

Mystics and Missionaries: Narratives of the Spirit Movement in Eastern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper combines insights from de Certeau's writings on mysticism, history and possession, along with Africanist perspectives on new religious movements to inform a case study of a Christian revival movement in late 1920s south-eastern Nigeria. The paper focuses on the events and fallout of the so-called Spirit Movement of 1927 in which bands of young men and women entered states of spiritual possession, paraded along the roads, attacked elders and secret society members, and killed suspected witches. Accounts of the origins and meaning of the Spirit Movement were highly contested and contradictory. This paper asks how we account for the mystical in historical ethnography, what light this event throws on colonial subjectivities, how we negotiate dominant missionary and colonial versions of such events, and how the problematic disjunction of sensorial experience and written account can be approached.

KEYWORDS

De Certeau; Christianity; Africa; Nigeria; Qua Iboe Mission; Historical Ethnography; Conversion; Mysticism; Spirit Movement; Narrative

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to draw insights from Michel de Certeau's work on mysticism and history in *The Possession at Loudun* to inform a case study of the Christian revivalist Spirit Movement in late 1920s south-eastern Nigeria. The comparison between early modern Europe and colonial Africa in the study of possession is especially suggestive of questions being asked by both the historical anthropology of religion and post-structuralist micro-history. While translations of empirical insights from early modern European history to Africanist scholarship have been fraught,¹ the methodological insights from micro-history have been popular (c.f. McCaskie, 2001). Yet despite the rapprochement between history and anthropology since the 1980s (Cohn, 1981), the influence of de Certeau's work on historical anthropology has been limited, and has focused on his more general insights into the 'making' of history (Stoler, 2002). Three particular themes of the ethnographic analysis of a Christian revival movement in colonial Africa resonate with de Certeau's studies: a micro-historical methodology which privileges narrative plurality and indeterminacy; the framing of spirituality through a scientific 'gaze' which focused on the body; and a set of questions regarding de Certeau's perspectives on the politics of mysticism, marginality and resistance. De Certeau's *Possession at Loudun* captures each of these three elements, and is perhaps most representative of his historical practice.

Possession at Loudun sets the exorcisms of Ursuline nuns in 1632 and the trial of Urbain Grandier within French courtly and ecclesiastical politics and against a fundamental historical shift: the 'rupture' from the seventeenth century onwards that displaced Christianity from its central place in European society and culture. From that point, intimate communion with the divine was displaced, isolated, objectified and labelled as mysticism (De Certeau, 1992b: 14). De Certeau's account of the infamous possession offers a challenging parallel to the Nigerian Spirit Movement. Both represented a crisis, an encounter with the unknown and with the

* Abbreviations, WUL: Witwatersrand University Library; PRONI: Public Records Office of Northern Ireland; NAE: National Archives of Nigeria.

1. There are several notable academic conversations between early modern Europe and Africa. From anthropology, Gluckman's re-analysis of the Nuer feud (Gluckman, 1955) became a mainstay for Medievalist historians' study of conflict and society (Wallace-Hadrill, 1959). And, in the other direction, studies of governmental reform in Tudor England (Elton, 1953) became a blueprint for Africanist historians in their analysis of the Asante kingdom (Wilks, 1975).

loss of a society's own certainties. Both had consequences that were twofold: they exposed the 'imbalance of a culture, and ... accelerate[d] the process of its mutation' (De Certeau, 2000: 2).

At the beginning of *Possession at Loudun* de Certeau states that 'History is never sure.' Throughout the text he employs a mode of writing which makes it impossible for there to be a sense of surety, completeness or authority. In juxtaposing narrative against narrative, usually in the form of extensive quotations, *The Possession at Loudun* is an unsettling micro-history.² Quite unlike other notable exponents of this genre (Davis, Ginzburg, Thompson, Samuel, Le Goff) de Certeau de-centres the micro-basis from which macro-linkages are inferred (Peltonen, 2001). Certeau reads archive not for corroboration but for contradiction. For de Certeau history cannot be reduced to either of its two meanings, a past reality or the study of that reality: there is a rigorous undecidability between these two semantic registers (De Certeau, 1988: 35, 2000: 7-8). Instead, he insisted that the historical operation is characterized precisely by the heterogeneous, unstable, and precarious relationship between these two poles (Wandel, 2000: 64). It is in this light that *The Possession at Loudun* exemplifies both an historical method and a theoretical position by actively reconstructing the interaction between competing versions, and hence helps us to perceive the plurality of the past.

In addition to this focus on the multiplicity of narratives, a key point of critical comparison concerns de Certeau's focus on historical narrative in the form of 'mystic speech.' By listening in on these pre-modern, pre-Enlightenment narratives, de Certeau, argues that we can attempt to recover and reclaim mystical language from its suppression under a medicalizing and psychologizing gaze (Buchanan, 2001: 326). Yet, it is impossible, de Certeau claims, to name what these voices describe since this mystic speech is derived from an unfathomable dimension of existence, and represent an experience that streaks across the consciousness like a flash of lightning: 'From that moment it is diffused into a multiplicity of relationships between consciousness and spirit, in all the registers of language, action memory, and creativity' (De Certeau, 1992b: 19). De Certeau's conception of mysticism is of a residual category comprised of shards of memory that are repressed historically and psychologically. This irreducibility is both divine experience, and a memory, 'A last, perversely theatrical manifestation of a certain form of ancient faith' (De Certeau, 2000: ix). This is to argue then that mystical, spiritual experience cannot be interpreted from its initial

2. It is a pity, I think, that the English translation of the book does not employ the practice of the French original in demarcating source from commentary by the use of italics.

form or an 'inside' knowledge. It must be seen as a perceptual practice that defies being thought of in objectifying terms. Hence, De Certeau calls for a return 'to what the mystic says of his or her own experience' (De Certeau, 1992b: 17), but ultimately cannot and will not capture what the mystic is talking about.³ De Certeau's utility to anthropological investigation is therefore limited on two fronts. Firstly by the extent to which his project can recover the content of mystic speech. And secondly, by the reduction of religious experience to an essence not unlike the 'human spirit' which moves mysticism and religion beyond sociological and ethnographic enquiry.

By juxtaposing the representation of mystic speech with the historical and scientific discourses that attempt to theorize them, however, de Certeau nevertheless provides an analytical framework pregnant with critical possibilities (Brammer, 1992: 30). Indeed, while our first comparative point relates to narrative and voice, this second theme relates to silence and concerns the procedures by which mystic experience is framed by a language of the body. Within days of the first reports in 1632 that nuns at the Ursuline convent in Loudun had begun to see visions, questions as to the identity of the possessor were dispelled and they were rapidly judged to be demonic (c.f. Ginzburg, 1983).⁴ The subsequent process of identifying natural from supernatural became a scientific process which was played out by a series of exorcists, physicians, surgeons, judges and state officials. Their proofs and trials focused on the physical manifestations of possession and on the bodies of the nuns and their parish priest, Urbain Grandier. Occupying a discrete domain from the seventeenth century onwards the mystics, de Certeau argues, created from a range of psychological or physical 'phenomena' (ecstasy, levitation, stigmata, fasting, insensitivity to pain, visions, tactile sensations, smells) a means to articulate a lived sense of the Absolute. This language is a language of the body: 'The visible body becomes, in practice, the very legibility of history. Words no longer say the truths that would be behind it, or that it would make manifest. They describe the surface on which meanings are phenomena: they relate the eye's passage over that surface ... it classifies the 'supernatural' domain into stories of organs (De Certeau, 2000: 45). The history of the possession at Loudun, therefore becomes a recovery of the

3. This is in contrast, for example, to Carlo Ginzburg's ambitious attempt to trace from inquisition records narratives of a pan-European complex of beliefs in fertility cults that were officially interpreted as demonic heresy. Ginzburg employs the contradictions of narratives not only to reveal the operation of the scriptural economy, but provided historical evidence of a more empirical nature (Ginzburg, 1983).

4. De Certeau argues that there is a symmetry between demonic and holy spirit possessions (De Certeau, 2000 p.5).

language of bodies silenced by ‘scientific procedures’ which de Certeau described as the scriptural economy, ‘the techniques of writing’: ‘I am trying to hear these fragile ways in which the body makes itself heard in the language, the multiple voices set aside by the triumphal *conquista* of the economy that has, since the beginning of the ‘modern age’... given itself the name of writing’ (De Certeau, 1984: 131).⁵

The third, related, point of comparison concerns the relationship between mysticism and resistance. De Certeau’s writings on mysticism betray an intense identification with outsiders and marginal people as part of his deep moral and social commitments, or what Giard referred to as his ‘tenderness for the anonymous crowd’ (Giard, 1997: xiv). De Certeau never explicitly links mystic practices to the register of secular anti-disciplinary tactics in his work, and of course his writings on tactics and strategies came later in his career (De Certeau, 1984). Nevertheless, linking mystics as marginal Others to Certeau’s interest in tactics suggests many questions, especially in terms of the resistance of epistemology and displacement. De Certeau presents us with a procedure for examining the relationship between mystic speech and scientific discourse which hinges on a paradox of visibility. Mystical phenomena are at once spectacular, visible appearances and at the same time remain unfathomable and invisible (De Certeau, 1992b: 17). Spiritual perception and practice is so fully determined by the dominant historical discourse in which it is captured, de Certeau argues, that the role of the interpreter is to provide an analysis of the relation between the hidden and the visible. Crucially the content of the relationship is simply that one is inaccessible and undecipherable to the other.

Consequently, the incongruence between the inaccessible speech and over-written discursive category (demonology, theology, medicine, politics) proves unsettling, displacing and decentring. As covert communication and hidden history, de Certeau’s conception of mysticism, resonates directly with his notion of the tactic. De Certeau considers ordinary people to be inventive in developing both discursive and nondiscursive ‘tactics’ which allow them to move across a terrain colonized and ruled by the strategies of power. By resisting the objectifying and systemizing procedures of dominant scientific discourses, an irreducibility emerges within the heterogeneities of lived experience (Brammer, 1992: 31). This reclamation, therefore, is less substantive than positional. De Certeau’s cultural analysis

5. Like Foucault, de Certeau focuses our attention on the historical conditions in which a subject is constituted as an object of knowledge and from this perspective de Certeau’s ‘scientific procedures’ begin to look remarkably similar to Foucault’s ‘genealogies’ Foucault, 1980 p.85.

consistently turns on precisely this process of differential recognition and on a figure of unknowable but constitutive difference (heterology) which injects a multiplicity of perspectives that decentre authority. Religion and resistance, mysticism and marginality were inextricably entwined in his scholarship, and it does not seem an enormous step to argue that de Certeau considered religion (especially marginalised mystical religious expression) as a form of resistance.

These three points regarding narrative, bodies and resistance prefigure many aspects of ethnographic scholarship on understandings of religious experience in Africa. The recognition of mystic speech, for instance, echoes debates concerning the framing of indigenous narratives within the master-narratives of science and Empire. Peel, for example, suggests that 'the denial of indigenous narrative allows the anthropological object to be constituted in a particular way' (Peel, 1995: 587). However, to focus on non-narrative forms, Peel warns, requires an exegesis which magnifies the role of the anthropologist as gatekeeper (Peel, 1995: 588). Rather he points to the significance of the relationship between those authoritative narratives which shape life and those narratives that constitute the 'arch of memories, actions and intentions' which represent life and produce sociocultural form (Peel, 1995: 582-583). Where Africanist and early modernist share a concern with placing religious narrative at the forefront of meta-narratives their stance differs. While Peel highlights the important structuring effects of missionary narrative and the way in which stories are essential to the ways in which persons and communities are constituted, so de Certeau highlights the inherent plurality and contradiction of narrative.

De Certeau's focus on the meaning of the embodied dimension of possession is also precisely the concern taken up by scholars of ecstatic worship in Africa. It is widely held in anthropology, as Boddy reminds us, that possession is 'an embodied critique of colonial, national, or global hegemonies' (Boddy, 1994: 419). Based on her study of the Watchtower revival in Zambia at the end of the First World War, Fields, for instance, has highlighted great difficulties in the analysis of collective practice rooted in ecstatic worship when compared to prophetic preaching. Their 'inarticulate sedition', especially speaking in tongues, has been variously interpreted as a pathology, a malaise, a confusion and hence as an epiphenomenon of the 'real' without intentional political import (Fields, 1982a: 322). In her work on *zar* cults in Sudan, Boddy writes that they 'descend into their hosts, dramatizing their Otherness, playfully and frighteningly opening a space for reflection and ambiguity by decentering or reshaping accepted meanings. The possessed learn a spirit anti-language that

metaphorically alters quotidian terms' (Boddy, 1994: 417). Comaroff illustrates how adherents possessed by the Holy Spirit in South African Zionist congregations channel its power during ceremonies toward the healing of both personal and social bodies (Comaroff, 1985). And, Stoller argues that the reason why the body of the spirit medium is important is that it is the major repository of cultural memories (Stoller, 1994: 638). The body, he argues, is the phenomenological arena in which cultural memory is fashioned and refashioned to produce and reproduce power.

Finally, any discussion of the relationship between Christian revivalism, new religious movements and politics in Africa is dominated by a debate between politically instrumental and expressive interpretations. That is, between those who link such religious expressions to political resistance at one extreme, and those who point to social renewal through withdrawal from the worldly at the other (Peel, 1968; Ranger, 1986; Maxwell, 1999). This debate has ranged from explicit links between possession cults and anti-colonial resistance (Stoller, 1984; Lan, 1985), Christian revivalist movements and proto-nationalism (Ranger, 1968b, 1968a), implicit political opposition (Fields, 1985, 1982a, 1982b), modes of cultural resistance (Comaroff, 1985), modes of cognitive re-ordering to worldly change (Peel, 1968), and modes of physical withdrawal and symbolic renewal (Fernandez, 1982).⁶

From each of these aspects, therefore, de Certeau's questions and evidence might be expected to contribute valuable insight into the perspectives of Africanist anthropologists, and to provide a comparative procedural framework for the study of spiritual revivalism of the type witnessed and experienced in Nigeria during the 1920s and 1930s known as the Spirit Movement. This paper asks therefore how de Certeau's study of mysticism may inform our study of the mystical in historical ethnography, what light this event throws on colonial subjectivities, how we negotiate dominant missionary and colonial versions of such events, and how the problematic disjunction of sensorial experience and written account can be broached.

QUICKENING ON THE QUA IBOE

The temporal and spatial contexts of the Spirit Movement speak centrally to de Certeau's ideas of mysticism emerging both within the interstices and at the margins of

6. Comparatively on West African coastal revival movements during the 1920s see Walker, 1983 and Shank and Murray, 1994 on the Prophet Harris revival, and Kalu, 1977 and Tasie, 1975 on the Garrick Braide movement which is most proximate to this case study.

society. The movement's centre at Itu in northern Ibibioland was at the periphery of the missionary encounter which had begun on the coast at Ibeno. Here, European missionary activity on the Qua Iboe river developed in the immediate aftermath of King Jaja's reign at Opobo in 1887 when an Irish missionary, Samuel Bill, established a non-denominational evangelical Protestant church with the intention of expanding northwards up the river. The Qua Iboe Mission asked a lot of its converts, and the imperatives to joining the new mission were based largely on the 'opportunity costs' of conversion (Peel, 2000: 216; Pratten, 2005: 418-419). For senior men the costs of conversion involved prohibitive social severance and sanctions. Those with much to gain or little to lose, including brokers of religious power and knowledge, the dispossessed, the old and the young, however, were among the first wave of converts. Young men and women were drawn in numbers to the new churches but their allegiances were contingent and ambiguous. Young women were faced with an often violent 'patriarchal panic' at the conversion of those responsible for the reproduction of the lineage. Young men, by far the highest proportion of converts, faced similar opposition over their failure to enter initiation societies, and at moments of particular economic hardship they found the disciplinary code of the church concerning polygamy (and hence labour supply) and gin-trading especially problematic. Overall, however, despite the complex distinctions and differentiations wrought by missionary encounters and colonial rule during the 1910s and 1920s the political landscape had very quickly polarized and a political opposition emerged along generational lines, the elder backed by colonial policy, the younger by the missions.

Progress for the Qua Iboe Mission was also constrained in part because of its own poverty. It had no home base from which to raise funds, and fund-raising from its congregations was limited both by their identity (poor young people), and by their dependence on the fluctuations of the palm oil trade. In this context, the fate of the mission was frequently linked to the need for spiritual 'quickening' and revival. Samuel Bill himself had been set on a missionary path after taking part in a Moody-Sankey revivalist crusade in his native Belfast in the early 1870s. Returning from furlough in 1901, during which the Ibeno population had been ravaged by smallpox, he found the church in a poor condition and was worried about the Mission's methods:

There is a general feeling of deadness and a danger of formalism. ... I don't know when there will be another baptismal service – at least not a big one. ... We are commencing to have a Saturday

night weekly prayer meeting – just specially to pray for a revival of our own spirits and a blessing on the word on the following Sabbath.⁷

These meetings soon petered out, but the calls for revival persisted. In lamenting the fate of ‘backsliders’, the first Ibibio pastor, David Ekong, recognized the need for a popular campaign when he wrote in 1912 that ‘...what we need now in Qua Iboe is a revival that will not only bring more people into the Church but will hold them when once they are in’.⁸

The region witnessed such a Christian revival during the First World War, though it was not linked to the Qua Iboe Mission. The Garrick Braide movement and the Christ Army Church with which it was associated was based on confession and faith healing, and spread from Bakana in the Delta through Ikwerre, Etche and across the Ngwa territory of Igboland (Kalu, 1977; Tasie, 1975). The movement passed into Ogoni and southern Ibibio-speaking communities in 1919 when its control passed to James G. Campbell, the founder of the West African Episcopal Church. These new churches diversified the religious landscape providing further competition for the Qua Iboe Mission, and infused Christian beliefs more thoroughly with Annang and Ibibio religious practice.

The mission’s prayers, however, had still not been answered. In 1922 news reached the Qua Iboe river of a spiritual movement in Ulster and the mission implored their friends at home to ‘... pray that this revival may reach Qua Iboe. The Native Churches are in great need of quickening’.⁹ By the mid-1920s, faced with resentment over their strict disciplinary codes ‘all was not well with the missions’ (Abasiattai, 1989: 499). The Mission felt it had reached a critical stage ‘when a fresh breath of the Holy Spirit is essential to its progress and development [and] the Native Church may be cleansed and blessed.’¹⁰ The church advertised its anticipation of a revival in 1924: ‘Revival is on the way. If we are faithful it will come, so let us keep praying.’¹¹

Then, in July and August 1927 the much-anticipated revival arrived as a wave of religious fervour swept across the Ibibio districts. The Spirit Movement, as it came to be known, began at John Westgarth’s station in Itu, north of Uyo which was an intersection between several missions including Qua Iboe, Methodist and Presbyterian. At its inception the Movement comprised many elements: the conversion of chiefs and diviners (*Idion*),

7. S.A. Bill to Edward, 14 September 1901, PRONI: D/3301/AG/1.

8. David Ekong to Mr Keown, 6 January 1912, PRONI: D/3301/AB/1.

9. QIM Quarterly, November 1922, (115), PRONI, D/3301/EA/10.

10. QIM Quarterly, May 1923, (117), PRONI, D/3301/EA/10.

11. Qua Iboe Field Notes, 1924, PRONI, D/3301/EA/11.

public confessions, speaking in tongues, nocturnal praying, 'burning of idols', and spirit possession. It was this aspect, spirit possession, that gave the movement's followers their other name, the 'shakers' (*mbon sibirit nkek idem* – 'people who shake with the spirit'). From Itu the movement spread right across Uyo and Ikot Ekpene Districts by December 1927 and into the Annang villages in Abak and Opobo Districts in January 1928. Given the trajectory of its anticipated arrival, the Qua Iboe missionaries wrote that 'some of the manifestations are strange and not unlike those that accompanied the Ulster Revival of 1859' the published history of which they had been consulting.¹²

Bands of young men and women, of between 100 to 300 at a time entered states of spiritual possession, paraded along the roads and lived in the churches and prayer houses.¹³ Here, the Holy Spirit was thought to inhabit the church altar, which came to be regarded as a shrine (*idem*) where prayers and sacrifices could be made to *abasi* (Messenger, 1962: 287). Many women drawn into the Spirit Movement wore *mkepata* (*Selaginella*) leaves for protection from malicious forces.¹⁴ The confessions of 'sins' that the 'spirits' demanded was directed against those who concealed secretive 'medicinal' powers (*iboké*), and specifically against suspected witches. Large numbers of cotton trees were felled as witches were thought to dwell in them, and public confessions of witchcraft were coerced as 'they called on persons to confess their sins, and put those who refused to do so to torture.'¹⁵ The movement turned violent very quickly and its adherents began to compel confession by trussing up suspected witches with ropes which were tightened with levers and by shrinking. In little more than a week during November 1927 there were 34 serious assaults related to such trussings including 4 murders. During 1927 eleven 'spirit' people were convicted on murder charges and three were executed (Jeffreys, 1952-53: 102).

After its initial phase localized recurrences of spirit movement activity continued annually until the late 1930s despite legal opposition from village chiefs and increased vigilance from the colonial authorities. Although it was initially leaderless, a core of young men in Itam, including Michael Ukpog Udo, Richneal Ekit and Akpan Udofia emerged.

12. *QIM Quarterly*, November 1927, (135), D/3301/EA/12.

13. In a ledger that registered 'Spirited Souls' (probably from 1927) the numbers involved in nineteen villages across Ikot Ekpene Division totalled 1,912 individuals, an average of 100 'spirits' per village. (Extract from ledger 'Registering Tribe of Ibibio Spirited Souls', nd, WUL: Jeffreys Papers File: 263).

14. As women were also to do in the Women's War of 1929. Report of the Commission of Inquiry appointed to inquire into the disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December 1929, 1930, RH: 723.13.s.4/1930.

15. Sumner, 'Tours of Southern Nigeria', 1923-28, Mss.Afr.s.538; Extract from Annual Report, Calabar Province, 1927, NAE: CALPROF 3/1/210.

Key elements of the movement, such as visioning, prophecy, dreaming and speaking in tongues were retained by them as they attracted adherents to an independent Christian church called Oberi Okaime, or the Free Healing Church. The church stressed Old, rather than New Testament practices, used the Ibibio rather than the European week, and developed its own writing and language which was taught at its school at Ikpa founded in 1936 (Abasiattai, 1989; Adams, 1947; Hau, 1961).

NARRATIVES OF AN UNDECIDED MISSIONARY

Everyone wanted to trace the movement to its source. One suspicion was that it was a mass frenzy caused by a feeling against the new tax about to be imposed, and the government in consequence was apprehensive about any signs of a spirit of rebellion. In other quarters, a certain class of books which had been coming into the country from America was suspected.

I would suggest that it is never easy, particularly under such conditions to determine whether a work is what we call genuine or counterfeit. ... Probably the white missionary, with his assumption of superiority or race and prestige, which is so rarely challenged, particularly where he exercises authority through a paid African ministry, holds perpetually his African flock at a distance. This makes mutual understanding and co-operation difficult. (Westgarth, 1946: 32, 59).

James Westgarth, at whose station the revival broke out, provides the single most important account of the Spirit Movement. While he was clearly aware of the various interpretations of the movement's origin, and of the inherent uncertainty of the process he described, he argued that the Spirit Movement came 'as a rushing mighty wind and in tongues of flame' (1946: xiii). He argued that 'as a mission we should accept it as a token that God is with us. He has put His seal on our labours by bringing to birth a living, Spiritual Church through this Movement.'¹⁶ Later, however, he would acknowledge the difficulties he faced in choosing whether to sanction or condemn the Spirit Movement. As we have seen, the pressure to enliven the mission was great, as was competition with the Roman Catholics in Itu District. Yet, he was anxious to distance himself from the events of 1927, to stress the spontaneity of the movement, and of course, to claim that its origin was divine. The publishers' preface to his 1946 account of the movement claims that he '... held no connection whatever with any 'Movement' definitely associated with such matters. The

16. *QIM Quarterly*, February 1928, (136), D/3301/EA/12.

whole affair was spontaneous among the natives. The white missionary appears to have been singularly aloof in his personal spiritual experience from the powerful tides that were sweeping all around him' (Westgarth, 1946). The extent to which he was linked with the Spirit Movement (or at least its origins) bears further investigation, however, as most other accounts implicate Westgarth directly and accuse him of indulging visions, dreams and prophecies from among his congregations that prompted the movement. Colonial reports, for instance, claimed that the revivalist movement was initiated by Mr Westgarth and fostered by pamphlets and occultist literature. They suggested that '... at the beginning of the Spirit Movement a European Missionary was so far misled by the pious protestations of the Movement as to write a pamphlet in Efik, comparing it to Pentecost.'¹⁷

Mission Christianity had little tolerance of seers and faith healers, and the place of visions, dreams and prophesy in the Qua Iboe's teaching during its early years is obscure. Westgarth alone committed these aspects to his journals which suggest that prophecies, dreams and visions had long been part of the everyday encounters of the church in the villages north of Uyo. In 1914 Westgarth began to record the experiences of one preacher, Etim Akpan Udo, whose dreams and premonitions consumed his rambling sermons.¹⁸ Etim had prophesied the end of the world on 1 January 1915, and responded to his subsequent disappointment by announcing that he had been commanded to lay down, and not wash himself for a month.

It was among the young evangelists and teachers at Itu, including Etim, that the Spirit Movement first began. In September 1927 Westgarth took one of the evangelists, Benjamin, aside to discuss the origins of the religious fervour. Benjamin said much of it seemed to follow the death of his mother, whom he believed had been poisoned. He wanted revenge, but began to see the error of his thinking:

Whist still sorrowing for his mother he gave himself to prayer, and reading the Bible. This was followed by a new experience of spiritual things. He said he often spent whole nights in prayer and reading, and writing out parts of the Bible. ...¹⁹

Benjamin's visitation, which Westgarth recalled had softened the evangelist's heart through the presence of the Holy Spirit, was followed by another, this time to both the

17. ADO Enyong Division to Senior Resident, Calabar Province, 22 February 1933, CALPROF 3/1/210.

18. Diary, J.W. Westgarth, 2 January 1915, PRONI: D/3301/CB/1.

19. QIM Quarterly, November 1927, (135), D/3301/EA/12.

evangelist and a teacher. The teacher, who was not named, was an impressionable young man, a psychic, Westgarth suggested, who 'had it not been for the gospel ... would in all probability have become a heathen practitioner of one of the old native cults' (Westgarth, 1946: 16). Afterwards the teacher appeared dishevelled at the weekly scripture lesson, and called everyone to church in order to cite to them the prophecy of Joel, 'In the last days I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. And your sons and daughters shall prophesy.' Some of the teachers insisted that Westgarth suspend the class, but he did not. The teacher returned from the class to his church six miles away where he 'preached in the unction and power of the Spirit' and the revival began to spread.

The pamphlet that Westgarth wrote, and which the colonial authorities blamed for enflaming the situation, was in fact a plea for calm.²⁰ It betrayed his deep-seated ambivalence to the movement's manifestations. In his *Advice Given to the Spirit People* he linked faith healing, for example, directly to 'things resembling the attributes of Ibibio cult or juju culture'. His ambivalence was especially clear in his comments on the practice of 'Speaking in Tongues.' 'We have learned,' he wrote, 'that the strange tongue is the sign that has come from the Holy Spirit, but it is not dignifying, because it is like the utterance of babies.' Within this infantilizing discourse Westgarth suggested that the movement's adherents were like children who do not have the words to express the lot of things on their minds. At the same time, he warned just how easily these signs were also those of Satanic possession, and how it would be better overall if these energies were channelled into literacy and Bible study. Westgarth admitted that the physical manifestations of the movement were difficult to understand, and that 'There have been cases undoubtedly where they have not been of God.' What he coyly described to the mission's supporters at home as 'unseemly' acts led the colonial authorities to call in troops.

Having begun within the Qua Iboe Mission, the effect of the Spirit Movement was to undermine its regional and liturgical monopoly. Even Westgarth, its apologist, would bemoan the superficiality of conviction which he said most 'spirit people' possessed, and claimed that despite the few who had genuinely entered the church, the majority had been subject to 'mass-suggestion'. He concluded that although the movement introduced a 'spirit of prayer' to the mission, and had re-invigorated its preachers and teachers, there was little permanent impact of the 'idol burning' movement for the mission.

20. *Utom Spirit*, (J. W. Westgarth), 1928, WUL: Jeffreys Papers File: 263.

COLONIAL RE-NAMINGS

The colonial authorities approached the Spirit Movement in terms of law and order. Alarmed that court chiefs were being tied up and that court messengers were assaulted, the colonial response to the Spirit Movement was repressive and a Police patrol toured areas in Ibiono clan in early December 1927.²¹ Jeffreys (whose Ibibio nickname was *Ntokon* – ‘hot pepper’) was DO at Ikot Ekpene in 1927 and sentenced ‘spirits’ charged with causing the disturbances to short terms of imprisonment. He mustered them in columns of fours and made them march in silence around the prison square; anyone breaking the silence was beaten. By evening, after marching all day, the spirit had left them and did not return. The DO at Abak recalled that in 1928:

... with promptings from the Political Officers [the chiefs] gave the offenders one month IHL [imprisonment with hard labour] and 12 strokes of the cane in the Native Courts. These strokes were always given in prison in the presence of a Political officer. I found the best way was to have 6 strokes given and then ask if the spirit was still present. If the answer was ‘no’ the other 6 strokes were remitted. If ‘yes’ they were given. In one incident all the crowd stopped jiggling apart from one man who in spite of being cut about with switches refused to be quiet saying that the spirit would not let him do so. A bamboo bed was found on which the man was bound and the other spirit dancers were told to carry him to Uyo some 20 miles. We had not gone far when the man said he would be quiet if he was untied (Jones, 1989: 517).

When they sought to understand the nature of the phenomenon itself the colonial authorities of District and Provincial officers could only offer analogy. Theirs was a knowledge that, as de Certeau explains, tended to reclassify the alterity that it met (De Certeau, 1988: 247). This reclassification took three forms. One was to link the spirit movement with its political opposite – the secret society, the second was to relate the movement by analogy to other known ‘outbreaks’, and the third was to relate the movement to a range of suspected subversive influences originating in American-influenced faith healing.

The spirit Movement adherents opposed and attacked members of the ancestral masquerade (*ekpo*) as a key site of paganism, but their actions, in terms of possession and violence, were perceived as very *ekpo*-like. District officers drew parallels between the Spirit

21. Report on Outbreak of lawlessness by Spirit-possessed, Itu District, (D. Itu-Enyong), 1927, NAE: CALPROF 3/1/209.

Movement and the annual cycle of the violence associated with the secret societies. Quite apart from the mixing up, as the authorities perceived it, of traditional and Christian beliefs, the Spirit Movement's actions bore the hallmarks of secret society-type operations. 'The atrocities committed by excited adherents of Christian Churches is interesting,' the Resident at Calabar noted, 'in view of a recent complaint of the Mission Societies against such pagan institutions as 'Ekpo'.²² The timing of the movement broadly coincided with the Annang and Ibibio ritual cycle which marked the harvest, the *ekpo* cycle and the end of the year during August, September and October. To a limited extent, it is possible to suggest that the Spirit Movement was shaped by this tradition of renewal in which the secret societies acted as 'social movements in embryo' and who came to the fore as remedial vanguards against hardship and fears of witchcraft (Cross, 1972) cited in (Ranger, 1986: 50). Historiographically this re-classifying of the Spirit Movement within the idiom of the secret society has persisted. In Adams' 1947 account, for example, he records that:

Members of these bands declared that they were spirits. It was clear that although they professed Christianity, what had become uppermost in their super-excited minds were pagan ideas: of Ekpo, a disembodied spirit which takes many forms according to the belief of the Ibibio (Adams, 1947: 24)

In other colonial accounts the movement itself was related to waves of religious fervour and with similar incidents such as those in the West Indies known as Myalism (Jeffreys, 1935: 22). Waddell described Myalism in Jamaica as an 'extraordinary superstition' which 'evinced itself in fearful paroxysms, bordering on insanity, accompanied with acts of violence on those who attempt to restrain it'. (Waddell, 1863: 188). Later, as the Spirit Movement petered out and was channelled into various denominations, it was understood through the lens of the Makka movement which originated in the Mambilla area of Bamenda Division in neighbouring Cameroon during 1938. The Makka movement was described as 'a frenzied dance in which most of the population, men and women, joined. The dancers would gyrate in a frenzy to the drum, waving their arms like a windmill. They would then begin to shake as in an epileptic fit and fall to the ground, apparently senseless. On recovery such a one appeared to be endowed with supernatural powers and went about the villages denouncing people as witches. ... it appears that those who originally introduced it said that

22. Resident, Calabar Province to Secretary, Southern Provinces, 20 December 1927, NAE: CALPROF 3/1/209.

Makka would purge the country of witches, cure all illnesses, increase the yield of the farms and even raise the dead from the grave.²³ In 1940 one of the colonial officers charged with putting down the Spirit Movement compared his experiences of such 'psychical phenomena' and wrote that this 'outbreak would be more correctly described as a mass display of tarantism characterised by tarantella dancing' (Jeffreys, 1940: 355). In so doing he linked the movement to tarantism possession widespread in the Apulian region of Italy from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries.²⁴ This connection was typical, of course, of the ways in which ethnocentric framings occulted indigenous understandings of religious experience.

The Spirit Movement therefore was not understood in terms relevant to the time and place of the movement itself, but solely by analogy to other movements of its kind. For the colonial authorities the Spirit Movement was also understood in terms of anti-colonial subversion. The bulk of a file held in Port Harcourt labelled 'Subversive Influences' and which included, among other things, threats of Communist sedition, Mahdist propaganda and the schemes and propaganda of radical nationalist trading entrepreneurs, comprised the literature and lecturers linked to religious revivalism. The authorities found two papers in particular which they considered subversive in the context of the Spirit Movement, both of which emphasized divine healing through prayer and possession. One was the magazine of the Unity School of Christianity,²⁵ the other was a paper by the Faith Tabernacle (Peel, 1968: 63fn). The anti-colonial tone of 'subversive and American' religious tracts during the 1930s was especially associated with Faith Tabernacle and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses).²⁶ During 1931, for instance, W.R. Brown, a preacher from Jamaica, gave lectures at Native Court houses in the south-east. Senior figures in the administration agreed that 'His utterances, are disguised as religious teaching, but they are intended to subvert all forms of constituted authority' and that in particular they had 'a decided anti-

23. Acting Secretary, Southern Provinces to Chief Secretary to the Government, 10 February 1939, NAE: CALPROF 3/1/1954.

24. The performance of dance and song that constituted tarantism was considered a ritual healing for a tarantula's bite. Long considered shameful and backward, the 1990s saw a revival in the popular music (pizzica) associated with southern Italian tarantism (De Martino, 1961; Pandolfi, 1992; Ludtke, 2000).

25. Founded by Myrtle and Charles Fillmore in Kansas City in 1889, the Unity School of Christianity followed Christian Science teachings with an emphasis on divine healing. Myrtle believed she could heal by repetition of the phrase 'I am a child of God and therefore I do not inherit sickness.' Their official publication, *Unity Daily Word* began in 1924 (see Melton, 1996 pp.637-638).

26. See Fields, 1982b; Fields, 1985 on the missionary radicalism of Watchtower movements in east-central Africa during the 1910s and 1920s.

British Government tone.²⁷ He sold Jehovah's Witness books written by their president J.F. Rutherford in which the British Empire was referred to as part of 'Satan's Organisation,' and in which chain stores in America and England sought to control the food supply.²⁸ These topics of imperialism, agricultural production and economic exploitation were particularly sensitive in the aftermath of the Women's War (the Aba Riots of 1929), and the Resident of Owerri Province judged that Mr Brown's lectures would cause unrest amongst the 'semi-educated classes'.²⁹

Throughout this period stories circulated in the north of the province of itinerant white American preachers who called meetings and asked for land to build Spirit Movement churches.³⁰ As a result, during the 1930s the authorities maintained a much greater vigilance of new religious movements, including revivals of the Spirit Movement, and of faith healers and itinerant preachers who were influenced by American churches of 'Christian Scientist leanings.' In several instances in 1933 and 1934 impromptu settlements that had been established around charismatic faith healers were kept under surveillance by plain clothes police, and were to be discouraged so as to prevent 'hysterical breaches of the peace', 'nocturnal orgies' or anything approaching the 'Spirit shaking'.³¹

SHAKING, JUDGING AND HEALING

The 'shakers' experience was expressed and deciphered in extraordinary physical acts. These acts constituted a social language of the body comprising physical features and psychosomatic signs which were read off and made legible by missionaries and colonial officers. Such had also been the case for the possessed at Loudun whose experience was set against a historical passage from religious criteria to political ones, from a cosmological and celestial anthropology to a scientific organisation of natural objects ordered by the scrutiny of man (De Certeau, 2000: 228). As a result of this historical conjunction, de Certeau argues the meaning of mysticism became written through the letter and the symbol of the physical body, from which they received the law, the place, and the limit of their experience (De

Commented [P1]: awkward sentence - rephrase?

27. Resident, Owerri to Secretary, Southern Provinces, 11 June 1931, NAE: RIVPROF 2/1/19.

28. Rutherford's texts included *Prosperity Sure and Light* published in 1928 and 1930 respectively by the International Bible Students Association in New York.

29. Resident, Owerri to Secretary, Southern Provinces, 11 June 1931, NAE: RIVPROF 2/1/19.

30. DO Itu to Resident, Calabar, 22 February 1933, NAE: ITUDIST 7/1/261.

31. DO Ikot Ekpene to Resident, Calabar, 1 February 1934, NAE: IKOTDIST 13/1/174, and DO Enyong to Commissioner of Police, Calabar, 5 April 1934, NAE: ITUDIST 7/1/497.

Certeau, 1992b: 21-22). Where de Certeau's work focuses our attention then is on the procedures by which the body is both a site of agency and a site of objectification. At Loudun the 'gaze' of physicians and exorcists upon the 'spectacles of the body' was taken as proof of possession and presence of the Other, even though it was a proof based on criteria they themselves had created (De Certeau, 2000: 95). For de Certeau the origin of these practices are historically and culturally shaped but are beyond our analysis. As de Certeau highlights in his discussion of early modern mysticism 'Spiritual perception ... unfold[s] within a mental, linguistic, and social organization that precedes and determines it ... It receives its form from a milieu that structures it before all explicit consciousness (De Certeau, 1992b: 21). In the case of the Nigerian Spirit Movement, by contrast, these origins can be determined and are seen to be diverse, including spiritual practices that were both local and historical, and international and contemporary.

A range of elements that became characteristic of the Spirit Movement shared features with practices of Annang divination, initiation and burial ritual. As the Spirit Movement in Calabar province spread from the Qua Iboe Station at Itu an *Idion* diviner was among its first adherents. He dreamed of seeing a figure through a bright light who placed blood on his right hand and on his chest. Passing through a narrow opening he was confronted by an awesome scene that was 'beyond anything I can express, ... a great expanse of light and beauty which was thronged with a host of beautiful people, such as I have never dreamed of.' His wife was also affected and burned the *Idion* house and all of their household shrines. These initial experiences, the seeing of bright, pale yellow light, and the placing of hands upon a person's chest, became a template for the transmission of the movement. At one night-time church meeting, for instance, the place was reported to be 'lit up with a peculiar light. Many spoke of seeing a beautiful figure in a vision. There was a great speaking in tongues and they thought that God had really visited them in a second Pentecost' (Westgarth, 1946: 28).

It was also common for one of the spirit people to approach those who had not confessed and to pat them on the chest; 'sometimes it was much rougher than patting, and amounted to a rapid pounding as quick as the beats on a side-drum' (Westgarth, 1946: 53). Touching the chest in this manner was an echo of the sensations (*ntuuk*) felt by an *Idion* in the chest during divination. Furthermore, for many of the spirit people the possession they experienced was manifest in raising their right arm skywards. This gesture, a connection between soil and sky, and between the god of the soil (*abasi ikpa ison*) and the sky god (*abasi*

enyon) was integral to Ibibio and Annang ritual practice (Pratten, forthcoming). Prophecy also took familiar forms. One village reported that Spirit Movement adherents pointed to passers by and said 'You will die tomorrow'.³² In the village of Ikot Afanga, people said that it was the spirit of 'medicine' (*iboké*) that 'worried' the young iconoclasts and led them to see false visions and prophecies. Three 'prophecy people' arrested in Ikot Afanga at the behest of Graddon of the Qua Iboe Mission were children of *Idion* diviners. In defence of their monopoly on these forms of knowledge, and in a significant precedent of *Idion*-church conflict, elder *Idion* men claimed that the 'shakers' were being 'pursued' by the *Idion* spirit and that since they appeared to be 'playing *Idion*' they should pay for their initiation.

The Spirit Movement hence struck a familiar chord and built on syncretic dynamic already apparent in the region's prophetic churches. The principal belief of Annang followers of the Spirit Movement concerned the Holy Spirit (*Edisana Odudu*), who was dissociated from the Trinity and conceived as a powerful spirit (*ndem*), capable of curing all diseases and injuries, insuring longevity, bringing wealth and combating malicious supernatural forces. In scores of cases the spirit seized a person quite suddenly, caused them great anxiety, fear and trembling, and was followed with a prompting to confession and then by 'unusual elation and ecstatic joy' (Westgarth, 1946: 50). The spirit possession of the 'Shakers' manifested itself in bodily convulsions and monotonous dancing. An Opobo chief, David Kapella, recorded the features of a trance-like state of consciousness which spirit possession induced. This included short-sightedness, feeling drunk, and a loss of self-control: 'life and mind are suspending', he wrote, 'I am unable to govern my mind for what I wish ... my left side is burnt inside like fire, and then turned my head by burning like fire inside. Whether I [was] living in the world or not I cannot tell, for I could not govern myself or get my right mind'.³³ Observers pointed to the consumption of the raw fruits of the *akana* tree, which are normally soaked for several days, as accounting for the drunken-like behaviour of the spirit people. Others said that their possession and visions were caused by eating very little.

The Spirit Movement attracted young men and women in their teens and early twenties. The dancing associated with the movement was mostly by young women and continued for hours until the dancer fell down exhausted. Falling to the ground in this way, like women stripping naked (which some spirit women were reported to have done at Ikpa), was a potent ritual inversion expressing physical and spiritual transformations of the self.

32. DO Uyo to Clan Councils of Uyo Division, 9 February 1939, NAE: ABAKDIST 1/2/81.

33. Paper entitled 'The Trouble Began' by David Kapella, n.d., PRONI: D/3301/OA/12.

The young men who joined the movement included many who had been inquirers at the Qua Iboe Mission stations but had since left the church as they had grown older and as they had become more intimately involved in the domestic concerns of marriage and reproduction. Those who had received some training in the three 'Rs', expressed themselves in 'unintelligible repetitive writing' (Jeffreys, 1952-53: 101).

Another aspect of the movement, which resonates with the idea that it was a release of underlying inter-generational tension, was its sexual dimension. For weeks in some of the churches, Westgarth reported that 'men and women lived in communal fellowship, having and eating their meals together' (Westgarth, 1946: 30).³⁴ This aspect of a union between the sexes, was also associated with a high degree of sexual licence, and was represented in terms of the sexual promiscuity among young people:

You are well aware that apart from dancing, shaking and making themselves a general nuisance, adherents are for the most part young people of both sexes, who use the movement as a cover for promiscuous sexual intercourse.³⁵

As a result opposition to the Spirit Movement was frequently related in claims of adultery. Many complaints alleged that by joining the Spirit Movement, and by staying at 'Spirit Settlements' such as the one that developed at Obot Enong Ikot Endem in 1932, wives were deserting their husbands.³⁶ These complaints were followed by litigation, such as a case of disturbing the peace brought against 23 Spirit People in November 1932 in Ibiono Native Court, which accused them of committing adultery with wives who had joined the movement.³⁷ It is difficult to judge whether these accusations were symptoms of the moral panic occasioned by the spirits, devices to discredit them, or an opportunity for illicit sexual liaisons. In the light of young men's ongoing grievances concerning polygamy, however, it appears that the adultery accusations were further evidence of deep-seated frustrations with the Missions' 'discipline'.

Among its varied activities, faith healing was the primary concern for those who directed the teachings and practices of the Spirit Movement. This involved praying, fasting, anointing, and laying on hands in curing the sick and infertile. Michael Ukpong Udo, for instance, registered 169 'patients' between November 1927 to May 1928. He noted that in

34. See Fernandez, 1982 on the re-harmonization of relations between men and women in Bwiti.

35. DO Uyo to Clan Councils of Uyo Division, 9 February 1939, NAE: ABAKDIST 1/2/81.

36. Extract from Quarterly Intelligence Report, Calabar Province, March 1932, NAE: CALPROF 3/1/210

37. DO Opobo Division to Resident, Calabar Province, n.d., NAE: CALPROF 3/1/210.

December 1927 'all kinds of diseases [were] brought at Afaha Station from the towns of Osuk, Afaha, Ikot Etim, Utit Obio and many others, and over 60 or 80 people or patients healed in a day without drugs except only touching with hand and all be healed immediately at one or two seconds.'³⁸ The commonest ailment patients suffered from was a weak body (*mem idem*), though other illnesses included swellings (*efik*), sweats (*ubiak idibi*) chest pain (*ubiak esi*), ailments brought on by medicine (*ibok*), witchcraft (*ifot* and *uben*), and suffering from an ancestral curse (*ufen mbiam ye ekpo*).

While the movement captured a range of internalized practices which sought to articulate a connection with spiritual power, so the 'spirits' also articulated an external connection. The diversity of features and resonances in the Spirit Movement echo Fernandez's point regarding the consequences of syncretism which 'rarely renders the sources by which it is stimulated fully compatible' (Fernandez, 1982: 563). From their point of view the relationship with the Qua Iboe church was inconsequential and their horizons were much broader. American religious literature was imported through the post office in Itu, and it appears that there was considerable dialogue between Michael Ukpog Udo and the Faith Tabernacle Congregation in Philadelphia during the height of the Spirit Movement in September 1927, and the Apostolic Faith Mission in Portland, Oregon from 1928 onwards.³⁹ Ukpog Udo requested and received a significant body of literature from both churches which he distributed throughout 63 villages, which, from the following, would appear to have had a significant impact on the spiritual revival:

... there is no church to control us and direct us accordingly if it were not your pamphlets we would entirely perished off because every church and Missionaries here call us by one name Beelzebub, but being that our Lord Jesus in Gospel Matthew Chapter 10 verse 25 shows plainly we do not grieve much for that. We only mourn for your sake that you should manage through the will of our Lord Jesus to arrange with the Government of Nigeria to permit you to come and establish your Mission here for use ...⁴⁰

38. Register for patients and the names of sickness (vol.1), (M. U. Udo), 1927-1928, Jeffreys Papers File: 263.

39. The extent of this direct contact with the American churches is an aspect of the nascent Obei Okaimo movement that has never been fully acknowledged as the early papers, journals and ledgers were seized (or perhaps copied) and have been lodged in M.D.W. Jeffreys' papers at Witwatersrand Library.

40. Shepherd Michael Ukpog Udo to The Apostolic Faith Mission, December 1928, WUL: Jeffreys Papers File: 263.

As a result of Ukpong Udo's correspondence, the Apostolic Faith began enquiries with the Government to establish the mission in south-eastern Nigeria during 1929. In the following years, often under pressure from council bye-laws which prescribed that Spirit Movement activity be contained within church denominations the movement found expression within the Christ Army Church, the Primitive Methodists, the African Church Mission, the Apostolic Church and the Assemblies of God.

America, however, was not the only source of spiritual influence. Westgarth dismissed the influence of the American pamphlets, but the influence of hypnosis literature and paraphernalia, was harder for him to deny. At the height of the religious fervour he found one of the Qua Iboe teachers, David, in a stupor claiming that 'the spirit is coming out of me'. He had joined the Psychological Society of Bolton, England, several years previously and had followed their teaching on the use of 'mesmeric disks' (Westgarth, 1946: 33). By hypnotizing himself, David had tried to make contact with, and subject himself to, spirit influences. He had books called 'How to converse with Spirit Friends,' 'How to know your Future', and his exercise book was full of automatic 'spirit writing'.⁴¹ David's writings were requests to the spirits to give him power, and to influence people in various walks of life to yield up to him all that he required of them.

SPIRITS AND SUBVERSION

For de Certeau austere, inner and subjective mysticism developed within the increasingly articulated and regulated Catholicism of the counter-Reformation. De Certeau links mysticism to a social critique of this new system in two senses - as an expression of the marginalized, and as an ontology that eludes the powerful. In the first sense he highlights the ways in which mystics often belonged to regions and social categories that were going into economic recession or which had been pushed aside by progress. At the extremes, he wrote, the mystics wavered between ecstasy and revolt, mysticism and dissent (De Certeau, 1992a: 22). In the second sense de Certeau locates mysticism as a seventeenth century reaction against institutionalized religion, scientific discourse and absolutist political and ecclesiastical claims. It acts, he says as 'a dissent of the individual in relation to the group; an irreducibility

41. The rough and gruesome drawings of snakes and fetters Westgarth saw in the teacher's exercise book led him to think they were Satanic.

of desire within the society that represses or masks it without eliminating it; a 'discontent within civilization' (De Certeau, 1992b: 12). De Certeau also suggests that the critical subjectivity of the mystic in relation to power takes several steps. Firstly it attacks the founding principles of the historical system within which it operates and creates a distinct critical space apart from that system, and secondly it specifies a set of practices (prayer and bodily possession) that are not ruled by discourse and hence escape the logic of statements (De Certeau, 1992a: 8).

In this context, how might we interpret the subversive potential of the Spirit Movement? The cultural meaning of the Spirit Movement captures the classic duality of interpretive possibilities of African revivalist movements – voice and exit. On the one hand, as David's hypnosis suggests, the movement appears as a quest for power. The political contours of the Spirit Movement, indeed, assumes political prominence when set against a heightening sense of inter-generational tension, declining economic fortunes, new demands from the colonial state in the form of direct taxation, and new domestic tensions in which demand for female labour was offset by an emerging discourse of women's independence. In particular, the Spirit Movement concerned a quest for a special type of power associated with the Europeans of the church and colonial office. Westgarth remarked that his congregations had the feeling 'that the European has a knowledge which he does not communicate to his flock, or thinks it wise to withhold ... they thought the missionary knew of this power all the time, but had not communicated it to them' (Westgarth, 1946: 16-17). One man who gave testimony during the movement said 'Lord, we thought this new religion was white man's wisdom, but Thou has visited us thyself and we thank and praise Thee' (Westgarth, 1946: 45). One of the clearest statements that the movement concerned a desire for power and through power, wealth, was contained in an anonymous letter to the DO at Ikot Ekpene which purported to identify the reasons why the Spirit Movement became so popular:

1. They said that you and DO know about this spirit it is came from God, that is reason why you white people do not want to put your hands to stop them, because you fear God.
2. They said that God has been proved this Spirit to you white people before, and by it you found the mentioned things in the ground. 1. Cement 2. Silver 3. Gold 4. Metal Lead 5. White-wash 6. Iro[n] Materials 7. Kerosene 8. Medicines.⁴²

42. Abasiattai, 1989 p.506; Anon to DO Ikot Ekpene, c. January 1928, NAE: IKOTDIST 13/1/174.

In Ikot Ekpene during 1928 the Spirit ‘ringleaders’ professed to be able to produce holy water, manillas and salt from holes in the ground, and in later revivals spirit people dug holes 15-20 feet deep in the hope of finding holy-water or precious metals.⁴³ These excavations echo a common means by which powerful substances of unknown origin, such as *mbiam*, are discovered in Annang and Ibibio society by digging to find a pot buried in the ground.⁴⁴ Such pots are doubly empowered, both as the objects of ancestors, and because they are of the domain of the earth deity (*abasi ikpa ison*). It was also reported that spirit men at Ikot Uba station washed their bodies with ‘whitewash.’ This act might be read literally in terms of seeking access to the knowledge of the ‘whites’, but may also be regarded as an adaptation of the practice of smearing white *ndom* chalk over the body to ‘cool’ down the body in healing and to promote fertility in initiations. The letter-writer went on to say that since the government was resisting the spread of the Spirit Movement it was popularly assumed that they were also deliberately denying the knowledge of these substances to Africans. ‘If that be the case’, the author concluded, ‘they do not want to be under control by anyone again.’⁴⁵

In contrast, the longer history of the Spirit Movement and the church that was founded by its leaders, Oberi Okaime, captures an imperative of withdrawal from the colonial order, and the mundane in total. This trajectory is best illustrated in the story of one of the leaders of the Spirit Movement Akpan Akpan Udofia, the author of the Oberi Okaime script. In 1927, aged 15, Akpan Akpan Udofia had a series of dreams which led him to believe that he was intended to be a teacher for Seminant, the Spirit of God. Sitting at his desk in the Ididep Central School, he witnessed a band of ‘spirits’ enter his school yard. One of the women in the group convinced Udofia that she had been sent by God to tell him that he would never attend his school again. Others told him that if he obeyed the command of the Lord he would be blessed and become His ‘writer’. Udofia joined the new movement and despite the protests of his schoolmaster and his father he turned his back on the single most important avenue by which young men of his generation might succeed in life, missionary education. At subsequent meetings Udofia had visions which made him believe that by consuming water he would ‘receive knowledge washed from a great book written in different colored inks and thus receive the words of God’ (Hau, 1961: 298). As a result he

43. DO Ikot Ekpene to Resident, Calabar, 20 January 1928, NAE: IKOTDIST 13/1/174.

44. WUL: Jeffreys Papers File 259.

45. Anon to DO Ikot Ekpene, c. January 1928, NAE: IKOTDIST 13/1/174

was taken into seclusion at some distance from Ididep for a period of eight years during which he was completely isolated from his family and the outside world. Udofia and several other men were reported to have lived 'like monks' in prayer, and fasting of a few or sometimes more than sixteen days.

Within Ibibio and Annang customary practice, seclusion (*akpe*) marked a rejection of the mundane and a means of protecting the self from the effects of one's enemies. It formed a central element of initiation practices that also comprised physical transformations through fattening, tests of character in public ordeals, and the acquisition of new social roles. During his seclusion Udofia was instructed by Seminant or the Secret Teacher, and for twenty years from the time he left school until 1948, Udofia was forbidden by his Secret Teacher' to study the Efik Bible or any history book, or to read, write or speak English. When K. Hau asked Udofia in correspondence during the 1950s whether this teacher was a man or a spirit, he indicated that his experiences with his 'Secret Teacher' must have been those of a man in relation to God, since he remembers them as being similar to his dreams of learning a strange language when a boy (Hau, 1961: 298). During his seclusion, knowledge of the Oberi Okaime symbols, language and Holy Books appeared only to Udofia and the leader, Michael Ukpou (Hau, 1961). The resulting Oberi Okaime language, which was taught briefly at its school at Ikpa in 1936 is based on a 31 symbol orthography, has a vigesimal counting system and bears no relation to Ibibio or to the secret scripts associated with the initiation cults such as *nsibidi* (Dayrell, 1910, 1911; Kalu, 1978; MacGregor, 1909).

Neither axis of this argument, voice in terms of the search for European power, or exit as represented by the withdrawal into an isolated community and language, however, provides an entirely satisfactory interpretation. The thrust of this movement as a whole was a search for spiritual power framed within Christianity but which drew on familiar forms in the personal and practical imperatives of healing and security. The Spirit Movement may be regarded, therefore, as a popular struggle of Ibibio and Annang people to adapt their stock of theoretical concepts to the 'explanation, prediction and control' of the social changes wrought by colonialism in the late 1920s (Horton, 1971: 95). It was, in Fernandez's sense, an 'argument of signs'. The ambiguous symbolic content of the Spirit Movement, spirit possession, healing, and witch-finding, served to understand the discontinuities of colonial dislocation. As an ill-defined, often leaderless Christian revival the Spirit Movement captured the youth's groping search for the resources of power from the Holy Spirit, from the soil, and from across the Atlantic; and as a witch-finding movement its emergence was linked to

the new wealth and status of those who usurped the positions within the political and spiritual hierarchy, chiefs, whose authority was based, in part, on protecting the community against witchcraft. Perhaps the movement might therefore best be seen as a mode of reconciling the social and conceptual contradictions of the contemporary Ibibio world.

This argument, that the Spirit Movement combined voice or exit, and embraced the duality of resistance and incorporation, however, may not tell us the whole story. Here we return to de Certeau and his emphasis on marginality where these two opposing interpretations, he would argue, are linked. Where marginality is defined negatively, then it is this very negativity that injects a potentially transforming impulse into the system. The processes by which the marginalized enact and perform their marginality serves as a social critique: 'the existence, the exercise, of critique always implies some form of perspectival externality and some perception of social disadvantage. The power of critique arises from such disempowerment' (Terdiman, 2001: 415). It is precisely by presenting the potentiality of social disadvantage in the inter-relation, not opposition, of voice and exit that the marginalized are able to project an epistemological advantage onto disadvantage itself (De Certeau, 1986; De Certeau & Giard, 1997; Terdiman, 2001). The Spirit Movement subverted the scriptural economy of the mission and the colonial state with an unknowable, invisible, decentering marginality. Its objects were buried in the soil. Its texts were written in a new and unknown script. Its adherents spoke a language of tongues.

CONCLUSION

The Spirit Movement, like other revival movements in colonial Africa was concerned with the reconfiguration of a symbolic landscape based in part on memory and practice. Like Fernandez's description of Bwiti, adherents of the Spirit Movement attempted to grasp 'greater spiritual potentiality' than that offered within the colonial world (Fernandez, 1982: 568-569). In so doing they contested the logic of the socio-cultural system of which they were part and were judged as 'decidedly 'other' by members of the local establishment (Comaroff, 1985: 191). It is in this sense, therefore, that the Spirit Movement serves to unsettle and decentre dominant orders. Its resistance lies in its otherness. For Comaroff, Tshidi Zionism constituted a 'dissenting Christianity', a systematic and coherent counter-culture associated with those estranged from the centres of power and communication (Comaroff, 1985: 191). Fields' study of the Watchtower revival similarly identifies an African

religious movement which ‘repudiated *both* mission Christianity *and* traditional religion’ and hence struck at the very heart of colonial ideology (Fields, 1985: 274-277).

These comparative instances of Christian revival in colonial Africa, are prefigured to an extent in de Certeau’s reading of early modern European mysticism. One way of understanding Michel de Certeau’s work is as an indication of how to understand non-recuperable resistance. De Certeau theorized the disruption of a dominant logic in two different but connected modes – the counter-tradition of mysticism, and in everyday practices. In both instances the repetition of a past ordering (in narrative, memory and reading) exposes alternative, counter-logics (Colebrook, 2001: 564). Hence, when confronted with a dominant system intent on control, the citizen has recourse to stories, legends and memories to reproduce ‘irrecuperable and uncommodifiable remainders’ (Conley, 2001: 491). Mysticism, like the tactic, appeals to the subject’s past but is paradoxically turned in the direction of the immanence of the present (Conley, 2001: 489-490). It is precisely this immanence, however, that is problematic in the writing of historical anthropology. As this analysis of the Spirit Movement has attempted to illustrate, anthropological interpretation serves to identify and contextualize exactly those irrecuperable elements of religious memory and practice that de Certeau’s model of resilient and residual spirituality cannot interrogate. De Certeau’s insights on narrative, embodiment and resistance resonate in important, though now mainstream, ways with the study of African Christian revivalism. Yet despite its profound limitations his focus on the relationship between mysticism and marginality, religion and resistance, continues to be the most challenging.

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