

Body and Belief: Exploration in African Ritology The Magic of Body Language

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1. Introduction

'Body and Belief' evoke the cosmo-biological.¹ The rhythm of time and seasons impacts on humans, and humans in turn respond with adequate gestures and rituals. Human development, from birth to death, invites potent transition rituals that refuse to go away despite modernity-postmodernity. My presentation assumes the cosmo-biological while adopting a wider anthropo-cosmological horizon. An anthropocentric African universe displays humans as a complexity of interacting components intending wholeness. The community and individual, related to living past tradition and grounded in the sacred, dynamically connect to an unpredictable world to realise their destiny. Permeated by its belief, the social body, an ethnic group, ensures successful insertion within an environment through adequate ritual gestures. Illustrations are drawn from life increased or diminished, life threatened or celebrated, making peace or engaging in warfare, attracting blessing or expelling evil, and initiating experts that preside over the repetition of ritual gestures that ensure wholeness.

I begin my presentation with a story drawn from the dynamics of Igbo (Nigerian) assumptions on the correct deployment of bodily gestures! The story focuses on how 'the madman' (not Nietzsche's but Achebe's) throws spanner into the works, and profoundly provokes thought through subverting the structure of meaning. Second, I draw attention to the ethnic base of all gestures and the priority of the cosmo-biological in the development of gestural behaviour. Third, I explain my bias for the anthropo-cosmological horizon in gestures to defend the dominance of the West African vision of the universe in this paper. Finally, I illustrate my principal points with three ritual patterns privileged among West Africans and peoples elsewhere in the world. These are, the naming ceremony (welcoming a neonate into the world), initiating young people into civic responsibility, and delivering healthcare or ensuring the healing of life and world through ritual therapy in an unpredictable world.

¹ This article is the reworked version of a paper, read at the conference *The Magic of Body Language*, to mark the 80th Anniversary of Tilburg University (13-14th March 2008), Faculty of Humanities, Tilburg University.

2. Body Language and the Subversion of Meaning – the Story

In a collection of essays – *Girls at War* – Chinua Achebe tied together strings of stories that concluded with the traumatic experience of the Nigeria-Biafra war. Some of the stories dwell on Igbo folklore, customs and traditions, and others focus on politics in the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial Igboland. The concluding story, ‘Girls at War’, gives the title to the book. *Girls at War* is about the rattle of gunfire, explosion of bombs, hissing bombers, broken limbs, split skulls and charred bodies. It is also about extreme hunger, starvation, *kwashiorkor*,² breakdown of social norms, broken families, sex in bomb shelters, condoms and all.

The opening story of Achebe’s collection is ‘The Madman’! My hunch is that Achebe adopted ‘The Madman’ as lead story to highlight the radical subversion of ‘body language’, the radical transformation of meaning making, the deconstruction of the ‘normal’, introduced by the Nigerian civil war.

The profile of Achebe’s ‘madman’ (and in tune with Igbo typology) is a basket on the head supported by the left hand, a cudgel in his right hand for self-defence, an obsessional (one-dimensional) walk in the middle of the highway with which he holds intimate conversation, movement from one major market to another, and, finally, stark nakedness.

Achebe’s story capitalizes on body language to underscore the subversion of meaning, the reversal of the normative. Close to the major *Eke* market, the madman sees two girls coming from a nearby stream, with water-pots deftly balanced on the head. Sighting the madman, the girls flee. He feels thirst, stops, lays down his basket and cudgel, angles down the stream, stoops, cups his hand to collect the cool water and takes a drink. In the water, another man, undressed, is bathing; his cloth lay on the bank. The madman smiles, grabs the bathing man’s cloth, wraps it around his waist and runs in the direction of *Eke* market. The tempo of the reversal of norms and meaning heightens. The man bathing, naked, shocked and angry, clammers out of the water spitting fire and pursues the madman into the *Eke* market. Stupefaction and shock for the family and friends of the bathing man! How come they were unaware of his illness? His second wife unties her headscarf and wraps it around her (mad) husband’s rude waist to cover his nakedness. He is led home! Healing rituals – divination, sacrifices, administration of herbs – intervene to bring him back to the socially accepted norms of health or sanity.³

The deconstruction that I think Achebe introduces by way of a story is that the dominant gesture of madness – *nakedness displayed in the marketplace* – is the

² *Kwashiorkor* is defined as a case of severe malnutrition in infants and children; this was experienced in unparalleled proportions during the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970).

³ See CH. ACHEBE: *Girls at War, and Other Stories* (London 1972 = African Writers Series 100) chapter 1.

ready to hand interpretive tool to capture the malaise of the Nigeria-Biafra war. I use this story to introduce my paper in order to draw attention to the hermeneutical vigilance that may be necessary in discussing ‘the magic of body language’, ‘body and belief’, despite the folkloric excitement the topic evokes. One is alerted of the thin line between the rational and irrational that human communities walk as they deploy the individual and social body in time and space to achieve their destined course in life – couched in social, political, economic or religious idioms. The irrational and even diabolical mobilisation of the social body, or a representative part of this body, carefully schooled (initiated or trained) to achieve an (evil) end is dramatically displayed by the Sho’ah and the Rwandan genocide.

3. Domesticating Body & Capitalising on Polyvalence of Symbolism

Body as primal symbol must be approached with all the seriousness it deserves. Igbo and many African traditions have insight into the dangers surrounding undomesticated deployment of body or the rude throwing around of body in time and space. In Igbo mythology *Power* is civilised or humanised through the ritual interaction between humans and the deity of peace and authority *Idemili* – Pillar of Water – the daughter of *Chukwu* (God) and *Ala* (Earth deity.) She was sent by God to civilise humans by humanising power! I quote Achebe’s rendition of the myth:

In the beginning Power rampaged through our world, naked. So the Almighty, looking at his creation through the round undying eye of the Sun, saw and pondered and finally decided to send his daughter, Idemili, to bear witness to the moral nature of authority by wrapping around Power’s rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty.⁴

The discussion of the ‘magic of body language’ or ‘body and belief’ has to give full value to the polyvalence or multivocality of the dominant symbol ‘body’. ‘Body’ carries positive as well as life-denying connotations. Abuse, bewitchment, exposure to evil possession, police brutality, initiation of child soldiers to kill, exploitation of children as sex slaves, and so on, are patterns of the deployment of the body permeated by belief that should be ethically challenged. Abuse is a major threat to life and calls for ethical action by the body politic, the social body, to humanise the world.

African groups are aware and exploit the polyvalence of body as dominant symbol. For example, *nakedness in the public forum*, the acceptable language of madness (individual and corporate), could also denote the invasion of individu-

⁴ CH. ACHEBE: *Anthills of the Savannah* (London 1987) 93.

als or society by undomesticated (dangerous) cosmic forces! Rituals that *ground* the deity in clay pots or that *fix* the deity in the head of the initiates are highly developed in *vodhun* religion (Benin, Togo, and Ghana).⁵ Another potent dimension of body is revealed in initiation camps where nakedness or scanty dress – of boys and girls, kings and their wives, experts in traditional medicine – embodies sameness or *communitas* (Turner), the foundational basic humanity of each that precedes codes and structures transmitted through socialisation. Finally, nakedness could transmit a potent religio-political speech of the social body to express extreme outrage and bring about reform in the polity. In Nigeria, when Yoruba or Bini women (mothers) expose their nakedness in the palace of the *Oba* (king), the *Oba* must resign. Southern Nigeria women recently threatened to carry out this reversal of symbolisation to express outrage at the misgovernance that plagues the country. As a matter of fact, around July 14 2002, about 600 Ijaw women of the Niger Delta (aged between 30 and 90) held 700 Chevron workers hostage at Escravos, demanding jobs for their sons, and threatening the hostages with nakedness if they made any attempt to escape. This ‘performative’ and transformative dimension of ritual gestures argues against the thesis of people like Maurice Bloch, who see ritual symbolism as utterly conservative, shepherding society into a narrow tunnel that leaves no room for freedom, creativity or reform.⁶

One then appreciates the irony and the pertinence of body symbolism in Achebe’s story. The Nigeria-Biafra war, corporate nakedness, could on the one hand be an expression of outrage at the evils besetting the society. On the other hand it speaks to the whole enterprise of warfare as corporate madness, the deliverance of society into the hands of undomesticated cosmic forces, and the tragedy of the naked use of power that displays the nadir of dehumanisation.

I have tried to draw attention to the ambivalence or polyvalence of body as primal symbol. Next, I will highlight the priority of the ethnic in any discussion of body symbolism and belief.

⁵ See N. LOVELL: *Cord of Blood. Possession and the Making of Voodoo* (London / Sterling VA 2002). espec. chapter 4 ‘Grounding Vodhun, Unmaking Gender’.

⁶ See M. BLOCH: *Ritual, History and Power: Selected Papers in Anthropology* (London 1989), especially his treatment of ‘The past and the present in the present’. On the performative power of nakedness see, ‘Nigerian women threaten nude protest’, threehegemon.tripod.com/threehegemonblog/id112.html (accessed 04/03/08). See also T.E. TURNER & L.S. BROWNHILL: ‘The Curse of Nakedness: Nigerian Women in the Oil War’, in A. MILES, L. RICCIUTELLI & M.H. MCFADDEN (eds.): *Feminist Politics, Activism and Vision: Local and Global Challenges* (London 2004) 169-191. See also B. SUTTON: ‘Naked Protest: Memories of Bodies and Resistance at the World Social Forum’, in *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 8,3 (2007) 139-148.

4. Priority of the Ethnic and the Cosmo-biological

In this presentation I assume that each individual human, each group or community is preceded by a founding group, an ethnic or ancestral body, historical or mythical, that endowed the individual and group with gestures that enable their insertion as humans in time and space, that make people competent to deal with everyday life events and creatively face the unpredictable. Consequently, no human group is without history, and no human group can function excised from the gestures and rituals that date to time immemorial. This is my basic assumption in dealing with the theme 'body and belief'. To give flesh to this assumption, I draw attention to the foundational ethnic base of all gestures – those successfully coded motions that characterise a group's historical insertion in time and space. The successful deployment of body in time and space not only links the group, first, to the immemorial actions of the ancestors. It also links them to known and unknown forces, spirits, deities and God actively encountered in the universe.

This interactional successful insertion of the group within a portion of the universe is foundational not only for intra-group and inter-group relations but also life in the cosmos. This explains why the ritual gestures of cosmic or ancestral religions (Pieris) that are ethnic-based are prior; they establish the grammar of religion. Trans-ethnic and transcultural religious traditions (world religions) that are meta-cosmic necessarily build on ritual gestures that are ethnic based. The gnostic-inclined religions of the far East (Hinduism, Buddhism and so on) and the soteriologically dominated religions of the Middle East (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) cannot survive cut off from the grammatical structure of religion as demonstrated in the cosmo-biological rituals of cosmic religions.⁷ These include the transition rituals that are dictated by human biological development and initiations, the pastoral and agricultural rituals that are predicated on the passage of time and seasons, and the calendrical preoccupation of nations and religions not only to organise festivals and public holidays but also to set benchmarks for economic growth and development. Not even modernity whose impact, especially in the Western world, decrees that belief can no longer be taken for granted can survive without religious or quasi-religious rituals: welcoming a newborn (naming ceremony) and burying the dead.⁸

⁷ I follow Pieris in classifying religions into cosmic and meta-cosmic: A. PIERIS: *An Asian Liberation of Theology* (Edinburgh 1988) 71-74.

⁸ See V. TURNER: *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago 1969). R. GRAINGER: *The Language of the Rite* (London 1974). G. LUKKEN: *Per Visibilia Ad Invisibilia. Anthropological, Theological, and Semiotic Studies on the Liturgy and the Sacraments*, collected and edited by L. VAN TONGEREN & CH. CASPERS (Kampen 1994 = *Liturgia Condenda* 2). F. KABASELE-LUMBALA: 'The Human Imprint on Christian Worship', in *Studia Liturgica* 26,1 (1996). E.E. UZUKWU: *Worship as Body Language: Introduction to Christian Worship: An African Orientation* (Collegeville 1997). G. LUKKEN: *Rituals in Abundance*.

5. Dynamics of an Anthropocentric Focus

I adopt an anthropological-cosmological focus in this presentation while presupposing the cosmo-biological. This enables an appreciation of the dominant West African anthropocentric orientation towards life in the world. Humans are the centre of the universe, though not in terms of modernity that establishes a well nigh impermeable barrier between the sacred and the secular. Rather, humans are the focal point of the cosmos in display – the emergence of each human person captures a complexity or combination of interrelationships full of beauty, promise, and danger-risk. It is the narrative of humans as perhaps a microcosm! The creativity required to become human (community and individual) highlights the mediation of rhythm as wisdom or rational insight to navigate the complex interrelated world. For example, the Bambara and Dogon of Mali gain insight into the created order that peaked in the human ancestors by postulating combinations or twinning. Igbo tradition displays access to reality as radically binary – a thing stands and something else stands beside it. Generally West Africans, and Central Africans to a certain extent, postulate a number of components that come into display for the becoming of the human person. The common West African starting point is pre-existence, prenatal choices and destiny. Each self pre-existed and is accompanied by a personal spirit (*chi* of the Igbo, *ori* of the Yoruba, *se* of the Fon, *okra* and *aklama* of the Asante and Ewe respectively) assigned to the self by God; each self, created or re-incarnating into the human world, is given, or already made a choice of, a destined course in life. Next a number of principles – eight for the Bambara, seven for the Asante, four or three for other West Africans and Central Africans – dynamically interrelate to display the emergence of the person. The seven principles among the Asante, according to Sarpong's study of traditional healing, are *mogya* (blood, linking one to matrilineal clan roots), *okra* (the guardian personal spirit that is the humanizing and undying part of the person), *sunsum* (the spiritual pre-existent self), *bonhon* (shadow enabling responsible activity in asleep), *sasa* (conscience, prompting the confession of wrongs), *ntoro* (spiritual element linked to one's father until puberty), and finally *saman* (one's form after death). Consequently, life, from pre-womb to post-tomb, is the interrelational art of finding the correct rhythm – full of excitement and risk. The human person or human life, in this 'enchanted world', is an unfinished sentence.⁹

Critical Reflections on the Place, Form and Identity of Christian Ritual in Our Culture (Leuven etc. 2005 = Liturgia Condenda 17). See also CH. TAYLOR: *A Secular Age* (Cambridge / London 2007).

⁹ See P.K. SARPONG: 'The Individual, Community, Health and Medicine in African Traditional Religion: The Asante Model', in *Pontificium Consilium Pro Dialogo Inter Religiones Bulletin* XXVIII,3 (1993) 271-280. In addition to Sarpong see, for example, M. CARTY (ed.): *La Notion De La Personne En Afrique Noire. Colloques Internationaux De CNRS No. 544 Paris 11-17 Octobre 1971* (Paris 1971). M.P. HEBGA: *La Rationalité D'un Discours Africain Sur Les Phénomènes Paranormaux* (Paris 1998). CH. ACHEBE: 'Chi in Igbo

The above focus on humans contrasts sharply with the 'disenchanted world' of the 'secular age' inhabited by the individual described by Taylor as the 'buffered' self. Fully tuning into the rhythmical motion or language of the universe, tuning into the rhythm of the complex combination of elements at play in the formation of the human subject enables ongoing creation of the human subject capable of rational grasp of or access to reality. I think Mveng, who approached the African anthropological cosmology from the perspective of art, has a point that rhythm is the point of entry into or appreciation of rationality. It comes into play or is displayed in rhythmic combinations when drumming: one strike of the drum with the right hand calls for two with the left, two strikes with the left call for three with the right, and the rhythmical combinations continue. Students of African and African American music talk about the polyrhythmic or polymetric in African music. Igbo wisdom tradition makes this accessible in the laconic saying 'Whenever Something stands, Something Else will stand beside it.' The overriding importance of this patented rhythm for the survival or health of any social group is captured and transmitted through balancing structure with anti-structure in initiation ritual process (Turner). African musical artists have argued that 'African musical arts were conceived and developed to nurture humane living', in other words 'to humanize the individual and bond humanity.' Their primary focus is not entertainment; rather they 'front entertainment as a tool for social-political-religious-mental health objectives'.¹⁰ This pattern of access to reality, the grasp of the spark or parcel of reason in its West African hue, is participatory rather than spectatorial. West African philosophers, Anyanwu (Nigeria) and Niangoran-bouah (Côte d'Ivoire), argue strongly in favour of this rhythmic sharing of experience, the participant-performer pattern of knowing displayed in sound; captured in a spectacular way by the drum. This suggests that rationality can never be fully grasped. Each cultural group has a historical grasp of it. We have access only to 'parcels of reason'.¹¹

Cosmology', in CH. ACHEBE: *Morning yet on Creation Day: Essays, Studies in African Literature* (London 1975). E.E. UZUKWU: 'Igbo World and Ultimate Reality and Meaning', in *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 5,3 (1982) 188-209. B. MEYER: *Translating the Devil. Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana* (Edinburgh / London 1999).

¹⁰ See M. NZEWI: 'Embracing Our Cultural Diversity: Empowering Posterity through Strategies That Rescue, Stimulate, Support and Promote – Using the Media', in *Mishito* (2005 = www.moshito.co.za/page.php?p_id=92 (accessed April 08, 2008)); M. NZEWI: 'African Music Creativity and Performance: The Science of the Sound', in *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy* 6,1 (2006 = www.voices.no/authors/Nzewi.html (accessed April 08, 2008)); M.A. OZAH: *Égwu Àmalà: Women in Traditional Performing Arts in Ogbariland* (PhD, University of Pittsburgh 2008) chapter 3.

¹¹ For rhythm, sound and rationality see E. MVENG: *L'art d'Afrique Noire. Liturgie Cosmique Et Langage Religieux* (Yaoundé 1974) 86-103; J. JAHN: *Muntu. An Outline of Neo-African Culture* (London 1961) 164-169, p. 165. See also G. NIANGORAN-BOUAH: 'La Drummologie et la Vision Nègro-Africaine du Sacré', in *Médiations Africaines du Sacré. Actes du 3e Colloque International du Cera, Kinshasa* 16-22 Fév. 1986 (Kinshasa 1987) 281-295. G. NIANGORAN-BOUAH: 'The Talking Drum: A Traditional Instrument of Liturgy and of

Taking note of the anthropo-cosmological approach to reality opens an interesting window to emic analysis of the 'magic of body language', especially as practised in western and central African regions. While the transition rituals that accompany one from birth to death and the rituals that mark the passage of time and seasons are universal ritual benchmarks, ritual performance around health, possession and witchcraft are more subtle. They require insight into the dominant anthropology and psychology to diagnose illness or bewitchment, discern the identity of a possessing or threatening spirit or witch, in order to decide whether one should administer medicaments, exorcism or healing rituals, or indeed whether it is a signal from a possessing deity requiring a radical change in one's life compelling one to undergo the complex rituals of initiation into the health ministry.

The rest of this presentation will comment on three areas that cover patterns of deploying body, in some African regions, that still impact on building the individual and society. First, the naming ceremony, which is indeed, the social birth of the child! It displays the neonate as a child of culture, even gives snapshots of a child's destined course in life, and opens the way towards other bio-social rituals that accompany human biological development. Second, the preparation and induction of young people to assume civic responsibility within a social group; these popular initiation rituals have seen transformations and perhaps corruption or the subversion of their intentionality or tacit religious intent as revealed in many areas of conflict in Africa. Finally, the ubiquitous ritualization of health delivery; this captures the overriding preoccupation of African Traditional Religion (ATR), a therapeutic religion that intends integral human wholeness. Therapy impacts on the practice of Christianity across the continent as testified not only by African initiated churches but also the healing and charismatic ministries in the mainline churches.

6. Naming the Child

Entrance into the human world and departure from it are experiences best captured in narratives – stories told by those who precede and succeed the 'ritual passengers'. The social group reserves rich transition rites to accompany these occasions. Narratives of origin and end of life are connected with the rites. In Western societies dominated by modernity-postmodernity, people who

Mediation with the Sacred', in J. OBAFEMI KEHINDE OLUPONA (ed.): *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society* (St Paul MN 1991) 81-92. K.C. ANYANWU: 'Sound as Ultimate Reality and Meaning. The Mode of Knowing Reality in African Thought', in *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 10 (1987) 29-38. See also M.P. AQUINO: 'Theological Method in U.S. Latino/a Theology. Towards an Intercultural Theology for the Third Millennium', in O.O. ESPIN & M.H. DIAZ (eds.): *From the Heart of Our People. Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology* (Maryknoll NY 1999) 6-48. These contrast with the 'buffered self' of modernity, TAYLOR: *A Secular Age* chapters 1 and 15.

no longer share the Christian narrative, still access these rites of entrance into or departure from life as a minimum mark of identity (RTE programme commentator, Ireland, recently – January 2008 – talked about the ‘four wheel Christians’, i.e. those who, in the course of their life, are driven to the church in a car three times: to be baptised, to be married or to be buried). Death rituals, especially those around disasters (‘disaster rituals’), capture the ritual imagination in the West, conflated with postmodern perspectives: the ‘silent processions’ in the Netherlands are a case in point.¹² In the African context, especially in places where Christianity holds sway, a mix of the Christian and ancestral narratives and ritual practices around birth and death are very popular. In some cases there has been a complete fusion, leaving little of the ancestral – the case of naming ceremony among some Igbo Christians. In others there is a conflation or a coexistence of both rites – the coexistence of the Christianised Yoruba naming ceremony and the Christian baptism. I limit my comments to the Naming Ceremony.

The naming ceremony as the major entry point of a neonate into a socio-cultural group has remarkable features in West African societies. The Igbo, Akan and Yoruba, for example, connect the child to the day of the week, to ancestral roots, and to circumstances surrounding the birth – all of which are linked to the destined course in life of the neonate. This is reflected in the multiple names given. Among the Igbo one could be called Okafor or Mgbafor (male or female child born on *Afor* day) as well as Chinua or Chinyere (‘let God fight for me’ or ‘God’s gift’). The Akan preserve the day of the week in the name more than the Igbo or Yoruba. The Ga of Ghana consider it important to state whether the child is first, second or third son or daughter. Normally the diviner is consulted before the name is chosen, in order to find out the linkage with the past, and the prenatal status or choices made. The revised Yoruba ritual, i.e. the Christianized naming ritual, has a touch of genius in its assimilation or transformation of the ancestral into the Christian narrative. The statement contained in the introduction to the text, ‘as Christians we have no other *Ifa* than our Lord Jesus Christ’, has potent Christological implications. *Ifa* (*Orunmila*) is the Yoruba deity of divination. The Christianized ritual assumes the profound values of the cosmic religious universe of the Yoruba into the Christ. This reveals the genius of Catholicism. As Gesché says, one has here the assumption or preservation of the pagan-ness (cultural heritage) of this cultural group for the overall good of humanity.¹³

¹² P. POST et al.: *Disaster Ritual. Explorations of an Emerging Ritual Repertoire* (Leuven etc. 2003 = Liturgia Condenda 15).

¹³ I analysed the Yoruba naming ceremony in detail in UZUKWU: *Worship as Body Language* chapter 5; the text is from T.M. ILESANMI: ‘Eto Ati Adura Isomolorukoi’, in *Adura Onighagbo* (Ilesha 1978; translated from the Yoruba by J. DUKIYA). Gesché discusses catholicism and pagan heritage in A. GESCHÉ: ‘Le Christianisme comme Athéisme Suspensif. Réflexions sur le ‘Etsi Deus Non Daretur’’, in *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 33 (2002) 187-210; GESCHÉ: ‘Le Christianisme comme Monothéisme Relatif. Nouvelles Réflexions sur le ‘Etsi Deus Non Daretur’ 473-496.

In the naming ceremony the 'little creature of Yoruba culture' is drawn (perhaps protesting like all babies) into gestures permeated with profound religious anthropology where the body is radically projected. The child is invited to *taste and see* ten types of food and drink drawn from the Yoruba universe – water, salt, honey, kola nut, bitter kola, and alligator pepper, sugar or sweetened food, palm oil, fish and wine. These are symbols that capture an optimistic vision of life and entrench the courage to achieve one's destined course in life. Furthermore, the child is invited to handle and feel the holistic impact of five objects that will be there all through his or her life – money, pen, white cloth, candle and Bible. In the same optimistic mode they symbolise successful life in the modern Christianized world.

One could argue that this ritual performance that takes place at five o'clock in the morning is unrealistic, way beyond the comprehension of the ritual passenger (the liminal entity). First, the power, hope and vision of the community are reaffirmed in this rite. And, as in the case of possession by a deity (see below), it is the memory of the ritual performance by the assembly that is capital – the performance permeates both the community and the child who has access to his or her identity through the memory of the community. Second, this is inculcation of Christianity suffused with West African anthropological flavour. The major theological statement is that Jesus Christ is *Ifa* – the deity of divination that proclaims the destiny and identity of the neonate. Christians no longer go to the oracular deity (*Ifa-Orunmila*) to learn the destiny of the child. Rather, Christ is the proclamation – Christ is the determiner of destiny. While presenting the Bible to the child, the prayer leader says to the child, 'The fear of God is the source of all wisdom. NN, ... this is the Bible, the word of God, the holy book. Love your God and serve him. Let his law be in your heart all the days of your life to enlighten you; and may your life be blessed.'

No child is given a name without establishing the linkage with the past in order to proclaim the presence of the past and future in the present. Naming ceremony, in a way, already designs the broad outlines of the individual's future (destiny). In West African religious anthropology destiny is an indwelling companion spirit – *chi* of the Igbo, *ori* of the Yoruba, *se* of the Fon, *okra* and *aklama* of the Asante and Ewe. *Ori* of the Yoruba is the head; the visible head is only the symbol of the spiritual, invisible or interior head; the visible head is the emplacement of the spiritual in which is fixed the destiny of the individual. The Yoruba catholic ritual declares Christ *Ifa* – the one that proclaims destiny and determines the spiritual emplacement of this particular head. In other words, Christ mediates the indwelling or accompanying Spirit. This evolving contextual Christian anthropology illustrates radical continuity in the identity of the West African Christian – continuity between the ancestral and the Christian. In the struggle to redefine Ewe Christian identity (Ewe of Togo & Ghana, cultural cousins of the Yoruba) German Pietist missionaries expunged *aklama* (the spiritual principle embodying destiny) from the Ewe (Christian) vocabulary. The missionaries chose a secular term *gbogbo* (breath) to express spirit (human bre-

ath, Holy Spirit as well as evil spirit). But Ewe Christians, in a move characteristic of the genius of Catholicism rather than pure evangelicalism of their evangelisers, expanded the sense of *gbogbo* (breath). In addition to the secular sense, *gbogbo* came to signify an 'open space in the mind' reserved for the emplacement of the Holy Spirit. This expansion of the semantic range of a secular term chosen by the missionaries as the appropriate term to express 'spirit' secures destiny without which Ewe Christian life would be inexplicable. This is inculturation that preserves the pagan-ness of Ewe cosmology. The 'open space in the mind' for the indwelling Holy Spirit, that embeds intimate relationship with the spirit companion of each entrant into the human world, must ever be nourished by frequent prayer or devotion. Failure to persist in prayer is an open invitation to evil spirits to come and inhabit the same open space in the mind.¹⁴

In conclusion, the Naming Ceremony wraps up one's identity – one's past and future become present in ritual performance where 'body' is radically implicated. Whether restricted to purely the ancestral or expanded to the Christian, the ritual displays the belief system of the community and its commitment to live because the future of the neonate is the pledge of the community's life. This embodiment and security of the community's life continue in other biosocial rites that transform young adolescents into responsible and mature adult members of the community.

7. Induction of the Youth into Civic Responsibility

Biological development, especially the challenging passage through puberty, is a preoccupation for every social group. It provides a critical and opportune time (*kairos*) to assemble age-sets, and set them apart from the limited family circle. The rite of separation embodies psychological and social action and stress – tearing children from parental and clan bonds to fuse them as candidates of initiation into the wider village, ethnic or national group. The body language speaks loud and clear: boys and girls are physically moved out of their villages and homes to the forest, grove or to a common house designated for initiation. This prepares them for national service – boys and male initiates ensure the military, economic, political and ritual reproduction of the ethnic group or nation, while female initiates have their energy directed towards the reproduction of family, social, political and moral values! A Kikuyu, for example, knows he is losing to society a son undergoing initiation.

The move away from village or home leads them into the kairotic liminal rites. Ordeals are expected; e.g. facial scarification comes at an early stage of transition rites among some Igbo and Yoruba groups. The ultimate intent of the highly symbolic liminal period is to domesticate or socialise sexuality (puberty rites) to ensure the flowering of heterosexuality for the survival and reproduction of

¹⁴ See MEYER: *Translating the Devil. Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana* 145.

the group; this guarantees social and individual cohesion. However, the body language of liminality proclaims sameness or what Turner calls *communitas*. The powerful and meaningful pedagogy of deploying body during the threshold ritual where clothing is scanty or uniform or where nakedness is the norm dissimulates or plays down heterosexuality, so that heterosexuality emerges with sharp distinctiveness at the rite of reintegration.¹⁵ Humanness is prior to sexual distinctions. From this basic spiritual experience of the equal dignity of all humans, initiands are immersed in the social, economic, political and spiritual values of the community. They die in order to grow; they are created anew, changed to become new persons.

Finally, ritual celebration of reintegration displays community as audience and actors. Reintegration declares the initiation process as a re-enactment of the moral order or reaffirmation of the foundations of the community. The community can trust the initiates and generational succession is guaranteed. Today, in African societies, these assumptions of the ritual performance are under enormous pressure.

8. Initiations – Youths at War

Boys' initiation among many African sociocultural groups is strategic for the preparation of youth for service and to ensure the security of the social group. This explains the readiness of the youth to fight today in Congo, Chad, Sudan, and so on, and also the use of initiation patterns by revolutionary movements to train recruits. The corruption of this process through the conscription of children, their separation from parental care and from a life-enhancing and meaning-generating group, is condemnable as exploitation of the weak and the instrumentalization of a good practice for ideological and criminal ends.¹⁶ Instead of being initiated into adulthood to assume civic duties and ensure group security, child soldiers are licensed to kill. An illustration of the stages of traditional initiation among Maasai and Borana, neighbours in Kenya and Ethiopia, will show the radical difference between initiating into ethnic or national service and initiating into ideological or criminal gangs.

The establishment of initiation into age-sets in East Africa and other African regions ensured generational succession, social reproduction of society, and the creation of integrally adjusted and happy persons, persons that achieve 'human flourishing' (Taylor), fashioned according to the socio-religious credo and ethos. The Maasai of East Africa (Kenya and Tanzania) have four male age-sets, and initiation occurs every 14 years. A new age-set is shadowed or sponso-

¹⁵ See TURNER: *The Ritual Process*, espec. chapter 3 where the author discusses 'liminality' and 'communitas'.

¹⁶ See the pathetic and highly fanciful (exaggerated?) memoir of a boy soldier from Sierra Leone: I. BEAH: *A Long Way Gone. Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (New York 2007).

red by an alternate elder (retired) age-set: one's grandfather acts as shadow, patron or godfather. This resolves intergenerational, father-son, conflict. Endurance tests, beginning with circumcision, during the threshold period, confirm initiates as accomplished Maasai persons. Among the Borana, neighbours of the Maasai, there are five parallel male streams or currents of generations of age-sets. Initiation occurs every eight years. A Borana moves through eight grades of life – from age 8 to 88. This begins with the pre-initiation sacred infancy (*dabale*). Then from age 8, and every eight years, one is initiated into junior shepherd with minor tonsure (*game didika*), senior shepherd with major tonsure (*game gugurdo*), junior warrior (*kusa*), and senior warrior (*raba*). An additional five years is attached to senior warrior (*raba dori* making one a senior warrior from age 32-45); at this stage one can officially marry though one could not beget children openly. Waging war, 'piercing' the enemy, is proof of virility, and therefore a proof that one is mature to 'pierce' (copulate with) a wife; however, shedding blood is incompatible with begetting or generating life. The next stage is initiation into politico-religious leadership (*gada*) introduced by circumcision (at age 45). By this time one's parent has retired and stopped begetting. From this office of political and religious duties, begetting and educating children, one moves on to semi-retirement as counsellor covering 27 years (*yuba* age 53-80). The final stage is sacrosanct elder (*gada moji*), a sacred period of obligatory sanctity when one's life is focused on imparting blessings for abundance and peace; violence is totally excluded – one's hair is completely shaven.¹⁷

It is important to note how this social system reproduces the society holistically. It takes care of the economy (shepherding), security and defence (warrior groups), politics (directing the society), ritual and sanctification (supervising initiation and other religious rituals and living in holiness so as to ensure integral wholeness of the group and the earth). Colonial force and missionary propaganda successfully swept aside the practises and rendered them impotent to direct society. The ethnic group or nation no longer constituted a community that could deploy its strategy for development; this jeopardised security, economy, and generational succession. Mutual support and retirement benefits previously secured under ethnic based imaginary devices or myths became weakened. The Kikuyu, Borana, Maasai, Luo, and so on, fell apart as nations or groups, lacking strategies of development or national project. They became pawns as well as players within the web spun by foreign colonial project, founded on foreign ritual and imaginary based on the call of the individual. Group solidarity and cohesion that was a major gain of age-sets became replaced and

¹⁷ See the interesting study of Maasai and Borana by R. HAZEL: 'La Circoncision en Pays Maasai et Borana. Guerre, Procréation et Virilité en Afrique Orientale', in *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 39 (issue 154, 1999) 293-336. See also in the same region Y. DROZ: 'Circoncision Féminine et Masculine en Pays Kikuyu: Rite d'Institution, Division Sociale et Droits de l'Homme', in *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 40 (issue 158, 2000) 215-240. An earlier work by Nasimiyu from the same region is still relevant; A.J. NASIMIYU: *Vatican II: The Problem of Inculturation* (PhD, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh 1986).

undermined by individualism. The socio-political turmoil in eastern and central African countries is part of survival tactics of defeated peoples. European colonial project supported by Christian evangelism subverted the ancestral transition rites, and converted individuals to their cause. But as Achebe said 50 years ago in *Things Fall Apart* 'our clan can no longer act like one.' This is because the *White Man* 'has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart'.¹⁸

The armies that we find across the continent today nevertheless recruit and train youths for war using patterns of initiation familiar to ethnic groups across the continent. In the West African region, especially in Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia, the collapse of the state and the upsurge in violent conflicts reignited the ancestral patterns of initiation and imaginary devices, drawing from competences of groups like 'man-leopard society'. In pre-colonial and colonial periods, from Southern Nigeria to Côte d'Ivoire, these were known ferocious warriors. Initiates become invisible as soon as they put on the leopard mask (costume), inflicting massive casualty on the enemy while being protected by their powerful medicine (charms), bulletproof or possessing medicinal or occult knowledge for expelling bullets from the body, and so on. Young Ivoirians on both sides of the conflict that peaked in the year 2000 were either initiated or sought magical protection from experts who are members of the group. This could explain partly the ferocity of the violence unleashed against opponents in the conflict as well as the massacres of those who considered themselves either invisible or invulnerable.¹⁹

When one compares these modern adaptations to their ancestral original, there is certainly a difference in the initiation process, pedagogy and spirituality. The world is different. Ethnic nationalities control neither the process nor the direction nor government of the modern nation-state. The pedagogy and spirituality of initiation that led to the emergence of competent responsible members of society are impoverished.

The authoritative study of Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, insists that initiation to diverse services in the community (kings or queens, mothers or fathers, experts in all knowledge, healers or exorcists, warriors or shepherds) are for the

¹⁸ CH. ACHEBE: *Things Fall Apart* (London 1958, repr. 1973). I explored some of these rituals in E.E. UZUKWU: 'African Inculturation Theology. Path of Liberation [Explorations in Ritual]', in *Liberation Theologies Forum*, Faculty of Theology, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, June 2001 – www.theo.kuleuven.ac.be/clt/uzukwu_text1.htm; and www.theo.kuleuven.ac.be/clt/uzukwu_text2.htm

¹⁹ See B. GUILLEHON: 'Ressources anthropologiques en temps de guerre: Violence dans la Fraternité des homes-panthères', in *Revue de l'Université Catholique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* 29 (2007) 25-43, 65-91. D. PRATTEN: *The Man-Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria* (Indiana 2007). René Tabard reports similar perceptions of invisibility or invulnerability in the Congo Brazzaville war between 1992 and 2000: R. TABARD: *Voie Africaine de Christologie des Apparitions Pascales* (PhD, Institut Catholique de Paris & Katholieke Universiteit Leuven 2007) 82, note 64.

benefit of the community; they are not to be directed purely towards individual selfish or psychological interests.²⁰ The child soldiers in Uganda, Angola, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and the list continues, were militarised with adaptations of native initiation rituals. However, they could not be called *responsible members of the community*. The *Poro* ritual process, the 'bush school' of Liberia and Sierra Leone, originally made youth undergo severe training, testing and instruction on communal life. It empowered them mystically to live responsibly and defend the ethnic group. The adaptation of this process in the period of confusion, including branding children with hot bayonets, carving the initials of the RUF (Revolutionary United Front) on their back to radically disorient them and give them a license to kill, is not a preparation for civil defence. The amputations, rapes, exploitation of girls as sex-slaves, and criminal acts committed in one's village as part of liminality are criminal and life-denying. The subversion of the rite, with indelible marks on the body aided by drugs and hallucinogens, mobilise the children to the extreme naked use of power that shocked the adult population and damaged, perhaps for good, a whole generation of young Africans. In deploying body in time and space, the children are an embodiment of undomesticated cosmic forces, really believing to be acting under the inspiration of divine or occult forces.²¹

Child soldiers became manipulable tools in the hands of 'Big Men' of African politics. The manipulation or perversion of the process and spirituality of initiation is a betrayal of the ancestral memory rather than its development. The manipulators are war criminals. Elders interviewed in Angola acknowledge that boy soldiers are transformed into ferocious warriors. They were toughened by experiences during the threshold rites (e.g. some were made to drink the blood of people they assassinated). Nevertheless, they have not socially 'transited' or 'passed' into the stage of responsible adult persons. They are not permeated by the spirituality and pedagogy of initiation. Their acts of terrorism, deployed even in times of war, are totally unacceptable as 'responsible adult behaviour'.²²

Child soldiers present an ambivalent personality, culpable and yet innocent, acting as adults but mere children. Social groups found it difficult to pardon and reintegrate them. In the DRC mere children that marched into Kinshasa with AK47 rifles on their shoulders during the Kabila invasion of 1997 shocked

²⁰ See TURNER: *The Ritual Process* chapter 3-5, espec. p. 105-108; UZUKWU: *Worship as Body Language* 249.

²¹ See S. ELLIS: *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War* (New York 1999). chapter 6; and P. RICHARDS: *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth & Resources in Sierra Leone, African Issues* (Portsmouth NH 1996) chapter 4 and 7; BEAH: *A Long Way Gone*.

²² See the interesting study of youth by J. COMAROFF & J. COMAROFF: 'Réflexion sur la Jeunesse. Du Passé à la Postcolonie', in *Politique Africaine* 80 (Décembre 2000) 90-110. Also A. HONWANA: 'Innocents et Coupables. Les Enfants-Soldats comme Acteurs Tactiques', in *Politique Africaine* 80 (Décembre 2000) 58-78.

the society. This led to a reorganisation of the power equation as well as the perception of threats to life. Women were controlling commerce and trafficking between Kinshasa and Luanda (Angola). Child soldiers are killing like adults. Absolute poverty led to the break-up of families. The oppressive naked power of children is nothing short of witchcraft. Women and children (against the practice of ancestral wisdom) came to be included in the register of the aggregate existential situation that calls 'the tradition into question'; they are witches, blameable for illnesses, natural disasters, economic downturn, death, etcetera.²³ Exorcism has to intervene to bring healing to the society.

9. Ritual Therapy – Body Language, Mysticism and Healing Social Relations

Healing or ritual therapy dominates African religious imagination. African religion could rightly be called a therapeutic religion in contradistinction to religious experiences elsewhere in the world. A major point of clash of cultures occurred, was bound to occur, between Western Christianity, Western modernity and African cultural traditions over the dynamics of mystical-religious experience with its accent on therapy. Beside the bias of missionary Christianity, there was the radical difference in focus and claims displayed in ATR mystical structure. Direct access to deity was highly regulated in the Western Christian memory: strictly limited to founders like Moses and Jesus, and perhaps Mohammed. On the contrary, the African religious imagination postulated two experiences that were intolerable to western Christian anthropology. First, the psychological destabilisation and perhaps possession (obsession) of candidates called to the health ministry. After rigorous and lengthy initiation they join the ranks of experts who were and still remain the bedrock of ATR. These are the *nganga* of the Bantu, the *dibia* of Igbo (Nigeria), the *babalawo* of the Yoruba (Nigeria), and the *bokono* of Fon (Benin), defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as 'traditional medical practitioners'! They are better called 'experts in knowledge'. Through esotericism as well as the natural scientific knowledge of herbs, they are capable of recapitulating and reintegrating the cosmic, social, psychological, religious, and pharmaceutical dimensions of the African world in favour of life and against all that threaten life, especially against witchcraft and sorcery. However, they display the ambivalence characteristic of the African world; some deploy their knowledge negatively (sorcerers)! Missionary Christianity saw

²³ See F. DE BOECK: 'Le 'Deuxième Monde' et les 'Enfants-Sorciers' en République Démocratique du Congo', in *Politique Africaine* 80 (Décembre 2000) 32-57. See also B. BUJO: *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*, trans. B. MCNEIL (New York 2001) 134s.

them as their greatest threat and confronted or demonised these custodians of ATR.²⁴

The second experience of ATR mysticism at variance with Western Christian anthropology is the immediate access to deity and the deity's inhabitation of chosen 'servants' or 'handmaids' ('wives' – non-gendered in West African religion) that the deity 'mounts' during ritual, i.e. occupies the head or the open space in the mind of the chosen wife. This cohort, especially in the West African world, are numerous gifted women and men (*vodbunsi* or *iyorisa* – wife of *vodbun* or of *orisa* in Fon, Ewe and Yoruba religions) at the service of deities that enter their body, dance, make revelations and perform, or cause to be performed, therapeutic actions culturally and sociologically defined for the good of the social group. Missionary Christianity successfully transmitted to followers that mystical experiences in the ATR are demonic; all ancestral spirits and deities that possess devotees are classified as demons under Satan.²⁵

African cultures transmit a religious anthropology that postulates multiple components in the making of the human person, and establishes a porous line between the visible and the invisible. Therefore, spirits (known, unknown, good, and dangerous) are part of everyday life. In a 'porous' African world, as opposed to an 'impervious' modern Western world, spirits, deities, and ancestors can become manifest bodily. With the surge in African initiated churches (AICs) since early twentieth century and the toleration of Charismatic Movements (since the 1970s), the Holy Spirit, angels and saints can temporarily inhabit the Christian subject through possession, for culturally defined sociological tasks (healing and exorcism). This position is consonant with ATR worldview and at variance with Western Christian anthropology.

The Catholic and some Protestant churches in West Africa accept or perhaps tolerate charismatic movements. Nevertheless, they distrust and condemn possession or trance, which in their view is demonic. The only tolerable or acceptable bodily gesture in Catholic mystical experience is ecstasy. Ecstasy is individual, quiet and characterised by immobility; slight levitation is allowed and perhaps tears; ecstasies retain the memory of their experience. On the contrary, the AICs and Charismatic Movements replicate the body language characteristic of ATR mysticism: boisterous drumming and dancing invite the descent of the Holy Spirit, angels or saints into the mystics who pass into trance, speak in

²⁴ Some interesting descriptions of these experts are found in accounts of initiates, for example: E. DE ROSNY: *Les Yeux De Ma Chèvre: Sur Les Pas Des Maîtres De La Nuit En Pays Douala* (Paris 1981) 48-49 (English translation: E. DE ROSNY: *Healers in the Night*, trans. R.R. BARR (New York 1985); J.A. UMEH: *After God Is Dibia*, 2 vols.; vol. 1: *Igbo Cosmology, Divination & Sacred Science in Nigeria* (London 1997); vol. 2: *Igbo Cosmology, Healing, Divination & Sacred Science in Nigeria* (London 1999). See also J.C.U. AGUWA: *The Agwu Deity in Igbo Religion. A Study of the Patron Spirit of Divination and Medicine in an African Society*, *Igbo Life and Culture Series* (Enugu 2002) espec. chapter 2.

²⁵ In addition to works already cited see: M.-C. DUPRÉ (ed.): *Familiarité Avec Les Dieux: Transe Et Possession (Afrique Noire, Madagascar, La Réunion)* (Clermont-Ferrand 2001).

tongues, and prophecy; they have no memory of their experience. However, as students and commentators on African mysticism insist, an overriding social agenda, hinged on therapy, puts the ATR mystical experience and those of AICs and Charismatic movements under community control.²⁶ Trance, or rather trance-vision-audition, leading to loss of memory in AICs, Pentecostals, and Charismatic movements, is consonant with the Bible and is crucial for God's mission. Loss of memory displaces attention from the mystic, despite the intimate residence of the Holy Spirit that provokes the trance. Attention is rather directed to the community's social agenda. The community lays the foundation, draws up the parameters and even determines the nature of the spiritual experience in its totality.²⁷

The open and missionary-pastoral agenda of African mysticism (as opposed to the closed and private Western Christian experience) rescues African mystical experience from the pathology that threatens any kind of mysticism. The missionary-pastoral focus, displayed in ritual therapy, is so vital for the flourishing of the social group that rigorous discernment follows the manifestation of possession or obsession. ATR organises the discernment of the possessing spirit – deity, ancestors, or even wicked evil of witchcraft – around the ministry of the 'experts of all knowledge' and priest guardians of sanctuaries. These never experience possession after their initiation. Only after careful discernment could one proceed to be initiated as servant or devotee of a deity. The devotees of the deities who, through trance, vision or audition predict or discern illnesses, and prescribe medicinal herbs or sacrificial offerings, fulfil a necessary task in an unpredictable world. They may never progress to the hierarchy of the 'expert'. Their Christian counterparts, ordained as visionaries or prophets (e.g. in the *Celestial Church of Christ*) or recognised as gifted with the

²⁶ See for example Eric de Rosny's interesting comments on this in E. DE ROSNY: *L'Afrique des Guérisons* (Paris 1992) 129-132, and espec. chapter 7 'Renouveau charismatique et transe en Afrique'. Also Roger Bastide and Edward Parrinder expressed their views in discussion following the paper of E.G. PARRINDER: 'Le Mysticisme des Médiums en Afrique Occidentale', in D. ZAHAN & R. BASTIDE (eds.): *Réincarnation et Vie Mystique en Afrique Noire* (Paris 1965) 130-142, espec. 138-142. Adjévi Hobli Mensah makes an interesting contribution to the discussion in A. HOBLI MENSAB: 'Vigueur des Possessions vodu; trances récentes chez les catholiques du Renouveau charismatique au Sud-Togo', in IBID. (2001). A. DE SURGY: *L'Église du Christianisme Céleste. Un Exemple d'Église Prophétique au Bénin* (Paris 2001). LOVELL: *Cord of Blood* 17, 49-53. D.O. OLAYIWOLA: 'The Interaction of African Independent Churches with Traditional Religions in Nigeria', in *Studia Missionalia* 42 (1993) 357-370, espec. 368.

²⁷ I.P. LALÉYÉ: 'De la Quête Spirituelle de l'Afrique Contemporaine. Repérage des Fondements pour une Évaluation Critique', in *L'Afrique et ses Formes de Vie Spirituelle. Colloque International Kinshasa* 21-27/11/1983 (Kinshasa 1983) 54-68, espec. 62-63. See E.E. UZUKWU: 'Bible and Christian Worship in Africa. African Christianity and the Labour of Contextualization', in *Chakana* 1,2 (2003) 7-32; IDEM: *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness: Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style* (forthcoming).

Holy Spirits' charism (the Charismatic movements), discern illnesses and direct the community and sick people to the required curative rituals and prayers.

It is remarkable that the vocation of the expert of all knowledge, the devotee (wife) of a particular deity, those members of the Christian church gifted with the charisms of the Holy Spirit, and finally the persons struck down by illness, malignant spirits or witches, are all exposed bodily to the spiritual and invisible world. The initiation of those called to the health ministry and the curative process of those struck with sickness or attacked by evil spirits address the person and community bodily. The *Celestial Church of Christ* (very popular in Benin Republic and Nigeria) created an interesting ritual to cure witchcraft attacks. Sick supplicants are encouraged to undergo 'expositions' in the *Celestial Church*. 'Exposition' focuses on the body of the besieged who is kept in a protected area of the church compound. As the supplicant is particularly porous to the inflow and outflow of spirits, he or she is to be enclosed in an area totally impermeable to evil spirits: an encircled (protected) area of the church, surrounded by candles and other recommended objects (according to the directive of visionaries). The supplicant is laid in the middle of this protected area and a visionary frequently pronounces prayers of healing and security. This exercise could last for seven days.²⁸ The person attacked or invaded by an evil spirit is exorcised and empowered not only by the sacred word of the Lord but also through the use of instruments or symbols of defence against the enemy.

10. Conclusion

As illustration to this presentation, I focused on three areas that display the communal and individual deployment of the body to highlight the fact that we are body people; we are not people who just happened to have body. Humans are incomprehensible without body. They are revealed bodily and relate or dialogue with other humans and with the ambient universe bodily – *the issues are in the tissues*. This is true of Western societies where modernity and secularisation dominate as well as of African societies where a religious image holds sway. Being a participant-spectator at a rugby match in Lansdowne stadium Dublin brought the truth of our being body-people home to me in a radical way. Even the new African Pentecostalism that rejects the type of therapeutic rituals described above addresses the person bodily by imposing radical change to eating, drinking and sexual behaviour.

In our presentation, the naming ceremony displays practices packed with cultural symbolism. Christian and Islamic influences have added interesting features to this ritual. But as an entry point into life, this ritual culturally transmits, consciously or unconsciously, a re-enactment or memorial of destined

²⁸ DE SURGY: *L'Église du Christianisme Céleste* 261s.

course in life that still lies in the future; a foretaste of the hope of full human flourishing, originally contained in ancient sacred narratives of origin.

In initiation rites, beginning with the induction of the youth into adult life to make them competent agents in the society, I concentrated on male initiations. There is no intention of undervaluing female initiations that in African cultures image womanhood or female adulthood as realised in motherhood through marriage. Female and puberty rites, especially when coupled with circumcision, are also a minefield of controversy – the WHO, feminists and human rights activists combat female circumcision. I privileged boy's initiation because of its transformation and subversion across Africa, especially where the process has been used to transform boy recruits into ferocious killers. It is an example of how good can be profoundly vitiated.

Finally, therapeutic rituals tie together communal and individual destiny, communal and individual body, in their brokenness, but in order to reengineer their dreams and hopes. I focused on the West African experience where initiation of 'experts in knowledge', who divine or discern, foresee, predict and prescribe rituals or medicaments, remain relevant. I think it important to note that there is continuity between the functions and personalities of the experts in knowledge and the ministers, pastors and even founders of churches (AICs and Pentecostal groups) across Africa. The numerous devotees of deities in West Africa (mostly women) display radical porousness of the body permitting the residency of deity and the inflow and outflow of power to heal and mend bodies. This has been radically adapted in the reception of Christianity throughout Africa. Whether in ancestral religious circle or in Christianity, the experience displays a confluence of ritual gestures and mysticism, mysticism hinged on a clear social agenda. This endows mysticism with resilience and popular appeal. It makes policing the phenomenon very difficult for the leadership of the mainline churches that has been most influenced by Western modernity.

'Body and belief', the 'magic of body language', merits to be studied not only in the 'enchanted' world that has occupied this presentation. It is also pertinent in the 'disenchanted' modern world struggling or muddling along with the malaise of modernity that impact on body. It is pertinent in the globalised world where 're-enchantment' is at work.

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