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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David M. Gordon. *Invisible Agents: Spirits in a Central African History.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012. 384 S. ISBN 978-0-8214-4439-9.

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Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (November, 2013)

David Gordon's book "Invisible Agents: Spirits in a Central African History" attempts to write a "post-secular" (p. 22) history of religions in Northern Rhodesia/Zambia. It centers on religious discourses and practices of spirits as agents. Against "the distinctions between the otherworldly qualities of sacred spirits and the this-worldly qualities of profane agents" (p. 2), the author locates his arguments "around the conceptions and sensory perceptions of historical agents who have thought that invisible spirits have exerted power in this world" (p. 2). Instead of excluding spirits as some sort of "false consciousness", spirits as invisible agents are positioned in the center of a historical narrative that complicates the divide of religion and politics as well as a simple anthropocentric perspective.

However, as anthropologists and philosophers have demonstrated, spirits bring in more complications: They are "quasi-objects", something between thing and person and they are present without presence. They are invisible and therefore need a medium to gain visibility, audibility and materiality. Even more important, when spirits enter history, they disturb clear-cut temporalities by creating presences from the past that actively attempt to shape the present, the future and sometimes also to correct the past. Spirits disrupt the linearity of historical time conceptualized as a series of events in chronological order. Hence spirits question the notion of history and time as inherently flowing and sequential.

The author begins his rich narrative with oral traditions of the royal ancestors of the Bemba Crocodile Clan who ensured protection, fertility and well-being. With the arrival of Christian missionaries and the establishment of the colonial state (chapter two) these ancestral spirits were not only increasingly marginalized (as well as "nature" and alien spirits) but also "satanized" and connected to witchcraft. Because the colonial state and colonial chiefs did not protect their subjects from witchcraft, the Bamuchape witchcraft eradication movement entered the public arena and cleansed afflicted people from evil, in particular from "Christian witches".

Chapter three explores the Watchtower movement on the Copperbelt, its millenarism and its opposition to and interactions with secular welfare associations, nationalists and trade unions, who were all fighting the colonial state. Chapters four, five and six narrate the history and various aspects of the Alice Lenshina movement that ended in a catastrophic war. Chapter seven describes secular socialism as Kenneth Kaunda's state religion and the role of Archbishop Milingo as a spiritual mediator. The last chapter explores the agency of the Holy Spirit, who after Kaunda's downfall in 1991 turned Zambia in a Christian nation as part of Pentecostalism and a neoliberal order. Thus, the author constructs a complex history in

which very different spiritual agents – ancestor spirits, Christian spirits, witches and the Holy Spirit – make their appearance and are claimed to form the basis for individual and collective actions.

To better understand local perspectives and "histories from below", it is extremely important to bring the agency of spirits into historical narratives. Since the 1960s, historians of Africa and anthropologists have increasingly interacted and learnt from each other. In the course of time, anthropology of religions has seen various attempts to explain and understand spirit possession, also in a historical perspective. Spirits have been conceptualized as refractions of social reality, as symbols and as sources or claims of power. Against these attempts the author connects spirits in Central Africa, above all, to emotions. While spirits, when embodied, may indeed display different emotions, I fear that this is another reduction of the diversity that characterizes spiritual worlds. In addition, when exploring various moments of upheaval in the history of Northern Zambia in more detail, the author does not follow up systematically the emotive character of spirits.

The author writes: "Rather than a history of institutionalized religion, this book is a history of the spirits believed to have influenced this world" (p. 2). But also in Africa spirits form part of institutions, of pantheons and of rituals. They were part of centralized or more acephalous cults of affliction and mediumship. The institutions, power relations and forms in which spirits have gained agency, visibility and materiality were highly varied and changing as well as the concepts of mediumship, audience and subjectivity, which all deserve a more detailed analysis. In fact, the complicated history of the dialectics of spirituality and materiality, invisibility and visibility and their transformations would certainly need a deeper exploration. It makes a difference, for example, if books are thought to have spiritual power as in the Watchtower movement or if the female body of a spirit medium is possessed by a spirit. This study would have provided further important insights if the always necessary mediation of spiritual powers in different mediums (including technical media) had been given more attention.

Spirits are not given entities. They are produced in different ways under specific historical conditions. Following Jack Goody (1988), the production of spirits is guaranteed because religious movements and churches et cetera and their spiritual agents necessarily fail to keep their promises of cleansing witches and healing. This inadequacy leads to ever new attempts to deal with the problem of evil, suffering and death and to create new spirits or re-invent some older ones. It is possible to present the internal logic of alternative religious cults and movements, as for example Richard Werbner has shown already in 1989. I repeat, spirits are not just there; they proliferate or become marginalized and these dynamics are important in order to construct spiritual histories as a "longue durée". In many parts of Africa, in times of war and epidemics, waves of new spirits have made their appearance; spirits may form different generations following each other, rather often defining themselves in opposition to older spirits. What I miss in David Gordon's book is an attempt to explore the different "paradigms" of spirits at different times (continuities and discontinuities) in their inter-connectedness and/or oppositions from the pre-colonial to the postcolonial periods.

As mentioned before, the author brings in spirits as agents in history. Yet, he does not deal with spirits as representations of "history from below" though there have been various attempts by anthropologists and historians to do so, in particular during colonial times. As Paul Stoller, Michael Taussig and many others (including the reviewer) have tried to show, spirits in rituals of spirit possession may evoke the past in some sort of counter-images, manipulate the present and evoke the future.

In spite of these critical remarks (that are made by an anthropologist) this book brings highly relevant insights into the history of Northern Zambia. It traces the continuity of spiritual agency in very different forms and thereby questions the concept of the "postsecular". The book clearly shows: there never was a "secular" that was not contested and disturbed by spirits.