

An African Renaissance of Born-Again Christians? Pastor Kula's Ministry and the Crusade for Deliverance in Post-Millennial South Africa

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The South African vision to transform a society battling the legacy of previous ills is faced with a tangible loss of legitimacy. State institutions and an ambivalent government agenda intending the uplifting of the nation increasingly fail to inspire people's confidence: The trust is broken. At the same time many religious programmes offering spiritual alternatives appear to command considerable trust levels. Particularly healing ministries as well as churches openly addressing witchcraft related problems are blessed with good faith as they view and address occult phenomena in biblical terms. In doing so a practice older than the Judeo-Christian scripture, i.e. witchcraft and especially the fight against it, is regulated inside Christian theological doctrines and repertoire. This article uses the concepts of trust and credibility as its starting points and by means of a qualitative case study describes a rather new ministry, the True Faith of the Apostolic Church Ministry and its charismatic crusade for deliverance. By aggressively supporting and propagating the notion of evil forces being at the heart of all social and personal mishaps as well as emphatically underlining the global capacity of "evil" the church leader calls for a concerted action to counter the destructive machinations of a satanic underworld. The rhetoric used in these representations furthermore lends itself to the questioning of the social construction of imagery.

Broken Trust

"Broken trust, a wake up call for major institutions", was the headline chosen by the Human Sciences Research Council in its media release on the eve of South

Africa's Local Government Elections held in December 2000.¹ Based on the outcome of a national and representative sample survey² carried out by the organisation in September 2000, the media release announced that "trust in major institutions appeared to have hit rock bottom", adding that key national and civil society institutions: national and local government, the political parties, police, courts as well as media and business - in short much of the official South Africa - had all suffered considerable reductions in levels of public trust. At the same time and in the same survey, "the churches" stood sound and solid as a rock amidst this scenario of pending anarchy, in which credibility as a commodity had apparently become a very scarce resource. Where, according to the statistics, other competitors to an alarming extent were being perceived with distrust and scepticism, "the churches" continued to enjoy great trust levels.³ Allowing the figures and percentages to speak for themselves, the survey release certainly fell short of specifying the kinds of churches or religious communities which inspired such confidence in the changing times facing their country. South Africa's "churchscape" is many-faceted, and contradicting comfortable generalisations remains a challenge that this article cannot attempt. Instead, and pleading ignorance of current debates shaping and reshaping the South African state, I will merely use the above concepts of "trust" and "credibility" as starting points, and by means of a case study and observations from my last research visit to the Eastern Cape will describe a rather young ministry, the *True Faith of the Apostolic Church Ministry*. This institution appears to command considerable trust levels and is, so to speak, blessed with good faith at a time when official institutions, equally claiming to have stakeholders' well being at heart, fail to inspire confidence.

Some Methodological and Epistemological Reflections and Concerns

"How come western-based people are so obsessed with a phenomenon that they do not at all believe to exist?"⁴ The dubious phenomenon under discussion was witchcraft and Nkosi Zakes from Tabankulu in the Transkei asked me this when learning about a mission, that had led me to, of all places, Potchefstroom in the North-West Province. At the occasion of the annual general meeting of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa) in October 2000 we were wined and dined in the town's university *vir Christelike Hoer Onderwys*. Although the chief's subtle mockery was friendly, I felt he had confronted me with an issue all too pressing, and Nkosi Zakes' question continues to haunt me as a strong reminder of the pitfalls along the way to the production of scientific knowledge and its very perspectival nature. The legacy of imperial constructions of knowledge about "Africa" in itself requires an awareness and a questioning of institutionalised contexts of discovery as well as a sensitivity towards the political arenas with their often hidden agendas - and in the case of research on

occult reference systems there are many⁵ to which scholarly debate may, sometimes unknowingly, be related.⁶ By focussing on the specific rationality of a particular context and time for this article, I have, however, no desire whatsoever to add to the increasingly bizarre perception of the "dark continent" by the "privileged" outside it, as this is already done more than is tolerable by the many visionaries of the apocalypse in "Africa". In the case of witchcraft related issues there are, nonetheless, potential shadow sides and troubling questions of immediate relevance, which, as the violent manifestations of occult reference dramatically remind us,⁷ must not be played down. But in order to engage in a truly mutual dialogue, the researcher needs to accept that her or his "own" culture as the "other"⁸ offers just as many areas in need of investigation. Legitimacy and therefore validity of the information obtained will entirely depend on the extent to which the socio-cultural context of the parties involved in the research process is first recognised, acknowledged and when possible mutually *uncoded*. I find it to be of paramount importance for the parties involved in the research process to make sufficient allowance for the socio-cultural context that brings forth the phenomenon in question as well as the socio-cultural setting which originally gave rise to its scientific formulation as a "problem".

For the following case study I draw on interviews and impressions gathered during a research visit to the Eastern Cape in South Africa from September to December, 2000. The following are mid-term reflections embedded in a process-oriented approach that is methodologically based on qualitative communication, preferring human, understandable terms rather than attempts at translation of the complex observations and impressions into safe statistical variables which then seem so much more controllable than the very phenomenon they claim to cover.

The Quest for Spiritual Alternatives

There can be no doubt that religion played a decisive role in South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle. Several religious communities, among them Christian denominations in particular, were actively involved in the search for a new South Africa, committing themselves to the redress of past violations and thereby to the construction of a just society (Moosa 2000). A national interfaith conference in November of 1992 was charged with the drafting of a *Declaration on Religious Rights and Responsibilities* in which its ten principles were designed to balance the relations between the country's many religious communities as well as with the secular sphere, namely the state authorities.⁹

While on the one hand the new South Africa was generally expected not to be hostile to religion, the "right to criticise and challenge all social and political structures and policies in terms of the teachings of their religion" (WCRP-SA, no date) on the other hand was granted to religious communities, each defined in the same declaration as a:

... group of people who follow a particular system of belief, morality or worship, either in recognition of a divine being, or in pursuit of spiritual development, or in the expression of a sense of belonging through social custom or ritual.

This is a crucial development considering the tangible loss of legitimacy by state institutions that nevertheless try to portray the country's rainbow qualities as compatible with the common images of western market-oriented principles for the re-integration of South Africa into the ambitious and ambivalent, often confusing global circuits of "capital and culture".

South Africa needs to reinvent governance. The commitment, the promise, the vision to transform a society battling the legacy of previous ills and confronted with today's often ambivalent and problematic demands of global participation is founded on the requirements of a constitution for once aimed at ensuring the rights of all its citizens. In order to implement policies intending the uplifting of its people, it first of all depends on the acceptance of its programmes by these very people. Yet, what if people perceive state agencies as having let them down? What happens when the trust is broken? Who do people turn to and why?

Pastor Kula's *True Faith of the Apostolic Church Ministry*

"There is this radio broadcast of this pastor who has people from all over the province calling in to confess to him their terrible misdeeds and to repent so that the pastor can set them free." When Professor Mtuze of the African Languages department at Rhodes University, East London, spoke with me, I had only just arrived in the city. It was my first research visit to the Eastern Cape, and I was still trying to make sense of this place by the coast in South Africa's poorest province. It was also the first that I heard about Pastor Kula, and looking back, I think it was inevitable that trying to find out more on the "enormous public secret" of witchcraft (Ashforth 2000: 16), our paths were bound to cross. The public discourse on witchcraft has been underway for a long time, and it has found entry into many newspaper articles and television documentaries. There was even a recent television series, "*A ke bona boloi*", which is Northern Sotho for "I see witchcraft", and which aims at educating people on the dangerous implications of witchcraft accusations.¹⁰ The secrecy underlying witchcraft and its enormous representation in the public discourse may seem contradictory, and yet in the many talks I had with people who came forward to speak out on witchcraft, their explanations and interpretations almost bottomless, I came to understand its ordinariness. I therefore cannot provide the "exotic touch" that sometimes makes much of the academic debate on the phenomenon seem so helpless.

As the country is blessed with an enormously active mobile phone landscape, I managed to get hold of Pastor Kula as he was returning to his home in

Port Elisabeth from George, where he had conducted a series of religious ceremonies. Speaking on the phone for the first time, we merely screamed at each other to make ourselves understood against the noise of a car in motion. Later though, I was to understand that this was a characteristic aspect of Kula's communication, for even when he was not preaching, he would very often raise his voice dramatically to accentuate whatever he was elaborating on: he was a man with a message. Immediately he offered to meet me the following day, a Sunday, in King Williams Town where he was going to speak during the religious portion of Radio Ciskei's evening programme. I learned that Kula spoke on various regional and community radio programmes, during which people called in to talk to him, mainly about the ways in which a particular curse had affixed itself to the sufferer, or how a caller had even become engaged in satanic activities.

He also offered to bring along two people who had served evil forces for many years under the sea until they were set free by Kula, suggesting these would be the people I should speak to. I would only have to take care of their transportation from Port Elisabeth to King Williams Town. But the prospect of meeting someone for the first time in such awkward circumstances was an idea I did not immediately take to, and so I politely declined the offer, explaining that I was more interested in his activities and personal background, which he understood. On Sunday morning I left East London for King Williams Town (a short hour's drive to the west) to learn more about Pastor Kula's mission. I had been told by some students at the local Rhodes University campus that they had either personally listened to one of his radio shows or had heard of him from people around them. The testimonies given by the callers on air seemed to have impressed listeners quite a bit.

Vision of a Blinded Man

In King Williams Town I was met by Kula's sister and her husband who showed me the way to where the pastor was staying. We drove to their house in a quiet suburb close to King's Centre and they then left me at the door as they had other business to attend to. I was greeted by their two young sons who were very well mannered and showed me in. In the living room, Vuyisile W. Kula was seated in an armchair from which he rose to greet me in a warm manner. A robust and not very tall man in his middle forties, he was wearing dark glasses that completely covered his eyes. He was blind, and I tell his story as he related it to me.¹¹

The founder of the True Faith Apostolic Church Ministry, initiated in September 1995, was saved in 1980. He had been brought up in a Christian environment by a mother who was running a *shebeen* in Port Elisabeth and who, while worshipping the ancestors and consulting *sangomas*, at the same time urged her children to go to church. But Vuyisile W. Kula refused church and became entangled in gangsterism instead. His criminal career came to an abrupt end on

August 23 in 1978 when his eyes were stabbed out by other gangsters, leaving him a blind man who took to drinking alcohol and smoking *dagga* to cope with his misery.

It was some two years after this incident when Kula heard the preaching of Pastor Iphraim Mashaba of the *Full Gospel Church* that marked a turning point in his life. He accepted Jesus Christ as his personal saviour and was born again. Not long thereafter the new Kula one night had a vision: he found himself next to three old, identical-looking men in a big hall. The man in the middle called: "Vuyisile (the joyful), we have no people!"

Immediately Kula, touched and used by an unknown power, started to speak about Jesus very strongly. He was preaching the word of God. While he was preaching there were thousands of pigeons and they were very joyful, as Kula's words were like food to them. In the hall there now were a lot of *sangomas*. He heard himself telling them: "You are the prophets of Satan!" Upon this the *sangomas* stripped themselves of their fur clothes and lay down their (ch)arms before him.

This is the first section I would like to engage as I think it helpful for a better assessment of the terminological dimension. When I asked Kula about his understanding of *sangoma* he explained that *sangomas* were consulted when people encountered problems. The *sangomas* are in his words the "prophets of dead people", as they are used by the ancestors to communicate with the living. The *sangomas* are the ones to give instructions for sacrifices to be offered to the ancestors, which could be in the form of brewing beer or slaughtering a goat or a cow. From this ritual a miracle in return is expected. To support his condemnation of such faith, Kula referred to various verses in the Bible in which the disapproval of *sangomas* and the practice of worshiping the dead are strongly opposed:

There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee. (Deuteronomy 18: 10-12)

And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? For the living to the dead. To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. And they shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry:

and it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, that they will fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward. And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness. (Isaiah 8: 19-22)

Listening to Kula's elaborations and interpretations, I recognised a religious system that allowed for a practice older than the Judeo-Christian scriptures, i.e. witchcraft and especially the *fight* against it, to remain in a biblical context. Viewing and even naming the "problem" in biblical terms made it plausible to look for its regulation inside Christian theological doctrines and repertoire, when not too long ago missionary culture branded the reference to evil spiritual currents as "heathen" and found ways to sanction delinquents (Mndende 2000: 92).

Yet, it is the same context that prohibits another religious expression, that to many people is deemed vital when having to deal with witchcraft-related matters: the invocation of dead generations as religious agents, the ancestors, whose spirits Kula described as being entirely opposed to the Holy Spirit. "You don't mix Christ with ancestors and *sangomas!*"

I recalled a conversation with a man in his late thirties who had asked me for a lift to his home town in Butterworth, Transkei. He told me of his personal experience with witchcraft, and he deeply regretted that so many Christian denominations would not have their adherents worship and consult the ancestors as an acknowledged part of their theological teachings, but instead distanced themselves from such faiths, leaving concerned followers to consult with institutions more understanding of the need for ancestral rituals, outside the church they otherwise belonged to.

I wondered to myself whether the success of the fastest growing church in South Africa was grounded in its readiness to answer to this spiritual need: the Zion Christian Churches are centrally controlled congregations and considered to be the most powerful among the churches in South Africa. People seeking advice can, with the help of spiritual prophets from inside the church, communicate with their ancestors. And sometimes these are "assisted" by the church's own ancestors. Other African Initiated Churches have also acknowledged the wish by many of their adherents to connect with their ancestors and hence have incorporated ancestor veneration in their theology and healing techniques. Here ancestors are viewed as clean and pure spirits, a caring assembly of presences. For some people Jesus himself is an ancestor, who died and now acts as a spiritual agent. Still, Pastor Kula strongly insisted: "You don't mix Christ with the ancestors or *sangomas!*"

In a videotape¹² that was produced by Kula's church in order to bear witness to the miracles at the hand of the pastor and hence to attract new people, one section shows a woman that is introduced as a *sangoma* who is made to empty her

sack before Kula. "Everything must come out to the light" he is heard saying, as the middle-aged lady produces a "Playmobile sky fighter", next to what looks like a doll curio such as those sold in tourist locations. The *sangoma* picks up the various utensils: the horns of a buck, a sponge-like object, and several glass containers filled with different fluids and contents. While she is explaining their uses, Kula reassuringly follows her around.

Most likely specialists in the field of spirituality and healing techniques cannot help but be shocked at such simplification and defamation of an art and knowledge acquired in years of hard training and examination which usually come after the call to become a *sangoma*. And many may see the need for balancing the viewpoints of Pastor Kula by countering them with the self-understandings of *sangomas*, their clientele and other groups of people under attack. As stated earlier, this paper is primarily concerned with retelling the story of Pastor Kula in such a way that the interaction between his narrative art and specific worldview may be explored.

In our conversation I realised how freely Kula used the terms "*sangoma*", "traditional healers", "witches", "witchcraft", "witch doctor", "zombies", "devil worshippers" and "satanism". My previous visits to South Africa had sensitised me to the dilemma of the witchcraft-related terminology and the unresolved issue of definition: just *what is witchcraft*? In November 1999 the conference on *Legislative Reform for the Witchcraft Suppression Act* convened by the Commission on Gender Equality that followed the first national conference on witchcraft-related violence the year before in Thohoyandou¹³ invested much time and effort in debating appropriate alternatives for what was widely agreed to be a passionately hated derogation of an indigenous knowledge system. Legislative work in particular continued to reflect colonial reasoning, in that it basically denied the existence of witchcraft and at the same time fell short of any differentiation. It was totally inept at addressing witchcraft related conflicts. In the wake of this conference, which had brought together traditional healers and leaders, academics as well as victims and perpetrators of witchcraft related violence, a draft proposal for a new law was presented to parliament in May 2000 under the working title "Regulation of Baloyi Practise" (as opposed to its problematic predecessor, the "Witchcraft Suppression Act"). *Baloyi* is a Sotho term for which there is no precise English word. It could, however, loosely be translated as 'practitioners of witchcraft' and was otherwise allegedly understood throughout the country. Yet *baloyi* did not seem a familiar expression around Eastern Cape, whereas the harmful and anti-social practice was widely known as *witchcraft* in English, and as *ubugqwirha* in Xhosa.

Many people I spoke with in the Eastern Cape equated witchcraft with satanism: "Witchcraft and satanism are one thing", Pastor Kula emphatically and repeatedly stated. It was the first time I had heard of satanism as a synonym for witchcraft in South Africa, and it was confirmed in many more conversations.¹⁴

The same applied to the concept of the “occult”, something some of the western-based scholarly debates insisted to be a non-African rationality.¹⁵ It made me wonder whether people dealing with or even afflicted by witchcraft on a regular basis were just too busy to bother with the “right” connotations. I got the impression that the debate over political correctness is more a scholarly dilemma concerned with a “political correctness”, but while lamenting the inappropriateness of the conservative language, finds it too difficult to do without.

A Feeling like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

In the time following his first vision, Kula was left with a feeling of strength, “a deep love for God and a deep love for Jesus”. He compared his state of emotions to the way Jesus was just before he was captured in the garden of Gethsemane, and he “so longed for the Lord Jesus Christ to return soon.”

He now was a member of the *Act of Apostle Church* in his hometown of Port Elizabeth where he sometimes preached to fellow adherents, but in 1995 he fell out with the church elders over the issue of the meaning of baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Though principally accepting the importance of baptising, Kula strongly emphasised the cardinal importance of the blood of Jesus. In his view, without the sharing of the blood of Jesus there could never be any true forgiveness of sins. “We are washed clean by the blood, not by the water”. He underlined his position by vividly referring to Matthew 26:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (Matthew 26:26-28)

This conflict with the church elders had been ongoing for several years, and after a year of intense praying in 1994 and 1995 Kula one night had a dream in which he was praying through the spirit in new tongues and “with power!” The spirit told him: “The faith you preach is true faith.” This marks the start of “True Faith of Apostolic Church Ministry” and its founder Kula ever since has been pursuing his spiritual mission by preaching a theology based on repentance and deliverance.

“What the Public should Know about the True Faith of the Apostolic Church Ministry”

There are several issues that the True Faith Apostolic Church Ministry covers, but it is clearly one in particular that it is best known for – and that it survives

on financially: the *deliverance crusades*, in which former devil worshipers are captured, made to repent and then released. "Come and hear unbelievable testimony which is above Human Being's knowledge" is the title on the invitation leaflet with pictures of four young women who could be schoolgirls, all identifying themselves as former devil worshipers:¹⁶

I was a Devil Worshiper operates in churches, schools and taverns, etc. I thank God through Jesus Christ he saved my life, now I am free.

On the same document, underneath a photograph of him wearing dark glasses, Kula is described as a man God uses "in a special way".

Come and hear how terrible he lost his eyes.

The fact that he was stabbed in his eyes and subsequently lost his vision while still actively engaged in gangsterism, reminded me of another account by a preacher from the *Universal Church of the Kingdom of God*¹⁷ in East London, who, before being born again, had also led a criminal life. This aspect in the biographical reconstruction, whereby a person's past is described as very bad and full of destructive habits, seems not an uncommon feature in the testimonies of the converted, as already the story of Saul / Paul teaches. In the "Strong Prayer Service" on Fridays I had furthermore witnessed how the word "Satan" was translated into *tokoloshe*, which in anthropological literature is described as a witch's familiar, a representation of evil, yet another example of an interchangeable use of terminology. It however does not mean that I ignore the distinctions made by the functionalists who have a precise and detailed understanding of the identity and quality of phenomena and elements that so often find themselves one-sidedly summarised under the category of "the occult" (especially by the media and in policy papers) with little regard for their underlying specifics. Again, here I merely reflect back issues in the way they were presented to me during fieldwork. But back to Pastor Kula's leaflet: "In our crusade throughout the country God set *sangomas* free and, devil worshipers, and witches. Broken marriages are restored, and broken families are also restored". And: "Peace and unity in the Community at Large" are seen to flow from this new state of affairs.

The notion of evil forces as being at the heart of all social and personal mishaps is further underlined by a second leaflet that in few steps outlines the ministry's position on key issues: the restoring of broken marriages and broken families seen as the result of satanic activities, are a central theme and as such they feature in many testimonies. In recognition of their deliverance by Pastor Kula people can be requested to relate their misdeeds to a broader public. This is then done within one of the church's deliverance crusades or, on special re-

quest by Kula, videotaped. In either form, claims of causing road accidents, pain and untold misery, as well as prostitution and the spreading of Aids are common themes here, all of which is suffering brought upon others as agents of evil forces orchestrated by Satan.

The Aids pandemic is too grave an issue to dismiss superficially as a side issue. Yet in view of the enormous health challenges facing South Africa, I find it important to consider very seriously the realities of a reference system which interprets illness as a secret, a curse and a punishment by malevolent powers.

The causing of HIV/Aids as part of a satanic repertoire takes on an even more dramatic quality in view of a public debate on the true causes of the deadly pandemic, in which government positions on the matter have been heavily attacked by health activists at grassroots levels as they were seen to sabotage campaign work aimed at combating the spread of HIV/Aids by preventative education with the communities.¹⁸

In spite of the majority of traditional healers explicitly offering *treatment* as opposed to a *cure* for Aids and HIV-infected patients, there are nonetheless persistent versions of how Aids is caused and how it can be cured, so that a desperate person's quest for healing at times may not stop at therapies that involve harm to others, for example "virgin raping", and generally the raping of persons believed to not be infected with the virus. The latter, particularly children, are favoured for their assumed "innocence". Efforts to put an end to these practices will need to involve a strategy that specifically targets male sufferers as potential perpetrators of this form of violence. Nevertheless, efforts and programmes for the improvement of an unbearable situation will also have to secure enough legitimacy to counter a practise born out of despair. Failure to do so may prove just as fatal as the "myth" itself.

Witchcraft – Whose Craft? The Construction of Imagery

Whereas anybody can be instilled with witchcraft, the vast majority of those seen as responsible for causing the misery are female. This representation may suggest a gender specific dimension in witchcraft belief. Particularly the emphasis on sex, as well as on sexual activities judged as the working of demonic forces, calls for a closer look at the dynamics of invoking gendered imagery.

Testimonies by the released girls often carry a sexual connotation insofar as the formerly afflicted relate details pertaining to their sexual activities and orientations as worshipers of Satan. A recurring theme here is female prostitution as a particular form of serving the devil before being restored to "humanity" by Pastor Kula. Also in the stories there is much reference to women introducing girls to Satanism. The following quotation from an article in *City Press*, a national *hebdomadaire*, illustrates a "typical" example for the procedural recruiting of victims by Satan:¹⁹

Balokazi Qungqu, now 20, from Paarl, was also helped by Pastor Kula. She claims she was possessed by demons at the age of 11. She was in the former Transkei when "a woman gave me a nail and told me to keep in my hand closed. On Christmas Day both of us went to the beach where we plunged deep into the sea," Qungqu said. "A few minutes later I found myself on dry land with many people around. I met a woman named Gabriel who introduced me to Satanism. She said I wouldn't be paid for my future job, but I would only get food. We ate human flesh and drank human blood. My job was to increase the rate of divorce, kill people and give them heart attacks and strokes. I was given a green and white robe and a snake. My body was full of razor cuts. They put a red marble under my tongue," she said. Balokazi saw everybody to be killed under the water. After watching she felt strong enough to face them. She was told to kill at least two people a week. Zukiswa Nikina (19) said a powerful healer in the Eastern Cape told her she would help her, but instead introduced her to Satanism.

This illustrative newspaper article lends itself to the questioning of the social construction of an image that portrays women as frightening females in gender relations:

Men's fear of women is expressed in a number of different symbolic models one of which is of women as fearsome objects, witches, sorceresses and other semi-supernatural figures able to transform men by spells. (Njiro 1999: 3)

But speaking of men's fear of women, it is important to note that in the case of Pastor Kula's protégées paraded in the crusades, it is mostly young women claiming that it was other women, usually older than themselves, who lured them into serving Satan whose masculinity apparently goes unquestioned.

Furthermore, the audience which one sees in the videotapes is dominated by women, some of them elderly and others mothers with their babies. But it is mostly schoolgirls who display a somewhat teenage attitude supported by much giggling and whispering with their peers. Many are dressed in school uniforms, which suggests school classes attending the crusade. The reactions, especially from the young audience, goes from the routine observation of a church service or school ritual with the partly obedient, partly bored repetition of affirmations (mainly a shouted "Amen!") to the attentive listening to the stories told by the young witnesses, many of whom look like teen schoolgirls themselves. Whenever

the camera closes in on boy-attendants they seem equally excited and awkward as their female counterparts in the audience.

The uneven proportion of male and female representation in the above quoted newspaper article as well as in the video footage is striking. Those appearing in the material produced to prove the power and importance of the ministry, as live evidence of the devil's ceaseless dealings, are predominantly women and more specifically teenage schoolgirls. Although Kula claims to have delivered many elderly people and young men, they here remain conspicuously absent.

Generation and authority are further aspects that come into play: whereas witches are widely believed to be elderly people, and here again women seem to suffer a higher risk of being suspected of practising witchcraft, it is increasingly children and youth who call themselves devil worshipers, satanists, and zombies.

Finally, the above representation of the situation points to a paradigm shift in the quality of the aftermath following the witchcraft affliction: falling victim to evil forces was widely read as rather passively suffering a tragic fate for reasons yet to be identified, and most likely so with the help of a spiritually gifted medium. Here the focus instead is on the very active part that sufferers, once having fallen prey to Satan, now play in that they are both victims *and* perpetrators of an evil agenda at once.

A Global Crusade in Need of Monetary and Spiritual Support

Clearly, Pastor Kula is hoping to expose and extend the powers of his ministry into foreign countries and new territories. In South Africa his activities are numerous as he tours the country in order to establish new ministries. He also networks by following up on invitations from other churches, responding to the anxious quest for fighting evil and for deliverance.

According to Kula there are very few true Christians in South Africa, "20 - 30% at most!", whereas the overwhelming majority of those claiming to be Christian in reality do not truly worship the "one and only" God, in Kula's conviction the Christian God. He insists: "We are all born God's children, but we *must* come back through Christ." He however never discloses the criteria on which he bases such claims.

Kula states that there are even whole countries belonging to Satan, as well as schools, churches, governments and generally state institutions and organisations. On the political and societal level, the impact of Satanism was particularly detrimental. As "false faith" it serves as a door-opener for Satan to use the respective organisation as his tool and extend his destruction even more deeply into society.

While momentarily concentrating on the South African plight, Kula is adamant about the global objectives of his work. He wants his work to be under-

stood as a global mission. Satanism and therefore witchcraft "affects all people throughout the world", and it hence is not a "black man's problem", as he put it, but a global issue of immediate urgency.

The leaflet entitled "WHAT THE PUBLIC SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE TRUE FAITH OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH MINISTRY" defines the church as a "charity organisation which preaches the Word of God throughout the country". The two important issues raised here are financial matters and the global dimension of the ministry. "We need so much help" is a strongly emphasised theme also at the admission-free deliverance crusades, which can last from early morning to evening, and during which people are invited, apart from demonstrating their faith by prayers, to support the ministry financially as well. In the amateur videotapes that can be purchased at a negotiable price, Kula indicates his cell phone number followed by his bank details. In the information leaflet one finds the explanation for such material concerns:

What is important in this ministry is to capture and release those who were former Devil worshippers, to accommodate those who are homeless and send those who are entitled to school to attend school, because some of them had sacrificed their families to the Devil. Some were even rejected by their families. We do that to those who were former Devil worshippers. By your help we can do more than what we are. [...] In this ministry we've got pastors who are working full time in this ministry, they've got families who are depending on them. All these people depend on this ministry. Lastly, hundreds and thousands of people accepted the Word of God in our crusades. (*True Faith of the Apostolic Church Ministry*, without date)

To underline the global capacity of the evil and to demonstrate the necessity for a concerted approach to the problem, reference is also made to distant countries such as India and China as places from which the satanic underworld is being coordinated. In a video clip one girl names India as the headquarters of Satan, more precisely located under the sea and equipped with modern technology. As a servant of the devil she flew to this place on the back of a big black cat the size of a small aeroplane.

African Renaissance: An African Remedy Against Spiritual Instability?

And so, finally, here is where the prominent image, that I so high-spiritedly used as a figurehead, comes into play, via Pastor Kula. The visionary motto of African

Renaissance particularly lends itself to a reflection and confrontation with positions and perspectives highlighted at the example of Pastor Kula's mission, especially with regard to the striking parallels in the language used by both parties, Kula and the evangelists of an *African Renaissance*, to communicate their respective messages.

In contrast to Pastor Kula's use of deliverance crusades to enthuse and to recruit people for his mission against evil, Government's efforts to implement *African Renaissance* to secure good governance and justice remain vague on the official level. Anyhow, the more concrete instructions for this moral leadership in daily life are perhaps better looked for in the ideas of *uBuntu*, the philosophical concept often referred to when discussing the applicability of African Renaissance. *UBuntu* draws upon fundamental reflections on human-ness alongside ethical principles in African thought and is a normative order based on a communitarian spirituality and communal understanding. In *uBuntu* day-to-day-guidance, art, politics and religion are not regarded separately. Instead, the quality and the dignity of the human person are always the central and supreme ideas in this cosmology.

Predominantly concerned with guidance for a harmonious togetherness of people, it nevertheless does not fail to hint at the potential consequences following an absence of the Supreme Goodness, i.e. *uBuntu*:

social breakdowns, (that usher) the whole human society into an experience of cultural disarray, social decay, - and into an age filled with ruins and fragments of morality - where our intellectual landscapes are littered with allegorical tales of deterioration rather than dramatic narratives of reconciliation, personal or communal harmony, positivity and advancement to being true microcosmic images of the macrocosmos and the Supreme Creator. (Koka 1999:4)

Pastor Kula and the True Faith of Apostolic Church Ministry did not strike me as particularly passionate about politics. Apart from the conviction that the evil at all times and everywhere tries to enter into the political sphere to live out its malicious agenda, Kula did not pick up on political developments going on in South Africa, be they past or recent, nor did he speak out on current political discourses. The negative and destructive scenarios briefly outlined here, however, seem not far away from the rhetoric and visualisations determining Pastor Kula's reality, in which the degeneration of moral responsibility, the destruction of human lives and therefore the fight against such attacks play an elementary role. The same is also true of the more promising alternative offered by *uBuntu*:

Ubuntu in society, and on the continent, as a whole, generates the individual's sense or feeling of belonging to the corporate society. It makes one to find positive welcome and protective refuge in the immediate and broader community. (Koka 1999: 13)

Protection and refuge are certainly key themes also in Pastor Kula's self-understanding as he offers the accommodation of people who lost their homes and families due to evil forces while his ceremonies spell out ways to protect oneself against them. And, as a final commonality, the notions of restoration and rebirth evident in African Renaissance as well as in the "Born Again Ministry", as Pastor Kula's church is also known under, in both cases signal an end to regression and the strive for the renewal of society — however different the proposed methodologies for achieving this objective may prove.

Notes

- ¹ Local government elections were held countrywide after the redrawing of municipal boundaries by a Demarcation Board and the creation of new wards by new delimitation committees.
- ² Findings were based on a national representative sample survey of 2611 respondents that was conducted by the HSRC in September 2000 (HSRC media release, www.hsrc.ac.za, 14 November 2000).
- ³ E.g. police, courts, provincial and local government and political parties enjoyed only between 33 and 37 percent of voter's trust compared to 74 percent of respondents stating their faith in churches.
- ⁴ Much of the research on witchcraft in African societies is carried out by people living outside the world of witches, which often poses difficulties in conquering cultural boundedness. See also: Ashforth, 1998: 530.
- ⁵ There have in recent years been numerous conferences on witchcraft-related issues, at national as well as on provincial levels, focussing on legislative, political, criminological and medical aspects, e.g. *National Conference on Witchcraft Violence 6-10 Sep. 1998* in Thohoyandou, *Conference on Legislative Reform for Witchcraft Suppression Act No. 3 of 1957, 28-30 Nov. 1999* in Pietersburg.
- ⁶ See also: Bourdieu 1991.
- ⁷ Witchcraft-related violence was recognised as a national priority concern by the South African government in 1998.
- ⁸ The "othering" here is not meant as an intrinsic otherness, as identity likewise is not understood as an ontological category.
- ⁹ World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP-SA) "Declaration on Religious Rights and Responsibilities", without date.
- ¹⁰ Produced for the SABC by Mmulah Productions, 1999.

- ¹¹ Where appropriate in the following narrative I will attempt to engage specific issues by means of a critical hermeneutic.
- ¹² The tapes are mostly in Xhosa, but Kula's words and the testimonies are also translated into English.
- ¹³ It was following the Thohoyandou conference recommendation that the eradication of witchcraft-related violence was recognised as a national priority.
- ¹⁴ The understanding of satanism here differs from the cult originally encountered amongst youngsters in the United States, although newspaper articles have covered similar behaviour in youth communities throughout South Africa.
- ¹⁵ See Ruecker 1985.
- ¹⁶ Leaflet of "True Faith of the Apostolic Church Ministry" (without date).
- ¹⁷ This global evangelical church originated in Brazil in the 1970s and has millions of followers worldwide.
- ¹⁸ The mention by President Thabo Mbeki of factors other than sexual transmission involved in the outbreak of HIV, namely poverty, was internationally as well as nationally met with angry criticism, as the remarks were viewed as detrimental and utterly counterproductive to efforts to combat the spread of HIV. As much as living conditions must be taken into consideration here, it is hard to understand why the South African government chose to formulate its stand in ways that would surely give rise to counterproductivity.
- ¹⁹ Children say they were "filled with demons and ordered to kill", Gcinikhaya Mbesi, City Press, 37156, Nov. 21, 1999.

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