

Invisible Agents

Spirits in a Central African History



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INTRODUCTION

Seeing Invisible Worlds

INVISIBLE FORCES MOBILIZE US to action. Sometimes they are remote and absolute, such as “freedom” and “fate”; or they are proximate and changing human creations, such as the “state” and its “laws”; or they combine proximity with the personal, as in the emotions of “love” and “hate.” Invisible forces are sometimes imagined to be spirits that possess bodies, incarnate the dead, and guide the actions of the living. Yet not all agents of the invisible world are compatible. While we accept the influence of our own invisible worlds, those of others appear implausible forces for change in the visible world. We thus may seek to change, repress, or simply ignore the invisible worlds of others. This book considers various moments of social and political upheaval influenced by conflicting beliefs in invisible agents, including a precolonial ancestral government that claimed to control the spirits responsible for fertility, a prophet’s efforts to cleanse the colonial order of witchcraft and evil, and the overthrow of a postcolonial socialist regime thought to be influenced by Satan.

A recent survey, a form of knowledge preferred by secular society, indicates that nearly nine out of ten sub-Saharan Africans consider “religion” to be very important in their lives. But what is meant by “religion”? And in what sense is this set of beliefs and practices termed religion “important”? In this survey, religion and its measure of importance are the spirits that flourish in Africa. For example, the survey indicates that roughly half of the 470 million Christians in sub-Saharan Africa (Christians, we are told, make up 57 percent of the total population) believe that Jesus will return to the visible world within their lifetimes. Slightly more African Christians claim that God will grant prosperity to those with faith.¹ But these beliefs are not part of a removed and detached

otherworldliness that many secularists associate with “religion.” Even if implausible to some, the spirits of the invisible world—including ancestors, nature spirits, God, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and Satan—hold implications for realms of human agency. Rather than a history of institutionalized religion, this book is a history of the spirits believed to have influenced this world.

Religious and secular authorities often claim that beliefs in spirits are “superstitions,” false beliefs. Spirits have been marginalized by a post-Enlightenment Christianity that guides human actions in this world by focusing attention on the symbolic meanings of religion and on its moral implications. Spirits are distant, appearing only in an afterlife, in heaven and hell, instead of having a direct influence over happenings in the material world and the health and wealth of living beings. Clearly, this is not the position of all Christian believers in the West—now or in the past. Yet this nonspiritual type of religion is found among the mainstream Protestant and Catholic clergy and lay leadership, and has influenced scholarship. Drawing on such post-Enlightenment theological and scholarly abstractions, much scholarship focuses on the distinctions between the otherworldly qualities of sacred spirits and the this-worldly qualities of profane agents.² Instead, the history of the entwined visible and invisible worlds that I propose here locates its arguments around the conceptions and sensory perceptions of historical agents who have thought that invisible spirits have exerted power in this world.

Africanist scholarship characterizes such belief in invisible spirits as part of an “African traditional religion” that continues to influence modern life. For philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, “most Africans, whether converted to Islam or Christianity or not, *still* share the beliefs of their ancestors in an ontology of invisible beings” (my emphasis).³ Such accounts draw on a long tradition of anthropological scholarship that describes ancestors as “shades” with a presence in the physical world.⁴ Theologians, historians, and other scholars of religion have joined in describing these ancestral religions as such.⁵ There is much of value in these accounts. For many people, ancestral and nature spirits have wielded power in this world. And yet the notion of African traditional religion implies a primordial set of beliefs that are static, closed to outside influences, and unengaged with historical changes. If they still exist in modern life, it is because Africans hold on to such beliefs with remarkable tenacity, or so it is argued. However, modernity, in Africa and elsewhere, is neither what it seems nor what it promotes itself to be. Religion is not the past of modernity, but integral to its present logic, the regulation of its rationality, and its modality of power.⁶ In this vein, recent scholarship on the African spirit world has shown that it is entwined with modernity rather than being only a residual traditional religion. Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar identify an invisible world that permeates postcolonial politics across much of Africa;

anthropologists have found “witchcraft” and “magic” to be part of the quotidian experience of modernity.⁷ And even at the Western European heart of the supposed secular revolution, the triumph of secularism now appears to have been a mirage, the Enlightenment’s publicity stunt.⁸

Invisible Agents develops this line of inquiry. The invisible world discussed here is not a remnant of tradition, but an outcome of and engagement with a particular experience of modernity. My point is not to present Africans steeped in irrational, exotic, or traditional beliefs, but to describe how these rich products of the human imagination inform identities and actions; in other words, to offer an account of historical agency in a world populated with spirits.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF AN INVISIBLE WORLD

Implausible African beliefs have constituted one of the oldest—even foundational—problems for secular Africanist scholars. Nearly four decades ago, Terence O. Ranger published an article that considered connections between millenarian religion and anticolonial nationalism.⁹ This approach inspired an effervescence of historical scholarship. Historians found a rich source base in the writings of paranoid colonial administrators who referred incessantly to such connections. Movements that combined ancestral and Christian beliefs in millenarian efforts to rid the visible world of invisible forms of evil were thought pregnant with possibilities for nationalist movements in terms of their forms of organization and their anticolonial ideologies.¹⁰ Ancestral religious ideas, such as rainmaking, could also serve the anticolonial struggle.¹¹ The recognition that spirits inspired anticolonial agency was a helpful and productive insight, albeit an incomplete and a very particular aspect of spiritual agency. In the emphasis on *connections* between modern politics and primary acts of rebellion, the spiritual beliefs of those who constituted these movements were subordinated to the formal—meaning African nationalist and anticolonial—political role that these movements played. If agency was primarily political and nationalist, spiritual beliefs were but an accident, a colorful detail of human agency.

Scholars have subsequently questioned the supposed evolution of forms of resistance, complicated arguments that religion was simply a cultural component of nationalist struggle, reconsidered the ties between religious organization and civil society, and taken the autonomous claims of faith more seriously. Ranger himself revised his original position in several regards. In a critical survey of the literature, he finds the notion that religious movements constitute “a stage in the evolution of anti-colonial protest” excessively teleological and often inaccurate. Such an approach invariably treats religion as a sort of false consciousness, awaiting an accurate historical consciousness in the form of working-class or nationalist ideas. The explicitly spiritual nature of

these movements is ignored by focusing on anticolonial politics.¹² In a more recent literature survey, however, Ranger still seems uneasy with a focus on spirits, especially occult forces, which, he thinks, presents Africans as steeped in strange superstitions.¹³

That spirits are thought to hold power should point to the political importance of religious ideas, not suggest that they are false superstitions. Political scientist Michael Schatzberg has demonstrated the rich analyses that may follow from extending the “parameters of the political,” especially to spirits that are thought to exert power in this world.¹⁴ Not only do religious movements appear political in new ways, but conventional political movements engage in often unrecognized forms of spiritual politics.¹⁵ Yet much scholarship on religious movements remains embedded in a secular view of politics. For example, there have been many fruitful inquiries into the public role of Christianity, exploring whether churches are autonomous and promote opposition to the state or are captured by the state and become instruments of patronage politics.¹⁶ Other recent Africanist scholarship focuses on elements of civil society, for example the engagement of women with Christianity.¹⁷ Human agency is still viewed in terms of secular political claims and identities, however. The spiritual component of religion is not what is important; even if religious movements constitute civil society, spiritual beliefs remain a form of false consciousness, sometimes explicitly critiqued, sometimes ignored as irrelevant detail.

A linguistic turn in humanities and social science has helped to point out that the fields of meaning designated by “religion” and “politics” differ across time, societies, and languages. Imposing such labels often reflects interpretative translations of unfamiliar realms of human agency. Scholars sensitive to this problem have shunned “religion” to characterize certain African beliefs and practices. Instead, they often focus on how European missionaries rendered Christian concepts in vernacular linguistic worlds and thereby transformed both Christianity and the meanings of old words, often changing this-worldly political concepts into otherworldly religious concepts.¹⁸ Understanding the transformative power of translation is an important and worthy endeavor. Yet translation itself is not the only key to understanding the implications of spirits for historical agency. In her study of the Lourdes shrine, Ruth Harris expresses unease with the “totalistic way the ‘linguistic turn’ reduces all human experience to language.”¹⁹ Discourses are not closed and contained systems; they engage with sensory, visible, and nonlinguistic worlds that involve work, corporality, violence, and emotions—in other words, those actions, experiences, and interactions that constitute our sensory lives. To understand the agency of spirits, then, is to relate spirits—or spiritual discourses—to this nonlinguistic world.

One way to relate spirits to the nonlinguistic world is to view them as symbols for the sensory, visible world. Indeed, the symbolic form of analysis is a conventional way of reflecting on *religious* discourses. On the other hand, *political* discourses are not usually viewed in this symbolic fashion. But, as pointed out, there is no intrinsic reason for treating discourses that we term religious and political differently. Religious ideas, especially when they refer to this-worldly spirits, are also conscious statements on and about power, rather than subconscious or metaphoric reflections.²⁰ The bias toward the symbolic study of religion is not evident in all scholarship. Given the clear role of missionary Christian discourses in creating colonial hegemonies, many scholars have discussed them as sources of power. For example, Jean and John L. Comaroff, J. D. Y. Peel, Elizabeth Elbourne, and Paul S. Landau all discuss the influence and African appropriations of colonial Christian missionary discourses, although they generally conceive of power in a Foucauldian disciplinary sense.²¹ Efforts to discuss spirits, Christian or otherwise, as sources of power have not been as frequently or as effectively carried out, with a few noteworthy exceptions. Ruth Marshall's study of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, for example, treats spiritual discourse as a "site of *action* [her emphasis]" rather than being reduced to "its function of signification," in terms of metaphor, metonymy, or symbol.²²

Most relevant to this book is Karen E. Fields's treatment of religious discourses as sites of power in her pioneering study of Watchtower (Jehovah's Witnesses) during the heyday of indirect rule in colonial Zambia. Fields argues that the colonial state, although purporting to be secular, relied on a range of religious agents, including missionaries and chiefs who claimed spiritual powers. The Watchtower emphasis on a personal relationship with God, through rituals such as speaking in tongues, radically undermined this colonial constellation of power. Political rebellion thus emerged directly from the spiritual claims of Watchtower adherents. By ensuring an independent form of spirit possession and communication, Watchtower members undercut the authority of chiefs and missionaries. While Fields may have proclaimed the end of the chiefs' authority a little too soon—and overestimated Watchtower agency in ending it—her broader point stands; religion was politics. Political struggle invoked spiritual powers that defied and defined authority. Human agency to transform the world emerged directly from these spiritual beliefs. In this sense, spirits were not symbols or stand-ins for political struggles around "real" resources.²³

Two recent studies of cannibalism and vampirism further illustrate the argument. In the first of these studies, Luise White develops metaphoric and symbolic associations between vampire rumors and the colonial "extractive" economy (even while she suggests that such rumors should not be viewed

as “false”). White claims that “vampire accusations were specifically African ways of talking that identified new forms of violence and extraction.”²⁴ She links vampire rumors to a variety of colonial relations, including labor relations, missionary rivalries, anticolonial nationalism, and intrusive medical interventions. The strength of this approach is in its ability to relate belief to historical context; its shortcoming is that the scholarly interpretation of metaphors and symbols may differ from that of historical actors.²⁵ The relationship of vampires with the extractive colonial economy is an effective and engaging metaphor, but one developed by White, and not by the workers of the Copperbelt. Instead, for the inhabitants of Copperbelt towns, vampire rumors linked the spirit world to the physical world directly. On the central African Copperbelt, people acted on the knowledge that they were empowered or oppressed by invisible forces.

Stephen Ellis, in his *Mask of Anarchy*, also has an account of cannibals, but his cannibals are very real, literally those who eat others to gain power. In Liberia, there were rumors of cannibals similar to those found in central Africa. But for Ellis, the act of eating to gain power was more significant than any imputed metaphoric quality. Belief in cannibals, most importantly the belief that eating people gave rise to forms of power, was not a metaphor for social or political relations, although it probably was a conscious form of metaphor and metonymy employed to acquire power (I really eat people, and thus I “eat” people and exercise power over them).²⁶ It was not a description of forms of exploitation as if they were like cannibalism, but instead, according to Ellis, people ritually ingested human body parts to gain power over others.²⁷ The difference in these accounts rests on the emphasis by Ellis on the belief in these practices to acquire power on the one hand, and the emphasis by White on the metaphoric qualities of spiritual beliefs on the other.

If spirits are not metaphors or symbols, however, other ways to explore the relationship between the visible and the invisible worlds, of spirits to the non-linguistic world of senses and experiences, need to be established. For if spiritual beliefs are only discourse, autonomous from an outside reality, they lose their historical relevance beyond the history of a fanciful and disconnected imagination. A critic of Ellis, for example, could claim that cannibalism was no more than a marginal detail of Liberian belief, hardly central to the unfolding of war and politics in Liberia.²⁸ The actions of bodies and the quotidian interactions between peoples and with their environments become unimportant to the study of belief—or “belief” becomes reified and ahistorical. If spirits are not symbols, historians need to at least find ways of speaking, if not theorizing, about the relationship of spirits to human interactions and environments.

Guidance may be sought in the century-old discussions about the relationship between society and belief among sociologists of religion that cycle

through the socioeconomic determinism of Marx's opium of the people, the ethnocentrism of Weber's Protestant ethic, and the functionalism of Durkheim's religion as "social fact." Each approach holds insight and problems, which cannot be revisited here. Durkheim's formulation is the most insistent on the social importance of religion, and yet theoretically cautionary and qualified enough for empirical historians. For Durkheim, the context of religion is central: "If we want to understand that aptitude for living outside the real, which is seemingly so remarkable, all we need to do is relate it to the social conditions upon which it rests." But he also insists that this view is not a "refurbishment of historical materialism":

Collective consciousness is something other than a mere epiphenomenon of its morphological [social] base. . . . If collective consciousness is to appear, a *sui generis* synthesis of individual consciousness must occur. The product of this synthesis is a whole world of feelings, ideas, and images that follow their own laws once they are born. They mutually attract one another, repel one another, fuse together, subdivide, and proliferate; and none of these combinations is directly commanded and necessitated by the state of the underlying reality. Indeed, the life thus unleashed enjoys such great independence that it sometimes plays about in forms that have no aim or utility of any kind, but only for the pleasure of affirming itself.²⁹

For Durkheim, while the forms of belief engage with social functions, they do not simply replicate, represent, or symbolize them. In a similar fashion, historians can recognize that spirits morph to occupy historical landscapes, but are not determined by those landscapes. These spirits, as Luise White emphasizes, are a human dialogue about nonlinguistic worlds. However, even while they can engage with this world, they do not necessarily represent or symbolize it, and sometimes animate the imagination of people in unexpected ways. Spirits can thus mobilize bodies, summon feelings, and transform lives, not unlike charged and fraught discourses about "race," in, say, US society.³⁰ Their imagined forms (gods, ancestral shades, nature spirits) and qualities (good, evil, indifferent, jealous, or angry) affect how people conceive of and transform their respective realities.

An insistence on the relevance of a this-worldly context for spiritual beliefs thus need not and should not overemphasize social function. The tendency to render the functional aspect of belief is often attributed to British anthropology in the 1930s and 1940s, especially to Branislaw Malinowski, Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, Meyer Fortes, and their students, who sought to demonstrate the rationality of beliefs.³¹ The argument against a reductive functionalism

seems to be a straw man: even in the 1940s, contemporaries such as Godfrey Wilson critiqued the tendency to dissolve “symbols into a mere reflection of the social structure.”³² Scholarship still explores the social functions of spirits, especially the interconnected “healing” of the body and the body politic. In one example from an excellent book, Neil Kodesh, drawing on much recent scholarship, argues that the idiom of healing was key to the history of political complexity in Buganda.³³ And yet “healing” focuses on consensus-building rather than conflict, revealing only one aspect of the multiple public and private uses and conflicts that mobilized spiritual discourses. As in the insistence of the rationality of African beliefs by the early functionalist anthropologists, this neo-functionalist scholarship is yet another interpretative strategy employed by secularists to render spirits into an explanatory framework with which they are at ease.

A post-Enlightenment discourse that treats spirits as distant, prayer as an ineffective intervention, and miracles and curses as false makes it difficult to understand a world in which people believe that spirits wield influence. The secular mind struggles to appreciate invisible worlds where spirits mobilize bodies to action in a fashion comparable to the invisible forces of their society, such as the state and its laws. Unfortunately, since the burden of the truth about the past weighs heavily on historians, they have had an especially difficult time dealing with worlds invisible and implausible to them. In the classroom, when first confronted with a myth to be used as a historical source, many undergraduates claim that the myth did not “really happen.” Professional historians are more nuanced, and yet their visceral reaction is to insist on the language of false consciousness, or at best metaphoric and symbolic beliefs that demonstrate a subconscious rationality, rather than ideas that informed agency. Such scholars imply that spirits delude or obfuscate rather than empower. In the political imagination of many central Africans, spirits wielded power, or gave them or others power. Because spirits needed to be dealt with, they inspired agency. People—in popular movements, religious institutions, and state agencies—mobilized around their spiritual discourses.

THE CENTRAL AFRICAN INVISIBLE WORLD

Since the invisible world is important only insofar as it is a shared collective representation, a way that people talk about the world around them, it has to be appreciated at the level of this collectivity. General claims about the characteristics of the invisible world on a universal, continental, or even regional scale reveal only scholarly abstractions, not those of historical agents. Despite some similarities and pan-regional and transnational connections, Africans do not share an invisible world. Spiritual beliefs break down across nations, ethnicities, and even communities. For that reason, this book engages with

a particular central African history, roughly falling within northern Zambia. However, certain general features of the central African region provide a useful backdrop to this particular history.

“Central Africa” is a geographic expression that conventionally refers to the region drained by the vast Congo River. It includes hundreds of ethnic groups, however defined; almost as many languages; kingdoms and decentralized village-based polities; territories colonized by French, Belgians, British, and Portuguese; and nation-states that emerged from these colonies, which range from Cameroon in the northwest to Zambia in the southeast. While the similarities between peoples in this vast region are elusive, commonly related languages that are grouped together as “Bantu” are spoken; in fact, the region constitutes the richest diversity of Bantu languages, indicating the historical depth of settlement by Bantu-speakers, who began to disperse from the Cameroon region more than three thousand years ago. Either through their common ancestry, through pan-regional connections, or through similar experiences (and probably a combination of all these factors), central Africans share certain cultural features and historical trajectories. Scholars have even claimed that there are commonalities to all central African religious movements.³⁴ While I do not pursue this argument, in the following section some general features of the history of the central African invisible world are related to the particular case study presented in this book.

The central African invisible world has an ancient history. Based on the linguistic spread of religious terms, Christopher Ehret identifies a distinctive and millennia-old set of beliefs in the importance of ancestral spirits alongside the manipulation of evil by witches among central and eastern Bantu speakers.³⁵ Using linguistic evidence for west-central African societies, Jan Vansina points to the centrality of spirits in forms of government.³⁶ In the Congo River basin, according to Vansina, “early western Bantu speakers believed that the ‘real’ world went beyond the apparent world.”³⁷ These early inhabitants of the central African forests acknowledged the religious ideas and even ancestral spirits of their predecessors, the Batwa peoples.³⁸ Around four hundred years ago, European observers confirmed these spiritual beliefs.³⁹ Recent ethnographies point to their continuity.⁴⁰ In south-central Africa, remnants of Luba and Lunda oral and material cultures describe spiritual interventions in society and politics.⁴¹ Precisely because of shared beliefs, claims to power over people and productive resources were made through the spirit world. Land was unproductive without the spiritual power to make it fertile. At the same time, rival leaders and prophets challenged their opponents’ claims to intercede with the spirit world.

An overview of the literature, fieldwork experience, and the historical depth of belief in spirits suggests that spirits in central Africa have become

connected to a core aspect of nonlinguistic existence: emotions. Spirits manifested viscerally; they were *felt* by individuals, and heard and seen through emotional phenomena. Dreams, trance states, and glossolalia were all highly emotive manifestations of the spirit world. Jealousy and anger were also related to spiritual forces, and could even cause death.⁴² Death separated the spirit from the body; birth brought them back together. Grief and joy gave ancestors their agency. Spirit possession was also gendered and sometimes even sexual. Love was often inspired by spirits (or by witchcraft), and spirits married those they possessed.⁴³ Like emotions, which sometimes appear without explanation, central African spirits were capricious.

Since emotional actions led to political and social cohesion or transgression, collective imaginations suggested ways to manage emotions. This management or governance of emotions depends on the forces considered to inspire emotions. In Western modernity, social scientists, physicians, and psychologists have theories of emotions and have developed corresponding biomedical, educational, and legal institutions to control emotions, minimize the damage they do, or harness them to acceptable social and cultural ends (from the emotion of love to the institution of monogamous marriage, for example). In central Africa, comparable institutions needed to control the spirits that potentially disrupted or misdirected the stable functioning of society. The management of such spiritual emotions was required at the immediate family and community levels, precisely because of the emotions that familiar intimacy engenders. Across central Africa and beyond, an old form of spiritual government combated “witchcraft,” the dangerous spiritual emotions located primarily within the family and local community. That is why witchcraft was the “dark side of kinship,” as Peter Geschiere has put it.⁴⁴

The antiquity of the management of spiritual emotions is illustrated in central African oral traditions and charters of governance that join quotidian concerns about witchcraft within the family and the community to stories of powerful conquerors who overcame local witchcraft, especially spiritual emotions such as love and jealousy, or perished while doing so. In such oral traditions, the success of precolonial rulers in calming spiritual emotions indicated their ability to promote fertility and keep in check illness and death. The first chapter of this book describes the dangers and promises of spiritual emotions, and indicates the rituals needed to avert death and to encourage fertility.

Old spiritual beliefs survived even as they morphed to maintain their relevance in modern times. Across the region, the uncertainties of the late nineteenth century, linked to the violent expansion of the slave and ivory trades, ratcheted up the need for spiritual security, especially among the most vulnerable.⁴⁵ At first the colonial rulers of central Africa, the British, Belgian, Portuguese, and French alike, relied on the local leaders who had previously

mobilized—but did not monopolize—spiritual power. European administrators emphasized the legitimacy of these chosen leaders in terms of their supposed traditional depth and (often paradoxically) in terms of their civilizing potential. The colonial administrations remained at best embarrassed by such leaders' spiritual claims, however, which they tended to discourage. As part of their civilizing mission, colonial regimes implemented legal restrictions on interventions into the spirit world, such as the Witchcraft Ordinance of 1914 in Northern Rhodesia, which expressly prohibited accusations of spirit possession and manipulation, and thereby curtailed old forms of political legitimacy. Movements that dealt with the spirit world became illegal, but remained influential as secretive and occult forms of power. As chapter 2 of this book indicates, when colonial forms of sovereignty disempowered the spiritual agency of chiefs, people sought alternative ways to deal with spiritual malaise and political impotence.

Christian ideas propagated by the mainline Protestant and Catholic missionaries across central Africa worked with the colonial state to disenchant daily life, directing attention toward a spiritual afterlife and away from the presence of spirits in the immediate world. Twentieth-century European Christianity generally focused on spirits that were remote from the world of the living, even if these spirits held moral power and suasion over the living (with the exception of some nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries in South Africa and twentieth-century Pentecostals). European missionaries tried to distance the invisible from the visible worlds and, alongside the colonial administrations, discouraged—or prohibited, in the case of the Belgian Congo—international Christian missions and churches that conformed to existing central African notions of proximate spirits, such as those held by the Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses. These and related Christian movements still prospered and proliferated, but, as chapters 3 and 4 illustrate, outside or on the margins of colonial laws. In the postcolonial period, the mainline churches that emerged out of the European mission societies ignored, or remained inept at dealing with, spirits, especially evil spirits that brought death, sickness, and misfortune.

The failure of European missions and their successor churches to distance the world of spirits from the world of the living does not mean that Christianity was unimportant to the history of the invisible world. Central African Christian beliefs advanced independently of colonial-era missionary doctrines. Even while many formal Christian denominations were established and thrived across central Africa, a particular form and experience of Christianity, replete with distinctive spiritual personae—vampires, ancestors, demons, witches, and prophets—emerged. A colonial (and denominational) focus leads to an incomplete understanding of the way that widespread spiritual beliefs transformed

Christianity.⁴⁶ Put another way, Christianity populated the invisible world with new spirits and replaced or eroded the powers of old spirits. International Christian ideas were incorporated into a central African invisible world, and, in turn, this invisible world informed a changing global Christianity.⁴⁷

Central African Christianity thereby came to accept direct spiritual interventions in the visible and physical world. Christian narratives were downloaded into the present. Biblical places were related to the immediate environment and biblical characters were inherited by the living, just as ancestral titles were previously inherited by systems of positional succession.⁴⁸ New Jerusalems are now scattered across the region; many a Moses is remembered to have led his people against evil.⁴⁹ Even the literate and bureaucratic culture of Western Christianity did not displace the powers of the spirits.⁵⁰

Central Africans recast the moral judgment at the center of European Christian notions of an afterlife in heaven or hell as a struggle against spiritual evil in this world. The spirits of the past, which may have been angry for lack of respect, recognition, or propitiation, became evil spirits. Sin meant the mobilization of these evil forces, and not the transgression of certain church-defined moral codes. On the other hand, the beneficent role of older spirits ceded to the beneficent Holy Spirit. Ancestors gave way to God and Jesus, while all other spirits became demons—regardless of whether such spirits were angry for a justifiable and explicable reason. Christianity thereby contributed to the Manichaean quality of spirits, good and evil, God and the devil, absent in the spirit world before Christianity. As communal ancestors ceded to a universal God, well-being focused on Christian rituals such as baptism, confession, and even exorcism, all of which replaced veneration and propitiation of ancestral and territorial spirits. As a Christian binary morality grafted onto a belief in the presence of spirits in this world, the angels of heaven and demons of hell became part of the immediate world, not just the afterlife. This Manichaean spiritual world became an effective way of characterizing a colonial order that spread hardship and misfortune. Colonialism—with its material forms of exploitation, its assaults on personal dignity, and its racial categorization of the visible world—was an evil to be cleansed by a radical spiritual revolution, an Armageddon.⁵¹

Even while colonial-era missionaries failed to impose their vision of spiritual belief, they helped to shape secular ideologies and moralities. In alliance with colonial administrators and missionary-educated elites, colonial missionaries set about constructing what they deemed to be a moral civil society. In the postcolonial period this vision of a moral society inspired national philosophies of government, such as the state religion of Zambian humanism with its own civilizing mission that banished spiritual forces to the afterlife. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), despite the lifting of restrictions

on African Christian movements, Mobutu Sese Seko's Authenticité drew on colonial constructions to introduce invented traditions and promoted Mobutu as a heavenly force that descends to govern this world (as in the well-known Zairean state television clip). Nonetheless, both Christian and occult spirits remained a way of conceptualizing power and challenging authority.⁵² In fact, precisely because of the inequalities linked to colonial and postcolonial societies, spiritual discourses on power proliferated. In the 1980s, as the final chapter in this book illustrates, Zambian humanism was swept away by a spiritual political theology held by Pentecostal and charismatic churches.

The limitations of secular modes of authority, in particular the late colonial and postcolonial developmentalist state, and an accompanying growth in inexplicable and audacious forms of power, encouraged spiritual discourses. As the state failed to deliver the promised benefits of development, its core mission, justification, and claims to sovereignty were compromised. In the case of Zambia, a prosperous country at the time of independence, Zambians had high "expectations of modernity." The disappointments of the developmentalist state were deeply felt.⁵³ In other parts of central Africa, such as the DRC, where the developmentalist state gave way to the gatekeeper state, the failure was catastrophic.⁵⁴ As the postcolonial state failed in its modernizing mission, or modernity benefited only a few, spirits appeared as a discourse on an unrequited faith in a universal modernity.

The uncertainty of life in central Africa has also contributed to spiritual discourses. Here, another old quality of the spirits has been reaffirmed: that they are capricious. In a similar fashion to Adam Ashforth's argument for the South African city of Soweto, where spirits manifest in a climate of postapartheid uncertainty, in central Africa the uncertainty of life contributed to beliefs in spiritual agency.⁵⁵ Economic misfortune, violence, and disease indicated the agency of angry and evil spirits. Without apparent reason, violence afflicted communities or people died of mysterious new diseases. On the other hand, an ordinary person might become extraordinarily wealthy—perhaps even the leader of a new nation. Children could become wealthier than their parents, reversing or rendering chaotic older gerontocratic orders.⁵⁶ Such unpredictability in life, inexplicable in terms of hegemonic and secular forms of sovereignty and morality, made the agency of good and evil spirits apparent. The modern Protestant notion that hard work leads to wealth and well-being has not conformed to the lived experiences of most people for whom a discourse on capricious spirits is far more convincing and realistic. Since modernity has been unpredictable, nonlinear, and frequently disappoints, a discourse on spiritual agency is a discourse on the lack of agency by living humans.⁵⁷ Central Africans have discussed the capriciousness of spirits as they reflect on the arbitrariness of power and their own inabilities to transform their lives.

Spirits could inspire ideas of revolutionary change. For the European-led missions, conversion to Christianity involved a gradual struggle toward enlightenment, as they inserted the convert into a progressive moral teleology guided by an established church hierarchy. For those who led the nationalist movement, the party would serve the same moral purpose as the mission church. On the other hand, the prophetic spiritual movements examined in this book posed a radical model of conversion that sought to transform the individual as a basis for a spiritual revolution. Conversion in this framework harnessed spirits to local concerns and identities; it critiqued old practices, addressed inequalities, and promoted a utopian future. Since spiritual forces possessed the individual, they allowed for a remarkable and sudden personal transformation. Conversion purified the individual of evil and laid the foundations for a new society. The revolution, often violent, was a cleansing of evil, a personal catharsis or exorcism that led to a reborn individual and nation, and ultimately to heaven on earth.

The connection between violence and beliefs in a spirit world is an understudied aspect of central African history. Violence is often attributed to “big men” who manipulate and indoctrinate credulous and underage soldiers, set about capturing valuable resources, or, in a more sophisticated argument, “rage against the machine” of dysfunctional governance.⁵⁸ Such reasonings may explain why people take to arms; they do not explain acts of ritualized brutality and quotidian violence. The belief that people were fighting the devil—or human incarnations of evil spirits—may have inspired violence, or at least represented and made sense of violence. Because of the gendered nature of spirit possession, such violence often targeted women. When nationalist-supporting villagers massacred a community of Lumpa Church members, many of them women, brutalizing and raping them, as described in chapter 6, they considered the members to be incarnations of evil, possessed by demons. For the villagers who committed these acts, killing was not sufficient. The demons needed to be publicly and ritually vilified so that they would fear returning to the land of the living. There is a widely held misconception that Christianity in Africa inspired peace, while colonialism caused trauma and violence. According to this idea, the violence and disruption caused by Christianity and Christian missionaries were due to their role as agents of colonialism; the missionaries were not “true” Christians. To the contrary, as in other periods in the history of Christianity, Christian spiritual beliefs engaged with violent histories, and sometimes inspired violence. Christian spirits could be violent agents. Chapters 5 and 6 of this book point to how Christian beliefs contributed to violence during decolonization. Other examples drawn from the central African region indicate similar histories.⁵⁹

Of course, spirits are not unfamiliar to other parts of Africa and to other parts of the world. In South Africa, spirits formed an important element of political and religious discourse, providing life-giving rain, inspiring struggles against taxation in the nineteenth century, envisaging Zion for the many followers of Isaiah Shembe, revealing apartheid-era witches in the late twentieth century, and contributing to the uncertainties of life in the twenty-first century.⁶⁰ The most emotive refrain in the South African national anthem, “Nkosi Sikilel’ iAfrica” (God Bless Africa), resounds with a call, “Woza moya,” for the Holy Spirit to come down and bless Africa. The proliferation of Pentecostal and charismatic churches in southern Nigeria and Ghana, with their ongoing struggles against evil demons, indicates comparable spiritual agencies.⁶¹ In Liberia, Poro societies provided a parallel power to the state.⁶² The Tongnaab deity has offered good fortune in life and commerce to the increasing number of pilgrims who make their way to its shrine in northern Ghana.⁶³ Spiritual agents can be identified in the history of the African diaspora in the Americas—Haiti, Cuba, North America, and Brazil, for example.⁶⁴ Similar conceptions of spiritual power were also found among people with no relationship to Africa, such as in Southeast Asia.⁶⁵ On the other hand, spirits have not been as central to religion and to politics in other parts of the African continent. In parts of the African Sahel, for example, even while forms of spirit possession have long prospered, Sharia Islam, with its focus on texts, moral codes, and the afterlife, has repressed spiritual interventions (although Sufi Islam allowed for direct spiritual interventions).⁶⁶ Here, the introduction of Christianity engaged with a different set of concerns and politico-religious configurations.⁶⁷

In outlining some of these general features of the central African region, I do not argue that there are unchanging and homogeneous central African traditions, but only point to the importance of proximate and capricious invisible agents in early modern and modern central African history. The exact nature and historical trajectory of this invisible world and its relationship to the visible world diverge in many central African communities. Particular histories were created out of similar experiences, such as the slave-and-ivory trading wars of the nineteenth century, colonial impositions, postcolonial nationalism and socialism, and neoliberalism; and similar changes in the spirit world, including the appearance of an evil Satan, a good God, as well as the diminished role of ancestral shades and nature spirits. This book discusses the role of invisible inspirations in one of these Zambian histories.

METHODOLOGY AND ZAMBIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Even while spiritual beliefs are shared, they are private, and thus require the historian to appreciate an internal perspective, a challenge since there are

so few written accounts left by believers and since personal beliefs remain hidden from secular authorities. Often the historian reads belief from the accounts of skeptical outsiders. Many of these outside authorities impose categorizations, especially those of “religion” and “politics,” onto the experiences and activities of people. To grapple with these methodological quandaries, the contexts that motivated and inspired the writing of the primary and secondary source material have to be appreciated.

This book employs three types of evidence used in Africanist scholarship: fieldwork, oral testimony, and documentary sources. Informal fieldwork for this project began in 1997–1998, when I conducted the research that informed my first book on environment, society, and culture in the Luapula Valley, located adjacent to the Lubemba Plateau, and when I came to appreciate the importance of spirits as a political resource, and began to think about the history explored here.⁶⁸ I also developed competency in ChiBemba, the language of the Lubemba Plateau, as well as one of the principal languages of Zambia’s urban areas (I studied ChiBemba at Ilondola Mission, one of the Catholic missions discussed in chapter 2). Since then, I have returned to Zambia almost yearly, with significant intervals of fieldwork devoted to this book in 2005 and 2008. My fieldwork involved living in villages and in church compounds, attending services and seminars, and discussing the issues found in this book with the followers and principal clergy of the movements examined. Upon identifying reliable informants, I recorded interviews: in 2005, on popular Christianity (especially the Lumpa movement of Alice Lenshina) and the anticolonial nationalist movement in northern Zambia during the 1950s and 1960s; in 2008, on the Pentecostal and charismatic churches that have proliferated across Zambia since the 1980s. Like all historical sources, memory represses, disguises, and reveals selectively. Yet fieldwork and interviews open up local perspectives, even in the interpretation of documentary sources.

The documentary sources, including unpublished archival material but also publications such as newspapers, memoirs, and government publications, that inform this book are found in libraries and archives in Zambia, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and the United States. Each repository holds secrets that yield only after lengthy investigation and interpretation. Crucial to the interpretation of documents is an appreciation of the contexts of their writing: What was emphasized? What was left out? And why? Any one document emerges from multiple perspectives, prejudices, experiences, informants, and other documents. In an archive, the enterprising historian can identify the paper trail, the many revealing documents, often hidden in obscurely titled files and boxes, that lie behind a single published government report or commission of inquiry. Historical investigation is an engagement with archives to understand this multilayered construction of documents, a sort of fieldwork in

the archives, which in turn relies on understanding the historical contexts in which the documents were written.

An effective appreciation of local history and historiography is thus crucial to the interpretation of documents. The writing of Zambian history began in the encounter between Zambian oral historians and outsiders, including missionaries, colonial officials, and anthropologists. The first accounts of the precolonial Zambian past, generally the migration of Luba and Lunda royals into a land inhabited by much earlier settlements of Bantu-speakers, appeared in the district notebooks of colonial officials and the publications of mission societies. Certain missionaries or mission societies took special interest in collecting these stories. The Catholic mission society, the White Fathers, for example, undertook extensive surveys of all aspects of culture, history, and religion in the areas where they proselytized. This represented the beginnings of a long tradition of Catholic missionary scholarship that stretches from Edouard Labrecque, whom Giacomo Macola describes as an “indefatigable organizer of culture throughout northeastern Zambia,” to Hugo F. Hinfelaar’s insightful work on Bemba women’s engagement with Christianity.⁶⁹ (While Protestant missionaries also collected histories, their emphasis on a progressive civilizing mission meant that they were less interested in historical traditions than were the Catholics.) Many of these missionaries spent decades in the field, were fluent in local languages, and were avid collectors of culture and history.

Missionaries believed that there was only one religion, even while each group could possess a different secular history. Thus, non-Christian narratives deemed religious were problematic, while those narratives that were viewed as historical were acceptable. Christian stories had to replace ostensibly religious narratives, but ostensibly secular histories were permitted, and could even be promoted. Missionary publications thus separated the religious from the historical; the former were beliefs that had to give way to Christianity; the latter could be kept as markers of distinct human communities. In mission-recorded oral traditions, the agency of living beings replaced the agency of spirits. Stories about the spirit that the missionaries would call God (*Lesa*) and the origins of humankind, for example, were unacceptable in the published missionary scholarship. Much subsequent historical scholarship is based on these sanitized missionary publications. Fortunately, the missionary researchers left a paper trail: the original unpublished writings and research notes are now available in mission archives. These notes were the product of careful research: the missionaries considered knowledge of customs repugnant to them as a weapon in efforts to combat them. “Morally speaking, many customs are directly opposed to the Christian code,” a White Father, Louis Etienne, wrote. But he also noted that “as long as the missionary does not acquire a thorough knowledge of these customs, he will be unable to remedy them; he will be able

to impart only a superficial culture, a semblance of Christianity, which will always be merely a thin veneer superimposed upon paganism, fatally lacking in depth, and certain to crumble under any serious trial.”⁷⁰ Accounts of such customs and histories thus exist in many missionary documents, although they rarely found their way to missionary publications. If possible and necessary, I have made use of these unsanitized research notes.

In the late nineteenth century, the British government awarded a charter to Cecil John Rhodes’s British South Africa Company (BSAC) to rule a vast territory, which included present-day Zambia and Zimbabwe. The BSAC recruited colonial officials who were responsible for the implementation of a variety of colonial exactions, such as taxation and the recruitment and organization of labor for the incipient mining industry. Since they struggled to govern their vast districts, colonial administrators turned to existing elites in their efforts to maintain control. In order to determine the “legitimate” rulers of any particular area, they collected histories, which were reproduced in many district notebooks, now found in the National Archives of Zambia (NAZ). The tendency to research and write down local histories and traditions increased after the British government declined to renew the BSAC’s charter in 1923 and took over the administration of Northern Rhodesia in 1924, formally introducing indirect rule during the 1930s. Officials responsible for the implementation of indirect rule, such as W. Vernon Brelsford, produced several monographs and articles from their collection of local knowledge, first written as appendices to their many “tour reports,” which are also found in the NAZ.

Like the missionaries, these local colonial officials were interested in particular narratives. Mirroring a concept of royalty and aristocracy in their own societies, colonial officials focused on lineage and on the strength of inherited traditions. Thus, despite the fact that many of the colonial officials spent several years in an area and developed fluency in local languages, their accounts of the basis of political power were partial and culled to their particular interests. However, these officials also viewed it as their duty to repress “false” beliefs. Thus, in their battle against the spirits, they left valuable archival traces that can be employed by the historian. At times, such archives represent the prejudices of a secular mind, identifying an exotic and irrational “other.” And yet, like the missionaries, colonial officials knew that success in their struggle against beliefs they considered false depended on the accuracy of their data.

The third productive encounter between Zambians and outsiders occurred with the arrival of the anthropologist. In northern Zambia, Audrey I. Richards, Bronislaw Malinowski’s student, was a pioneer of colonial anthropology. Her work on the northern Zambian kingdom and people termed the “Bemba” began in the 1930s and drew on a long collaboration with Paul B. Mushindo, an elder of the Church of Scotland’s mission in northern Zambia, as well as

the support of various liberal settlers and colonial officials such as Stewart Gore-Brown and Thomas Fox-Pitt. Richards's work, characterized as functionalism, sought to appreciate the totality of cultural and religious forms that informed sociopolitical arrangements. A major concern of her initial analysis was with the forces of change that she perceived as having disrupted the cohesive functioning of tribal society.⁷¹ Richards continued to publish about Bemba society and visited occasionally up until the late 1960s. Her many articles, which drew on copious field research notes, detail Bemba sociopolitical organization and their religious expressions.⁷²

Richards's functionalism gave way to an embrace of change by a progressive school of colonial-era anthropologists centered at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute (RLI). They, too, benefited from a dialogue with local interpreters and ethnographers.⁷³ There was great diversity in their scholarship, which included the sociological studies of Godfrey Wilson and Monica H. Wilson (close collaborators and friends of Richards), the symbolic cultural ethnographies of Victor Turner, the structural functionalism of Max Gluckman, the detailed longitudinal field investigations of Elizabeth Colson, and the liberal historical accounts of Lewis H. Gann. Many of them wrote about what they presumed to be single ethnic groups (the Lozi, Lunda, Tonga, etc.). But instead of fearing change and "detrribalization" with increased urbanization and the growth of the copper-mining economy, a preoccupation of functionalist scholarship, the RLI anthropologists were fascinated by the new cultural forms emerging in the towns. They sought to represent African societies of Northern Rhodesia in the midst of a great transformation from village to urban life. To a certain extent, their progressive politics may have led them to overestimate the permanence and the linearity of such changes. Their "expectations of modernity," as James Ferguson's more recent ethnography puts it, shared by the growing literate and cosmopolitan urban Zambian population, would not materialize in the postcolonial period.⁷⁴

As with the colonial missionaries and administrators, there was much that was repressed by these anthropologists. Richards imagined an ordered tribal society where power devolved from the paramount; that which did not fit in this view was left out (or represented as anomalous signs of tribal breakdown). The RLI anthropologists struggled to relate spirits to society. Often influenced by Marxism, they ignored the richest components of their data (e.g., for Godfrey Wilson), or they focused on ritual (Gluckman) or symbol (Turner) rather than spiritual agency.⁷⁵ Fortunately, as with the missionaries and colonial officials, these anthropologists left detailed field notes in various archives, and, when carefully examined, they, too, provide richer source material than the final published accounts. This book has especially benefited from a careful reading of Richards's research notes.

As independence approached, rival political and religious movements fought over followers and over the implications of the end of European colonialism. The conflict between popular nationalism and other prophetic movements around the time of Zambian independence left rich archival traces, underappreciated by other studies. For example, this is the first book to employ the detailed archival sources on the battles between the United National Independence Party (UNIP) and prophetic movements such as Watchtower and Alice Lenshina's Lumpa Church. Readers who want to appreciate the multiple perspective and documents that lie behind a widely cited official report, the *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Lumpa Church*, the long-established authoritative text on the Lumpa Church, should consider the archival documents referenced in chapter 6.⁷⁶

In the heady days after independence, as Kenneth Kaunda and the UNIP took over the control of the colonial state and a booming copper economy, Zambians and foreign scholars expressed high hopes for the nation. A nationalist historiography celebrated the emergence of this new order. Some looked to the precolonial period to identify indigenous forms of statecraft. Andrew Roberts charted the political history of the rise and fall of the Bemba polity, demonstrating the secular logic of precolonial forms of political organization, and culling religious and mythological aspects from his history.⁷⁷ Robert I. Rotberg rendered the rise of African nationalism in central Africa as the growth of a liberal secular modernity against an authoritarian and anachronistic colonial state.⁷⁸ Henry S. Meebelo looked to the early colonial period to identify how acts of resistance against the colonial state eventually manifested as the rise of a nationalist movement. Millenarian or "religious"-based agency was imagined to give way to secular nationalism.⁷⁹ This intellectual project engaged with a political project, the creation of the state religion of Zambian humanism, which is documented in the United National Independence Party archives, a valuable resource for understanding the postcolonial state's response to spiritual beliefs.

When Kaunda's rule failed to meet the expectation of party activists and the one-party state was declared, the nationalist historiography appeared Whiggish and dated. But even as Zambians became disillusioned and critical of Kaunda's regime, scholarship remained muted, at least compared to the far more critical and analytical scholarship about, say, Mobutu's Zaire. In part this was because under Kaunda, Zambia hosted southern African liberation movements, and hence was a sympathetic home to some of the radical historians and social theorists of southern Africa.⁸⁰ The critical tradition of scholarship that did emerge during the 1970s and 1980s generally emphasized structural forces rather than historical agency. Scholars, drawing on a Marxist dependency theory then in vogue, wrote about the structural "roots of rural

poverty,” a legacy that the postcolonial Zambian regime found difficult to counteract.⁸¹ Marxists were also interested in religion. In one example particularly pertinent to this book, Wim M. J. van Binsbergen placed religious practices within their socioeconomic contexts; or, in his language, he linked a distinctive religious superstructure to underlying transformations in the mode of production. Even while his descriptions were far more subtle than the determinism of his analytical model, van Binsbergen stressed class forces instead of treating the content of religious ideas as statements of power. Marxist abstractions replaced spiritual assertions. His chapter on the Christian Lumpa movement of Alice Lenshina, a central concern of this book, stands out in this regard. He argued that Lenshina’s movement was constituted by peasants who radically rejected state control and the petty bourgeois leadership of the nationalists, an analysis that he could only sustain with little reference to the concepts held by Lenshina’s followers.⁸²

By the 1990s Zambian historiography began to look beyond the blinkers of theoretical Marxism and view the heterodox struggles of ordinary people. Samuel N. Chipungu edited an important collection on the experiences of Zambians under colonialism.⁸³ A new generation of anthropologists offered alternative views to the paradigms of tribal change developed by their predecessors, the RLI anthropologists.⁸⁴ Karen Tranberg Hansen published ethnographies about marginalized groups, servants, women, small-scale traders, and youth.⁸⁵ James A. Pritchett’s long period of fieldwork informed his analysis of alternative forms of corporate organization.⁸⁶ Megan Vaughan and Henrietta L. Moore questioned Richards’s contention of a stable and traditional Bemba tribal society where practices such as *chitemene* (a form of slash-and-burn agriculture) were engrained in culture and would collapse under the stresses of modernity.⁸⁷

At the end of the 1990s, a post-nationalist historiography emerged. A seminal moment in the dissemination of this historiography was the convening of a conference in Lusaka in August 2005 and the publication of a selection of its proceedings, *One Zambia, Many Histories*. This was, in the words of the editors, a decisive attempt to “place at the centre of the analysis the counter-hegemonic political and religious histories and projects that stubbornly refused to be silenced in the name of national unity.”⁸⁸ Some examples from the volume stand out in their relevance for this book. Giacomo Macola demonstrates the intolerant and exclusionary nature of UNIP’s nationalism, which allowed little opportunity for political dissent.⁸⁹ Miles Larmer discusses the political opposition that was forced underground after the banning of the United Progressive Party (UPP) in 1972. Even the once-powerful trade union movement increasingly succumbed to—even as it resisted—co-option and incorporation into UNIP.⁹⁰ The church, as Marja Hinfelaar points out, proved

to be one of the few spheres of civil society that remained autonomous from UNIP and able to critique its leadership and practices.⁹¹ Their weekly newspaper, the *National Mirror*, thus provides an important source for independent voices in the postcolonial period, and is employed extensively in the final chapters of this book.

My post-secular argument is related to this latest post-nationalist and in some senses postmodern trend. It questions some of the central tenets of nationalist history alongside modernization theory, with its assumptions of secular agencies and its progressive teleology. This focus on the multifarious and unexpected narratives and epistemologies, the centrality of spirits in Zambian history, may upset those who seek solace in their secular worlds. The methodological approach promoted here attempts to extend the vistas of my predecessors—the missionaries, colonial administrators, anthropologists, and progressive activists—and make visible the rich, complex, and dynamic worlds that they ignored, repressed, or rendered invisible.

AN OVERVIEW

This history of a world populated with spirits begins with the oral tradition of the Bemba Crocodile Clan royals that recalls their migration to northern Zambia, their battle with the “owners of the land,” and their death and burial in a sacred grove, indicating the ability of the royal ancestors to calm dangerous emotions and to ensure fertility and fecundity. The first chapter, “The Passion of Chitimukulu,” ends in the late nineteenth century, when the slave trade and warfare impinged on south-central Africa to an unprecedented degree, and local prophets challenged the hegemony and efficacy of these Crocodile Clan spiritual claims and interventions.

Chapter 2, “Christian Witches,” turns to the early twentieth century, when the Bemba royals were incorporated into the colonial state. Even as the Bemba rulers were empowered as indirect rulers by the colonial district commissioners (DCs), they were disempowered as mediators with their ancestral spirits. In addition, new Christian spirits challenged or replaced the ancestors. And yet evil proliferated, in part because Christian moralities and notions of sin became associated with angry spirits and even witchcraft. But ideas of evil spiritual agents also spread because they provided an effective way to describe the colonial order. Movements such as the Bamuchape witchcraft cleansers harnessed new Christian spirits to cleanse the evil that the missionaries stubbornly refused to recognize.

The newly established copper-mining towns of the 1920s and 1930s, where a number of Bemba men and women sought employment and opportunities, form the backdrop to the third chapter, “Satan in the City.” Here a new type of Christian movement, free from European missionaries, the

“Watchtower,” took guidance from the international Jehovah’s Witnesses pamphlets that associated the authorities of this world with Satan. For the Watchtower movement on the Copperbelt, the colonial authorities and mining companies were Satan’s agents. In the name of the Armageddon and a new heaven on earth, Watchtower fomented opposition among workers dislocated from rural environs and liberated from indirect rule. In a series of strikes, they confronted the colonial authorities, missionaries, European-educated African elites, and the secular urban civil society that these elites were in the process of creating.

Chapter 4, “A New Jerusalem,” returns to the rural Bemba heartland by considering the rise of a revolutionary church led by the Queen, “Regina” or “Lenshina” in the ChiBemba language, who sought to replace old beneficent spirits with new spirits, God and Jesus, in order to eradicate the influence of evil witchcraft. Not only did Lenshina innovate the ideas of the Bamuchape witchfinders and Watchtower to challenge the Christianity of the missionaries and the political sovereignty of the colonial state, but her spiritual quest addressed the afflictions of the most marginalized of groups, rural women, burdened by a patriarchal colonial order.

Popular nationalism spread in the same areas as the popular Christian movements. Chapter 5, “The Dawn,” considers the rise of a nationalist movement that brought Christian spiritual notions into the struggle for a popular sovereignty, leading to an explosive, Manichaean, and sometimes violent movement that demanded faithful adherence to the mass movement. Popular nationalism had such a close resemblance to millenarian religious movements that elite attempts to contain expectations through a program of secular moral reform were challenged.

By the early 1960s, the followers of Alice Lenshina and the nationalist movement fought for influence, resulting in a brutal civil war in northern Zambia. We witness in chapter 6, “Devils of War,” striking examples of spiritual agency during this civil war, as enemies became devils, bullets turned to water, and brave fighters were described as Christian heroes.

The war ended when Kaunda sent in colonial troops to forcefully disperse Lenshina’s followers’ villages. The victory of Kaunda’s nationalists and their seizure of the colonial state apparatus in 1964 promised to inaugurate an era of secular socialism, guided by Kaunda’s state religion, humanism. Chapter 7, “God in Heaven, Kaunda on Earth,” argues that humanism was never a convincing philosophy for Zambians. They turned instead to spiritual mediators, such as the Archbishop of Lusaka, Emmanuel Milingo, who exorcized the evil spirits that afflicted Zambians who were losing faith in the nationalist vision.

Chapter 8, “A Nation Reborn,” explores the agency of the neoliberal Holy Spirit, which promised wealth and advancement in a post-socialist era. In

1991, Christians led the way in challenging Kaunda and his humanist state religion, contributing to the downfall of Kaunda in 1991. Zambia's second president, Frederick Chiluba, declared that Zambia, blessed by the Holy Spirit, would be reborn and prosper as a Christian nation. Pentecostal-inspired spirits framed the challenges and opportunities of a neoliberal order.

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