Spirit, Desire and the World:
Roho Churches of Western Kenya in the Era of Globalization

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1st of 3 files

Introductory material and chapter 1

The remaining chapters and the appendices are in two additional files

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the Roho churches of Vihiga District, Western Kenya, from their beginnings in 1927 to the present. After an initial historical overview of this group of African Independent Churches, it examines their creation of a vernacular theology – the founders' vision. This was characterized by a strong pneumatology, in which the Holy Spirit acts as guardian of the community. The thesis locates this vision, and its rejection of modernist, western, and capitalist modes of development, in the articulation of the traditional communal mode of production in contradistinction to the European industrial capitalism characteristic of Kenya in the 1930s. It examines the desire of Roho leaders to play a role in the public sphere and recounts their attempt to influence national political life through an indigenous conciliar movement at the time of political independence. Finally, it examines the process of re-envisioning undertaken by Roho leaders and members to meet the dual challenges of pauperization and modernization at the present day.

Dedicated to the Bishops and Archbishops
of the Roho churches of Vihiga,
who first introduced me to Roho Christianity,
and who continue to encourage me
to enter more deeply into that faith

Acknowledgements

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Glossary of common Swahili expressions found in the text

(with acknowledgements to Johnson, *Swahili-English Dictionary,* 1939,
which I have adapted according to common usage in the Roho churches).
Verbs are found under the stem.

boma (pl: ma-)	(1) raised earthwork for defence. Therefore also (2) the local government administrative offices (colonial usage, espec. in Tanganyika).
dini	Religion. *Dini ya Roho:* religion of the spirit (somewhat derogatory, and used before the creation of distinct denominations). Compare: *Dini ya Israel:* the religion of those who call themselves 'of Israel', i.e., African Israel Church Nineveh.
fitina	In popular usage, false allegations intended to malign the character of someone.
gaagaa (ku-)	To roll from side-to-side as if in pain or delirium. Used of the practice of rolling on the floor in repentance and in search of the Spirit.
gwaride (pl: ma-)	Lit., drill, parade (of the military); in Roho usage, a procession of witness.
harambee	A fund-raising event for a community project.
jua kali	Lit., hot or fierce sun, used of informal industries generally practised in the open-air or under temporary shelters.
kanzu	Long-sleeved gown stretching to the feet, and used for prayer and worship. Normally white, and of cotton, it was formerly the usual outer garment of Swahili men at the coast. See Chapter
kesha	Night-watch for prayer and fasting
kijiji (pl: vi-)	Village, small community. In the Roho context, the lowest level congregation, normally led by a deacon (*shemasi)* or village elder (*mzee wa kijiji*).
kipande (pl: vi-)	(1) Lit., a small piece of something (2) the name given to the labour registration document that every adult male African was required to carry outside the reserve, which included the details (employer, nature of employment, and dates and wages) of all wage employment undertaken by the individual.
madhabahu	'On the platform', 'in the sanctuary', and by extension 'the leaders'. Lit., 'in the place of sacrifice'.
maisha	Life. *maisha ya kiroho:* life of the Spirit, spiritual life.
makumbusho	Remembrance, commemoration, memorial service. Used both for the 'Forty Days' service after the burial, anmd also for annual commemorations.
matatu	Mini-bus or pick-up adapted to carry passengers.
mganga (pl: wa-)	Traditional doctor or diviner (from stem –*ganga,*(1) to bind up mend; (2) save, set free from a charm.)
moyo (pl: mi-)	(1) The physical organ of the heart; (2) feelings, soul, mind, will, self; (3) inmost part, core, pith, centre; (4) courage, resolution, presence of mind; (5) desire, hope

msalaba (pl: mi-)	Cross
mzee (pl: wa-)	An old person, an elder, often in an official or ritual capacity, a term used with respect.
nabii (pl: ma-)	Prophet.
nyayo	Footsteps. A slogan used by President Moi initially to suggest that he was following in the footsteps of Kenyatta and later that everybody else should follow in his own.
okoa (ku-)	To save. Frequently used of salvation in the Protestant Christian sense in *wokovu* (n., salvation); *ku-okoka* (get saved); *ku-okolewa* (be saved). A term formerly avoided by Roho Christians.
pepo (pl: ma-)	(1) disembodied spirit, such as *jini* and *shetani*, evil spirits (2) as *peponi* (locative), the place of the spirits, paradise, heaven (a term commonly used at Christian funerals).
roho	(1) soul, spirit, life, vital principle; (2) breath; (3) throat; (4) character, individuality. *Roho Mtakatifu:* Holy Spirit. Used also of human and ancestral spirits. *Roho* is cognate (through the Arabic) with Hebrew *ruach.*
-safi	Clean, pure. *Ku-safisha:* vb, to make clean, pure.
shamba (ma-)	Farm, plantation, garden; the country as opposed to the town.
tamaa	Coveted object, longing, desire, lust, ambition, avarice, cupidity, greediness.
takasa (ku-)	To cleanse, purify, sanctify. The reflexive, *kujitakasa,* literally, 'to cleanse oneself', is often used as an alternative to *kutubu,* 'to repent'. *–takatifu:* holy, pure. *Utakatifu wa Mungu:* the holiness of God.
tubu (ku-)	To repent. *Toba:* repentance.
ugali	A stiff porridge or cake normally made of maize or millet and eaten with a relish.
uhuru	Freedom from slavery. The term used for political independence.
ushuhuda	Testimony, proof.
watu wa roho	People of the Spirit: the common term used by members of the Roho churches of each other

List of abbreviations and acronyms used in the text

Shortened names and acronyms of churches and church organizations (where the shortened form is not an acronym, it is indicated in the text by use of italics)

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
ACHS	African Church of the Holy Spirit
ADC	African Divine Church
AHZC	African Holy Zionist Church
AICN	African Israel Church Nineveh
AIPCA	African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (originally African Independent Pentecostal Church)
African Holy Spirit	African Church of the Holy Spirit
AIM	Africa Inland Mission
African Israel	African Israel Church Nineveh (also known more recently as African Israel Nineveh Church)
Bethlehem	Church of Bethlehem
CCA	Church of Christ in Africa
CCK	Christian Council of Kenya: born out of the Kenya Missionary Council in 1943; became the National Christian Council in 1966.
CGL	Church Group of Light
CMS	Church Missionary Society (Anglican); since 1984 the Church Mission Society.
Divine	African Divine Church (often popularly referred to as A.D.C.)
EAUC	East African United Churches and Orthodox Coptic Communion
FAIM	Friends African Industrial Mission
FAM	Friends African Mission
Gospel	Gospel Holy Spirit Church of EA
GHSCEA	Gospel Holy Spirit Church of EA
Holy Ghost Musanda	Holy Ghost Church Musanda
Holy Ghost Ruwe	Holy Ghost Church Ruwe
Holy Spirit	Holy Spirit Church of East Africa
HSCEA	Holy Spirit Church of East Africa
ICA	Israel Church in Africa
ICCC	International Council of Christian Churches (an anti-ecumenical world council of fundamentalist churches)
IHS	International Holy Spirit and United Independent Churches
Interior	African Interior Church
KAICCEA	Kenya African Independent Communion Churches of East Africa (the Kenyan 'Province' of EAUC)
KAUCC	Kenya African United Christian Churches
KICF	Kenya Independent Churches Fellowship
KUIC	Kenya United Independent Churches
Legio / Legio Maria	Popularly used for Maria Legio of African Church Mission
Lyahuka	Lyahuka Church of East Africa
LCEA	Lyahuka Church of East Africa
Nabii	Nabii Christian Church

NIM   Nilotic Independent Mission

NIM	Nilotic Independent Mission
NCCK	National Christian Council of Kenya; before 1966 known as the Christian Council of Kenya; became the National Council of Churches of Kenya in 1983.
Nomiya	Nomiya Luo Mission or Church
OAIC	Organization of African Instituted Churches (from 1978-1985, known as the Organization of African Independent Churches)
PAG	Pentecostal Assemblies of God, formerly Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.
PAOC	Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.
Roho Israel	Roho Israel Church of God
RICG	Roho Israel Church of God
Sinai	Church of Africa Sinai Mission
SA	Salvation Army
SACIM	South African Compounds and Interior Mission
WCC	World Council of Churches
Zion	African Holy Zionist Church

Other abbreviations and acronyms

AG	Attorney General
AGM	Annual General Meeting
AIC	African Independent Church
AR	Annual Report
DC	District Commissioner
DN	*Daily Nation*
DO	District Officer
EAS	*East African Standard*
HOR	Handing Over Report (of administration officers)
HSS	'Holy Spirit Songs', collection by Rev. Francis King'ang'a
IR	Intelligence Report
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KCH	*Kenya Churches Handbook* (ed. D.B. Barrett)
KNA	Kenya National Archives
KT	Kenya Times
LNC	Local Native Council (later African District Council)
NKCA	North Kavirondo Central Association
N. Kav.	North Kavirondo District
NKTWA	North Kavirondo Taxpayers Welfare Association
OI	Oral Interview
PC	Provincial Commissioner *or* Personal Communication
PO	Personal Observation
Std.	*Standard*
WR	*Weekly Review*

Map 1
Location of Vihiga District in Kenya

Source: Kenya Government, *Vihiga District Development Plan (1994-1996), used in* Mutoro, *Women Working Wonders,* p. 40.

Map 2
Former locations and peoples of Western Province
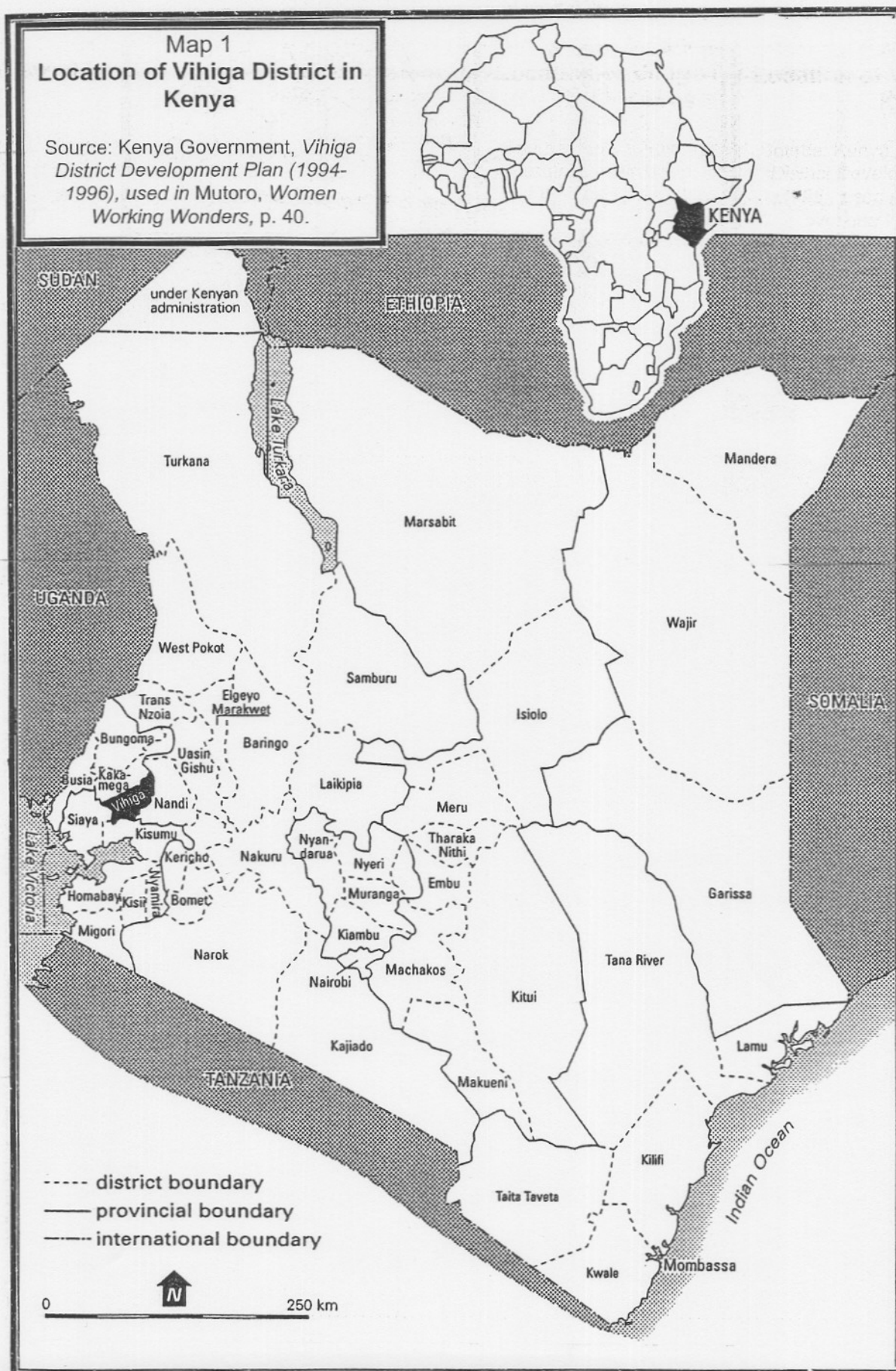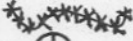
Source: Were, *History of the Abaluyia*, 1967, p. 28

MOUNT ELGON

ELGON (Non - Abaluyia)

U G A N D A

MALAKISI

KIMILILI

NORTH TESO

TRANS - NZOIA

SOUTH TESO (Non - Abaluyia)

BUKOLI

NDIVISI

WEST BUKUSU

EAST BUKUSU

RIFT VALLEY PROVINCE

BUKHAYO

MARACHI

BUNYALA

KABRAS

SAMIA

Nzoia River

WANGA

BUTSOTSO

Kakamega Township

Kakamega Forest

BUNYALA

MARAMA

ISUKHA

IDAKHO

KISA

TIRIKI

NYANGORI

Abaluyia and Kalenjin.

Yala River

BUNYORE

MARAGOLI

N A N D I

L U O

LAKE VICTORIA

KAVIRONDO GULF

KEY :-

+ + + + + INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY

— — — PROVINCIAL BOUNDARIES

0   7·5   15   22·5

Scale:- 7½ Miles to 1 Inch

Map 3
Roho Churches in Vihiga District

Provincial boundaries
Mission church centres ⊕
AIC centres +

Source: Survey of Kenya 1: 50,000 series

Kakamega

I s u k h a

Lugala

Mukumu

Shinyalu

Makhokho

Kimingini

I d a k h o

Kaimosi

Sabatia

Chavakali

ikuvu

Mudete

Lunyerere

N o r t h   M a r a g o l i

Ebunangwe

Lukuvuli

Mbale

Enderi

B u n y o r e

Bukoyani

Muhanda

Manyatta

Hamisi

Serem

Madira

S o u t h

Gisambai

Banja

Bukuga

Majengo

T   i   r   i   k

Kima

Vihiga

T   a   n   g'   o   r   i

Madzuu

Sinai

Jeprok

Ibwali

N a n d i

M a r a g o l i

Mung'oma

N

Nineveh

Tigol

Boyani ADC

Nyang'ori

Kajulu

Kiboswa

Nyahera

Ogada

N y a n z a

Kisumu

Chapter One
Articulating local visions and values

We need to go back to actual history, and locate the most profound symbols of African culture in a broader context, a context that bears the marks of domination and conflict.[1]

Part One. Introduction

Spirit or flesh?

In 2000, a small team from the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) participated in a youth revival convention in Western Kenya of the African Church of the Holy Spirit (abbreviated here as *African Holy Spirit).*[2] We wanted to challenge the young people to take advantage of our development programme. Our presentations, which included discussion of models of leadership and small business programmes, sparked a long spontaneous debate over the role of 'development' in the worship service two days later that concluded the retreat.

In the custom of Western Kenya Roho - or Holy Spirit - churches, the issues were handled publicly during worship, expressed in terms of the traditional Christian opposition between Spirit and flesh.[3] The purpose of this retreat had been to enable participants to be filled with the Holy Spirit through prayer and fasting. Their white prayer gowns were now dirty after three nights of rolling on the floor in their struggle

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[1] Ela, *My Faith as an African,* p. 175.
[2] African Church of the Holy Spirit Youth Revival Convention, 29th-31st April 2000, Kimingini, Kakamega. For more on this church, and on the Organization of African Instituted Churches, see below.
[3] By *Roho* churches I mean those churches that trace their roots to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Kaimosi in 1927 among the Luyia people, and a few years later (apparently independently) among the neighbouring Luo; and also churches of later origin that share a similar understanding of the Holy Spirit. See a fuller definition below, p. 110.

against the flesh. The dirtier the gown, the more proudly it was worn as a sign of perseverance in the battle. People described themselves as feeling 'light'. During the worship, when the leaders gave their customary greetings of *hallelujah!* and *mulembe!* (peace) as they ran and jumped in the air, only two or three such salutations were enough to cause the Spirit to fall on the congregation of over 1000 people, with the result that a few fell into trance and many spoke in tongues. The issue was clear to all those present: to what extent would 'development' be assimilated to 'flesh'? Could 'flesh' be interpreted to permit a positive recognition of material needs?

One of the leaders opened the debate by saying that 'development' issues should not have been brought into a revival convention. (This was an oblique criticism not simply of ourselves, but also of the youth leaders who had invited us.) I was then asked to greet the congregation. I used an image of Europe (from where 'development' is popularly perceived to flow) that I knew had been used by Roho leaders elsewhere. Europe was 'a society rich in material terms but where people's decaying bodies are found alone in their houses months after their deaths'. (In thus depicting what is perhaps the ultimate horror for people from Western Kenya, I was making a rhetorical gesture on behalf of the OAIC team in order to establish our credentials as a group which did not simply purvey a Western model of development.) Other speakers stressed that a desire for riches killed the Spirit. The acting High Priest preached from the parable of the wedding guest without wedding clothes – a reference to the OAIC team as outsiders (most of us were not properly robed, and therefore probably not 'one in the Spirit' with the other participants).

So far in the meeting, the church leaders had striven to express the views of traditionalists. The progressives were now accorded the argument from practical reality. The young men were exhorted to stop neglecting their families by following prophets and senior church leaders around in search of spiritual experience during the *kesha* (Swahili: 'night watches'), instead of working on their farms. A rule was proposed that before a young man buys himself a second pair of clothes, he should buy his wife one first.[4] The value of small businesses to help pay school fees and other necessities was acknowledged. It was agreed that the church should teach on the relationship between 'Spirit' and 'flesh' at diocesan levels. In conclusion, certain aspects of 'development'

were granted a role in the life lived under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; specifically, the OAIC small business facilitator was invited back on another more appropriate occasion.

I tell this story for a number of reasons. First, because this thesis has arisen from the practical challenges that my colleagues and I in the OAIC face in our work with African Independent Churches (AICs) in the fields of development and theological education. At both the grassroots and at the continental level we encounter profoundly moral visions of society which are distinct from, and often deeply subversive of, the values of the global capitalist world of the free market. This thesis attempts to describe one such vision from its earliest expression to the present day. I examine specifically the life and faith of one small group of AICs, the Roho churches of Vihiga District in Western Kenya.

The kind of experience recounted above leads to a fundamental assumption (which I examine in the course of the work) that religious faith as an ideology motivates believers in a particular direction - or possibly in several, contradictory, directions – vis-à-vis the society or societies in which it is present.[5] The story suggests that the faith of the African Church of the Holy Spirit is in some respects deeply opposed to 'western' or 'modern' values of 'development'. Secondly, then, this thesis asks what impact the values of the 'free' market and the continuing process of modernization are making on this faith. The story suggests that debates on these issues, on the role and purpose of 'development', and on the impact of global processes, are common-place and vital to the on-going life of the

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[4] Since it would be socially acceptable for a young man to be around the home compound and farm 'half-naked' but not for a woman.

[5] I define ideology (in a neutral sense) following Gramsci: 'a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life.' It inspires concrete attitudes and provides orientations for action. It is 'the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.'. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* (1971), pp. 328, 377, quoted in Bottomore, et al. (eds), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought,* article on 'Ideology', p. 222.

Roho churches in Kenya. I suggest that this is true no matter how 'rural' or 'un-progressive' these churches might appear to be to the casual observer.[6] In this respect I stand with the desire of recent researchers to stress the global understandings, connections, and objectives of AICs. However, the Roho churches I study do not always share the values of the dominant system, and unlike contemporary African pentecostal churches, are often resistant to the symbolism, technology, and ideology of globalized society.[7]

It also forms part of my argument in what follows that issues related to the form and meaning of 'development' were a fundamental component of the struggles that resulted in the formation of these AICs seventy or eighty years ago. The stances taken then in the churches' struggle to carve out for themselves a way of life in the midst of colonial oppression were crystallized in what I call here the *founders' visions* of these churches. It is through a continuously evolving dialogue with these visions and traditions that the present-day Roho churches both accommodate and confront the globalized world many years later. For their members, the original vision is still 'the seed of present thoughts',[8] and I explore the process in which church members continually negotiate between the demands of faith and the contemporary world. Finally, the story is a pointer to - and, in

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[6] Fabian makes the point in 'Six Theses', p. 121, that it is incorrect to assume that rural Africans are not aware of wider global issues.

[7] Schwartz, in her work on Legio Maria, a large Kenyan 'Catholic' AIC, stresses the resistance of its members to being enclosed in a 'world of their own', and their desire to break down others' restrictive perceptions of them. (Schwartz, *A World without End;* 'Christianity and the Construction of Global History: The Example of Legio Maria'.) From another perspective, ter Haar focuses on the global mission of AICs in Europe, in *Halfway to Paradise.* See Gerloff's review of this work in *Journal of Religion in Africa,* XXX, 4, p. 506. Gerloff's own work on the African-Caribbean church movement in Britain also recounts the mission of the African 'indigenous' churches in the UK, *A Plea for British Black Theologies.*

[8] Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts,* p. 1.

the context of this thesis, a warning about - my own role as an *actor* in the very process I wish to study.

Kalilombe, in a review of recent studies of AICs in Southern Africa, appeals for attention to be paid to the changes that have taken place in society since the churches' foundation, and the impact these changes have had on the churches' faith and life. In particular he asks for more attention to be paid to the AICs' involvement in the socio-economic transformation of society.[9] This work goes some way towards meeting Kalilombe's concerns; but it does so by defining the vision of the Roho churches as quite distinct from that of the dominant society, and demonstrates these churches' profound ambivalence towards that wider society, which has been largely created, moulded, and sustained by the forces of colonialism, globalization, and the free market.

African Independent Churches

There has been considerable debate on the best terms to use for these churches, which number about 55 million adherents across the continent at the present time.[10] I follow the current practice in the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) - the only continent-wide representative organ of these churches - and continue to use the term African Independent Churches (AICs) to refer to:

> churches which claim the title Christian in that they acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, and
> which have either separated by secession from a mission church or an existing African

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[9] Kalilombe, in a review of Oosthuizen et al., eds, *Afro-Christianity at the Grassroots,* in *Journal of Religion in Africa,* XXVII, 1, p. 109.

[10] Barrett & Johnson, 'Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 2001', IBMR 25:1, p. 24 (published 2000).

independent church, or have been founded outside the mission church as a new kind of religious entity under African initiative and leadership.[11]

I justify continuing to use the word 'independent' rather than the more modern expressions 'instituted',[12] 'indigenous', 'initiated',[13] 'African reformation',[14] or 'locally founded',[15] not just because it was the only general term for these churches in the first five decades of their existence, but principally because *independent* is a term with political connotations. (These were very clear to the founders of the African Independent Pentecostal Church in Kenya in the mid 1930s.[16]) When churches accept this term for themselves they imply that in their origins - if not in their present life, worship, and witness – they were rejecting significant aspects of the dominant missionary model of the church, and the missions' assumptions that their converts should be incorporated into colonial society. Mosala summarises this when he says the term 'African Independent Churches' 'connotes a specifically religious version of the wider African liberation from colonialism, capitalism, racism, and cultural chauvinism' regardless of their specific theology.[17]

Within the broader category of the AICs I distinguish three basic types:

1. *Spiritual churches:* this is the preferred term in East Africa for the type of churches called 'Zionist' or 'Apostolic' in Southern Africa,[18] or *Aladura* (Yoruba: 'praying') in

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[11] Slightly modified from D. B. Barrett's definition, in *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, p. 50.
[12] Adopted by the OAIC in 1985 when the Kenyan Government found the term 'independent' too political.
[13] Used by Allan Anderson of the Research Unit for New Religions and Churches at the Graduate Institute for Theology and Religions, University of Birmingham. See Anderson, *African Reformation,* pp. 10-11.
[14] Suggested by Thomas Oduro and Stan Nussbaum in *The Review of AICs*, 12: 2, May - Aug. 2001, p. 43.
[15] Used by the National Council of Churches of Kenya in their documents during the 1980s.
[16] The early Kenyan nationalist Harry Thuku is supposed to have suggested the name for the church. 'By 'independent church' we meant a church that would not be governed from Canterbury, Edinburgh, or Rome,' was the explanation of the leaders. Neckebrouck, *Le Onzième Commandement,* p. 459.
[17] Mosala, 'Race, Class, and Gender', p. 44.
[18] Anderson, *Zion and Pentecost*; Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets,* pp. 53-9.

West Africa,[19] and which H.W. Turner called 'prophet-healing churches'.[20] 'Spiritual churches' is close to the name the Roho people use of themselves, *watu wa Roho Mtakatifu* (Swahili: 'people of the Holy Spirit').[21] These are churches closely related to African culture, with a strong focus on spiritual gifts and powers. In the confrontation with European colonial and missionary value systems these churches created African communities of the Holy Spirit, in which people defined their own identity in ways fundamentally distinct from those valued by the missionary churches, whose members came to be more closely moulded in the individualist, instrumental values of colonial society.

2. *Nationalist churches:* known as 'Ethiopian' in Southern Africa,[22] 'African' in West Africa, and simply as 'Independent' in Central Kenya. These are similar in structure and formal theology to the mission churches from which most broke away, but were focused on African leadership and achievements in this world. These churches emerged more often in societies where colonial power was particularly oppressive (South Africa, Kenya), where white settlers took land from Africans, and where labour laws reflected the use of Africans simply as hewers of wood and drawers of water. In these highly politicized societies, the need to capture political power from the Europeans came to be understood as a divine imperative.

3. There is a third category of churches that are sometimes associated with the independent churches: the *African pentecostal churches.* Hollenweger and Anderson use this term to describe any African church which stresses the gifts of the Spirit, including the Pentecostal mission churches.[23] As will be seen, I recognize the shared history and common experience of the Holy Spirit of the pentecostal mission churches and the Spiritual churches. I prefer, however, to use the term 'African pentecostals' to denote the

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[19] Peel, *Aladura;* H.W. Turner, *African Independent Church;* Hackett, *New Religious Movements in Nigeria.*

[20] Turner, 'A Typology for Modern African Religious Movements', p. 23.

[21] The term 'Holy Spirit churches' would be preferable as an umbrella term for these churches, to avoid possible associations with 'spiritist' or 'spiritualist' groups. But it already describes a specific group of these churches (those that emerged from the Holy Spirit movement of Western Kenya in 1927). *Dini ya Roho* (Swahili: 'Religion of the [Holy] Spirit') is a term that was used by administrators and missionaries specifically for this group, and also to the Luo speaking group of Musanda-Ruwe, and sometimes to any indigenous group whose worship incorporated similar ecstatic phenomena. In Swahili *Roho* without the qualifying adjective *Mtakatifu* ('Holy') can also be used of ancestral and human spirits, but it is shorter and more memorable as a descriptive term than the strictly correct 'Roho Mtakatifu churches'.

[22] Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets,* pp. 53-9.

more recent *African-founded* churches which in style often look to the west, to western pentecostalism and to urban society rather than to African rural traditions.[24]

It should be noted that in practice there is considerable fluidity between these three types, and individual denominations may move partially or wholly from one to another. In this thesis I focus on the role of the Roho churches, a sub-group of the Spiritual churches, which originated in Western Kenya, and especially those Roho churches with roots or a presence in Vihiga District.[25] (A similar group of churches found in Central Kenya, known as the Akurinu, are distinguished historically from the Roho churches by a greater emphasis on ritual purity.) I pay particular attention to the Holy Spirit Church of East Africa *(Holy Spirit)* as a case study.

A personal journey

I consider next my own interests and background, and my reasons for involvement with the Roho churches. I come from the former imperial power against which the churches in this study were, in some respects, founded in protest. I was brought up during the declining years of the British Empire in a culture which assumed the inferiority at least of the *contemporary condition* of Africa if not of its essence. After my first university degree, between 1970 to 1976 I worked as a Church Missionary Society (CMS)[26] volunteer in Kenya, first as a teacher, then as headmaster of a community-run (*harambee*)

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[23] Hollenweger, *Pentecostals,* p. 149; Anderson, *Zion and Pentecost,* pp. 26-7, 35-37.

[24] For these aspects of modern African pentecostalism see Gifford, *New Dimensions in African Christianity* and *African Christianity: Its Public Role;* ter Haar, 'Standing up for Jesus'; Meyer, '"Make a Complete Break with the Past"'; van Dijk, 'Pentecostalism, Cultural Memory and the State'.

[25] See below, chapter two, p. 110, for a definition of these churches.

[26] CMS is an Anglican missionary society of the evangelical tradition, founded in 1799. The name was changed to the Church Mission Society in April 1985.

secondary school in rural Bungoma District, Western Province.[27] In this situation I was

confronted with two competing religious realities: the popular Christianity of the East

African Revival (itself a complex construction of African values and evangelical

Christian revivalism), and the still powerful traditional religious practices and beliefs of

the Babukusu (the northernmost people of the Luyia group). These latter beliefs were

manifested most obviously in initiation ceremonies, in rites to commemorate the dead,

and in practices of divination. Whereas in my mind I gave general assent to the Christian

revivalism, in my emotions I was profoundly moved by the latter. I felt uneasy at the way

these religious divisions in a community which in my own work I served as a unity.

After doing further studies in the UK (mainly in adult education) I returned to Kenya in

1978 as a full missionary of CMS. At the suggestion of the church statistician David B.

Barrett, at that time based in Nairobi, I was seconded to work with Bishop Antonious

Markos of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt in his continent-wide ministry with

African Independent Churches (AICs).[28] Hitherto the little I knew about AICs had

suggested to me that they were embarrassingly emotional and atavistic. During my initial

contacts with AICs in Nairobi I felt at times as if I were donning the persona of an under-

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[27] The concept of *harambee* has been formative in Kenyan political culture. The term *harambee* was originally a phrase used by porters on the coastal, meaning 'let's pull together'. It became a nationalist slogan in the years preceding independence, was adopted by Jomo Kenyatta as a rallying cry at public meetings, and became the motto on the Kenyan coat of arms. After *uhuru* it was widely used for as a general term for community self-help activities. The *harambee* movement was a significant mobilization of people for local development projects, such as schools, clinics, cattle-dips, etc, which the government was unable to fund from its own resources. The movement was strongest during the decade immediately after independence, where it made a very significant impact on national development. See Ombudo, *Harambee: its Origin and Use*; Ominde, 'The Harambee Movement in Educational Development'.

[28] For descriptions of Bishop Markos' significant ministry with AICs, see Barrett & Padwick, *Rise Up and Walk!*, pp. 33-52, and Markos, *Come Across… and Help Us*, Bks. 1 & 2. For a critique of 'the Ethiopian thesis' which Markos employed in his ministry, H.W. Turner, 'Reflections on African Movements', pp. 108-110. For additional material on the OAIC, see Barrett & Padwick, op. cit., pp. 33 ff.; N. Wambugu, 'The Organization of African Instituted Churches: An Introduction and Brief History', 9 pp., OAIC, 1995.

cover agent, such was the gap between my personal understanding and the belief systems of the church members. From 1979, however, emerging from my middle-class refuge in a new residential estate, I shared a compound on the edge of Kibera, the largest of the Nairobi shantytowns, with the founder of the Nairobi branch of a new African pentecostal church from Bungoma, the Pentecostal Christian Universal Church.[29] (My status as a single man undoubtedly helped me then and later to build close personal relationships with a number of church leaders, and to maintain a relatively open house.) Through my life in Kibera, and my work at the OAIC[30] – which was formed as a result of a conference of AIC leaders arranged by Bishop Markos in Cairo in 1978 - I slowly began to understand AICs better. This is a continuing task and is one reason for this present study.

In 1985 I started, but did not finish, a MPhil degree at the University of Birmingham in the UK, in which I intended to look at the public face of Kenyan AICs, and their involvement in the conciliar movement.[31] Some of the research I undertook then forms the basis of part of chapters two and five in this work, and can be identified by the date of interviews. In 1987 I returned to Kenya to work as development co-ordinator with the local association of Roho churches of Vihiga District known as Kenya United

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[29] A church originally from Bungoma in Western Kenya, with roots in the Pentecostal Evangelistic Fellowship of Africa. First registered in 1968. For documentation on this church see J. Seeley, 'Pentecostalism and Social Concern: Reflections on a Nairobi Case Study'; R. Hartfiel, 'The Healing Church: the History of Pentecostal Christian Universal Church'.

[30] Known as the Organization of African *Independent* Churches until 1985, when the Kenyan Government required a change of name in order to register the Organization under the Societies Act.

[31] Barrett and Padwick, *Rise Up and Walk!*, provides a overview of this movement on the continental level.

Independent Churches (KUIC).[32] I began to be disturbed by the discrepancies between

the development model of modernism and the 'otherness' of the Roho vision and

spirituality.[33] The relationships I built up during these years with KUIC led these Roho

churches to consecrate me as an 'apostle' in 2000 (see below, pp. 45ff). In 1993, I was

invited back to the OAIC and served first in research and communications, and from

1995 in the development programme.

In 1995 I was challenged by the OAIC General Secretary, Rev. Njeru Wambugu, to move

away from extension methodology (well characterized by the name of the development

programme at that time, Rural Development by Extension), towards an approach that did

not encourage the churches to become dependent upon the centre (i.e., the OAIC office).

Together with Rev. Lawford Imunde,[34] in 1996 we organized a continental-level

workshop in Johannesburg for AIC leaders, entitled 'The Founders' Vision: A Theology

of Development for African Independent Churches'. We looked at dominant and

alternative models of 'development', and sought to identify sources for an indigenous

African model. Perhaps not surprisingly, the workshop did not move the participants or

the OAIC very far towards the articulation of an overarching AIC 'theology of

development' (a somewhat naïve objective). Rather, it challenged us to listen more

closely to the visions of people at the grassroots, to encourage ordinary people to

articulate their hopes and values, and to explore the roots of their theologies and

ideologies. This thesis also represents, therefore, a continuation of this shift in focus away

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[32] Vihiga was then still part of Kakamega District, Western Province. For a summary of the changes in names of the various administrative areas during this period, see chapter two, pp. 52-3, and f.n. 5. For further details on KUIC, see below p. 46, f.n. 133, and chapter five, pp. 272ff.
[33] Padwick, 'Toward a Change in Spirituality?'

from the rather positivist project of creating a theology designed by 'us in the centre' for use by 'them' in the field. It remains, however, more of a personal and less of a communal or shared creation than I would have liked.[35]

Earlier in my life I lacked the self-confidence to write about such intimate, interior experiences as AIC spirituality (who was I as an outsider to do so?) but I can no longer avoid the challenge. Aspects of that spirituality have a strong personal appeal for me. I do not suppose that what I say can adequately reflect the experienced history, the lived reality and the spirituality of Kenyan members of the Holy Spirit Church of East Africa, the more so since I do not speak the dominant language of the church, Lulogooli.[36] Moreover, as the Comaroffs and Casson have shown with regard to the visions and preoccupations of earlier generations of missionaries, my own interpretations of Roho spirituality must to a considerable extent reflect the preoccupations of my own native culture.[37] Nevertheless, personal journeys like my own, and those of very many millions

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[34] Now Director of the Africa Programme at Loccum Evangelische Akademie, Hannover, Germany.

[35] Restrictions on time and money meant that I have been able to seek the reactions of only a few church members to the broader thrust of this story and my interpretation, but most of the details have been worked out in constant conversations and in interviews with them.

[36] For simplicity, I shall use here the term *Maragoli* to refer both to the people and as a general adjective (as commonly used in popular Kenyan English). I shall refer to the language as *Lulogooli.* (In popular Kenyan Swahili, the language is frequently called *ki-maragoli,* and the people *wa-maragoli*.)

Lulogooli is the Bantu language spoken by the Maragoli people. Politically it is regarded as a dialect of *Luluyia* (a political construction of 17 distinct but related Bantu languages in western Kenya). Linguistically Lulogooli is closely related to the language spoken by the *Gusii* (popularly, *Kisii*) people of South Nyanza. Mother tongue speakers call the language *lu-logooli,* speak of themselves as *ava-logooli*, and refer to one of their members as *mu-logooli*. There are many variant spellings of these words, due in part to the lack of distinction between 'l' and 'r' in Lulogooli. *The Ethnologue* (1999) records 8 variant spellings of the language.

I have hyphenated Bantu words in this note where appropriate to indicate the noun class prefixes and pre-prefixes, which – to add to the confusion – vary not only between Kenyan Bantu languages but also between Luyia dialects. See Kanyoro, *Unity and Diversity: A Linguistic Survey of the Abaluyia of Western Kenya.*

[37] Jean & John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vols. 1 & 2,* passim*;* Casson, 'To Plant a Garden City in the Slums of Paganism…', p. 395.

of others, reflect and refract the conflicts and relationships between cultures, and between dominant ('imperial') cultures and local realities that are of the very ligaments of the present globalized world. Edward Said notes

> …there is no vantage point outside the actuality of relationships among cultures, among unequal imperial and non-imperial powers, among us and others; no one has the epistemological privilege of somehow judging, evaluating, and interpreting the world free from the encumbering interests and engagements of the ongoing relationships themselves. We are, so to speak, of the connections, not outside and beyond them.[38]

Being of and in the connections is itself a privileged status, an issue I examine below.

Part Two. Theoretical considerations

In order to articulate the faith of the Roho churches, and to relate that faith over time to socio-economic realities, I employ a somewhat eclectic approach. I borrow from contemporary discussions of modernization and globalization (and how they inter-relate) in order to describe the qualitative changes that occurred in western Kenyan society during the last century, and the connections these changes have with the present era. I also use a development of the Marxist concept of 'articulation of modes of production' in order to throw light on the relationships in African societies between the economic base (or mode of production) of a particular society, and its ideological and political superstructure.

Globalization, modernity, and modernization

All societies are now caught up, to a lesser or greater extent, in the process of globalization. The word can have many meanings. Rajaee quotes Shaw's definition:

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[38] Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* p. 65.

globalization is 'a complex set of distinct but related processes - economic, cultural, social, and also political and military - through which social relations have developed towards a global scale and with global reach, over a long historic period.'[39] The definition is useful in recognizing the many forces at work in creating a global world, and the long period of time in which these global processes have been active. Such global processes include the development of long-distance cross-cultural trade, the mercantile system, colonialism, and indeed the missionary enterprises of the world religions.[40] It is equally possible to regard globalization, and the free market system and the IT revolution that are currently associated with it, as the latest and most intense stage of these global processes, and it is in this sense that I use it here.[41] This thesis argues that it is because there are historical, structural, and ideological connections between the stages of colonialism and contemporary globalization that the founders' visions of the Roho churches, forged in the earlier era, continue to have relevance today. Nevertheless, because the stages are historically and structurally distinct, the founders' visions are under threat today, and are undergoing a process of revision ('re-envisioning') and re-interpretation.

As already suggested, AICs confronted the colonial and missionary regimes in two different but related ways. The Spiritual churches created distinct social and religious communities in which their own faith and values ruled, but generally confronted the dominant political and economic models through religious, or 'spiritual' means. The

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[39] Rajaee, *Globalization on Trial,* p. 44.
[40] Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Process*; Pieterse, 'Globalization as Hybridization', p. 101.
[41] In contemporary Marxist analysis, globalization is sometimes seen as the latest stage of imperialism. See Sivandadan, quoted in Rajaee, op. cit. p. 32.

nationalist churches identified the issue of political power that lay behind colonial

oppression and sought to deal with it by mobilizing popular forces in the church. But both

were concerned with establishing *social and moral control* over the destructive and

divisive forces of colonialism and of the western modernity that it brought in its train.

Long-distance trade, capitalism and industrialization, colonialism, the missionary

enterprise, and globalization, have all acted as carriers of western modernity, to which,

indeed, they are in many ways structurally linked.[42]

Friedman lists the phenomena associated with modernity and attempts to bring these into

relation with each other.[43] The first phenomenon is the rise of individualism, in which the

person 'becomes a miniature society unto himself', and his sense of identity is

disembodied from social relations. 'By contrast, the subject of a ['traditional'] kinship-

ordered universe is not only constrained by a cosmological order. His very constitution is

intimately bound up with forces that extend beyond the boundaries of his body'.[44] With

the rise of modernity, the concept of the individual self is related in turn to a distinction

between the private and public spheres, and between a private and intimate self, which is

experienced as more 'real', and impersonal public and social roles. A similar process of

dichotomization, of body from soul (and mind), and of object from subject, and the

differentiation of distinct fields of knowledge (art, science, religion, politics;

mathematics, philosophy, medicine, law, history, chemistry, etc), also occurred. (In

contrast, another factor in modernity has been the attempt to identify a unity underlying

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[42] Other forms of modernity, however, have emerged more or less autonomously in different societies. See Pieterse, 'Globalization as Hybridization'.
[43] Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Processes,* pp. 194-232.

superficial differences, a process termed *dedifferentiation.* This has shown itself in the assertion of the unity of the human race, a search for a common transcendent among the difference perceptions of the divine, etc.)[45]

As a consequence of the separation of the sense of self from appearance, from socially ascribed roles, all social positions become achievable, because no attributes are inherent in the holders of such positions.[46] A belief in social equality and in democracy then arises. Social position is no longer stable, and some people turn for compensation to an ascriptive social identity that is based on 'culture', language, religion, common history and origins - in other words, *roots.*[47]

The separation of the subject from any fixed identity leads to a profound sense of alienation. Searching for meaning in a situation where there is also a general loss of control over one's own conditions of existence, both material and cultural, people create social movements.

> Movements provide a synthetic solution to the disenchantment as well as the alienation of the modern subject. The identity of the member consists of the self-willed replacement of his personal project by that of the group, the active fusion of self with the larger social undertaking, and the reconstitution of society that it entails.[48]

Such movements can be seen as *counter-movements* to the demands of modernity, or as 'counter-point processes' which Wertheim characterizes as being composed of deviant

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[44] Friedman, op. cit., p. 215. F.B. Welbourn notes, 'Independent churches were an attempt to rebuild…a society which would again be unitary in man's relationship to other men, to nature and to the unseen powers'. Welbourn, 'A Metaphysical Challenge'.
[45] Heelas, *Religion, Modernity, and Post Modernity,* p. 2.
[46] Friedman, op. cit., p. 217.

values that are nevertheless somehow contained within the larger society, and which may provide the loci of future alternative practices.[49]

The separation of person from role is accentuated by 'capital', both as a title to, and measure of value of, all products of society. A concomitant process is that of commodification, which transforms and reduces everything – including relationships, landscapes, and nature - into objects of monetary value and transaction.[50]

In pre-modern Europe, life was conceived as a great chain of being in which every life form had its own place in a universal hierarchy. With the rise of modernity, this projection of social differentiation and relationships into imagined space became changed into a projection into time.[51] An understanding in which social beings of greater and lesser value were arranged in a fixed system ('The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate') became temporalized into a continuous struggle to move from lower to higher forms. This was expressed in Darwinism and social evolutionary theories, which in turn are linked to the rise of racism and imperialism in Europe at the end of the 19th century, and lay behind much of the colonial activities in Kenya that I describe in chapter three.

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[47] Friedman, op. cit., p. 218.
[48] Friedman, op. cit., p. 219.
[49] Wertheim, 'Society as a Composite of Conflicting Value-Systems', quoted in Arce & Long, *Anthropology, Development and Modernities,* p. 10.
[50] 'Commodification is the fragmentation of that portion of reality that can potentially be appropriated into discrete objects with a definite economic value. The commodity relation is, furthermore, socially self-sufficient and thus autonomizes and defines an economic sphere separate from other spheres, political, social, religious, etc.' Friedman, op. cit., p. 226.
[51] Friedman, op. cit., p. 220.

In Europe, this process has been accelerated by secularization, and by the loss of faith in the existence of a transcendent reference point by which lives can be judged and given meaning. The resulting decline in holism leads to a social and personal sense that the present is not all there is, that there must be something better in the future.

> 'The ultimate salvation for the alienated individualized subject, bereft of roots and a transcendent goal, lies in the future, in his own becoming. That development, linked to increasing rationality, to increasing intellectual powers or to technological development is also clearly rooted in the nature of the modern self. The cognitive capacity is associated with self-control, the sublimation of brute primitive energy and its channelling into the building of civilisation…The 'civilizing process' is the modernist myth of modernity.[52]

The ideology of *modernism*, the constant drive to creatively destroy the present, together with its associated ideologies of evolutionism and developmentalism, is closely related to this logic. Indeed, the *modernization* school of development, which presupposes that societies of the global South, must move in a more-or-less pre-ordained way along the path of the global North, has its roots in this ideology.[53] I do not, however, identify globalization with modernization.[54]

The various models of development, whether 'modernizing', or more recently, 'neo-liberal', which the global North has attempted to impose on or introduce to Africa as lineal successors to the 'civilizing missions' of the colonialists and missionaries, are deeply imbued with the values of modernism. It is hardly surprising therefore that in

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[52] Friedman, op. cit., p. 220.

[53] The *modernization* school sees development as a movement towards a society of increasing complexity in technology and social institutions, promoted by greater involvement in the commodity market, and encouraged by the transfer of capital and skills from the already 'developed' global North. The *dependency* school (derived from largely Marxist or neo-Marxist analysis) argues that the very process of linkage of peripheral to metropolitan economies leads not to 'development' but to 'under-development' – to exploitation of the periphery by the centre.

Africa 'development' is often perceived by many at the grassroots as a predominantly external project, associated with usually Western aid and initiative, irrelevant to many local needs, and with little spiritual roots on the continent. Taking *local* (as distinct from Western, or 'global') belief systems seriously leads to questioning the whole concept of the dominant model of individualistic, capitalistic, secularizing, linear development. My introductory account of the debate on 'development' in the context of a revival meeting demonstrates that the grassroots can reject 'development' as a goal, precisely because of the modernist and capitalist values which are assumed to be indissolubly allied to it.

However, a picture in which the global North is seen simply as imposing its own values, and other societies simply react by adopting or opposing them (as in both modernization and dependency schools) is far too simplistic.[55] Rather, local societies both accept and reject, creating a *bricolage,* a new mix of discrete cultural items, in a new 'cultural hybridity',[56] or evolving their own modernities.

Articulation of modes of production theory

Understanding the way that symbols are used in the structuring and organizing of experience in the symbolic systems I call 'visions' cannot be separated from the task of explaining the relationship between these symbolic systems and the structures of society. In this process I have been driven back to a neo-Marxist analysis as offering the strongest

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[54] The identification of globalization with modernization tends to lead to the assumption that globalization begins in and emanates from Europe – rather than constituting a process of world (global) history.
[55] Long, in *Development Sociology,* pp. 10-11, and elsewhere, notes that both models diminish the role of local initiative, since in both social change is directed by external factors, and predetermined according to linear stages of development or capitalism, pre-ordained according to some theory based on the history of North American or European societies.

heuristic tool. Not only does it cast light on the relationship between theology - as ideology - and social and economic structures and systems, but it focuses on the concept of *struggle* between these structures and systems as a creative, positive, force.[57]

Van Binsbergen's discussion of the articulation between superstructure and infrastructure, in the context of class formation, rural-urban interaction, and the process of the incorporation of peasants within colonial and post-colonial African states, has been particularly suggestive. He defines 'superstructure' as:

> … a society's central concerns, major institutions, and basic norms and values…[It] is the central repository of meaning for the members of society… [It] patterns behaviour in recognized, predictable units (roles), which the participants learn in the course of their socialization… [It] provides the participants with a sense of meaningfulness and competence in their dealings with each other and with the non-human world. Ritual and ceremonies, as well as internalization in the personality structure of individual members of society, reinforce the superstructure and let it persist over time. [58]

The base of society (sometimes called the 'infrastructure') is a specific *mode of production,* which describes the way in which the surplus of a society is produced, and who controls its use.[59] When this (economic) base of society changes, this leads to a

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[56] Pieterse, 'Globalization as Hybridization'.

[57] As Mosala notes in *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, pp. 8-9.

[58] Van Binsbergen, *Religious Change in Zambia,* p. 273.

[59] Van Binsbergen defines 'mode of production' as follows: 'A *mode of production* is a model that stipulates a specific arrangement according to which the productive forces (means of production, resources, labour and knowledge) existing at a particular time and place, are subject to specific relations of production such as define forms of expropriation and control between the various classes of people involved in the production process.' *Religious Change in Zambia,* p. 42.

       Marx himself describes the social organization (the state) as one of the two levels of superstructure, the other being social consciousness, which are determined by the base. His classical formulation of this metaphor is 'In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production [essentially, the class relations into which men enter in order to achieve this production] constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to

transformation of the superstructure. The degree to which the superstructure is determined by the base (known as the 'relative autonomy' of the superstructure) has been the subject of very considerable debate, and many Marxists or neo-Marxists permit the superstructure a degree of effective influence over the mode of production. Distinct modes of production relevant to sub-Saharan Africa are the communal or domestic mode (sometimes broken down into the hunting, the pastoral, and the 'lineage' or 'segmentary' modes), the tributary mode, and the mode of capitalism. The latter can in turn be broken down further into various phases such as those of mercantile capitalism, industrial capitalism, and monopoly capitalism.

The communal, or domestic, mode of production – which in many respects represents western Kenyan society immediately before the arrival of the British just over a hundred years ago - is distinguished by the fact that property is communally owned, and the products of labour are communally appropriated.[60] In the later stage of this mode, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, land and cattle were the fundamental means of production. Production was based on human needs, and the unit of economic production was the extended family. Since there was little surplus, little development of technology was possible, and the level of social organization was correspondingly low. Despite this, 'the egalitarianism of the communal mode of production has not been paralleled in

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which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general.' Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,* quoted in Bottomore, et al. (eds), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought,* article on 'Base and Superstructure', p. 42. I have also drawn on this article, and on another, 'Mode of Production', p. 335-7, for the explanation of this concept.

[60] Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics & Black Theology in South Africa*, pp. 47-50, 69-99. In what I say below concerning the communal mode, I have also borrowed from the discussion on the 'segmentary' or 'lineage' mode discussion, supposed to have covered much of sub-Saharan Africa before the modern era. See Kahn & Llobera, *The Anthropology of Pre-Capitalist Societies,* pp. 57-88.

subsequent history' – a fact which has encouraged Africans more recently to raid this

earlier stage in search of symbolic weapons of struggle.[61] As Mosala notes,

> *Morality* is the fundamental strength of this mode of production, or economic system…
> The starting point and goal of production is human beings and their well-being. *People*
> are the basis and the content of this economic system.[62]

The ideology of kinship relations regulated the socio-economic processes of the

household, and was expressed above all in the importance given to the role of deceased

ancestors in the lives and purposes of the living, and in the principle of the bride-wealth.

This represents an exchange offered by the groom's family to that of the bride to offset

the latter's loss of productive capacity.[63] The third ideological institution of this mode of

production was initiation. In that its organization, and the bonds of solidarity it created,

transcended those of the household, initiation represents a development in the evolution

of co-operative organization.[64] In the communal mode, the central contradictions, or

sources of struggle, were between elders and juniors, and elders and women.[65]

The second historical mode of production is the tributary mode, named after its

characteristic extraction of surplus production by means of tribute. In this system,

production remained largely communal, but a surplus was paid to political leaders such as

chiefs, and the beginnings of class and state formation are seen. The ideology of kinship

is replaced, wholly or partially, by a form of state religion. Whereas in the communal

mode the heads of households were the priests, in this mode the priestly role is essentially

the chief's, and emerging specialists in divination or medicine become responsible to

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[61] Mosala, op. cit., p. 71.
[62] Mosala, op. cit., p. 72. (Italics in the original.)
[63] Mosala, op. cit., p. 76.
[64] Mosala, op. cit., p. 77.

him. The chief's ancestors become more significant than those of other people. The main contradiction now becomes that between the chief and his supporters on the one hand, and elders, commoners, and others on the other. The 'nation' is composed of kinship groups subordinated socially and ideologically to the kin of the chief, who becomes 'the father of the people'.[66]

The next stage for many areas of Africa was marked by the arrival of the mode of mercantile capitalism. This mode is characterized by a dominance of exchange relations as opposed to the productive relations that mark the stage of industrial capitalism. Like its theoretically prior stage, the tributary mode, the mercantile mode had hardly any impact on the history of western Kenya.[67] Other areas of Africa saw the emergence of chiefly states, and the growth of long-distance trade, at first within Africa and then with external economies, and the use of increasing degrees of force by the mercantile powers to secure their sources of supply. In consequence, in these areas communal and tributary modes of production became *articulated* (see below) to the mode of mercantile capitalism prevailing in the global North.[68] In western Kenya, in contrast, the communal mode of production continued relatively unaltered until effective colonization and occupation began in the 1890s.[69] The goal of the British then very quickly became the creation of a colonial state in which Africans became wage labour for capitalist agricultural or

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[65] Mosala, op. cit., p. 81. Whether these contradictions constituted relations of exploitation and can be termed class conflicts has been considerably debated.

[66] Mosala, op. cit., p. 81-2.

[67] The absence of significant long distance trade until the two decades immediately preceding the colonial arrival is a partial explanation. See below, chapter two, p. 59.

[68] For a summary analysis of this process in Zambia, see van Binsbergen, *Religious Change in Zambia,* pp. 43-44.

[69] The partial exception here is the kingdom of the Wanga, which emerged from the mid-19th century in alliance with Arab traders from the coast.

industrial enterprises. Within the remarkably short period of two decades, the population

of western Kenya moved from an essentially communal mode of production to very

substantial participation in the capitalist mode.[70]

The present global mode of production may be characterized as that of late monopoly

capitalism, in which the whole of society is transformed 'into a sort of "social factory"

for capital.'[71] This mode is the era of the total commodification of life. Social

organizations lose their function to that of the market, which eventually supplies all

material and service needs, including security, recreation, and social services, until 'even

the emotional patterns of life are channeled through the market'.[72] Human life is

devalued in order for increased surplus to accrue. Indeed, 'the *sine qua non*… of the

capitalist mode of production is increasing accumulation.'[73] This in turn leads to the

internationalization of capital, and to the promotion of a global market – forces that in

turn drive the process of globalization. Whereas earlier stages of capitalism separated the

symbolic field from other areas of life, late capitalism brings the symbolic under the

dominance of the economic, and breaks up collective experience (and its potential for

forming counter-ideologies) into the private experiences of individuals.[74]

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[70] See below, chapters two and four for a summary history of this latter process.

[71] Stuart Hall, et al., eds, *Policing the Crisis,* p. 371, quoted by Mosala, op. cit., p. 47.

[72] Mosala, op. cit., p. 47, quoting Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century,* p. 276.

[73] Mosala, op. cit., p. 48. Mosala quotes Braverman, op. cit., p. 281: 'In the period of monopoly capitalism, the first step in the creation of the universal market is the conquest of all goods production by the commodity form, the second step is the conquest of an increasing range of services and their conversion into commodities, and the third step is a 'product cycle' which invents new products and services, some of which become indispensable as the conditions of modern life change to destroy alternatives.'

[74] Based on Eagleton, *Function of Criticism,* pp. 120ff, quoted by Mosala, op cit. p. 49.

In any particular African country a number of distinct modes of production may be in operation concurrently. Van Binsbergen's analysis of the *articulation of modes of production* – that is, the way these different modes of production are linked to each other in relations of dominance and superordination – offers a point of entry into the analysis of African religious movements.[75] For example, in colonial Kenya the dominant mode was industrial capitalism; but subordinated to it was the communal or domestic mode of production of the 'native reserves', whose men left their farms to search for work in the farms and industries. In this way the subordinate mode subsidised the labour costs of the capitalist mode. We might therefore expect to find that the emergent religious movements of colonial Kenya express an ideological or theological stance in support either of the dominant *or* of the subordinate mode of production. Van Binsbergen argues, however, that a religious movement may be not simply a symbolic reflection of the economic base of any given society, or (in a society or *social formation* constituted of different modes of production) of one of those bases. It may also symbolize and partially constitute (ideologically and sometimes materially) the relationship, or articulation, between two or more of those modes of production. This model allows for a considerable degree of autonomy to superstructure and infrastructure.

There are theoretical dangers in pushing this form of Marxist analysis to extremes. One is essentialism. Reading back into a pre-capitalist society the dominance of the economy

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[75] 'The notion of one unitary, integrated social structure is replaced by that of a composite, internally contradictory social formation, consisting of various modes of production which each have their own logic and which are linked to each other in relations of dominance and superordination.' Van Binsbergen, *Religious Change in Zambia,* p. 45. The classical Leninist theory of imperialism stated that the development of capitalism in a country would 'dissolve' pre-capitalist structures, such as peasant societies. However, most contemporary theorists recognize that on the contrary, it preserves them, so that they

that is widely agreed to be a major characteristic of capitalism (the term 'pre-capitalist' to

describe these earlier societies should be a sufficient warning) may be quite

inappropriate. Secondly, Marxism generally assumes (like its ideological rival,

modernization theory) a unilinear teleology, predicated primarily from the study of

capitalism in European or North American societies.[76] Nevertheless, the Marxist concern

with the social totality, and its insistence on the need to explain the linkage between the

development of material structures and systems of religious and political thought, need to

be preserved. Like van Binsbergen, however, I do not pre-suppose the principle of

economic determinism.

Theological assumptions

In the broad foundations of my work I make two assumptions that are essentially

theological. First, that the church has a duty to restore justice, community, and

wholeness, to societies where it is lacking.[77] Charles Villa-Vicencio, in attempting to lay

out the groundwork for a theology of nation-building in South Africa after the

achievement of majority rule, notes that the process requires (among other things) two

elements: *critical social analysis* - understanding the 'meaning of the time'; and *cultural

empowerment* - enabling the oppressed 'to look to their own resources and discern the

become producers of cheap migrant labourer. Bottomore, et al. (eds), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought,* article on 'Marxism and the Third World', p. 315.

[76] The development of modes of production outlined above should be understood not as 'a universal law-like statement applicable to all societies', but as a model or a tool of interpretation to clarify events and the evolution of structures in history. For a discussion of these issues, see Kahn & Llobera, *The Anthropology of Pre-Capitalist Societies,* pp. 264-329, from which the last quotation is taken, p. 320.

[77] See especially Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction,* pp. 1-13, 19-48. Villa-Vicencio focuses on the role of the church in locating the human rights debate at the centre of social and political debate (p. 128). By human rights, however, he means not only 'First Generation rights' (rights touching on individual political freedom, but also' Second Generation rights' (socio-economic rights) and 'Third Generation rights' (ecological and peace related rights).

Spirit of the Lord within their own culture, history, and identity'. This process cannot be done without involving communities at the grassroots.[78] He argues also the importance of churches not only functioning as intermediary agencies which form 'civil society', but also taking some community responsibilities upon themselves, becoming involved in community development and the political process.[79] In this way - through the churches living out their vision practically at the micro level in building institutions and also in stretching as far as possible already existing structures - there is eventual hope for the transformation of the present all-embracing world-order. This requires '"building 'within the shell of the old society' step by step until enough experience, vision, moral energy, and political organizing has occurred - enough social and political momentum has been built up - to allow a more general *perestroika* to take place."'[80] To do this in the long-haul, however, requires the motivating power of a vision.[81] As will be seen, there are clear parallels between Villa-Vicencio's understanding of the role of the contemporary church in South Africa, and what this thesis by its general direction implies *could be* the role of the Roho churches today.

Secondly, I assume that there are certain theological truths revealed – or understood - in historical moments of crisis. Arguing the need to develop an African theology which is not simply 'inculturated' but relevant to the 'socio-historical dynamism of contemporary Africa', Ela says that we need to return to the crisis of colonialism:

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[78] Villa-Vicencio, op. cit., pp. 278-280.
[79] Villa-Vicencio, op. cit., pp. 171, 190.
[80] Villa-Vicencio, op. cit., p. 241 (quoting Alperovitz, 'Building a Living Democacy', p. 27).
[81] Villa-Vicencio, op. cit., p. 251.

An historical event of this magnitude cannot have left the popular imagination wholly indifferent and passive. We need to go back to actual history, and locate the most profound symbols of African culture in a broader context, a context that bears the marks of domination and conflict. The stories that Africa tells about its life and its past are of great interest for our understanding of the Christian faith. A whole world emerges through them, a world that we must attentively grasp and understand, and a world from which we must learn all we can.[82]

More recently, Shanks, in his attempt to build up a theology based on new social movements (feminism, human rights, ecology, etc) theologizes on the basis of 'shakenness', in which people caught up in situations of trauma suddenly break through 'to living within the truth'.[83] In many AICs such experiences are fundamental – probably *the* fundamental – sources of Christian faith and teaching, whether they derive from individual traumas such as illness or unresolved personal problems, or from crises of much wider impact such as the colonial seizure of lands, or the missionary denunciation of core community rites. Such experiences are both negative (the trauma itself) and positive (the consequent healing and the sense of new meaning and direction).[84]

Part Three. Local realities and global pressure

The post Cold War transformation of politics, the global free market, and the IT communications revolution have thrown into a new clarity the interface between global

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[82] Ela, *My Faith as an African,* p. 175. Haugerud, in *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya,* p. 27, quotes Gavin Smith: 'If we advance from the notion of culture as a fixed blueprint by which people act, toward a notion of culture as something produced and reproduced through history, then…cultural production does not occur with equal intensity from one day to the next… One has only to talk to people about past moments of collective rebellion and resistance to discover the heightened imagery engendered at those moments of intensive cultural production.' (Smith, 'The Production of Culture in Local Rebellion', pp. 182, 202.)

[83] Shanks, *God and Modernity,* especially pp. 1-6.

and local realities.[85] Globalization is not simply a homogenizing process: it invites, and partly creates, local identities. Rajaee, indeed, believes that globalization and the maintenance of local identities are symbiotically linked.[86] It is impossible to listen to members of the Roho churches as they articulate their life-visions without reflecting on how these visions were originally evolved by people seeking meaning and direction in situations in which they experienced intense pressure to change and conform to external values. In other words, global forces stimulated local initiatives. The process continues today. Recently, a number of academic disciplines have begun to recognize the importance of 'local thinking', which for long had been the preserve of ethnography.[87] I consider here two such disciplines: development studies or development sociology, and theology, and then explain my use of 'the founders' vision' as an example of local thinking.

Development theory and practice

Faced with the widespread failure of externally created and directed large projects, development practitioners began from the 2nd half of the 1970s to be interested in the role local cultures play in enabling people to become the *subjects* of their development.[88] Fundamental to this new interest - and indeed to the general direction of this thesis - has been the work of Paulo Freire.[89] Freire gave to educators and grassroots mobilizers an

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[84] As Anderson notes, *experience* is becoming increasingly recognized as having a positive role in theology. Anderson, *Zion and Pentecost,* pp. 16-17.

[85] Rajaee, op. cit., pp. x, 60. It will become apparent from what follows that I privilege the term 'local'.

[86] Rajaee, op. cit., p. xi.

[87] Esteva & Prakash, *Grassroots Post-Modernism*, p. 21.

[88] O. Anacleti, 'Cultural Emancipation'; Prah, 'African Languages, the Key to African Development', p. 73.

[89] See bibliography for some of the major works of Freire. McLaren & Leonard, *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter,* offers a recent critique of his work. Johns, *Pentecostal Formation,* argues that pentecostal catechesis and faith–development at the grassroots have many similarities to Freire's methodology.

understanding of action and reflection as the means of creating a critical consciousness, and as an effective mode of engagement in social and political change. Grassroots hopes and ideals were the foundation of this process:

> The starting point for a political pedagogical project must be precisely at the level of the people's aspirations and dreams, their understanding of reality, and their forms of action and struggle.[90]

More recently, Chambers - the guru of the Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) school of development practitioners – argued that 'local realities' are more relevant and appropriate to grassroots communities than realities defined and held by professionals, who are usually located in the centres of power.[91] Zaoual pleads for attention to be paid to what he calls 'symbolic sites'.[92] These are the underlying thought patterns, values and 'deep beliefs' of a people, which have the function of screening, rejecting, or transforming what they receive. As Zaoual argues, these symbolic sites filter, accommodate, challenge, and subvert external messages. This process continues whether we in the dominant cultures choose to acknowledge it or not.

This level of analysis has had little impact on the classical 'macro' models of development, the modernization and dependency schools. Instead of these over-arching theories (or, at least, in critical dialogue with them), Long proposes a more modest 'actor-centred' model, emphasizing the human agency of individuals and 'social actors' (organizations of various kinds) to process experience, take decisions, and work to

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[90] Freire & Faundez, *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation,* p. 27.
[91] Chambers, *Whose Reality Counts?* p. 100. PLA was formerly known as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).

implement them.[93] This approach recognizes the value of local initiatives (*agency)*, and stresses the local actors' 'knowledgeability' and 'capability'. It requires strict attention to be paid to the value systems of individual and social actors (the 'alternative discourses' available to them), and to the interface between these local values and those carried by external interventions, whether overtly or implicitly.[94] In this way the model restores decision-making to local actors while locating the arena for such decisions within specific political and socio-economic contexts, which are in turn partly the creation of 'macro' or structural forces. It asks why some actors take one path and others another. In his own field work, Long learnt

> that no sociological or historical study of change could be complete without: (1) a concern for the ways in which different social actors manage and interpret new elements in their life-worlds; (2) an analysis of how different groups or individuals attempt to create space for themselves in order to pursue their own 'projects' that may run parallel to, or perhaps challenge, government programmes or the interests of other intervening parties; and (3) an attempt to show how these organizational, strategic and interpretive processes can influence (and themselves be influenced by) the broader context of power and social action.[95]

In seeking to restore the concepts of 'meaning' and 'sense' to the way AIC members create theologies and ways of life that often seem 'irrational' to the post-enlightenment understanding of the global North, and to link their theologizing to their socio-political contexts, I follow a similar route.

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[92] Zaoual, 'The Economy and Symbolic Sites of Africa'.
[93] Long, N. & A., *Battlefields of Knowledge,* p. 23; Long, N., *Development Sociology: Actor Perspectives.*
[94] Whyte, S. & M., 'The Values of Development'.
[95] Long, *Development Sociology,* p. 24.

In research methodology, the actor-centred perspective requires external researchers and development workers to become fully aware of their own role. Our presence and work alongside and in interaction with the local actors clearly creates new situations and new demands, and it is important to analyse adequately this interface between 'us' and 'them'. In a later section of this chapter I examine my own role in this way.

Vernacular theologies and local churches

This is not a theological work *per se,* and it does not attempt to relate Roho Christian faith as such to historic Christian theologies.[96] However, it deals necessarily with aspects of Roho theology, even if the latter is considered here primarily as an ideological construct. I offer in this section, therefore, a background against which the development and articulation of such local theologies may be placed.[97]

Post-colonial attempts to develop African theologies by African theologians have followed two broad alternative routes. The first is African Christian theology (as represented by Mbiti, Mulago, Idowu, Magesa, et al.). The second is liberation theology (Francophone theologians such as Mveng, Boulaga, and Ela, the theologians associated with EATWOT[98], and the Black Theology school of South Africa of the 1980s). Proponents of the first alternative, called 'The Old Guard' by Young in his survey of African theologies,[99] have concentrated upon liberation from cultural domination, and

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[96] For those readers who want to determine how 'orthodox' the Roho faith is, I provide some additional information in the footnotes, and in the Appendix, which also contains statements by Roho Christians concerning their faith.

[97] The seminal work in defining the concept of 'local theologies' is Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies.*

[98] The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, founded in Dar-es-Salaam, 1976.

[99] Young, *African Theology,* pp. 13-40.

those of the second ('The New Guard'), upon liberation from class domination and neo-colonialism. One of the current challenges for African theology is whether liberation theology can find roots in the African world-view.[100] In response, Ela argues that liberation from cultural oppression necessarily requires Africans to have the freedom to determine their own lives, and that this is impossible without confronting issues of class and of neo-colonial domination and exploitation.[101]

In the 1980's and 1990's, as post-colonial states in Africa became themselves more oppressive, and as Africa faced the challenges of the new era of globalization and the free market, theologians began to focus on issues such as democratization and *reconstruction* (c.f. the title of Mugambi's 1995 work, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War)*. Pursuing the same themes, a meeting of ecumenical theologians in 2000 at Mbagathi in Nairobi issued a communiqué that was predominantly concerned with highly practical issues: how could theology 'make a difference in the 21st century?' How could it play an active role in overcoming the poverty and increasing marginalization of the continent and its peoples?[102] Indeed, the opinion was forcefully expressed that if the churches and their teachings were not actively improving the lives of people in the villages and shantytowns, then the teachings

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[100] EATWOT in the 1979 Accra Declaration, published in Appiah-Kubi & Torres, *African Theology en Route*, p. 193. Herman Browne, *Theological Anthropology: a Dialectic Study of the African and Liberation Traditions,* however, argues cogently that the attempt itself is ill-founded because African Traditional Religion (he uses West African examples) does not have the appropriate categories of thought.
[101] Ela, *My Faith as an African,* pp. 172-3.
[102] 'We lament over the African context and the African crisis. We lament our moral decline, the religious disharmony and the political conflicts on our continent, the debt burden and the impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes, our dependency on foreign aid, the widespread practice of gender violence, corruption in our governments, in society and in the church, and the ever-growing pandemic of HIV/AIDS. We lament in the understanding that our lamentation drives us to a vision of justice and hope for the future of our continent.' AACC / CIRCLE / CATI / EATWOT / OAIC Joint Theological Conference, Mbagathi, Nairobi, 14 – 18 August 2000: 'The Church Making a Difference in the 21st Century', Resolution 1.

themselves must be wrong. In one of their recommendations, the Conference encouraged

the churches 'to develop local theologies, christologies, pneumatologies, and

ecclesiologies.'[103] Participants at Mbagathi saw the promotion of such local identities –

for long a spontaneous activity of the AICs - as a necessary response to the impact of

globalization, and a way of recovering and preserving local initiative and values.

The statement in the Mbagathi Communiqué 'that the AICs are slowly but surely moving

from the margins to the centre of the African church', was, however, surely over-

confident - even supposing that that is the position to which they are called. In fact, the

AICs continue to have a marginal role in academic African theologizing. Of course, AICs

have served as case-studies of the inculturation and even contextualization of theology

and church structures. Sometimes the research conclusions have even brought about

changes in the structures of the 'established' denominations (the work of Perrin Jassy on

the Roho churches of Northern Tanzania formed part of the argument for a policy of

'small Christian communities' in the Catholic churches of Eastern Africa[104]). AICs have

also provided a rich source of thesis material. However, very few AIC members have

themselves written works of academic theology. The reasons are clear: churches with

European or North American origins have very rarely been willing or able to facilitate the

long and expensive process of training AIC theologians to doctoral level, and for the

great majority of AICs and their members the process has been far too expensive. Given

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[103] Resolution 12: 'In the context of globalization, we affirm the importance of encouraging mother tongues, such as in Bible translations. However, in order that Africans may be able to speak to Africans, we also encourage multi-lingual competency in the four official languages of the continent (Arabic, English, French and Portuguese) as a means of communication between ourselves. In addition we encourage the churches of Africa to develop local theologies, christologies, pneumatologies, and ecclesiologies. The promotion of such local identities is an essential response to the impact of globalization.'
[104] Perrin Jassy, *Basic Communities,* pp. xv, 247-249; *Forming Christian Communities*.

that most AICs operate effectively with an oral theology, their leaders have also seen such a process as of highly uncertain value.

The strong vernacular theologies of the AICs are constantly evolving. The process involves a continuous dialogue between - on the one hand - values rooted in earlier modes of production, which have been selected, preserved, and modified in the founders' visions, and the changing demands and values of modernity and the capitalist global free market on the other. This dialogue is mediated through the language and concepts of the Christian scriptures. However, many such AIC theologies are as yet partially submerged or only half-conscious. This hinders the process of their adjustment to contemporary reality, and means also that these theologies cannot easily be used as tools for critical consciousness. Without academic studies from within the AIC movement, it remains extremely difficult for outsiders to engage effectively at any level and in any discipline with this large constituency.

The founders' visions

Respect for local thinking, and the role it can play in motivating people to stand against dominant systems and ideologies, require us to look again at the visions of life AICs have constructed. Given that AIC theologies are rarely explicitly articulated, we must seek their underlying structures of thought in the 'symbolic sites'. For the AIC founders, such sites were often moulded in the fire of conflict with missionary churches and colonial regimes. The stories, symbols, and traditions that resulted constitute what I refer to here

as the founders' visions of these churches. A 'founders' vision or charter'[105] can be

defined as the reality constructed by members of the church by which they interpreted

events around them and which shaped their reactions and guided their decisions.[106] These

visions were constructed through extended and often communal reflections on the

Hebrew and Christian scriptures in the contexts and languages of their own cultures and

traditions, under the guidance and sometimes the revelation of 'the Holy Spirit'. In their

fullness these visions were rarely written down, and by a natural process of selection and

rejection the living traditions of the churches have often considerably modified the

original visions. As Ong notes,

> Oral societies live very much in a present which keeps itself in equilibrium or
> homeostasis by sloughing off memories which no longer have present relevance… The
> present imposes its own economy on past remembrances.[107]

Something of the original is nevertheless embedded in songs, stories, forms of worship,

dance, church uniforms, flags, and names; in laws of impurity, concepts of evil, and the

practice of exorcism; in forms, traditions, and narratives of preaching and prayer; in

dream interpretations and prophecies, and in understandings of healing and salvation. In

our living and working with these churches my OAIC colleagues and I have sought to

stimulate (one might almost say 'provoke') joint analyses of the ways and modes of what

has in many ways become our shared life of faith. In this way, together with church

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[105] Davidson, *The Search for Africa*, p. 256; 'Imunde, 'The Vision of the Founders'.
[106] I have tried to beware of reifying the concept of the founders' vision, as if it were something that actually existed independently of members' lives, worship, and faith. However, the need for simplicity and brevity obliges me from time to time to refer to the founders' vision without reference to its owners or believers. In any case, as the Comaroffs point out, all representations of social life must limit its diversity and flux, if only to give us some kind of 'handle' on events – both for academics and for the actors themselves. What is important is how such representations are constructed and in whose interests. (Comaroffs, *Of Revelation and Revolution,* Vol. 2, p. 406.)
[107] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 46. Quoted by Jonathan A. Draper, in 'Confessional Western text-centred Biblical interpretation and an oral or residual-oral context', p. 68.

members, we have tried to recover and articulate the original visions of the churches, and to reflect upon them as possible resources for engagement in the contemporary world.

Part Four. Methodological Issues

I consider next certain methodological questions, beginning with the work of recent ethnographers who have described new religious movements as constructions of meaning through images, research techniques in this field of work, and the problems raised by the interpretation of symbols. I then examine methodological issues relating to the use of oral history, without which any study of African religious movements would be impossible. Since I am also an actor in the churches I am studying, I then turn in Part Five to discuss questions of power relations in my work and research.

Ethnography and the interpretation of symbols

A characteristic of African theology in general[108] and of AIC theology in particular is that it is rarely written down and is expressed in sermons, songs, dances, rites, clothes, flags, use of space, etc. Because there are few written texts, I have used ethnographic methods to enter into AIC communities, in order to identify the implicit and explicit theological and ideological assumptions behind their world-view. The works of the anthropologists James W. Fernandez, Jean and John Comaroff, Richard P. Werbner, and Johannes Fabian have been of particular relevance here.[109] Fernandez in his study of Bwiti, a new religious movement among the Fang of Gabon, shows how its members are engaged in 'world reconstruction', through a re-working of traditional themes and symbols in conjunction

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[108] Pobee, 'Bible Study in Africa', p. 165.

with those of Christianity and colonialism in order to create meaning in their de-centred

world. Fernandez and Werbner attempt an 'anthropology of the religious imagination'.[110]

They regard religions as socially constructed, within specific socio-economic contexts, by

means of an 'argument of images' rather than of logical statements (an argument in

which both the believers and the researchers are equally engaged).[111] Comaroff, in her

diachronic study of the Zionist churches among the Tshidi-Barolong of South Africa,

examines ritual and ritual spaces to illustrate how structural contradictions were mediated

both in traditional society and among the Zionists living under the hegemony of the

modern South African state. In the Comaroffs' later work, *Of Revelation and Revolution,*

they explore through the means of the 'long conversation' between the Southern Tswana

and Nonconformist missionaries, how the Tswana were incorporated into the European

imperium and into capitalist relations. They demonstrate the dialectical relationships

between the Protestant faith and industrial capitalism. The nature of the resulting

transformations in both European and African are described partly by attention to

changes in the concrete realities of day-to-day life:

> how plows were put to work, transforming agrarian production and relations among
>
> producers; how money changed senses of value; how cotton dresses, brass bedsteads, and
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> window panes were implicated in the refashioning of people and their habitations…[112]

It is with the very much shorter conversations between the people of Vihiga and the

representatives of the *imperium* that I am concerned, and the resistance of some of them

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[109] Fernandez, *Bwiti;* Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance;* Werbner, 'The Argument of Images: From Zion to the Wilderness in African Churches'.
[110] Fernandez, op. cit., p. 4.
[111] Fernandez, op. cit., p. xix; Werbner, op. cit., passim.
[112] Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution,* vol. 2, p. 408.

in the name of Christ to just such transformations as the Comaroffs describe for the Tswana.

Fabian makes a number of useful methodological suggestions for the ethnographic study of religious faith and ritual, based on sociolinguistic modes of analysis. He stresses the study of systems of belief as they are actualized in social events, 'in a physical setting, in real time, and in the presence of actors'. Such events should be considered as communicative acts, which relate dialectically to the superstructure and to the base of societies. Fabian argues that just as people may be multi-lingual, so they may also possess competence in a number of belief systems. The main task is 'to understand the creation of meaning, or of a meaningful praxis, in and through the events of speech and communication.'[113] It is this study of religious events as the communication and construction of meaning that I have found particularly useful.

With regard to the interpretation of symbols, there are many theoretical difficulties. Church members describe most of the symbols mentioned in this work simply as having been given by the Holy Spirit, either to the founders, or more recently, revealed in dreams or visions to their present members. To interrogate the Holy Spirit presents problems. Such 'bald' statements are normally supported by an appropriate scriptural reference. If you ask why the Holy Spirit should choose one symbol and not another – why, for example, the colours of a flag are green and red and not something else - or why William Blake's engraving of the naked Nebuchadnezzar eating grass is such a favourite picture in

the houses of Roho believers, you will rarely receive a 'meaningful' response.

Alternatively a logical response will be constructed then and there because it is known

that the interviewer expects it. The problem, of course, is that the symbol functions

essentially at the subconscious level, as a way of integrating, containing, condensing, and

communicating significant aspects of a people's world-view, and that interpretations

offered at the conscious level must themselves be subject to interpretation. Sperber notes

that the very *concept* of 'symbol' is a secondary and cultural development of the

symbolism present in all societies.[114] Therefore the attribution of *sense* to symbols is

itself a cultural phenomenon. Demands made of participants that they 'explain' the

symbols they use may be out of place.[115]

Oral history as social construction

This work is not a straightforward history of the churches, although it attempts an

overview of the historical development of the Roho churches of Vihiga District –

significant actors in the Kenyan AIC world. Its concern is rather with the history of ideas.

In the process it necessarily makes use of other people's histories, both written and oral.

Some of these histories are academic studies: notably, those of Welbourn and Ogot,

Kasiera, and Rasmussen.[116] Given that most of the original founders of the Roho

churches have died, and of those who remain it is rare to find witnesses of clear mind and

good memory, it would be difficult to repeat the work of these earlier researchers. Other

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[113] Fabian, 'Religious pluralism: An ethnographic approach', p. 146.
[114] Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism,* pp. 34, 48.
[115] Anderson, *Zion and Pentecost,* p. 157, notes that the distinction between symbol and reality is an expression of Western dualism rather than of the African experience of reality.
[116] Welbourn & Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home;* Kasiera, *The Development of Pentecostal Christianity in Western Kenya;* Rasmussen, *A History of the Quaker Movement in Africa; Modern African Spirituality: the Independent Holy Spirit Churches in East Africa, 1902-1976.*

printed and written records that I have used have been the Kenyan national press[117],

records of the colonial era[118], and various articles, ephemera, and other documents about

and from the AICs which can be found in the Harold Turner Collection in the University

of Birmingham, and others that I have gathered in the course of my work.

I am interested in *how* Roho people tell the stories of their lives and of their churches –

how they structure the evidence, why they choose to tell some details, and suppress or

simply forget others. History is often a political tool, a way of asserting the rights of one

group, one church, or one clan, over another, or a defence of a particular viewpoint or

ideological stance. A written history was one factor that contributed to the removal of

Archbishop Eliakimu Keverenge of Lyahuka Church of East Africa (a Roho church) in

1986. His son Manoah Lumwagi had helped an American intern student to write a short

history of the church from which the life work of one of his rivals in the church was

excluded.[119] Tonkin points out that Vansina in his classical defence of oral history as a

trustworthy record of 'what actually happened' relies on the fact that in the strong

chieftaincies and kingdoms of West Africa, there was an official craft of court narrators

and historians.[120] This encouraged him to make a distinction between reminiscence and

oral tradition (which Tonkin claims is invalid). Among the acephalous societies of the

Luyia in Kenya, however, there are no such 'accredited' individuals or 'official'

historians. Every older person has accumulated historical knowledge and traditions

relating to his or her clan or church. In this context, 'history' becomes open or implicit

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[117] Principally from the Macmillan Library, Nairobi.
[118] Chiefly those available in the library of Rhodes House, Oxford, which has a deposit of microfilms from the Kenya National Archives.

contestation. Only one discernable genre in these Luyia societies seems to deal with non-contestable 'facts'.[121] This is the summary 'history' of the deceased (the loan word *historia* is used) which is read out at funerals. This is a written statement recording details such as the date of birth, initiation, marriage, the number of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, etc, of the deceased.[122] But such facts form only the bare framework of the individual's life, and no-one attends funerals to hear them. Neighbours and relatives are much more interested in *interpretation.* What were the causes of death, and who can, or might be, blamed? At the funeral a detailed oral account is frequently given by those closest to the deceased of the events – no matter how superficially trivial – leading up to the death. The consequent exchange of views, and attempts to get those views accepted, by the chief mourners, together with the contributions of many other speakers competing to summarize effectively their own perceptions of the deceased – these make for real public drama. In the case of other church and public events, participants frequently spend considerable time after the event discussing the performances of the various actors, and the interpretations that can be drawn from them.[123] Thus in Luyia society history and event as interpretation is at least as significant as history as factual account.

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[119] The history in question is Lumwagi & Leet, 'The Separated Ones: The History of the Lyahuka Church of East Africa'; information from OI, Rev. A. Kedogo, 26.10.85, Selly Oak, Birmingham.

[120] Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts,* p. 85.

[121] Tonkin, op. cit, pp. 2, 52) describes genres as 'The different conventions of discourse through which speakers tell history and listeners understand them… A genre signals that a certain kind of interpretation is called for. It could be called 'patterned expectancy'.'

[122] Sometimes they are prepared many years beforehand by the person himself or herself.

[123] Jules-Rosette in *African Apostles,* passim but especially pp. 50-1 stresses the significance of ritual as process, and the importance of the subsequent analyses of the event by the participants themselves.

So (following Tonkin) I assume that *all* histories, including those read at funerals are social constructions, and must be understood in that light. Both the genre and the social context of delivery are important. Even in the oral telling of life stories (another genre I shall use as evidence) individuals naturally structure their material coherently and in order to make a positive impression on their hearers, and to facilitate their own re-telling of the story. Such stories become the speaker's 'symbolic capital'.[124] Many such stories appear in my sources, gathered through oral interviews – initially unstructured as far as possible – and video and audio recordings of significant church and public events.[125]

Part Five. Living, working, and researching at the grassroots

'Uppers' and 'Lowers': bridging the power gap

How does a member of an 'imperial' culture, language, church, and educational system, someone caught up in the dominant economic, political, and military complex, communicate on a basis of parity with other human beings lacking all these 'advantages'? Robert Chambers describes the role of professionals as they seek to communicate with those rooted in local realities.[126] He notes that even when the 'uppers' try to listen to the 'lowers' (these are Chambers' terms), the imbalance in power prevents effective communication from taking place. 'At the cost of their reality, and of pluralism, diversity,

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[124] Karin Barber, of Yoruba praises, in Tonkin, op. cit, p. 63.
[125] As Jules-Rosette discovered, playing back tapes of events elicited very fruitful analyses from the participants of the meaning of the process and the contributions of the participants. (Op. cit., pp. 49-50.) I have followed the same method myself (especially using video tapes). I then made transcriptions of most recordings, and translations where the original language was neither English nor Swahili.
[126] Chambers, *Whose Reality Counts?,* p. 100.

and truth, others reflect our reality back to us'. This is true, Chambers argues, not only of the power gap but also of the gap between rich and poor.[127]

One of my AIC colleagues and research assistants reading this section made a direct and immediate comparison with the gap between the leaders of the mission-founded churches and those of the AICs.[128] The former have frequently enjoyed a prolonged formal education in the centres of power, in the language of the metropole. The AIC leaders, on the other hand, have spent much of their lives and ministries with oral grassroots communities, and are often of an identical socio-economic background and level of formal education as their members. It is salutary for the 'dominant' to remind ourselves of this gap.

Gerald West and Musa W. Dube, writing from a post-colonial theological perspective, and involved in facilitating theological education with those of little formal education, call the appropriate stance of 'uppers' as that of *reading with.*

> "Reading with" signifies a reading process in which the respective subject positions of ordinary, untrained readers and critical, trained readers are vigilantly fore-grounded and in which power relations are structurally acknowledged.[129]

West characterizes the role of an outsider academic as a representative of the dominant class who crosses boundaries in order to betray the hidden agenda of the dominant. Such

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[127] Chambers, *Whose Reality Counts?,* p. 100.
[128] PC, Rev. F. King'ang'a, Nairobi, who is a member of *African Holy Spirit,* and has studied in Anglican colleges and served in an Anglican parish in Hoxton, London.
[129] West & Dube, 'An Introduction: How We have Come to "Read With"', p. 7.

a person *has chosen to be partially constituted by the reality of the dominated.*[130] While I embrace the truth of this, by itself the phrase fails to express adequately the continuous internal critique, the reflexivity, that the two realities can set up in the form of a dialogue in the mental and emotional lives of all who are 'of the connections'. More simply, I prefer to think of my role as one of *critical solidarity. Solidarity* requires commitment to a particular community and to its faith or ideological stance, and is often of some cost to oneself. *Critical* solidarity requires an attempt to be honest to both realities. It is knowing, for example, that I write in the categories and to the requirements of the academic tradition of the dominant culture; but that I do this in order to reflect back to the dominant culture something of the reality of the other society, and the questions they ask of the dominant culture.

Becoming an apostle: the process of mutual enrolment

Who am I, who have I been, to the church members with whom I have been working, living, and conducting research? How have their perceptions and mine moulded our relationships and influenced this thesis? I do not introduce this subject simply so that the reader may be able to discount any influences I may have had upon the 'objects' of study. Rather, in seeking to move away from a subject / object dichotomy, I wish to bring my own role into the area of discussion, and to recognize my colleagues in the churches as actors with me. In describing his attempts to move beyond a positivist research methodology, de Vries uses the term 'mutual enrolment' to describe the relations that

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[130] West, 'Reading the Bible Differently', p. 33.

develop.[131] Researchers and development workers (and missionaries) enrol local actors in their projects; equally, they are in turn enrolled in the projects and schemes of local actors. Promoting a conscious awareness of each other's projects can increase the degree of congruity and of mutual understanding.

Significant in these relationships is the factor of *extraversion*, or the seeking of financial and other benefits through overseas links.[132] That is, in the Africa of the late 20th and early 21st century, connections with the outside world, and particularly with the dominant nations, are believed to bring power and prestige. Certainly extraversion *can* bring benefits. My service as 'development co-ordinator' at KUIC in Vihiga from 1987 to 1993 resulted in the protection of springs (to ensure a clean supply of drinking water), the starting of small business groups, and the erection of office buildings, achieved largely with overseas money.[133] It is unlikely that this would have happened had I not come. (I ignore here the serious issue of whether such an approach to development builds or diminishes local initiative.) Similarly, my interventions in the church that is the principal

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[131] De Vries, 'A Research Journey', in Long, N. & A., *Battlefields of Knowledge,* p. 65.

[132] Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*; Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role,* pp. 308-25.

[133] The KUIC leaders themselves benefited personally from the small business scheme, some buying a cow, another bishop roofing his house with iron sheets. Moreover, as a result of the international links created or maintained partly through my presence, three officers travelled abroad. One visited the UK in 1990 for a collaborative exercise in writing African Bible Guides. (The African Bible Guides project was an initiative of the INTERACT Research Centre, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, UK, to encourage the production of simple study guides for local church leaders prepared from within African cultures. An ecumenical group of African church leaders met in Selly Oak, Birmingham, to prepare two sample texts in English for later adaptation into mother tongues.) Another two leaders travelled to Kinshasa and Johannesburg on gatherings of the Network on AICs. (The Network on AICs and Missions is a loose fellowship of AIC leaders, missionaries, academics, and co-workers who are interested in crossing denominational boundaries to work with AICs. It publishes a Review of AICs three times a year, and holds a continental conference every 3 / 4 years. The 2nd Conference in Kinshasa was held in 1989 (Shank, 1991). The 3rd Continental Conference was at Johannesburg in 1993 (see Nussbaum, *Freedom and Interdependence*); the 4th in Nairobi (1997) and the 5th in Accra (2001).)

focus of this study, the Holy Spirit Church of East Africa, have benefited the church and/or its leaders.[134]

Thus in relation to the Vihiga Roho churches I have had roles that are both traditional and contemporary. I have been a patron - one of the senior KUIC archbishops has called me an 'archbishop of archbishops' – as well as employee, employer, and a facilitator of extraversion or international links, a role that in many ways can merge into that of patron. This latter role needs further explanation. As the Whytes point out in their study of the Banyole of Eastern Uganda (a people fairly closely related to the Luyia of Western Kenya), outsiders can be enrolled in projects of extended families, and become partially adopted by kinship networks.[135] Community projects with 'universalist' goals (i.e., projects beyond the narrow interests of the clan or individual, such as schools, clinics, roads, bridges, etc) normally require sponsors, whether local or external, either to 'pull development', funds, or support, to the local area, or to offer direct financial assistance. I have fulfilled and continue to fulfil both functions.

Within the Roho and pentecostal churches, I have slipped into accepted roles that are similar to those already identified for the community. While working with the leader of Pentecostal Christian Universal Church in the early 1980s to establish the Nairobi branch of that church in the compound I shared with him in Kibera, I was unconsciously

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[134] The present Archbishop was trained on a development course and the present General Secretary was employed by KUIC as a manager of a small bakery project. More recently I have been asked by the Holy Spirit Church leaders to intervene with their UK partner church at a time when a split in the Holy Spirit Church threatened to break off relations and the further inflow of funds. This intervention also ensured that the then Executive Officer of the church received funding for theological studies.

[135] S.R. & M.A. Whyte, 'The Values of Development', pp. 227-243.

becoming part of what Hoehler-Fatton calls *dala* Christianity.[136] She uses this term to characterize the early development of Christian churches in Kenya, which were focused on the homes and households (Luo: *dala*) of their leaders. In effect such leaders become patrons of the church members they gather round themselves. As patrons, church leaders are expected to intervene with the authorities when their followers are in difficulties, to provide advice and counsel, to act as an emergency source of finance, and to enable their clients to benefit from the world of bureaucracy. Such a role became increasingly mine with the leaders of KUIC during my stay in Vihiga, and continues in many ways to the present day. It should be noted that, in the context of research methodology, the role of patron is ambivalent: it deals openly in power and resource differentials, and can create (and is often intended to create) dependent clients, from whom a return in the form of loyalty or services is expected or can reasonably be demanded. This can be a barrier to honest and open communication but it can also open the doors to more intimate relations.

I became, however, increasingly dissatisfied to have only the role of patron, with its connotations of 'upper – lower' relations, and the social distancing the role seemed to require of me. In 1999, although still working from Nairobi, I began to seek a more personal link with the Roho churches. At a meeting of their leaders gathered at my house in Nyang'ori near Kisumu in January 2000, I asked whether they would permit me to wear a *kanzu* (Swahili: the white prayer-gown of the Roho churches) although I might not be able to accept all their beliefs. They replied robustly that if the Holy Spirit was calling me to do so, why delay? Two months later, at a Holy Spirit service in Shauri Moyo, Nairobi, I was invested with a *kanzu*, together with the half-length upper garment that

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[136] Hoehler-Fatton, *Women of Fire and Spirit,* p. 70.

identifies a leader.[137] Within a short time, at an ecumenical service organized by KUIC

and held in the Holy Spirit church at Bukoyani, I was given a red wooden cross for use in

prayer and exorcism,[138] and made an apostle (Swahili: *mtume;* Lulogooli: *mtumwa*).[139]

A parallel spirituality

In this connection, reference needs to be made here to my spiritual, interior, relationship

to the Roho churches. I am not a convert pure and simple to the Roho perspective on

reality, but my preaching and spiritual advice is not necessarily insincere in consequence,

nor is my apostleship simply motivated by ulterior motives.[140] Such interpretations are

too simplistic. Globalized and post-modern societies require the development of multiple,

shifting, identities. Jules-Rosette's account of her conversion to the John Maranke

Apostles during her field-work in Zaire, and the impact of that conversion on her

research, offers a particularly instructive parallel.[141] She notes that it was possible to

move from the roles of 'membership' to 'research' with comparative ease, that

membership 'may be defined as an introduction to the vocabulary and intents of members

and the viability of their descriptions', and that the process 'challenges previous questions

and perspectives'.[142] For her, as for me, the turning point of her research, 'the critical

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[137] The biblical reference quoted by the Roho churches is from Lev. 8: 7. 'Then Moses put the tunic *[kanzu,* Swahili – *likoti,* Lulogooli] on Aaron, tied the sash around him, clothed him with the *robe,* and put the ephod on him…'
[138] See below, chapter three, p. 151.
[139] These churches consider this office not so much in the sense of church planting (a modern pentecostal understanding of the apostolic ministry), but rather that of visiting, encouraging, and advising the churches, and acting as their roving representative, a role built up during my many years spent with KUIC.
[140] This question – a fair one, in my opinion - was put to me by visiting students from the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in 2001.
[141] Jules-Rosette, *African Apostles: Ritual and Conversion in the Church of John Maranke,* pp. 248-264; 'The Conversion Experience: The Apostles of John Maranke'.
[142] Jules-Rosette, *African Apostles*, pp. 248, 253. She also notes that being a member restricted her ability to ask certain questions, since her loyalty was now an issue. Again this has been true of me, especially in my self-imposed unwillingness to interview certain members considered 'dissidents'.

conversion experience, required the step from loyalty to assertion', or to 'advocacy.' My own conversion, since I was already a Christian, was as much political and cultural as religious. It was marked by my putting on the *kanzu* and subsequently being made an apostle, and a more open advocacy of Roho perceptions and beliefs (to which in any case I am committed as part of the apostolic role.) This advocacy is not (I hope) blind. To the extent that I have entered into others' symbolic systems, others' constructions of meaning, I am able to use their symbols and their logic. The academic and the cross-cultural perspectives ensure that I do so, however, with a certain degree of critical distance derived from maintaining another identity, and being at home in another symbolic and logical system. On the personal level, this critical distance, the gap created by differences in culture and power, is continuously bridged by our common humanity and emotional sympathies. In our shared repertoire of biblical images, symbols, and stories, we also possess a common language for expressing and exploring our mutual human and religious concerns.

Part Six. Overview

In chapter two, I explore the geographical and historical context in which 'the Spirit came', and the Roho churches of Vihiga were born. I then offer a summary history of these churches, and identify distinct families and generations. In chapters three and four I attempt to recover and describe the faith of the first generation of Roho churches during their first decade, against the backgrounds of the traditional and colonial societies in which these churches emerged. This early expression of the Roho Christians' faith I refer to as the 'founders' vision'. I seek to define the ideological relationship of this vision to

the values and the modes of production of these two societies. In chapter five, I examine the Roho churches' implicit and explicit claims to play a role in the public arena at local and national levels. In particular I trace the development and history of conciliarism among AICs, as a means of influencing the politics of the emergent nation of Kenya. In chapter six, I revisit the founders' vision at the turn of the millennium, and consider how it has changed to meet contemporary challenges, and the means by which these changes have been, and are, negotiated. Finally I attempt to locate present-day Roho Christianity in relation to the modernity and free-market values of contemporary Kenya, and consider whether the faith as ideology has a future.