructed and maintained in the course of the rituals of this church by means of an interactional form of control over the performance. Entitlement to religious leadership within the St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church is immediately linked to acknowledgement as a medium of the Holy Spirit. But as the Holy Spirit is considered to be independent in selecting his worldly manifestations, there exist no official procedures for

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1 For macroscopic studies of charisma, see for instance Apter (1968), Tucker (1968), and Masden and Snow (1983, 1987). For microscopic studies, see e.g. Wallis (1982).

2 Fieldwork on indigenous Christianity in the Zambian Gwembe Valley was conducted over a total of seventeen months in 1993, 1995, 1999 and 2001. This article is mainly based on data from my field research in 1993, which was financially supported by the Free University Berlin. I would like to thank Ute Luig for supervising this fieldwork and for helpful comments on an earlier version of the argument in this article. For a detailed discussion of processes of acquiring charismatic authority, see Kirsch (1998).

the appointment of religious leaders. Acquiring abilities as a medium is conceptualised as a spiritually propelled phenomenon that can not be influenced by human agents but has to be appreciated as it appears. Yet for the participants in religious practice, it is not possible to find definitively binding criteria to distinguish a medium of the Holy Spirit from a patient possessed by demons. Without discussion, diverging interpretations of phenomenological appearances, and varying social and moral expectations, are brought into a religious practice that is mainly directed at a holistic empowerment mediated by the spiritual powers of the community's religious leaders.

On the basis of this situation, it will be argued in what follows that the negotiation of who is collectively entitled to religious authority unfolds processually through the singing of communal hymns. As songs are held to invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit, the communal singing of hymns is a prerequisite for almost any religious activity of the congregation. Without songs, no mediumistic power is to be expected. At the same time, singing these hymns involves a sometimes collaborative and occasionally antagonistic negotiation of who is accepted as a religious leader. Since their mediumistic activities are dependent on the congregation's commitment to singing hymns, the church leader's status is in effect negotiated in a dialogical call-and-response form of singing that allows everyone to come to a judgement by either participating in singing hymns or simply refusing to participate. A general refusal therefore ends mediumistic activities so that the church leader's status is ultimately reduced to that of a patient. Conversely, strong communal involvement in the singing might give religious authority to a participant who previously had the status of an ordinary church member. These processes exhibit the church leaders' remarkable dependency on the laity, which at first sight seems to impede the establishment of enduring leadership. Thus, it must also be asked how religious leaders stabilize their authority in the face of such dependency.

The Congregation and Its Setting

The St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church in Siankumba village near the township of Sinazeze belongs to the *mutumwa/nchimi* movement, which originated in the 1930s in the northeast of Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) and has established itself since in many parts of the country.[3] The movement started when, in the course of his career, one Aram Rabson Chinyamu Sikaonga, a traditional diviner and herbalist (*nchimi*) from Isoka District, started invoking Christian spiritual entities instead of ancestors when making reference to empowerment (Dillon-Malone 1983b). Although an empha-

[3] For basic literature on the *mutumwa/nchimi* movement, see Dillon-Malone (1983a; b, 1985, 1987, 1988).

sis on herbalist and spiritual healing as well as on witch-finding seems to be a common element in most of the movement's churches, the *mutumwa/nchimi* movement is not a "univocal phenomenon" (Dillon-Malone 1983b:464) and exhibits no all-embracing organizational structure. It is thus characterized by segmentary diversification and local adaptations.

Part of this development is the St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church, which was founded by a Gwembe Tonga called Million Chiyabi. Having attended T. Siwale's *mutumwa/nchimi* congregation in Lusaka (cf. Dillon-Malone 1983a:221) while working as a labour migrant in the early 1980s and been cured of a severe illness in that church, Chiyabi returned to his home village of Siankumba in 1984, where he started a *mutumwa/nchimi* congregation and gradually succeeded in attracting followers. In 1993, the congregation's register listed about 260 adult members, although its religious practice is characterized by a floating fringe of membership which makes it almost impossible to demarcate exactly the social boundaries of the congregation. In the period following the establishment of the church, four different groups separated off and set up congregations in other villages in the Gwembe Valley. Having no institutionalised authority over these congregations, the church in Siankumba is ambivalent towards them. While on the one hand the existence of congregations with a convergent religious outlook and practice provides scope for collaboration, on the other hand these congregations also represent potential rivals in the competition for followers and patients. The church in Siankumba thus occasionally attempts to promote its own religious superiority over them. This is done by, among other things, emphasizing the fact that the congregation in Siankumba was the first of its type to be established in the area, and that it is accordingly the source of genuine spirituality in the Gwembe Valley.

Today, most Gwembe Tonga in the younger generations are associated with a Christian congregation. A considerable number of Western churches and indigenous Christian denominations coexist in mutual competition for members. In spring 1993, twelve different denominations could be found within just an hour's walk from the township of Sinazeze, some of them even having two or three congregations within a mostly sparsely populated area. The Christian practices of the Gwembe Tonga are thereby characterized by marked selectivity, in that repeated changes in church affiliation seem to be the rule rather than the exception. To a large extent people are free to attend the church of their choice, and even after making a selection they often tend to be sceptical of absolute claims to religious authority. Given this background, it becomes clear that the different church leaders have to struggle to maintain a following. Their authority is not given, but has to be continuously confirmed or even constituted anew. The St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church participates in this interdenominational competition. As will be argued below, it does so through particular processes of participatory exclusion and inclusion which permit claims to superior religious authority by drawing exclusionist distinctions from others, while at the same time being open to quite inclusive negotiations of who is to represent this particular authority.

Healing and Membership

The religious practice of the St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church centres on healing activities dominated by a holistic concept of illness and a "polyvalent metaphor of healing" (Comaroff 1985:197). In most cases treatment relates to bodily afflictions, mentally or socially odd behaviour, and cases of sterility. As in most indigenous Christian churches in the area of Sinazeze and other parts of southern Africa, witchcraft is considered to be the main cause of human afflictions. In contrast to the other churches in this area, however, the *mutumwa* congregation not only seeks to heal individual illnesses caused by witchcraft, it also stages events during which a witch-finder (*chilyansengo*) actively searches for destructive magical items that threaten the welfare of a community (cf. Colson 1966, Luig 1993). With respect to individually manifested afflictions, hidden causes are sought through mediumistic divinations (Devisch 1985) based on processually unfolding prophetic revelations that are occasionally confirmed or rejected by the patient. If the revelations of one prophet are repeatedly rejected by the patient, another prophet takes over. The treatment of patients relies on herbalist and spiritualist methods. The herbalist practice of the church includes use of medical roots (*musamu*) and shows striking similarities to the practices of traditional healers (*munganga*). Some local observers of the congregation's activities therefore doubt its claim to be Christian and suspect the church leaders of being witches themselves. The spiritual healing of the congregation is basically informed by the idea of antagonism between the Holy Spirit (*muuya usalala*) and demons (*madimona*). Although church-members tend to deny the existence of spiritual entities beyond this Christian dichotomy, their practices and interpretations of evil spirits reveal an ongoing, though modified preoccupation with the afflicting influences of the forgotten deceased (*zyeelo*) and the already mentioned *masabe* spirits. Praying, the laying-on of hands, and touching the Bible are understood to transfer divine powers and to be means of fighting demons. Yet the most promising effect is thought to be achieved by chanting hymns. As songs are thought to invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit, the communal singing of hymns sometimes culminates in trance-like states whereby the Holy Spirit and a demon fight for dominance over the possessed.

The congregation's attempts to replace the ailing influence of the demon with the healing powers of the divine entity already indicates that the transition from being a patient to being a spiritually capable church leader is a gradual one. Almost every church leader first came into contact with the church as a patient. After a period of time, he was then conceded to have integrated the Holy Spirit into his life to such an extent that he was accepted as a healing authority for future patients, whether for diagnosis, treatment, or the prevention of illness. The existence of such a gradual transition is reflected in the social composition of the congregation. There are patients (*mulwazi*) who are seeking relief from an immediate affliction and using the congregation's activities only temporarily during a more general quest for therapy. After successful healing,

they are not urged to continue their involvement with the church. If former patients decide to continue participating, they become members (*mukombi*) and are promised protection from illness henceforth. The church tries to provide this protection by, among other things, repeatedly bringing participants into closer contact with the Holy Spirit. If some of these participants later come to be seen as having acquired an outstanding relationship with the Holy Spirit, they are considered to be potential intermediaries with divine powers. Having thus attained the status of religious leader (*mufundisi*), they are in a position to act with authority over the congregation.

The simultaneous presence of these differing types of participants during religious practice indicates first the existence of "different constituencies within the same ritual" (Baumann 1992:99). Participants vary not only in respect of their previous experiences and expectations, but also in their knowledge of and familiarity with religious practice. Secondly, the particular course of transitions within the congregation makes it clear that neither entry into the community nor acceptance as a church member is marked by any institutionalised *rite de passage*. In 1993, no baptisms had been carried out for two years, yet many new members had joined the congregation in the meantime. Anyone showing an interest was allowed to join the congregation and, apart from some loose rules of conduct and prohibitions, no compulsory conditions were imposed for continuous participation. As will be shown in the following section, such informal transition also characterizes the promotion of church leaders.

Charismatic Leaders and the Power of the Spirit

The basic aim of the congregation is to benefit from the "life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit" (Hammond-Tooke 1987:157). This striving is also the basis for its reputation and the main attraction for new visitors. Yet for most participants, the power of the Holy Spirit must be mediated by religious leaders in order to release its effects (cf. Karp 1989:97). In that sense, the difference in power between the church leaders and the laity is constitutive of the functioning of the congregation.

Church leaders are regarded as standing in a privileged relationship with the Holy Spirit and as having obtained at least one of the seven spiritual "gifts of God" (*cipego caleza*): prophecy, spiritual healing, herbalist healing, preaching, singing, witch-finding, and glossolalia.[4] The church leaders' power can thus be described as a charismatic type of authority, which Weber distinguishes from traditional and rational legal

[4] At the time of my fieldwork in 1993, eighteen participants were attributed spiritual capabilities of this sort, the gift for spiritual healings being the most common. Nearly all of these church leaders were conceded as having obtained a combination of several gifts of God, for instance herbalist and spiritual healing in combination with preaching. The gift of singing was always combined with other gifts of God. About half the religious leaders were women.

types of power in that charismatic authority basically relies on a reference to „supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers" (Weber 1968:241). The privileged association of the church leaders with the Holy Spirit is most obvious in their entering into trance, which is regarded as a sign of their becoming temporal vessels for divine manifestations. On the basis of such an attribution, their activities become decisive in shaping the congregation's religious performances. By also voicing doctrinal norms, cosmological tenets and a discourse on the essence and causes of afflictions, they describe particular notions of reality that at times prove to be highly influential over their followers' perceptions and experiences. And finally, when acting as intermediaries for socially contextualized processes of healing, they come to be reference points for the negotiation of social relationships even beyond their immediate scope of activity. To that extent, their activities can be influential and prestigious. They also promise material benefits, since church leaders charge patients for divinations, treatments, and witch-cleansings. Yet for the most part, they may only exert an influence if they are allowed to do so. Their authority is greatly restricted by the fact that their human *persona* is considered secondary to the importance attached to mediation by the Holy Spirit.

The church leaders' authority is therefore mostly limited to their immediate religious activities. They are usually not treated with any exceptional respect, devotion or obedience outside religious practice. As their entitlement to authority depends on their being accepted as spiritual intermediaries, the very existence of the church leaders' human *persona* tends to cast doubts on their trustworthiness. My informants were convinced that empowerment by the Holy Spirit always runs the risk of being counterbalanced by the medium's human and thus potentially selfish and power-grabbing aspirations. Some people, so I was told, might even simulate spirit possession in order to make a lucrative profit subsequently as a healer (cf. Beattie and Middleton 1969:xxvi). In other cases, church goers well concede that a religious leader was spiritually possessed, while at the same time doubting his claim to be inspired by the 'genuine' Holy Spirit. Both instances indicate that those participating in the religious performance tend to be sceptical of claims to authority, and that objections are mainly voiced by questioning the church leader's relationship with divine entities. They do not acquiesce in what they understand to be usurpations of power, but rather make active selections among those claiming spiritual empowerment. A patient might reject a prophet's divination, and church goers in general stop attending the services if the church leaders do not live up to their expectations. In short, the authority of the St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church religious leaders can be depicted as relying basically on power that is delegated to them.

In the religious practice of the congregation, church posts amount to little more than providing additional stability for a status that is mainly centred around the public recognition of abilities as a medium. Until 1999, there was no routinization by transforming charismatic authority into formalized and dominant church posts. The charis-

matic complexion of the St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church has not culminated in institutionalisation in Weber's sense (cf. Fabian 1994), but is perpetuated by what Edward Shils (1958) calls the "distribution of charisma", that is, by an ongoing dissemination of charismatic authority (cf. also Masden and Snow 1983, 1987).

The church leaders' need to stabilize their authority results to a crucial extent from local notions concerning the essential qualities of the Holy Spirit. A privileged association with this divine entity at one point in time does not necessarily evolve into a relationship for life. Just as the Holy Spirit selects his worldly intermediaries autonomously, it might also cut this contact at any time. Having been abandoned in this way, the medium is reduced to being an ordinary person. For the congregation, this notion of the Holy Spirit's potentially fleeting presence requires the continuous identification of its appearances. The search for communal empowerment therefore culminates in questions of who is a spiritualistic medium, who might acquire similar abilities, and who is just about to lose his spiritual potency. In talking about the criteria for identifying a medium of the Holy Spirit, my informants first maintained that marriageable age is a precondition for spiritual selection – they made no difference between the genders. Secondly, by describing people who were n o t likely to be selected by the Holy Spirit, such as adulterers or thieves, they implicitly voiced moral expectations with regard to the medium's social conduct. My informants differed, however, in what precisely they expected: for some, the polygamy of some church leaders put their status as genuine mediums in doubt, while others raised no objections. Similarly divergent arguments were made with regard to the consumption of alcohol: some considered it necessary for mediums of the Holy Spirit to abstain completely, while others did not really care about it. Moreover, there was strong resentment against materialistic selfishness, for instance when patients were charged too much; but again my informants differed in what exactly they meant by "too much". Thirdly, with respect to other criteria for recognizing a medium, my informants emphasized that the adequacy of religious propositions as expressed in sermons and prayers and the effectiveness of the medium's activities, for instance in divinations or healings, ultimately represent the most obvious proofs or counterproofs of ability as a medium. In the last instance, this effectiveness was held to be the most crucial point in discerning a genuine medium of the Holy Spirit from 'false' prophets and healers.

What is interesting here is that these criteria are not explicitly discussed during the religious practice of the St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church. Being convinced that mankind has no right to pass judgement, participants expect spiritual capacity to reveal itself without being dependent on human arbitrariness. This position seems at first sight to permit the assumption that the postulated self-evident nature of mediumship must be reflected in some distinct phenomenological appearance. Yet during my participation in the congregation's services and subsequent interviews, it became clear that no definitive phenomenological marks of distinction exist between a patient's possession by demons and possession by the Holy Spirit. Although I was told,

for example, that mediums of the Holy Spirit tend to move upright during their trances, whereas patients are most likely to turn themselves downwards, towards the ground, both types of trance displayed elements of the other, thus preventing a generally valid classification. In some cases, interpretations differed to such an extent that one informant suggested that a trance he witnessed had been induced by demons, while another believed the same trance to be a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. This situation clearly supports Judith Irvine's important remark that one should not reduce the interpretation of a trance to an assessment of its phenomenological appearance:

> [...] the emergence of an interpretation will also depend on contexts of situation; it will depend on the observers' knowledge of participants' past histories; and it will depend on the motives and interests of the various observers who interpret what is going on. In other words, interpretation is a creative process, incorporating a historical trajectory, and involving active collusion among participants (Irvine 1982:257).

Although not explicitly negotiated, participants' potentially diverging interests, moral expectations and interpretations are brought together during religious practice and ultimately built up to form a collective statement as to who is most likely to represent religious authority. As their entitlement is based on the status of medium, the leaders of the St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church depend decisively on the congregation's agreement that their trances are induced by the Holy Spirit. The trances therefore come to be critical moments in creating the authority of religious leadership. This aspect leads us to a consideration of the congregation's religious performances.

Performance and the Power of Songs

In contrast to many other churches in the area, no catechism classes, bible-reading circles or women's groups exist in the St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church. Its religious practice tends rather to be limited to the holding of services which represent practically the sole occasion for the congregation to constitute itself as a whole. Services thus represent a central place in the development, propagation and establishment of religious ideas, the communal experience of spiritual entities, and ultimately establishing the authority of the congregation's leaders.

Services are held each Sunday and usually continue for about four hours, divided into different phases of ritual interaction.[5] Each of these phases concentrates on a

[5] I am well aware that performances are in general characterized by continuous modifications, creativity, and a highly situated temporality and thus should not be reduced to a historically timeless analysis (see e.g. Drewal 1990). But as it is the recurrent processual aspect of a performance that is of interest here, the creativity and situated temporality of particular performances do not play a central role

particular core activity, and they are arranged together in a recurrent sequence: (1) singing communal hymns; (2) prayer led by a religious leader; (3) singing communal hymns; (4) collecting donations; (5) singing communal hymns; (6) bible-preaching; (7) singing communal hymns; (8) divining patients' afflictions; and finally (9) healing.

As it becomes evident here, the chanting of hymns plays a crucial role in the congregation's ceremonies.[6] Periods of communal singing are interspersed throughout the sequence, and even during the phases of the central religious activities, hymns are occasionally intoned. All hymns are based on a call-and-response form, with a lead singer initiating the first lines and a chorus singing the dialogical response.

Songs are considered to invoke the power of the Holy Spirit and thus to provide spiritual support for appeals to God, healings and exorcisms. Also, mediumistic trances are thought to be dependent on being supported by simultaneous, unanimous and forceful singing.[7] I was repeatedly told that the Holy Spirit disappears prematurely if it is not continually shown appreciation by communal hymns. Mediumistic trances were thus to be supported until the Holy Spirit independently left the medium; only then could a revelation or a spiritualised activity be expected. However, this argument was never voiced with regard to the patients' trances. Although these trances also evolve parallel to the singing of communal hymns, interrupting the chanting was not seen as constituting an impediment to the healing process. The patients' trances were thus ended quite casually because the communal singing slowly ceased.

Here we find two aspects that are of particular relevance for our analysis. First, it is clear that church leaders are very dependent on the congregation's commitment to singing during their trances, which as already mentioned are crucial to their authority. Secondly, this reminds us that the mediumistic trances and the trances of the patients have no unambiguous phenomenological marks of distinction, and that no explicit negotiations exist as to who is being attributed spiritual ability. The two types of trances must be treated differently, but what type of trance is attributed at a certain point in time is a matter of the participants' unspoken interpretation.

Against the background of these considerations, and with reference to Benetta Jules-Rosette's seminal works on the interactional dimensions of African-Christian hymns (1975a, b, 1979), I would like to suggest that, within the St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church, the act of singing itself forms the basis for negotiations regarding the

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in the following analysis. Nor will the historical modifications of the ritual be examined. Rather, services in spring 1993 will be conceptualised as a specific constellation in the process of an ongoing structuration (Giddens 1986): they displayed distinct and recurrent features that allow for some abstractions beyond situated specificity.

6 The crucial importance of songs in African-Christian practices has repeatedly been pointed out; see for instance Blacking (1981) and Kiernan (1990).

7 The linkage between songs and mediumistic activities is also known from other religions in south-central Africa. For the Shona in Zimbabwe, who are culturally related to the Gwembe Tonga, see Tracey (1970:38) and Kaemmer (1989:34).

acquisition of charismatic authority. Potentially diverging assessments of a person in trance are brought into an interaction involving song, in which they are non-verbally, yet dialogically, negotiated in the call-and-response form of the hymns. If there is continuous and forceful singing dialogically integrating the majority of the participants, entitlement to religious leadership is asserted; if one of the groups involved refuses to play its role in the dialogue of song and thus causes the hymn to stop prematurely, the possessed is attributed the status of a patient.

This process is crucially informed by the fact that the hymns of the St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church do not for the most part belong to the repertoire of Christian songs otherwise known in the area. Newcomers to the church hence have to learn the hymns before being able to participate. But it also turns out that there is no teaching of songs before the service so that the hymns actually have to be acquired during their performance. The composition of the congregation consequently shows striking differences in musical expertise. Having attended the church over a prolonged period, the religious leaders usually know all of the congregation's songs and are highly proficient in their performance. This makes them stand out from the members and patients who occasionally are unfamiliar with songs performed during the service. But there is also another crucial difference between the religious leaders and the laity: the position of the lead-singer is exclusively left to the church-leaders. Only those endowed with a spiritual gift of god are allowed to initiate and to continue a song as a lead-singer. This privilege of the church-leaders and their proficiency in the songs gives them the possibility to influence interaction in their own favor.

The Repudiation of a Prophetess

Arriving in Siankumba one Sunday morning in 1993, I found the church goers gathered in small groups in front of the church building and waiting for the service to start. Now and then new patients were registered, and some church elders delivered herbal medicine to be used after the ceremony. Seated among a group of church leaders was a middle-aged lady whom I had not met before and whom Million Chiyabi introduced as BaPrisca, an exceptionally capable prophetess of the *mutumwa* church in Sinazongwe.[8] News was exchanged, and BaPrisca's visit to Siankumba was invoked as demonstrating the close relationship between the branches. During our conversation, I was informed that she had repeatedly visited the congregation for a couple of years and that she had even performed some 'miracles' here. From my experiences with the Christian churches in Sinazeze area, I also knew that congregations tend to attribute great spiritual power to church leaders who arrive on a visit from a more or less dis-

8 Siankumba and Sinazongwe township are approximately 24 km apart.

tant locality (cf. Colson 1966). I thus expected the church goers to appreciate her visit, and the service itself to be thoroughly spiritualised.

Around eleven o'clock the congregation gradually assembled in the church. With their backs to the wall and legs outstretched, the women sat down in the northern part of the building, the men in the southern part. In addition, the seating arrangement reflected the participants' status with respect to their ascribed spirituality: patients and children were seated on the western side of their respective wall, whereas the members occupied the eastern side. The spiritually highly esteemed eastern wall was left to the church leaders. BaPrisca was allocated a place next to Million Chiyabi.

The service started with the singing of a communal hymn. Initiated and led by a female church leader, the hymn had a call-and-response form and was kept up for about fifteen minutes, with the church leaders vigorously encouraging all the participants. In the course of this increasingly intensified interaction, two female participants fell into a trance and staggered violently through the room. The first to become possessed was soon treated by a spiritual healer who prayed over her and subsequently helped her back to her place. The trance of the second ended when the lead singer suddenly switched to another hymn; she fell to the ground and remained there whimpering. The newly initiated hymn finally induced a third participant to enter a trance. This time, however, the trance was not ended by spiritual treatment or a sudden cessation of the singing. Rather, the congregation sustained the hymn up to that moment when the trance calmed down by itself, and the possessed person stood still and raised his voice to announce that a witch had been dancing in the church at night and that everyone should pray for protection. The people next to me explained that the first two to become possessed were patients afflicted by demons, whereas the third was seen to have incorporated the Holy Spirit.

We knelt down and closed our eyes. One of the church leaders spoke a prayer interrupted from time to time by short interludes of singing. These hymns were again call-and-response songs and were initiated by the church leaders, who also took the lead in the singing but made no attempt to encourage the congregation to participate. The singing was thus mostly limited to the church leaders and some church members. During the church leader's prayer, the room was filled with human sounds and voices speaking in tongues that were all interpreted later as indicating the presence of the Holy Spirit.

After the prayer and another official welcome to BaPrisca by Million Chiyabi, she was given an opportunity to address the congregation. In her speech, she thanked God for allowing her to join the service and repeatedly emphasized that being a member of the *mutumwa* congregation in Siankumba represented divine grace. She then finished her speech and sat down. Now the lead singer, who had also started the service, began singing a hymn. While dancing and clapping their hands, church leaders insistently encouraged the congregation and involved them in an increasingly compelling dialogue of song. Then suddenly BaPrisca fell into trance. Still having Chiyabi's intro-

duction in my mind, I was convinced that this was a sign of her being a prophetess of the Holy Spirit, and assumed it to be consistent with this that the church leaders tried to stimulate the congregation's involvement even further. Yet despite their persistent efforts, the singing fell away as the patients and members of the congregation gradually stopped chanting the refrain. Being a dialogical call-and-response song, the hymn could not proceed without the congregation reacting to the church leaders' singing of the first line. When the chanting finally came to an end, BaPrisca's trance inevitably subsided and she was left lying somewhere in the corner of the room.

The service continued with a collection of donations and then with a sequence of sermons. Bible verses were read and a church leader preached to the congregation, reminding them of Christian ways of living and doctrine. The sermon was interrupted several times, when short hymns were initiated, the singing of which was limited to the church leaders and a few church members. No efforts were made to enlarge the circle of participation or to intensify the chanting itself. At some point during the sermon BaPrisca discretely returned to her place, from then on remaining silent for the rest of the ceremony.

Having finished the preaching and a subsequent round of communal hymn-singing, the service proceeded to the divination of afflictions. Patients were summoned to sit down in front of the church leaders, and prophets started to reveal the causes of their illnesses. During the prophets' mostly monologue performances, patients were occasionally asked to judge the adequacy of the divination. All the patients were satisfied; if they had doubted the prophet's testimonies, as had happened a week before, another prophet would have taken over. By chanting short interludes of songs, the church leaders occasionally interrupted the divinations without making any attempt to involve the rest of the congregation. Hymns sometimes even served to prevent the congregation from hearing whatever secret discussion was going on between a patient and a prophet.

The ceremony ended with a healing session, in which the patients lined up seated in the middle of the room and a communal hymn was begun by the church leaders that was taken up forcefully by all the participants. The spiritual healers now passed from one patient to another and prayed over them. BaPrisca was among the patients and received a spiritual healing. No further indication was given that she was a church leader as well.

The Repudiated Prophetess: A Tentative Framing

In the course of this Sunday service, BaPrisca underwent a radical transition from prophetess to subordinate patient. At the outset the Siankumba church leaders treated her like a collateral religious authority and henceforward made every effort to give

her support. While in trance, she was accordingly provided with a continuous spiritual strengthening through the assertive singing of the church leaders. Yet the rest of the congregation seems not to have shared the church leaders' assessment. Without explicitly raising an objection, most patients and members refused to sing the refrain and thus gradually broke off the song dialogue. The falling away of the spiritualising hymn also forcibly ended BaPrisca's trance. Talking to members and patients after the service, I realized that they did not consider her to be possessed by the Holy Spirit, but rather to have embodied demons. It was therefore not seen as necessary to show appreciation of her trance through sustained chanting. In contrast to the prophet at the beginning of the service, whose revelation was gradually elicited through a communal effort, the falling away of the singing deprived BaPrisca of her entitlement to act authoritatively.

It is only possible to achieve a partial and tentative understanding of the background of these divergent assessments. The incident described above is nevertheless an interesting case in point, because here a precedent regarding BaPrisca's reputation can be identified that with some plausibility may have informed the asymmetry of interactions. Just two days before that particular Sunday service, the *mutumwa* congregation of Sinazongwe had been summoned by the inhabitants of the village of Siansimuna to perform a witch-cleansing. As usual, the witch-finder (*chilyansengo*) was accompanied by some other church leaders and a choir to give him spiritual support. The prophetess BaPrisca was also present. Yet before the witch-finder started his task of detecting the witches' concealed magical items, four horns filled with harmful medicine (*insengo*) were found in his own clothing. The villagers were infuriated because they suspected him of deceitfully hiding magic first in order to pretend to cleanse them later on. In negotiations with the church leaders, each detected *insengo* was to have been cost two heads of cattle to be given to the witch-finder and his congregation. Although in a subsequent village assembly BaPrisca and the other church leaders desperately tried to dissociate themselves from the witch-finder and publicly declared that he had acted exclusively in his own interest, the inhabitants of Siansimuna remained extremely distrustful and finally decided to bring the case before the paramount chief in Sinazongwe.

When BaPrisca visited Siankumba the following Sunday, she acquainted the church leaders of the St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church with her version of the incident. Discretely talking to them in small groups, she tried to win support for the negotiations to come, as she knew that the paramount chief had sometimes sought advice from Million Chiyabi's congregation even in cases concerning other *mutumwa* churches. The church leaders kept a low profile but finally agreed to support her. This decision, among others, implied prospects of future co-operation between the two congregations and accordingly promised the stabilization of the church leaders' standing within the highly competitive religious context. At the same time, giving support to BaPrisca was also linked to expectations that they themselves would be acknowledged

as the spiritual headquarters. Besides enhancing their reputation, this suggested some material benefits, as informal hierarchies among the healing churches in the area tend to involve the occasional referral of patients to its headquarters from a subordinate congregation. The church leaders' decision might thus be interpreted as reflecting an attempt to create a stabilizing network of co-operation while simultaneously establishing a superior position in their own favour within that network.[9]

While BaPrisca had talked to the church leaders in Siankumba, however, she had not explained herself to the rest of the congregation. Nevertheless, a number of patients and church members knew about the incident – the village of Siansimuna being close to Siankumba – and indeed they remained sceptical of BaPrisca's trustworthiness. Associating her with the witch-finder, and suspecting her of being unduly selfish, the congregation refused to follow the church leaders when they pronounced themselves in favour of her ability as a medium. In contrast to the church leaders, the patients and church members showed no interest in establishing co-operation with Sinazongwe or in supporting their inter-congregational superiority. Rather, they judged whether they had been witnessing a medium of the Holy Spirit and ultimately repudiated the attribution because of BaPrisca's presumed moral inadequacy. The scepticism of the patients and church members prevailed, although during her earlier visits BaPrisca had repeatedly been accorded ability as a medium. Not even her attempt to win the church goers' support through an explicit rhetoric of recognition was successful in changing the participants' assessment of her. By prematurely ending the singing of the hymn, the congregation thus expressed disapproval of the church leader's affirmation and eventually caused them to join with them in that position.[10]

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9 During subsequent fieldwork in 1995, I learned that the relationship between the congregation in Sinazongwe and Million Chiyabi's had actually become more hierarchical in the years after the episode in Siansimuna. Every now and then, patients were referred from Sinazongwe to Sinazeze; one former patient from Sinazongwe had even been promoted to prophet in Siankumba, walking for hours each Sunday to reach the congregation, which he considered to be of higher spirituality than that near his home. In 1999, however, the superior status of the church in Siankumba had decreased again: most of the church elders of 1993 had left the congregation. Some of them had set up their own *mutumwa* church without subordinating themselves to the alleged hierarchical superiority of Million Chiyabi; others offered herbal treatment without being associated with any church community. And since Million Chiyabi had started to move his personal residence from its former site close to the church building to a rather isolated area in the hills – thus marking for the first time a difference between his personal home and his centre of religious practice – the congregation in 1999 had also lost its focal point of interaction. Hence, despite its appearance in 1995, the development of the *mutumwa* churches in Sinazongwe District ultimately did not involve an increase in institutionalisation (cf. Fabian 1994).

10 As I was told in 1995, BaPrisca was indeed treated as a patient in the period that followed, but after some months of healing, recurrent possessions and exorcisms, she came to be accepted as a prophetess in Sinazongwe once more. The witch-finder was sentenced to pay compensation and eventually stopped attending *mutumwa* services.

The Performance of Songs: Inclusive Authorization and Authoritative Exclusion

The Sunday service described above also provides us with the possibility to analyse the relationship between performance and the acquisition of charismatic authority in the St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church on a more general level. We have already seen that the congregation's services are divided into particular phases of ritual interaction. The progression of phases always remained the same during the services I participated in. One of the crucial differences between these phases is how the singing of hymns is conducted, two different types of participatory inclusion or exclusion (cf. Kapferer 1979, 1983) being distinguishable.

At the beginning of the service and during some of its phases, the church leaders attempt to induce comprehensive involvement in the singing by the congregation. They do this by initiating songs that are quite commonly known, by actively calling upon those present to join in the hymn, and by continuously repeating the verses in prolonged iterations, thus allowing newcomers to learn the lines. This developing cooperation gradually draws the heterogeneity of participants into a shared activity that is based on a common wish to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Such a situational construction of community is essential to the functioning of the congregation because no encompassing sense of togetherness exists besides the communal practice, and also because joint efforts are considered necessary to call forth divine powers. At the same time, the communal singing of hymns forms an indispensable background to spirit possessions and exorcisms. The exorcism of demon-possessed patients is thus the responsibility of the entire congregation. What is more important for us here, however, is the fact that the authority of religious leaders relies on unanimity. Since mediumistic trances depend on the continuous support of spiritual songs, church leaders, church members and patients, everyone has a share in the empowerment of religious authority. If there is no consensus on the mediumistic ability of someone in a trance, the dialogue of song can be interrupted by any of the groups involved. If there is agreement among most of the participants, the perpetuation of their singing comes to express the empowerment of the person in a trance. Without verbally discussing different positions, the participants' voices negotiate and finally create a collective statement. On the basis of such inclusive singing, the entire congregation that is present during these services thus decides who is going to be conceded authority and accordingly who is going to serve its own empowerment.

Such sequences of communal singing are repeated several times in the course of the service which also includes phases of a more exclusionist kind. The prayer, the sermon and the divinations are phases during which central religious activities are enacted and given priority by the church leaders. Here too hymns are chanted, but in contrast to the phases of communal singing, they are just occasionally interpolated and are not used as a continuous spiritualising background. While initiating these hymns, the

church leaders make no attempt to encourage those present to participate. Moreover, the hymns are drawn from a repertoire that only long-term participants are acquainted with. By thus excluding patients and most of the church members, the chanting tends to be limited to the church leaders and some members. It is not possible for the majority of the congregation to deny a church leader its support and accordingly to interfere with the religious practice going on.

This is highly revealing when seen in the light of the notions of authority that these phases basically convey. The prayer that is uttered by one of the religious leaders aims to bring the participants into closer contact with divine beings. By preventing the congregation from expressing negative assessments with regard to the acting church leader, religious leaders strive to maintain their claim to represent the sole legitimate intermediaries between humanity and God. A similar point can be made with regard to the sermon. The exclusion of church members and patients prevents them from situationally questioning the biblical exegesis as suggested and authoritatively presented by the church leaders. There is, furthermore, no possibility for the majority of the congregation to influence the divinations. The prophet's revelation can only be repudiated by the patient concerned. Being performatively excluded, the other patients and the church members are assigned the role of mere by-standers who are not allowed to judge the prophet's revelation and thus to question the church leaders' claim to spiritualised knowledge. This also guarantees that one of the major tasks and attractions of the church, the divination, can be carried out without being impeded. The prophet is allowed to unfold his diagnosis without being prematurely interrupted. The same holds true for the prayer and the sermon. In contrast to the phases of communal singing where the presence of the Holy Spirit is experienced in the form of embodiments, the sequences of prayer, the sermon and the divination all serve as more detailed characterizations of the Holy Spirit. Whatever religious notions are voiced by the church leaders, they are made particularly explicit during these sequences. By performatively excluding the laity, the church leaders lay claim to a certain stretch of time during which they develop their religious propositions up to a point of potential plausibility that later comes to be a criterion whereby patients and church members judge them.

Concluding Remarks

Because of the church goers' general scepticism towards claims of the ability of mediums and the unstable membership of the church, acquiring charismatic authority in the St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church relies to only an insignificant degree on displays of emotional affection and prolonged exchanges of recognition (cf. Wallis 1982). Instead it evolves in the form of a rather pragmatic interplay between performative

negotiations as to who is conceded (temporal) religious authority and the aims of once entitled authorities to channel possible outcomes to their own advantage.

In the course of the congregation's religious practice, phases of the inclusive attribution of authority and authoritative exclusion alternate, and thus represent two facets of a continuous dialectical process. Regarding its inclusive basis, performative entitlement through singing ensures that all participants have their part to play in shaping what they consider to be appropriate religious leadership. Once such 'genuine' mediums of the Holy Spirit are dialogically brought to the fore, the participants can be expected to continue attending the services, as for them the church now constitutes a place of outstanding spiritual empowerment. Through such inclusiveness, the St. Moses God's Holy Spirit Church adjusts itself to a highly competitive religious context which makes it necessary for the churches to cope with peoples' selective practices of affiliation. The church leaders who are thus empowered are subsequently conceded the right to mould the congregation's practice authoritatively. Yet, since their status is characterized by fragility, they repeatedly find themselves forced to define the relationship between the worldly and the spiritual sphere in such a way that the church goers' scepticism is overcome and their own position stabilized. In order to accomplish this, they fall back especially on their privilege of ceremonial leadership by creating intervals of monologue discourse which enable them to make their religious propositions plausible without interference by others. By performatively excluding the laity, church leaders assert an autonomy of religious expression that is indispensable if they are to be taken seriously as religious authorities at all. And finally, the religious expressions that are uttered during these phases of monologue discourse also form the basis for subsequent assessments of the church leaders' spiritual abilities: if a church leader fails to overcome scepticism, the congregation might just withdraw their empowerment of him during further sequences of communal hymns – by degrading him to the position of a patient.

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