ABSTRACT: Drawing on ethnographic and historical material from Melanesia and beyond, this article explores movements of religious intensification within Christianity. The morphology of religious intensification is defined by a multiplicity of localized upsurges laterally interconnected by means of decentralized packs of inspired participants. Charismatic intensification is above all an intensification of affect produced through the workings and movements of the Holy Spirit. In contrast to the ‘domesticated affect’ of institutionalized Pentecostalism, religious intensification trades in ‘wild affect’—improvised, loosely structured mobilizations of affective outpouring. These contagious upsurges in spiritualized intensity propel participants toward a new metaphysical horizon, namely, the Parousia or Second Coming. The effusion of apocalyptic affect can in many cases be historically explained in terms of the subsidence of the colonial order; as one cosmological meta-narrative collapses, another rushes into the existential breach. Surging toward a new world here produces an unraveling of existing hegemonic teleology and eschatology that function to fix, dominate, and restrict human bodies.

KEYWORDS: affect, charismatic Christianity, intensity, Melanesia, revival

February 1977. “Spiritual independence day” among the Guhu-Samane of Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea (Handman 2015: 142). “In late 1976 Ulysses, his wife, and his daughters started to have visions of angels, God, and the Book of Life (written in Guhu-Samane), and they heard Jesus’s voice ‘as if on a radio.’ Told by a mysterious white man to return to Ulysses’s natal village of Au, they traveled across the valley during a major rainstorm and gathered people there to prepare a feast for this unnamed white visitor. On February 2, 1977, just as the feast was ready, the white man disappeared as mysteriously as he originally appeared, but in his place the power of the Holy Spirit descended on the people of Au village. People spoke in tongues, were born again, buried traditional magical items or remaining men’s house sacra, and started a movement that eventually led to a split with the Lutheran Church” (ibid.: 124).

August 1970. The Holy Spirit surges within the community of Kwai’ana, North Malaita, Solomon Islands. Samson Baisulia recalls how “after Muri Thompson arrived, they held service inside the church, for almost one week. When they all came and held the service, the Holy...
Spirit really started to come in and everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit … Muri Thompson did the preaching, but anyone who was filled with the Holy Spirit could perform healing … They were filled with the Spirit and began to prophesy and speak in tongues. Throughout the night that is all that you would hear, women praying and speaking in tongues. People were also burning and destroying traditional magic objects. Some others were doing discernment, people could see things that had happened and things that were yet to happen. Others were doing writing too, writing on the board. Just scribbling on the board and then someone else would come and interpret in terms of the scripture. People had prayed for revival for 5 years and then it finally happened” (personal communication).

July 1973. An effusion of intensity at Kemborapusa village, Enga Province, Papua New Guinea. “Mr Opa Miki came to the local church and conducted services there. Many Christians came to listen to God’s word and as they sat in the church the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them. Some people began to quake as they do when they are attacked by the sickness of malaria. They cried with many tears and mucus flowing freely from their noses and mouths. Many people thought some of these people had become mad and others were suffering from malaria. However, the occurrences of shaking, tears and running noses increased in this church. This movement of the Holy Spirit continued to increase and spread to the churches of the Sim, Mapoa and Sip Associations” (Tramulia 2004: 4–5).

May 1976. The Sepik village of Ilahita, Papua New Guinea, a former stronghold of the tamba-ran, moves with a new force. “Many more people came and the Holy Spirit touched them all … Some people stood up, some fell down, some made noise and started shaking, some worried and some prayed, some cried, and after all stood up joyfully and praised God. But some fell down and thrashed around. Initially the church leaders were unclear, but later they realized, these people were possessed by evil spirits. When a person was in this state, the church leaders stood around them and prayed. One of them would command that the spirit left the afflicted person in the name of Jesus … It was not as though a person had pushed them or if they had fallen down on their backside like a tree, it looked like a person’s leg had given way and they went down to the ground” (Jost 2001: 16).

December 1973. The Foi people of Orokana, near Lake Kutubu, Papua New Guinea, are swept up in contagious fervor. “The movement spread rapidly through the nightly testimony, praise, and singing till dawn. Christians received rich blessing and non-Christians were drawn in … Confession and restitution led to radiant, overflowing joy and a new sense of the presence of the Lord. A few praised God in languages they did not know, always real languages like Sambirigi, Huli, Motu or English … There were many visions, some clearly godly, others dubious or even suggestive of evil. People began to shake in the all night singing, the constancy of which made people so tired that husbands or wives went home and left their spouses in the company of others, clean contrary to tribal custom” (Prince and Prince 1981: 194–196).

All movements of religious intensification, often called ‘revival,’ ‘renewal,’ or ‘awakening,’ are irreducibly unique singularities that laterally interact and interconnect as elements of wider, open, complex wholes. Anthropologists have excelled at capturing localized intensifications, with many accounts forming the core of some of the best-known ethnographies of Christianity (e.g., Bialecki 2017; Handman 2015; K. Marshall 2016; Robbins 2004). But rarely have we seen the forest for the trees. No ‘revival’ occurs in a vacuum, and all are inevitably and inexorably connected to similar surges that are happening or have happened elsewhere. While never losing their essential difference, singularities hang together, or coalesce, through burgeoning affinities, shared style, and horizontal capillaries. They are not isolated explosions but autonomous, pulsing nodes embedded within a reticulated field of electrified becoming. Intensity never sits
still; it moves incessantly, branching out contagiously to create new eruptions which themselves consequently irradiate.

Such rhizomic morphology is exemplified by 1970s Melanesia. During this time, the Christian spirituality of communities across the region suddenly and rapidly accelerated, creating a heterogeneous yet cohesive field of intense religious movements that radically reshaped Christianity across Melanesia. Robbins (2004: 122) suggests that “this era might well be seen as something of a Melanesian ‘great awakening’ … this series of revivals made Christianity important in many parts of the region in a way it never had been before.” Look at any instances of revival, and one inevitably sees them as constituent elements of regional upsurges. The spiritual eruptions of eighteenth-century America saw simultaneously a “period of unusually intense ‘religious interest’ in a single church” and “the multiplication of local revivals over a broad geographical area for a prolonged period of perhaps several years” (Carwardine 1978: xv). Jason Bruner’s (2017: 4–5) insightful portrayal of the East African Revival of the 1930s shows that “through regular regional conventions, the traveling of itinerant groups, and the use of new communication technologies, revivalists built a religious movement—a dynamic network of people who understood themselves as sharing in a new common identity characterized by a new religious vocabulary, new spiritual practices, and a transformation of their daily habits and practices.” Against the mythologizing of Azuza Street as the cataclysmic ‘big bang’ of global Pentecostalism, its leading expert, Allan Anderson (2007: 4), instead sees it as but one important part of a “polynucleated and variegated phenomenon.” David Martin (2002: 169, 171) similarly describes the global groundswell toward charismatic Christianity as intrinsically “multi-centered” and “incurably pluralistic.” Innumerable localized upheavals necessarily connect as parts of broader, diverse fields of intensity.

Connection between firing nodes of religious intensification is not subtended by any centralizing force, but is made informally and rapidly, carried along not by directive or instruction but by a compulsion to further spread contagious energy. Religious surges proliferate primarily along horizontal lines of force. Bringing a society, let alone a whole region, alive with the power of the Holy Spirit is not—and could not be—a top-down orchestration by a single church, denomination, or theological institute. Religious intensification does not come about through orders transmitted from church authorities via the ecclesiastical strata to innumerable congregations, who then ignite and unite under a single theological banner. It is also not sustained due to vertical control and capture by formal leaders and spokespeople.

To the contrary, religious intensification thrives upon the incessant creation of lateral connections. It is peripatetic, always in search of new avenues for circulation with no dominant control center—only filaments, capillaries, and branching out (in the horizontal, not arborescent, sense). To quote Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 7): “It evolves by subterranean stems and flows … it spreads like a patch of oil.” As McClymond (2004: 10) puts it: “Like water in a leaky basement, it has slowly seeped in even when not welcomed by church authorities.” While a regional spiritual uplift may by historical coincidence remain within a single, regionally dominant colonial church (J. Bruner 2017), Bialecki’s (2010: 704–705) characterization of revival as “rhizomic and acephalous, running across various geographic and social borders … quick to jump over denominational and other social boundaries …” characterizes a better representation of this horizontalist ethos, especially in pluralist Christian landscapes. The widespread intensification of Christian life in Melanesia is illustrative, as it cut across a wide range of conservative evangelical congregations (the parent churches of which cherished a much more formalist, staid idea of revival), but also infiltrated mainstream Protestant and Catholic churches as well. Institutions may play crucial roles, such as the Christian Leaders’ Training College (CLTC) in Papua New Guinea; however, they do not act in any deterministic or regulatory manner, but rather as pluralistic hubs for the cross-pollination of ideas by Christians from a wide range of denominational backgrounds.
In such a climate, spiritual power jumped contagiously and ceaselessly between manifold Christian groups pulsing across the region, in the process bypassing, exceeding, and bursting existing vertical hierarchies and rigid codifications. Intensification never waits on formal approval from church leaders or missionaries, and it never stops to observe policy and protocol.

While circumventing vertical organizational styles, the lateral interconnection of an intense religious multiplicity nonetheless requires human actors. It is not simply spiritual intensity that rapidly moves across contexts, but spiritually intensified people. Within Zambian Pentecostal-charismatic churches, Kirsch (2013: 42) describes this as the “logistics of the spirit,” a spatialized diagram of the Holy Spirit’s ontology drawn by the mobility and movements of human carriers. For our purposes, we must multiply these lines of force into a spiritual rhizome pulled across regional space.

The agents of spreading spiritual intensity within revival movements are rarely appointed incumbent authorities, but rather vagabond fire starters who seize the moment, setting movements in motion before either fading into the background or jumping into another community, an unfolding eruption, or a prayer retreat. Rather meekly referred to as “new lights” (Shaw 2010: 18–19), they are really spiritual incendiaries. Preachers, pastors, and revivalists like Muri Thompson, Diyos, Opa Miki, and Ulysses—these and countless others whose names appear in the story of 1970s Melanesian religious uplift did not build movements around themselves. They were not executing plans set down by superiors or seeking to fix the form that worship should take. Beyond inspired leaders, however, movements of religious intensification are propelled by motley packs and bands of Christians drawn from surging communities who, under the urgent compulsion of the Holy Spirit, commence spontaneous itinerant evangelism, fanning out across the landscape, promoting upheaval as they go. Intensity is movement. In turn, they create yet more bands and packs who then embark upon their own inspired enterprises, so that connections across and between heterogeneous groups rapidly multiply and diversify. They become the ligatures and filaments of regional fields of religious intensification without central oversight and organization.

While ostensibly the result of a Muri Thompson ‘crusade’, the Solomon Islands revival of 1970 was actually produced by innumerable small, rapidly formed groups of lay Christians circulating within the country. Small groups of senior Solomon Island Christians then traveled across many parts of Papua New Guinea in the early 1970s, nurturing local movements. In the late 1970s, women across the Min cultural region assembled themselves into bands of itinerant spirit meri (women of the spirit), whose “special role” was to “embody the Holy Spirit in widely separated locations” (Jorgensen 2007: 128). These groups had also been influenced by the Solomon Islanders and other Papua New Guineans under the spell of revival. During 1974, ‘evangelistic teams’ were formed from United Church congregations in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea (Wood and Reeson 1987), who were pivotal to sparking religious excitement across the region. Brother Peter Jost (2001: 5) describes how, in the Sepik region around 1976, “it was like a team was formed. It wasn’t as though one man appointed members and they made a program, no … They didn’t have name or number, they just worked.” Small, autonomous cells of intensity circulated around the region, in the process weaving the lineaments of a religious revolution. Around the world, the same dynamic obtains. The mpiandry (shepherds) of the Fifohazana movement in Madagascar (Rich 2008), the Balokole (saved ones) of the East African Revival (J. Bruner 2017), the Welsh revival in the early 1900s (Hall 1972), the numerous irradiations of the 1994 ‘Toronto blessing’ (Steingard 2014)—the power of these kinds of movements depended inextricably upon the multiplication of grassroots swarms and packs that fostered contagion. The point is that for every movement of intensification, there is the creation of inspired packs—lateral, intersecting offshoots that embody, diffuse, and interconnect explosions of spiritual power. Sparks fly, freely jumping across fences and boundaries to start new fires until whole regions are ablaze.
Becoming-Spirit

Religious intensification is above all an intensification of affect. Bialecki (2015: 97) defines affect as “the intensities and energies found in a particular moment or object that has consequences on others that it is in contact with in that moment. Affect would be defined as the preconscious movements and stillness of the body, the quickenings and slowings, the twitches and pauses, that others respond to often without even being aware of it.” Affects are the active substrate of life, forces that animate, undergird, and propel all human relationships, action, representation, and cognition. Operating at the threshold of potential and actual, they function as a continuous circuit of becoming, intensity-on-the-way-to-realization. Affects are the active, contagious forces moving within, binding together, and shaping embodied social life. The feeling of ‘being part of something’ unfolding; carried along by the flow of an encounter; ripples of intensity coursing through situations. It is a world of dynamic relational forces beyond, but surrounding and anchoring, our conscious reflection, continuously shuttling us back and forth between greater and lesser states of being depending on the entities we encounter.

Within Christian revival movements, the Holy Spirit is the affective force par excellence. It is the Holy Spirit that affects and intensifies the believers’ interiors, launching them toward massively expanded existential capacities. Melanesia in the 1970s was the scene of profound affective intensification. “I was sobbing, and my heart was like a fire, and then I was full of joy and singing” (Griffiths 1977: 181); “shaking, crying, confessing, praying, singing aloud” (Kale 1985: 48); “males and females hug each other with tremendous affection to express their sense of belonging to one family in Jesus Christ” (Namunu 1983: 62); “A crowd of one thousand attended and after the normal appeal was made a woman began to shake and experience ‘a deep conviction of sin.’ This had a triggering affect with many other people following suit” (Barr 1983: 147); “crying and wailing over sin lasted for two days and nights … Then came a great release and they were overcome with joy. They broke into singing, jumping, dancing, clapping their hands, and praising God” (Liddle 2012: 26); “What happened was even more dramatic than drunkenness. People lost their clothes, broke things around them, leaped and danced around singing songs. Some people fell down as if dead—they had been possessed by the Holy Spirit” (Flannery 1983a: 169); “What the women brought with them was not a new belief or practice, but an emotional experience. This experience spread by contagion from person to person so that it became a social experience, a movement” (Schwarz 1984: 256); “The term otepaipole (revival) as used by the national people is not synonymous with the English word revival. To the Enga, the term means to shake, utter strange noises, speak in tongues, and leap about” (Dawia 1983: 126).

Accounts from around the world confirm the affective core of religious intensification. The East African Revival was “somatic” and built upon “intense physical conversionary experiences” (J. Bruner 2017: 60, 61). Widespread Christian intensification in China in the early twentieth century sent “strange thrills [coursing] up and down one’s body” and revealed “the agony of the penitent, his groans and cries and voice shaken with sobs” (Bays 1993: 164). For early Pentecostals in North America, revival participants “frequently reported electrical shocks in various parts of the body … Images involving fire, heat, or hot coals appeared almost as frequently as electrical metaphors … ripples, waves, billows, oceans, [and] cloudbursts of blessing … waves of liquid love” (McClymond 2004: 8–9). Intensification in contemporary Vanuatu “appeared as a ritual context that promised the realization of love in its fullest form” (Bratrud 2021: 468). The Swedish movement Livets Ord (Word of Life) described by Coleman (2000) also illuminates the deeply affective, material, and sensuous dimensions that characterize surges of religious intensity. If it can be said to possess an essence, ‘revival’ is a multiplicity of transmittable affective intensifications whose ultimate author, leaving its signature on all superhuman phenomena, is
the Holy Spirit. A regional assemblage of spiritually excited bodies, heightened sensations, overflowing feelings, incessantly spreading and interconnecting. Rhizomic spiritual affects.

If this form of affective spiritual eruption appears spontaneous, liberated, and experimental, that is because it is all of those things. But for social scientists reared on notions of conceptual framework, structure, pattern, culture, ritual, and indigenization, this all seems like too much mushy emotivism. There is a legitimate concern that some affect theorists operate on the “belief that affect is independent of signification and meaning” (Leys 2011: 443) and are implicated in the ‘banishment of subjectivity’ (E. Martin 2013). They are accused of reducing all human activity to an afterthought, to something propelled by a vague “sense of push” (Thrift 2004: 64) outside or prior to consciousness, representation, and conceptuality over which we have little control. Life is driven by irreducibly autonomic forces and our ‘intentions’ are only post facto explanations of what was inevitably going to occur. We do not think Being but Being thinks us.

Affects certainly constitute fundamental non-representative ontological forces, but they necessarily imply an image or idea that hangs on their back. While embodied sociability may be driven by non-propositional, non-interpretive, or non-intellectualist affects, this is not the same as arguing that it lacks conceptuality altogether (Zerilli 2015). Instead, there is a “conceptuality of embodied coping” whereby our “being-in-the-world,” irrespective of its thorough corporeality, always occurs “under aspects” (ibid.: 273, 274); we always see and experience life with at least some idea, however vague, about what is going on. Affects and representations may be ontologically distinct but operate as the virtual and actual dimensions of everything that exists. Thus, Navaro (2017: 210) asks: “What resonates as affect in the different geographies that we study as anthropologists?” Where is the culture—the patterns and structure—that sits alongside the intensities, forces, and powers driving, augmenting, and diminishing our lives?

Anthropologists of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity have been exercised by these issues. This stems from the basic observation that unlike other Christian traditions built upon orthodoxies, liturgies, and doctrines, Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity is definitively “affective-experiential” (Archer 2015: 322). The affective core of these brands of Christianity is articulated by philosopher James Smith (2010: 72), who argues:

Rather than seeing human action and behavior as entirely driven by conscious, cognitive, deliberative processes, pentecostal worship implicitly appreciates that our being-in-the-world is significantly shaped and primed by all sorts of precognitive, nondeliberative ‘modular’ operations. In short, we feel our way around the world more than we think about it, before we think about it.

Anthropologists have added to these understandings by introducing the ideas of expectation, structure, learning, and conditioning into how these Christian modalities operate. Despite holding to an “ideal of spontaneity” (Lindhardt 2011: 4) in their worship, the embodied, precognitive affective outpourings of Pentecostal-charismatic Christians are, in fact, carefully cultivated. Affect and cognition are thus inseparable. Luhrmann (2004: 519) gives us the concept of “metakinesis” to describe how converts “learn to identify bodily and emotional states as signs of God’s presence in their life.” Brahinsky (2012: 215) maintains that Pentecostals construct a “sensorium” whereby “religiously inflected sensory aptitudes, and perhaps even mind-body dynamics, emerge through a process of careful cultivation and nurturance.” Meyer (2011: 29) articulates a notion of “sensational forms” as “relatively fixed modes for invoking and organising access to the transcendental, offering structures of repetition to create and sustain links between believers in the context of particular religious regimes.” Finally, Reinhardt (2015: 408) writes of Pentecostalism as a “methodic dive into divinity in terms of modes, intensities, flows, and refractions of the Holy Spirit.” From the perspective of these authors, the tears, tongues, and trembling that so
dramatically define Pentecostal-charismatic Christian worship occur as spontaneous becomings and miraculous surprises that are nonetheless generated by learned dispositions and established—although fluid—theological tenets. Deeply vitalist, radically immanent, and unruly, yet normatively so. Structured anti-structure. The Pentecostal habitus. Domesticated affect.

What is the affective difference between the church-based Pentecostalism described above and religious intensification movements known as ‘revival’? The difference is one of degree, not of kind. Both are intrinsically charismatic religiosities whose effusive, ecstatic engagements with the Holy Spirit are clothed in representations and precepts. Take, for instance, the preparations that invariably underpin movements of religious intensification. Almost all reports of these dramatic, prolonged eruptions involve dedicated solicitation of the Holy Spirit through prayer. One report from Solomon Islands states that “for more than a year, the praying continued to build up” (Griffiths 1977: 170), while another report from Papua New Guinea describes how “75 men prayed for three years” (Tramulia 2004: 4).

But the expression of charismatic ecstatic intensity within the polynucleated eruptions of the 1970s did not lock into or utilize a pre-established template or ‘sensational form’ for Pentecostal affective outpouring. The Holy Spirit had never affected people in this way before. The overwhelming majority of Melanesian Christians whose religious lives rapidly intensified during this era belonged to conservative evangelical churches established by missions. From this heritage they inherited formalist notions of revival as a needed reinjection of enthusiasm and earnestness into cooling church life. But they were not members of Pentecostal churches, and most would not have had any systematic education in the Pentecostal sensorium. While not systematic, however, the relationship of Melanesian religious intensification to institutionalized Pentecostalism was still vital, for it acted as a source of ideas and practices that could be quickly taken up within communities on the threshold of religious effusion. Crucial was the ministry of a Dutch Pentecostal missionary throughout East New Britain, Bougainville, and Malaita in the late 1960s and early 1970s and also the proximity of the Assemblies of God (AoG) church to effusive sites in the Sepik region of Papua New Guinea in the mid-1970s. Owing to the thoroughly interconnected character of this field of intensification, shards of this Pentecostal theology circulated freely across the evangelical landscape and proved a potent stimulus for the unfolding movements. Combined with this were the teachings and preaching of itinerant evangelists sympathetic to emotional revivalism and charismatic worship, who also furnished Melanesians with further notions about access to a new mode of religious power. So the affective gifts of the Holy Spirit associated with Pentecostalism emerged within this historical context, not as the performance of learned, rehearsed techniques, but more as a spontaneous, experimental trial with the intensities and modalities of the Holy Spirit. One could call it Pentecostalism-in-the-making.

All of this underlines the fact that institutionalized Pentecostalism and movements of religious intensification exhibit contrasting morphologies and economies of spiritual intensity. Writing about American Pentecostalism, Frederick Dale Bruner (1970: 39) clearly demonstrates this basic distinction: “Pentecostalism is revivalism gone indoors. In Pentecostalism revivalism has moved from its tents and rented halls into organized Christendom and myriad local churches.” In contrast to the ‘domesticated affect’ of Pentecostal churches, then, we can posit the ‘wild affect’ of religious intensification. This phrase designates affects of the Holy Spirit that do not follow well-worn channels but are instead unruly, emergent, becoming, mobile, and fluid. Wild affect has a structure, but only a loose one. It is an affective grasping, not an affective institution. In such contexts, the affects of the Holy Spirit are sensed but not yet fully recognized. It is a form of affect that is spreading, always searching out and forging new lateral connections among surging communities, not locked away inside specific sacred houses. In language that perfectly exemplifies the affective dimensions of religious intensification, Teske (1983: 114) describes a
series of pulsing societies in the highlands of Papua New Guinea: “It was very much spread by contagion and not via organized proselytizing. What was spread was an EXPERIENCE, not a set of dogmas or tenets. In other words, it was not like the introduction of a new church with a complete or even partial confession of faith and practice. It was almost totally a spread of an emotional/social experience.” Bodies surging, convulsing, and breaking, not under theological duress but as an orchestration on the move, a creatively improvised thrust toward a new affective and metaphysical life. People becoming-spirit, possessed by new forces in new ways.

**Push toward Parousia**

In his study of the East African Revival, Jason Bruner (2017) rescues the portrayal of religious intensification from overdetermined accounts, positioning it as resistance to hegemony. The received line of thinking on the topic is that “revivalist movements always arise in a historical context and as a rule are reactions against the status quo in church or society” (van der Laan 2010: 216). A key part of religious intensification is the creative unraveling of established colonial hierarchies, epistemologies, and eschatologies, but to see the process exclusively in negative terms overlooks what is often the defining ethos of such movements for participants, namely, the affirmative pursuit of new personal, collective, and metaphysical lives. Thus, Bruner (2017: 19) contends that “Balokole were not solely, or even, in the end, ultimately, interested in dissenting from political, religious, or cultural orders; rather, they went about the work of creating a new life, which they called the ‘life of salvation.’” As a prolonged affective surge, revival is always positive, moving forward toward something. To ‘react’ is to stop, arrest flow, halt momentum. We can therefore say that the ‘critique’ intrinsic to religious intensification emerges as a displacement of its ultimately affirmative impetus and is not the dominant principle upon which it is founded.

The new world being affectively mapped out within the process of religious intensification is the Kingdom of God. The affective eruptions that manifest within these movements are, for their participants, nothing else than the Holy Spirit’s unruly scribblings on the flesh. But such an intense deluge of the spirit within revival carries the meta-signal of the Parousia, or Second Coming of Christ. Examples abound from 1970s Melanesia. One observer of the eruptions on Malaita, Solomon Islands, in 1970, reported that “about 7 people saw visions of Christ when they were filled with the Spirit. Most of them saw that Christ was ready to come back!” (Jan Pasterkamp, unpublished newsletter, 20 October 1970). Among the Enga of the Papua New Guinea highlands region, “the trembling and other physical manifestations were strongly sought … within the context of the belief in the imminent return of Jesus” (Kale 1985: 64); for the Ilahita Arapesh studied by Tuzin (1997: 18, 19), “the frenzied state of Revival activities” was loaded with “millenarian promise”; the Guhu-Samane of Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea, engaged in “very intense prayer, with prayer sessions sometimes lasting the whole night, in an attempt to urge Jesus to come back soon” (Flannery 1983a: 175); from Kapuna, Gulf Province, participants’ “wonderful experiences” were the basis of a steadfast belief “that Jesus was coming back” (Meakoro 1983: 195). The dramatic intrusion and effusion of the Holy Spirit were seen by those caught up in moments of religious intensification as embodying the imminent rapture, “the inauguration of a new economy of abundance rather than the miserly administration of an old order” (Smith 2010: 23). Every ‘gift’ is at the same time a piece of the Kingdom-at-hand. Tongue speaking is “assured in the glossolalic utopia” (de Certeau 1996: 31). This dynamic is conveyed within Ruth Marshall’s (2010: 207) work on Nigerian revivalists, where she maintains that local spirituality can be seen as “a state of messianic potentiality, but one that must still be enacted through the work of faith.” To put this in terms of religious intensification instead of
Pentecostalism, we can describe it not as a ‘state’ of messianic potentiality but rather as an affectively articulated becoming, or an intense unfolding of Christ’s return, a feeling within people’s bodies of a new paradisical world coming into being, rushing into view. A fundamentally new eschatological horizon mapping itself onto the epicenter of life through crying, shaking, tongue speaking, dreams, and prophecy. “Apocalyptic affections” (Land [1993] 2010: 136–137). “What is the trajectory of a body, for example, if not an enactive speculation on future position?” (Mas-sumi 2015: 208). Feeling out a new world.

The process of religious intensification is an improvised mobilization of apocalyptic affect. A propulsion of the affects by the Holy Spirit toward the ‘end times’. We have to hold in mind, however, that such eruptions are multiplicitous intensities, highly contagious, lateralized movements creating and interconnecting polynucleated regional networks of surging communities. The intense push toward Parousia, then, is the “common articulation” (Mouffe 1993: 18) of the field, the diffuse ethos by which irreducible singularities coalesce. This begs the million-dollar question: why would a large swathe of the Christian population across Melanesia, especially Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, but also in pockets in Vanuatu (see Eriksen 2009) (and potentially elsewhere too), begin contagiously intensifying at this particular historical juncture?

To begin answering this question, I want to take an unusual detour to Germany in the Middle Ages and illuminate a curious and instructive occurrence. Throughout the years 1000 to 1600, multiple towns along the Rhine and Moselle Rivers experienced what has been dubbed ‘dancing mania’ or ‘dancing plague’. During these upheavals, groups of men and women, sometimes in their hundreds, would dance compulsively and wildly for days, weeks, even years without stopping, often leading to casualties. Dancing to death. “Clapping, leaping, chanting in unison”; “screaming of terrible visions and imploring priests and monks to save their souls”; “dancers yelled out the names of devils, had strange aversions to pointed shoes and the color red, and said they were drowning in ‘a red sea of blood’” (Waller 2009: 624–625). What we have is a vivid example of contagious intensity; heightened affect rapidly and quite disturbingly spreading between people and communities, driven incessantly by “a profound fear of wrathful spirits able to inflict a dancing curse” (ibid.: 625). All communities afflicted by this bewildering kinesthetic explosion had been “savagely hit” (ibid.) by a range of tribulations, including flood, famine, leprosy, and the plague. The argument thus runs that the sense of immense despair and dread brought about by these existential threats was channeled, sublimated, or converted through existing religious beliefs into a frenzy of movement.

The point is not that instances of religious intensification are ‘reaction effects’ to states of ‘social stress’, as per the tired functionalist approaches of the likes of Wallace (2003: 10–23). Such arguments reduce affective eruptions to kneejerk reactions and also carry with them sinister pathological overtones. The explanation is deeper and more complex than that. Affect is “our most basic comportment to the world” (Smith 2010: 72); every aspect of our lives is powerfully shaped by this substrate of ideational and physiological momentum that operates at the threshold of potentiality becoming actuality. A large-scale societal disruption must therefore register through large scale affective intensification, whether positive or negative, dilating or contracting individual and corporate capacities, bringing joy or misery. As the American soul poet Gil Scott-Heron tells us in the lyrics to 1976’s “Bicentennial Blues”:

The blues was born on the beaches where the slave ships docked
Born on the slave man’s auction block
The blues was born and carried on the howling wind
The blues grew up a slave
The blues grew up as property
The blues grew up in Nat Turner visions
The blues grew up in Harriet Tubman courage
The blues grew up in small town deprivation
The blues grew up in big city isolation
The blues grew up in the nightmares of the white man

The blues and dancing plagues demonstrate that large-scale affective intensifications are inextricably linked to historical moments when basic cosmological parameters, especially as they pertain to collective destiny and eschatology, are challenged, undermined, even destroyed. Societies are brought to the eschatological precipice and affectively plunge into the waters of a new world. Life’s horizons radically shift, and the affective core of existence reverberates with the slippage. Affective fault lines, the tectonics of sociability. For all instances of prolonged, geographically dispersed affective intensification, then, we should be carefully searching to identify historical conditions of possibility—the distortions to a society’s metaphysical trajectory that set in motion compulsive surges toward alternative worlds.

Melanesians in the 1970s were facing enormous transformations to their region brought about through decolonization. Between the years 1970 and 1980, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji (but sadly not West Papua or New Caledonia) gained self-government and subsequent political independence from their colonial overlords. This was accompanied in the late 1960s and 1970s by various missions formally and informally constituting autonomous local churches throughout the region. Naturally, not all Melanesians felt the same about decolonization, self-government, and independence. Some were enthusiastic and excited about the opportunity for autonomy, while others were apprehensive and even oppositional, fearing the disappearance of an incipient modernity and its prospective material trappings. But regardless of attitude, Melanesians across the region were faced with the same about decolonization, self-government, and independence. Some were enthusiastic and excited about the opportunity for autonomy, while others were apprehensive and even oppositional, fearing the disappearance of an incipient modernity and its prospective material trappings. But regardless of attitude, Melanesians across the region were faced with the same metaphysical dilemma: the world as they knew it, imposed, ordered, and governed by expatriates, was coming to an end. The cosmological, political, and developmental coordinates established through colonization—underwritten by racist teleologies attempting to fix, stifle, and constrain Melanesians as morally, spiritually, and physically inferior—were now thrown open to the potential of new definitions.

The simultaneous demise of the colonial order and the rise of polynucleated spirit movements across the region was mutually ramifying. Hassall (1989: 229) is one of the very few to have noticed the synergy, stating that the appearance of numerous “religious revivals” coincided with “the imminence of political independence.” Eriksen (2009: 71) similarly describes how the achievement of Vanuatu’s political independence in 1980 coincided with widespread religious intensification, a conjuncture buttressed by the popular understanding that “Christianity was explicitly singled out as the framework for the new nation.” The observation of this confluence is of the highest importance. The eruption of countless revivals across Melanesia was nothing less than the eschatological intensity unleashed by the collapse of a metaphysical order. An intense, anxious clambering to the threshold, guided by the Holy Spirit. An improvised affective surge toward a new world, catalyzed by looming independence, decolonization, and demissionization. This is the exact dynamic informing Handman’s (2015: 125) claim for the Guhu-Samane: “Taking place just two years after the independence of the nation-state of Papua New Guinea, the 1977 revival seemed to be the chance for local people to reinvent themselves, using the power of the Holy Spirit.” Similarly, Kale (1985: 70) describes how participants in the Enga revival conveyed “a feeling that God has apportioned 2,000 years for this era. First self-government, then Independence, a time of tribulation, then Jesus’ return will bring about the end.” The fall of the Colonial Kingdom and the coming of God’s Kingdom, played out through
the eruption of apocalyptic affects. Tears, tongues, and trembling as the springboard between meta-narratives. An intensive zeitgeist. A new affective era.

**Unravelings**

When Spinoza famously asked, “what can a body do?,” he sought to train attention upon the untapped potential residing at the affective level of existence. Given that affect is inherently emergent, the continuous, motivating push of potential ideas, gestures, movements, and utterances in the making, what are the political implications of intensification for hegemonic structures that depend on fixing, controlling, ranking, and restraining? Movement and immanence come hard up against arrest and domination. Massumi (2015: 105) provides an illuminating explanation:

> What a body can do is trigger counteramplifications and counter-crystallizations that defy capture by existing structures, streaming them into a continuing collective movement of escape. If the movement effects an intensification of the collective field through the mutual inclusion in it of reciprocally heightened capacities in contrastive attunement, then the degree of freedom has been increased across the board … In this enactive immediacy, resistance is of the nature of a *gesture*. Resistance cannot be communicated or inculcated. It can only be gestured … It cannot impose itself. It can only catch on. Its power is to throw out the lure of its own amplification. Its power is of contagion. The gesture of resistance is a micro-gesture of offered contagion …

Any process of wild affective becoming proceeds by way of creatively undoing what seeks to imprison it. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) talk about this as ‘deterritorialization’; Bonta and Protevi (2004: 78) see it as “the process of leaving home, of altering your habits, of learning new tricks.” Most accounts of religious intensification underscore its political potential as a “handy and effective means for indigenous Christian leaders to break free of domination” (Bays 1993: 175) within colonial and post-colonial material, symbolic, aesthetic, and ideational assemblages. But we need to recognize that intensive flight from domination occurs as part of an essentially affirmative process of feeling out a new territory (J. Bruner 2017: 23). Dominant power structures unravel as intensive bodies surge toward a new spiritual life. ‘Critique’ is nothing else than the displacement of intensive momentum. Leaving subjugation in the affective wake. Not so much a “cosmopolitical liturgics of resistance” (Yong 2010: 151–165; my emphasis) as an affective cosmopolitical overhaul.

On their way to the apocalypse, surging Melanesian Christians escaped first and foremost from an assemblage of colonial signification and materiality. Through colonialism, Melanesians had been held hostage within a teleological and eschatological matrix that essentially functioned to restrict, undermine, and diminish their capacity to act. Colonial discourse presented Melanesian people as “savage, cannibalistic, dirty, lazy, lying, superstitious, venal, and uncivilized, while the landscape is depicted on the one hand as pristine and uncontaminated, and on the other hand as eerie, sinister, and inhospitable” (Stella 2007: 207). At the same time, they were seen by missionaries and administrators alike as morally, politically, and spiritually puerile, incapable of managing their own affairs and thus in need of perpetual oversight and control by a colonial machinery that could alone guarantee ‘civilization’. As one missionary put it, the local church “needed time and nurture for its gradual growth … from babyhood and utter dependence through childhood and adolescence” (Griffiths 1977: 160). Stunted by design. Teleological immobilization.

If one is always lagging on the modernist teleology of ‘progress’, then the metaphysical finish line, the eschaton, is never reached. Equality, progress, and salvation for all, but only if and
when you are ready, what Ruth Marshall (2010: 205) calls “eschatological paralysis.” Operating through “temporalities of deferment,” it is “the power that delays or restrains the end of time” (ibid.: 209). For Christians, the end times are their cosmological raison d’être. To live as a Christian is to chase the apocalypse. But this eschatological vision of salvation was effectively blurred by the textualistics of evangelicalism. One cannot get to the Promised Land without direct knowledge of the Word of God. In most cases, only a rudimentary literacy was gained by the small cadre of local Christian leaders who either passed through mission Bible schools or cultivated close relationships with missionaries, while the reading and writing skills of the large majority of lay Christians was severely limited. As Bialecki (2017: 5) notes, “texts only work if the protocols for accessing them, the hermeneutic processes and exercises that properly open up the Bible, are themselves invariant.” No keys to the Kingdom.

Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the rescue. Messianic return as meta-historical denouement. Religious intensification instantaneously dissolves and resolves the teleological and eschatological shackles of colonialism. Again Ruth Marshall (2010: 205) provides key insight: “Rather than staging a perpetual deferment of the eschaton, messianic time is the incorporation of the parousia into every instant of the chronological time, implying a transformation in the actual experience of time; a time of kairos, not chronos.” In a similar vein, Land ([1993] 2010: 133) calls this “the primacy of grace over against the inexorable, internally conditioned, or socially dominated historical process.” From eschatological paralysis to eschatological immediacy. From the end times being perpetually delayed, restrained, and complicated (by having to learn the right codes) to it rushing into view through the affective outpouring of spiritual gifts. The Parousia permeates the present, thereby obliterating the dual paradigms of teleological immobilization and eschatological paralysis. With ‘spiritually immature savages’ no longer in need of vertical-ized paternalistic oversight to reach a perpetually deferred paradise, the contagious, lateralized, and autonomous proliferation of religious intensity produces the eschaton here and now.

The apocalyptic affects that populate the field of religious intensification also effectively unravel mission and government epistemologies in interesting ways. Molecular affective erosions of molar hegemonic blocks. Tongues speaking, both glossolalic and xenolalic, was a crucial dimension of religious intensification in Melanesia, as it is for charismatic Christians across the world. Smith (2010: 147) sees “tongues-speech” as “a language of resistance,” as “a discourse that is symbolic of a deeper and broader desire to resist and call into question the existing economic and political structures” (ibid.: 149). But not symbolic; totally embodied and affective. Counterposed to the textualism of mission evangelical Christianity, the profusion of unintelligible speech across a region takes the form of an epistemological sledgehammer. Staid, frustrating, inaccessible literacy is instantaneously rendered defunct as the Spirit fills countless mouths with the intense, contagious babblings and babblings of the imminent Parousia. Impassioned chaos reigns over cold, objectifying order. Tongues-speech as positive destruction. Heading out in search of a new affective and eschatological territory by subverting and destratifying the paralysis structures of linguistic domination.

Conservative evangelical missions operating in a colonial milieu place a tremendous amount of importance upon bodily and sensory comportment. A principal thrust of the missionization process is the implementation of “a technology of power which sought to reconstitute the indigenous people’s bodies, and through this their moral constitution” (Eves 1996: 85). Cleanliness is godliness. Corporeal morality. Within this emotional economy, restraint is the dominant currency. In this respect, what Jean Comaroff (2012: 57–58) states for the African context holds equally for 1970s Melanesia: “Outbursts of public emotion among those who had committed themselves to the civilizing mission were read as signs of immature faith, of an absence of rational self-possession. A regime of sensory surveillance was installed by the gatekeepers of
Protestant propriety in order to suppress the signs of unmediated savage ardor.” Movements of religious intensification are the antithesis of an emotional economy of restraint and constitute an affective riot. Violently shaking, collapsing to the ground, effusive wailing and crying, mucus flowing from the nose and mouth. Under the tremendous force of the Spirit, the body is literally overflowing and exploding the corporeal strictures of mission religious ethics. Compulsive, infectious, and wildly unruly movement floods the ritual high ground of poised, static, rationalist control. Sprinting away from the cool climes of subjugation for the glowing intensity of the eschatological promised land.

An important though perhaps unexpected deterritorialization of existing cultural regimes effected through religious intensification is the vitriolic flight from traditional custom and cosmology. The affective catapult toward the apocalypse at the dawn of a new political era not only leads away from colonial regimes of signification but also spurns those that are deeply localized. It is of course true that charismatic Christianity redeploy(s) existing indigenous impulses to new ends, what Kimberly Marshall (2016) has called ‘resonant rupture’. Like the “remnant” discussed by Navaro (2017: 212), this process operates “as a residual, relational affect with the potential for re-creation … like a bud that shoots again in fissures that have been carved on purpose.” Pre-existing, mainly dormant indigenous practices serve as effective channels for the mobilization of apocalyptic affect, and there are many examples to draw upon from the intensification of worship across Melanesia in the 1970s. Despite the unwitting harmonization, however, there is pronounced dissonance at work. As Jason Bruner (2017: 7) observes for the East African Revival, while there were “a few points of similarity or continuity” in revivalists’ practices, participants viewed their relationship to indigenous culture “as one of deep and fundamental opposition,” part of a strategy of diabolization shared by charismatic Christians the world over.

The deterritorialization of indigenous spirituality within the context of religious intensification is fundamentally affective, occurring through contagious spiritual forces that create hunting packs bent on unseating and extirpating evil powers. In the fervor of heralding the imminent Parousia, participants in revival surge intensely against their local cosmologies. Christian good is invariably counterposed to traditional evil, following the broader theological dichotomy of God versus Satan. The attacks are not so much a careful, planned doctrine of annihilation as per institutionalized Pentecostalism (Rio et al. 2017), but more a frenzied, opportunistic raid to plunder and destroy the Enemy. In place of ‘spiritual warfare’ we might call this ‘spiritual ambush’, with the understanding that ambushes can always lead to wars. Local spirits, whether autochthonous entities, ancestral ghosts, or nefarious witches, are conflated with Satan. Their presence is known through ritual sacra, taboo groves and pools, and human possession. Within revival these manifestations compulsively appear, through both voluntary and coercive conjurings, and are set upon by excited bands of exorcists seeking to clear cosmological space for the Parousia to unfold. Affective demonology. In damning language, Tuzin (1997: 36) captures the frenzied, intensive destruction of indigenous culture as part of an affective rush toward salvation among the Arapesh: “Not until this millenarianism has run its disillusioning course will they perceive the real damage done when they exposed the cult secrets, burned the statues, paintings, and shell treasures, and launched a campaign to repudiate and destroy all that belonged to their Tamba-ran past.” As the linchpin of their efforts to make the “heightened condition of spiritual heat a permanent state of being” (Handman 2015: 148), intensified Guhu-Samane revivalists similarly formed packs to evict territorial spirits, even if they ended up spooked themselves. Some participants in the Enga intensifications departed from the human entirely, performing a spiritualized becoming-animal as ‘dog-men’. These dog packs had the ability to sniff out sin, raising the alarm through barking, and worked under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit to unravel a variety of local practices, including the use of poison (Cramb and Kolo 1983: 100–101). The same dynamic
obtains in contemporary Melanesian revivals. Describing a recent charismatic upheaval on the island of Ahamb in Vanuatu, for example, Bratrud (2021) shows how intensifying Christians have asserted their moral and spiritual preponderance by setting upon kava drinking, sorcery, and witchcraft as sins requiring immediate eradication. Through its incessant drive toward the apocalyptic eschatological horizon, religious intensity spawns mobs of spiritual antagonists impatiently seeking to cut away old growth so that the bright new light of the Holy Spirit may break through.

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