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Spirit media : charismatics, traditionalists, and mediation practices in Ghana

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6

Publics and priests

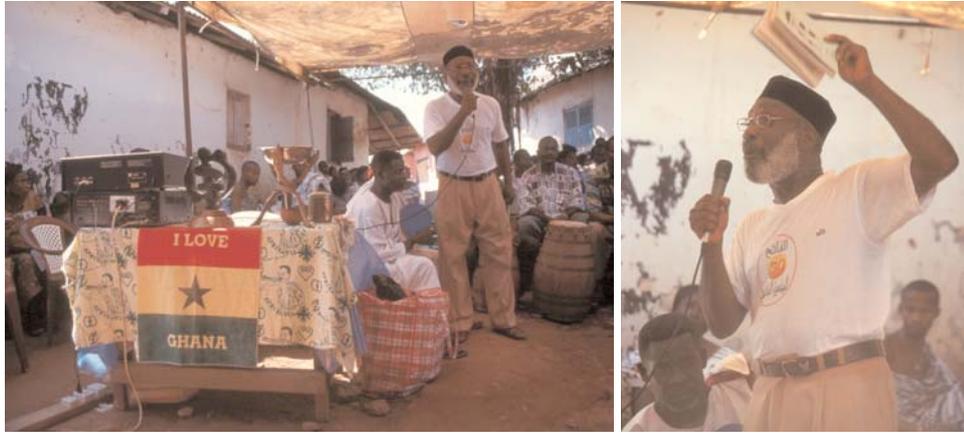
Dilemmas of mediation and representation

Introduction

Together with my friend Kofi I attend the wake-keeping for a deceased Afrikania member, a Ga priestess. The place Afrikania has been given is somewhat away from the house where everything takes place. Across the open space adjoining the house they have put up their table with the usual symbols: an Afrikania cloth, the *Gye Nyame* figure, a steel bowl on a wooden tripod, a Ghanaian flag, and a copy of the *Divine Acts* (fig. 6.1).¹ A bad quality loudspeaker system amplifies their preaching and drumming (figs. 6.2 - 6.4) to the whole area, but the open space is virtually empty. In front of the house, where the crowd is, a group of *akomfo* (priestesses) are dancing to the rhythm of their drummers (figs. 6.6, 6.7). Others are watching a Ghanaian movie played on a large TV put outside in front of the dead body's room. I leave Afrikania's side to join the activity. A dreadlocked drummer tells me that he and his fellows are fetish drummers. When I ask him why he calls the music fetish, he says it is fetish because the *akomfo* use it to dance.² It doesn't take long before one of them suddenly jumps up and starts dancing wildly and running around. She puts white powder on her face and the others remove her white head tie, her white top, her bra, and her earrings. After some time she is brought back to her chair to sit down, water is poured on her feet and her face is rubbed with water. She looks exhausted. Not much later another woman shows signs of getting possessed. Her eyes are rolled away and she starts shivering and talking aggressively. More women follow, all behaving differently when possessed. One goes round to slap everybody's hand forcefully. Another one dances wildly and summersaults over the ground. They dance either bare breasted or with a white cloth tied around their chest. Most have white powder sprinkled on their bodies and sooner or later all of them have water rubbed on their faces and sprinkled on their feet. Some of them are carried away. In the midst of this Kofi comes to pull me away to the Afrikania performance. Away from the boisterous chaos Afrikania people orderly drum their rhythms, dance their dances, sing their songs, shout their slogans, and preach their messages. The delegation leader Osofo Boakye preaches the usual Afrikania message and hardly addresses the life of the deceased.

Afrikania states that we all worship one and the same God. But we, we do it according to our tradition. Because every church in the whole world worships according to the tradition of the place where that church originated. But we Afrikians, someone will ask us 'which church is it that lets *akomfo* cele-

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Figs. 6.1 and 6.2 Afrikania priest preaching at a Ga priestess's funeral.

brate church service?' That is the question that people ask. We want everyone to understand that in the olden days there were no churches in the world, no chapels. Wherever the *okomfo* prays, that is our place of worship (*asòreyeso*). Amen Rah! The white man came and told us that we should build chapels. But we don't go inside a chapel; it is at *asòreyeso* that we call on God. Amen Rah! That is what we want to make clear. An *okomfo* does not hold a bible. If she holds a whisk and uses it to speak to God, God understands her.³

At midnight, the Afrikania delegation files past the body and performs some rituals (fig. 6.5). As soon as we enter the room where the priestess lays in state, one of the Afrikania women shows signs of getting possessed and she is quickly taken outside. While we stand around the exuberantly decorated body, Osofo Boakye swings an incense vessel with burning charcoal and a palm flower and a very young, still straight palm leaf over the body. Then he bends one young palm leaf into a circle, puts it on the body's chest, and places a straight one just below. Later he explains (as 'there is a meaning to everything we do') that the palm nut tree is a tree that no wind can make fall. The palm flower thus means strength and protects against evil spirits. The straight young leaf means that a human being looks straight up to God and the bended one that when a person dies she is forever united with God. Then he dips his thumb in a bowl of water and makes the *puduo* sign, the symbol of the infinity of God also used during services, on the body's forehead, but without touching the skin. Then we leave and walk back to our place. The possessed woman is half undressed. Her assistants remove her top and bra and tie her cloth around her breasts while she is hanging on the bench. When they finish, she starts crawling to the open space. There she starts rolling on the ground. Osofo Boakye later explains that she and the deceased are of the same divinity. So he was around and came to take possession of the woman. But, he adds, 'priests and priestesses can use tricks and pretend to be possessed, because they know the signs of being possessed by a particular divinity. That is a

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Figs. 6.3 and 6.4 Afrikania performance at a Ga priestess's funeral.

false prophet. The majority of them are quacks. All these priestesses you saw, they just pretend that they are possessed.'

What struck me most about this event was the strict separation between the performance by the deceased's fellow priestesses and the part played by the Afrikania Mission. I do not know the details behind the spatial arrangement of the wake-keeping.⁴ But the physical distance between Afrikania's preaching and the priestesses' possession dance illustrates the gap between two different registers of relating to the spiritual that I wish to foreground in this chapter. The previous chapter focused primarily on Afrikania's creation of a new, Christian-derived common form of Afrikan Traditional Religion for a public purpose. This chapter deals with the tension between Afrikania's intellectualist, symbolic approach to traditional religion inherent to its project of public 'representation' and the embodied, sensual character of traditional religious practices of 'presence.' Afrikania's preaching *about* the importance of *akomfo*, for example, seems to contradict its uneasiness with their central religious practice and experience, spirit possession. This tension also manifests itself in Afrikania's concern with the symbolic meaning of ritual objects and substances rather than with their spiritual power; or, in its privileging of deities as part of a cosmological pantheon that 'we believe in' over the location of such deities in human bodies and physical places, that is, its privileging of representation over presence.

The formats that Afrikania has used to represent all cults and shrines in the region or even the continent as ATR have been shaped by the markedly public character of the movement. From its very foundation, the notion of 'the public' has been crucial to Afrikania's activities and development. The recurring concern is to show the goodness of traditional religion and culture to 'the people,' 'the general public,' or 'the rest of mankind' and Afrikania has developed a strong public voice. Before turning to the relationship of this public voice to more private registers of engaging with the spiritual, several related questions need to be addressed. What kind of public does Afrikania envision and address? Whom do they want to attract? What kind of people is actually attracted by Afrikania? These questions are dealt with in the next section.

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Fig. 6.5 Osofo Boakye performing rituals on the priestess's dead body.

The section thereafter addresses the issue of how Afrikania convinces its public and its members that what it does is not merely an invented performance of tradition, a public show, but 'real' traditional religion. In other words, how does Afrikania authenticate its claims to traditional religion if, as we have seen in the previous chapter, this very category is produced by the interaction with Christianity? This question is important in the light of the recent creation of Afrikania's religion, pointed at by local critics, but also in the context of competing claims to offering access to spiritual power and concerns over the corrupt practices of 'false prophets.'

The relationship between Afrikania's public representation of ATR and traditional religious practices and practitioners, however, forms the core of the chapter. From the beginning the movement has been opposed by many shrine priests and priestesses for reasons that will be pointed out below. Their attitude towards Afrikania and vice versa has become considerably more positive and accommodating over the course of the movement's history. Yet, a number of tensions and matters of contention remain and these will be analysed in detail. In short, this chapter deals with the dilemmas Afrikania faces in mediating between the public that it addresses, the members that it attracts, and the priests and priestesses that it claims to represent.

Addressing and attracting 'the people'

The question of Afrikania's audience is a complicated one, because Afrikania tries to reach and attract very different people on very different grounds. In this section I discuss its abstract and unknown publics, its known, but differentiated and often volatile members, and the clients of its spiritual consultation service.

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Publics

In almost anything Afrikania does, there is an awareness of 'the public.' Often Afrikania directly and exclusively addresses this abstract, unknown public, as when the leaders speak in a radio or television programme, send letters to the editors of newspapers, or put a signboard by the roadside. Sometimes an event is directed both at a physically present audience and 'the general public,' such as when the press is present to cover the proceedings of a newsworthy Afrikania occasion or when the sounds of a Sunday service or the above described performance are amplified into the whole neighbourhood. And sometimes also 'the public' is addressed indirectly, for example when prospective Afrikania priests are taught how to go about representing their religion or shrine keepers are told to keep their shrines neater and more hygienic.

Although Afrikania thus constantly addresses 'the public' in general, its intended audience is very diffuse and differentiated. In fact it addresses many different publics at once, with different aims and different messages. First of all, 'the public' is implicitly envisioned as Christian, urban and alienated from traditional culture and religion. Hence Afrikania's concern with showing beauty, modernity, hygiene, orderliness in order to first change people's negative attitude towards ATR, and ultimately bring this alienated public back to their religious roots. The following 'sermon' quote from Ameve (11 August 2002) is typical for Afrikania preaching:

Our duty is to make you feel proud. Go to the Agbeke palace and seek salvation openly. Go to Pokuase and seek salvation openly. It is your heritage; that is what your ancestors left for you. That is what your ancestors have done and left. Don't feel shy. If you feel shy you are coward. Our own ancestral things are there. You are sick, you are in distress, you are in problems, you can't go and seek salvation because of fear. Why do you make yourself a slave in your own country? In your own home? If something is there that can give you relief, go and take it.

Such discourse is addressed not only to those attending the service, but perhaps even more to all people, who as a result of their Christian (or Muslim) faith have supposedly distanced themselves from their 'cultural religious heritage,' but may be brought back to it if shown its value. In line with Afrikania's concern with national development and national cultural strength, this alienated public is first of all national, but it ultimately includes all (alienated) Africans in the world, both in Africa and elsewhere. An important public 'elsewhere' are African-Americans and African-Caribbeans, whom history has separated from their 'true African roots,' but who are encouraged to return to these. But Afrikania's global public also includes non-Africans, whom Afrikania wishes to educate and to sensitise about ATR in order to change global public opinion and prejudice about ATR. Just as it wishes to improve national public opinion about ATR, it also seeks to teach 'the rest of mankind' that the religion of Africa is not 'fetish,' 'voodoo,' or 'black magic,' but a developed and positive world religion. This global non-African public is not called to return to a cultural heritage, but to respect African religion as equal to any other religion. Finally, Afrikania addresses traditional religious practitioners in Ghana. Afrikania encourages them to

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be proud of their religion, not to hide it out of shame, but to bring it out into the open and to be more assertive in the face of Christian hostility. But this aim may clash with the message that 'our religion is not fetish or voodoo,' as traditional religious practitioners often employ exactly those terms to talk about their gods (Rosenthal 1998:1). Afrikania also calls on them to join to movement and stand strongly united in an increasingly hostile religious climate. With such differentiated publics that are addressed with different, sometimes conflicting messages, it is not surprising that the membership Afrikania attracts is also very diffuse.

Members

Afrikania claims that all traditional religious practitioners are automatically Afrikania members, but this is of course highly contested. Although membership seems to be growing fast in the rural areas with the establishment of branches there, the question is what Afrikania membership entails. Certainly, Afrikania membership is not exclusive as membership of a Christian church usually is. Afrikania members from a traditional religious background continue to have their spiritual loyalty to a particular shrine and serve a particular god or gods. Afrikania membership is very loosely defined and much less elaborate than in the ICGC. In chapter 3 I have discussed the carefully supervised membership trajectory and disciplinary structures that mould ICGC members into 'good Christians.' By contrast, in Afrikania disciplining and supervision of members is (almost) absent. In fact, all it takes to become a member is 1,500 cedis (\$ 0.18) and a passport picture for a membership card and monthly membership dues of 1,000 cedis (\$ 0.12). 'So that when you have a problem, we use that money to help you.' The main page of the membership card (fig. 6.9) contains a passport picture, personalia (name, age, hometown, country, occupation, mother's name, father's name, and next of kin), and Ameve's signature. Then there is space to write down the monthly dues paid, funeral contributions and special donations (much like is done in Catholic churches). The last page states some constitutional rules, among others the rule that 'membership is open to all members of the black race.' Blackness is negotiable, however, as Ameve and his secretary Mama repeatedly pushed me to become an official member and in fact already counted me among the members.

Since Boogaard's study (1993) of the Afrikania Mission, the movement's membership has considerably changed. Although Boogaard distinguished different categories of members, she pointed out that the majority of the membership of the Accra branch was formed by ex-Christian, middle-aged men, whose interest in traditional religion was first of all intellectual and political. Conspicuously absent from Afrikania's Sunday service at the Arts Centre were women and young people, exactly the group that is well represented in charismatic-Pentecostal churches. Also, there was not a single shrine priest or priestess among the Accra members.⁵ When I came to Afrikania ten years later, I noticed that there were many women and children among the people attending service at either the Sakaman branch or the Arts Centre branch, the gender balance being more or less equal. I also saw many young people. As Gideon, one of Afrikania's younger members, commented on the difference between the past and the present, 'in the past it were only older people who were just doing

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Fig. 6.6 Ga priestesses dancing at the funeral.

their thing at the Arts Centre. Now it is also young people, who have become aware that they have to preserve their tradition.' Finally, I observed that quite some shrine priests and priestesses and traditional healers attended these services, were officially registered members, and were given specialised tasks to perform.⁶ Several of them will be introduced and listened to below. Here, let me present two young

members of the Sakaman branch. It must be kept in mind, however, that they are not representative for the membership, exactly because this is so diffuse.

I met Kofi at Telstar, the Internet café on Dansoman High Street, where I often went to check my email and where he works as an attendant. It was not until I came to photocopy some Afrikania material that we discovered our shared interest. When we went to the above described wake-keeping of an Afrikania member together, we talked at length about his life, his interest in traditional religion and related issues. Kofi grew up with traditional religion, although neither of his parents are traditionalist. As a kid he stayed with his aunt in a village near Kumasi for four years. She is an *okomfo* and he helped her preparing the herbs. That way he got to know a lot about herbal healing. His interest in Afrikania started in secondary school, when he did a research on Afrikania. He attended all Afrikania meetings and after secondary school he stayed. His mother didn't like it at all, but she had to go back to the US, where she stays with two of her children, so she couldn't say anything. His father stays in Kumasi and doesn't mind. He doesn't go to any church himself and says you should do whatever you like. Kofi stays in Dansoman with his elder brother; they rent a two room apartment. His brother is a Pentecostal, 'always wearing suit and tie and playing Ron Kenoly tapes.' He doesn't like at all that Kofi is a traditionalist. So when Kofi plays his traditional music, his brother puts it off. Kofi also has to put his things like *batakari* and cowries in his trunk. If he leaves his cowries on the table, his brother will take them away and he will not find them again. But apart from the religious difference, they can get along quite well. Still, Kofi is happy that his brother will be leaving for the US soon. Then he has peace of mind and the freedom to do whatever he wants to do with Afrikania.

Kofi stresses the importance, if you want to get somewhere in life, of taking pride in your own thing. So he has decided to search for what his ancestors had.

There are so many good and powerful things in it. The majority of the people

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nowadays do not want to see that. For everything they look to America. Why is something better just because it comes from America or Europe? If you want to become somebody, it is not necessary to go to the US, like everybody thinks.

Therefore he does not want to join his mother in the US. He thinks that you need a purpose in life, and you can have and develop that here in Ghana just as well as any-



Fig. 6.7 Ga priestesses dancing at the funeral.

where, even better. Kofi has never been without work for more than one week, even though as an Afrikania member it is hard to find a good job. People do not like Afrikania; his boss neither. So Kofi doesn't tell him much about it. He didn't tell him that we went to an Afrikania wake keeping, for example, but said that we went to church.⁷ He works 14 hours a day, six days a week. On Sundays he is free, attends Afrikania service, but not every Sunday, washes his clothes, and relaxes. He works hard, but unfortunately the job doesn't pay well. He says it would be very easy to stop Afrikania and get a better job, 'but dignity is more important than money.'

With 19 years Kofi is one of the youngest people in Afrikania (apart from the members' children). He likes to take advice from the older people, such as Osofo Boakye or Osofo Anim. He plans to follow the Afrikania Priesthood course next year. For the practicals that are part of it, he might go and stay with his auntie again,

to learn from her. After that he might establish his own shrine. He doesn't know where yet, whether in the city or in the rural areas. It will be easier in the rural areas, he says, because there it will be easy to find drummers and other helpers you will need. In the city that is difficult. At the moment, however, he hardly ever visits the rural areas.

Another young Afrikania member is Raymond, a student of sociology and philosophy at Legon. He also told me the story of how he came to join Afrikania.

I used to be a Catholic, but I stopped because of many things in my life. My mother has not been herself since ten years. At that time, she had applied for a job as accountant at the University of Ghana and a co-applicant took her to juju. Since then she has not been herself. She didn't get the job. I tried to help her, but she would not co-operate, saying that 'these things are fetish.' She is also a Catholic. Myself I had a severe stomach ache just before my exams. I was taken to Korle-Bu and underwent a major operation. I nearly died. I was told here that had it not been for the ancestors, I would have died, so I should thank them. So I should perform some rituals here to thank them. I was also told that

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the spirits of the air are pursuing me and that another accident will happen in the future. So I have to do rituals to prevent that. My auntie once called the spirit of my grandmother, and she heard the voice of the ancestors say that she is not at home, she went to the market. They also said 'we are here at our peaceful place.' Then I started doubting the Christian doctrine of heaven and hell. Because how can they, non-Christians, be at a peaceful place? [...] I heard Ameve speak on TV during the clash between Christians and traditionalists over the ban on drumming. Then I heard him say something on one of the FM stations that I liked very much. Anytime I went to Winneba, I passed this place and saw the name painted on the building. Then I decided to come to this place.

While Kofi was attracted to Afrikania by a combination of a personal affinity with traditional healing nurtured by his priestess aunt and an intellectual interest nurtured in school, for Raymond it were first of all several spiritual experiences, or to be more precise, afflictions experienced to be spiritual in nature, combined with an interest in Ameve's public rhetoric that pushed him to come.

Surely, the members who came to Afrikania through the intellectual, political angle are also still there and they form the pivot on which Afrikania turns. They take up the leadership positions and influence the direction of the mission. These are people like Osofo Boakye, one of Afrikania's senior priests, and Osofo Aba Baffour, the only woman in the Afrikania council of priests; or younger people like Kofi Agorsor, an young artist and musician, and Godwin Azameti of the Blakhud Research Centre in Klikor (Volta Region). Despite great differences in background, their interest in Afrikania came from a combination of a political awareness of Africanness and a personal search for an African religious identity. They share the militant approach to ATR started by Damuah and continued by Ameve. Instead of introducing one of them in greater detail, let me introduce Enimil Ashon, who also joined Afrikania as part of a personal and political search for African identity, but left six years later. He is now a member of the International Central Gospel Church, where we met him in chapter 3.

I was a Roman Catholic, I was born into it. I was a mass server, altar boy, I was a chorister, everything that a Catholic should do. Before I went to school I thought that the only religion was the Catholic religion. Then in sixth form I started reading about other religions and I got to know about Confucianism, Buddhism, all these thing, and then West African religion. But this was academic [part of the school curriculum], we used it to pass the exam to get to the university. This was in 1972. Then I went through life, I went to the School of Journalism, where I got to know about all these philosophers and the things they were pondering. Some of them were saying that religion is the opium of the people and I began to search my mind. Then I started work as a newspaper man and I started writing on the arts, talking to poets, to dramatists, people who are questioning the status quo all the time. People like Kwah Ansah. Then came the revolution in 1981 and then emerged Osofo Okomfo Damuah, who incidentally I had also met as a Catholic, in the Catholic Youth Organization. So

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Fig. 6.8 Ga priestess.

for me Damuah was somebody special. So then emerged Damuah from the revolution talking about traditional African religion. It was then that I got to know the type of things he was writing, the radio programmes and stuff like that. I got very interested, so I drew closer to him. They were meeting at the Arts Centre and I was going there. That was my turning point, it was Damuah who came to focus me. Talking to Kwah Ansah and all these poets, like Atukwei Okai, for a long time I had already become an advocate for the African way of doing things. So when Damuah came with the African religion, I thought this was it and I left Catholicism. That is how I came into Afrikania.⁸

Six years later, however, in 1988, while pursuing his MA in communication studies at the University of Ghana, Enimil left Afrikania. I asked him why.

When I was there, some of the Christians, mostly Pentecostals, would come to my room to convert me. But I asked them questions, just basic fundamental questions about Africa and by the time they left me, they had doubt about their Christianity. Then one day I got very very ill. I was in hospital for three weeks. There was a Catholic priest whom my sister had gone for to come and pray for me, but I didn't want Jesus, so the priest could not pray for me. At that time I was violently anti-Christian. And somehow I lost consciousness. I was in coma. When I regained consciousness, according to my relatives, the first thing I requested was prayer. [...] I got out of hospital and met a friend of mine whom I respected very much. I was afraid to die so I was very susceptible to influ-

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ences. My friend came and prayed in my room. The prayer he prayed was so powerful. When he finished he invited me to a breakfast meeting of the Full Gospel Businessmen Fellowship International, whom I had attacked in my earlier articles, when I was not a Christian. So I came. It was a meeting of intense prayer and worship. They shared testimony of what God has done in their lives and when they finished they made an altar call and I thought I had heard enough to want a relationship with Jesus. So I responded. I am a man of extreme positions. So when I converted into Christianity, I just switched all the way. I was on sick leave for six months so I just took the Bible and read it and read it and read it. And I was convinced that it was the book of life, that it had the solution.

Enimil's story not only points to what may attract searching people like himself to Afrikania, but also to the limits of Afrikania's intellectualist representation of ATR. During his severe health crisis he did not turn to Afrikania, but rather to Pentecostal prayer, and converted as a result. These limits will be explored in greater detail below.

Clients

A last group of people attracted by Afrikania, although in a very different way, are the people who come for the spiritual consultation and healing Afrikania offers since recently (fig. 6.11). I call them 'clients,' even though Osofo Fiakpo, one of the 'spiritual consultants,' stresses that Afrikania does not actively advertise the service.

Ameve is not telling people on TV to come to Afrikania, that we can solve their problems for them. That is what these Christian pastors do, they advertise themselves on TV that you should come to their church and your problems will be solved. He doesn't do that, he is not forcing people to come. He just shares his ideas with the interviewer on TV or on the radio, that is all. And that may attract people.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, almost all of these are Christians. Afrikania members, when coming from a traditional religious background, usually have a shrine in their hometown where they go to seek spiritual solutions, or, when not from a traditional background, may not be interested in spiritual consultation at all. Spending several afternoons waiting in the hall for my turn to see Torgbe Kortor and Osofo Fiakpo, I met many clients, among them Helen and her mother. Helen is a Catholic, her mother, 'a best friend of Osofo Ameve,' goes to the Church of Pentecost. They came to Afrikania secretly, Helen told me.

In the Catholic Church they don't like it when you go to places like this, and in the Church of Pentecost especially they are very negative about it. So we don't tell anybody in our churches. I also don't tell any of my friends. In Africa here, when you come to places like this, you do it secretly. When you say you have gone to a shrine to seek this and that, they will say you are not a Christian and

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advertise your name. Only if you would meet somebody here, then you would know of each other, but then you have both seen each other at this place and will not talk to anybody about it.

Helen had never been to any shrine before, this was her first time. She told me about her travels through the desert to Libya, about the robbers on the way and how she hid her dollars sealed in a condom in her anus. Her plan was to go to Italy through Tunis, by boat, but once in Tunis it turned out to be difficult to find a boat and her money

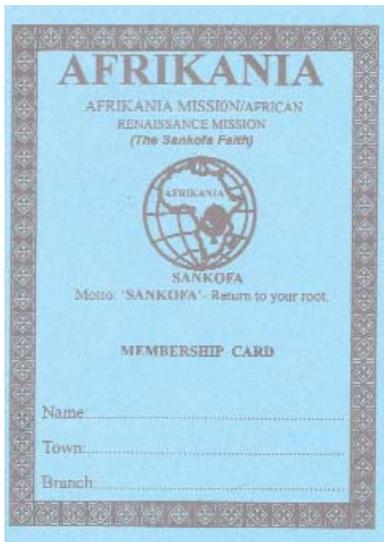


Fig. 6.9 Afrikania Mission membership card

started running out. She decided to come back. Later she tried again and crossed the desert with a group of Malians to Morocco, where they posed as Sierra Leonean refugees, hiding their passports under the inner sole of their boots. But they were exposed and sent back. Now she wanted to go to Korea. She had the visa already, but the ticket money was the problem. That was the reason why her mother brought her here to seek spiritual consultation. But there was more. She was a trader, but her business had collapsed. She had a son of seven years, but she couldn't marry the father, because his family did not agree. Her son lived with the father, she didn't even know where. She dreamt about finding a white husband, 'or if he is black, then a good one. White men are caring and good in making love.' She always prayed to God that he will give her a good husband. 'Every woman wants a good husband.'

Another time I met Ami, an Ewe woman in her forties from Keta, living in East Legon. She is well educated and speaks very good English. Like Helen, she came here for the first time. She heard of Afrikania through television, 'Ameve always comes on television to explain things,' and she also saw the signboard by the roadside. She is a Presbyterian and goes to Presby service on Sundays. She also goes to other shrines sometimes, 'for the sake of adventure.' 'Presby pastors say it is not good to go to shrines, but they know that many people are going.' Like many Christians, she believes in traditional religion to solve spiritual problems.

The people here are more Christian than the Christian pastors themselves. They don't sleep with somebody else's wife, because they fear the gods. But the Christian pastors do that. Only modern pastors come to shrines, old pastors do not. Modern pastors want money. And to show the people that they are powerful, so that more people will come to their church. That is why they come for consultation here.

Indeed, once while I was talking to Ameve, a Christian pastor came in. He had started a church not so long ago, but it was not going well, so he came to ask Ameve for advice. Ameve told him that he should come back for spiritual consultation and so he

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did. Osofo Fiakpo also stressed that 'pastors come here too, because they want to get more people in their church, to get quick money, and we can do the rituals for them and they will get results.' When I asked him why they are helping Christian pastors to make their churches grow, while these same pastors denounce traditional religion in public, he answered:

Hmmm, well, if we do not help them, the gods will say we should help them, because he has a problem, so we should help him, like we should help anybody who comes to solve his problem. So if we do not do it, the gods will not like it.

But he also stressed the financial aspect of spiritually supporting pastor clients.

It is they who bring us money. When you say to a pastor, we can do this ritual for you when you bring us four million, he will agree to it and pay. But with the Afrikania members, they cannot pay. When you ask them to bring one million for rituals, they will come with stories that they cannot pay. So it is the Christians and especially the pastors who are our regular customers rather than the Afrikania members. So the Christians are rather supporting us.

Unlike the members, these 'regular customers' do not share Afrikania's goal of publicly promoting ATR or its militant public discourse against Christianity. On the contrary, many of them will, in other contexts, participate in the widespread denunciation of traditional religion and its practitioners. Instead, what draws them to Afrikania, in secret, is a conviction that life's problems have spiritual causes and demand spiritual solutions that Christianity cannot offer, a strong awareness of the power of African spirits. They could go to any other shrine or spiritual healer, and many Christians indeed do so, but for many others the 'civilized' outlook of Afrikania lowers the mental barrier just enough to make the step.

Practices of authentication

During the Sunday service of 21 July 2002, Osofo Oson preached as follows:

Our lesson this morning from the reading from our Holy Scripture is about asking ourselves if it is good for the government or the state and its information machinery to support people who preach falsehood to our people. This is what we inherited from the colonialists and it is up to us to do something about it. So that our real traditions surpass what they are doing today. This is the main reason why Afrikania has come to preach about all these things so that the falsehood will be known to us. We have to differentiate truth from falsehood.

Time and again Afrikania points out the falsehood of Christianity to its public and stresses the need for honouring 'our real traditions' or 'the real religion of Afrika' and

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proclaiming 'the truth.' This claim to authenticity is obviously problematic and raises the question of authentication. In the previous chapter I have shown that in order to be respected and acknowledged as a 'true religion,' Afrikania draws heavily upon Christian-derived formats. At the same time it has to convince its public that what it has to offer is still 'truly African.' This section discusses Afrikania's practices of authentication vis-à-vis its diffuse public.

The question of 'authentication' emerges out of a critical approach of the notion of authenticity in anthropology that examines how the authentic is socially constructed. This question has been most fruitfully explored in relation to tourism and commodities (e.g. Cohen 1988; MacCannel 1989; Steiner 1995). The deconstructivist approach to authenticity has been criticized for failing to explain how constructions of authenticity nevertheless manage to convince people that they are 'real' (Van de Port 2004; see also Bruner 1994; Chidester 2005a; Lindholm 2002). A focus on 'authentication' as a practice implies, first, understanding authenticity as a resource and identifying those who make claims for authenticity and the interests that such claims serve. Second, it implies identifying the means these claimants employ to make their claims convincing and the circumstances under which they are successful or not. The problem is not so much to reveal how what is presented as authentic is actually constructed (and thus fake), but to explain, given that all of social life is in a way made up, why and by whom some constructions are perceived as 'authentic' or 'real' and others as 'fake.' This is again the problem of mediation cast in different terms.

To analyse Afrikania's practices of authentication, it is useful to distinguish between two different, but related understandings of authenticity implied in Afrikania's public representations. The first is 'cultural purity' and has to do with 'the African quest for authentic religious identity' that inspired indigenous religious movements across the continent, including the Afrikania Mission. The antonym of authentic in this cultural sense would be 'foreign' and it refers to a communal identity, an 'Us' in relation to others. The second understanding is what I would call 'spiritual sincerity' and this has to do with the 'genuineness' of religious behaviour, the question of whether people really believe and experience what they say they do, that is, whether one is a 'true believer.' Or whether religious specialists' claims to spiritual power are legitimate, that is, whether someone is a 'true man of God' or a 'false prophet.' These matters are much debated in Pentecostal circles, but draw on pre-Christian forms of religious power and are of increasing concern for Afrikania also. The antonym of authentic in this sense would be 'fake' and it refers to the relation between inner person and outward appearance. These two understandings of authenticity, however, are intimately related. For Afrikania, there can be no spiritual sincerity without cultural purity. One can only be 'true to oneself' if one is true to one's cultural heritage. African authenticity thus has a spiritual dimension. From this perspective, African Christians cannot be but spiritually fake, because Christianity is 'inherently foreign to the Afrikan.' Both notions of authenticity carry political value and are produced in relations of power. Claims to authenticity, both cultural purity and religious sincerity, are central to the public struggle over religion and culture as resources for strategic interaction and contest, to manipulate and justify authority. But because authenticity is so often contested, the challenge is to convince one's intended public of the validity of

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one's claims to authenticity. This is especially challenging for Afrikania, both because what it does seems so newly invented and Christian-like, and because its audience is so diffuse.

As already hinted at in the previous chapter, Afrikania's techniques of cultural authentication involve creating distance. In the first place, this is temporal distance. Despite the movement being merely twenty years old, it makes claim to ancient traditions from 'times immemorial,' 'before the white man came,' before the advent of Christianity, before even 'our ancestors migrated from Egypt to West-Africa.' But it also draws on spatial distance, in claiming that Afrikania religion derives from the rural areas where what is called 'the real thing' still exists. From the Accra perspective, what is far away in the village and partly hidden, is experienced as being 'more authentic,' in the double sense of being culturally purer and more powerful, than what is just around the corner and easily accessible. These far-away, rural places are in Afrikania's events in Accra represented by visiting priests and chiefs from villages in the Volta Region, adorned in their traditional paraphernalia (fig. 5.14). The public's experience of distance and inaccessibility is strengthened by the performance of secrecy. The ordination of priests described in chapter 5, for example, was a public spectacle. Part of the event, however, was not to be witnessed by the audience and the media public: the 'initiation rituals,' which took place in seclusion behind the building. More than the concealment of a powerful ritual – I was told that hardly anything had happened – it was the suggestion of it, an assertion of spiritual authority. Lastly, Afrikania tries to create a mental distance of unfamiliarity for the public by using mystical substances vaguely referring to 'traditional spiritual power.' The grass necklaces around the initiates' necks, the leaves in their mouths, the herbal water sprinkled on their bodies, the 'stone' they were given to eat, and the medicine rubbed into their hair, all had to invoke a vague idea (in the minds of the public) of 'traditional spiritual power' and thus confirm Afrikania's authority.

Afrikania thus creates an aura of authenticity for its reproduction of ATR by presenting itself as Christianity's Other. This otherness is created by invoking on the part of the urban, Christian public an experience of distance in time, space, and symbolism. This is similar to processes of creating otherness and authenticity in anthropological writing (Fabian 1983). Or in contemporary African art trade, where the longer the journey, the deeper into the foreign territory, the greater the illusion of discovery and the belief in the object's authenticity by the buyer (Steiner 1995). In this respect it is also similar to popular depictions of traditional religion, where shrines and priests are usually located in the bush, far away from the city (Meyer 2005a). Yet, Afrikania carefully presents another Other than the negative, Pentecostal-derived stereotype that dominates the popular media. Its message is that, contrary to what 'these liars' make you believe, in reality ATR is just as clean, beautiful, well-organised, and civilised as Christianity, but whereas Christianity is foreign, this is really Afrikan and powerful.

Afrikania thus not only claims cultural purity vis-à-vis Christianity, but also spiritual sincerity and power. It tries to disrupt people's belief in especially Pentecostal spirituality and expose its agents as impostors, saying that the spiritual power of Pentecostal pastors derives from traditional shrines. These pastors, Afrikania claims,

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Fig. 6.10 'Binding charm' and 'mouth power'.

consult shrine priests and perform rituals to gain power. When these rituals work and the pastors succeed, they attribute this success to the power of the Holy Spirit. But this claim is fake, just as their speaking in tongues, their 'possession,' is just a performance for their followers to make them believe, and give their money away. Afrikania thus denies Pentecostal spirituality to be real; the real and only source of spiritual power is ATR. At the same time, however, Afrikania leaders such as Osofo Boakye say that many shrine practitioners are 'quacks,' which is one

of the reasons for the ambivalent attitude towards them addressed below.

This struggle for power also has its economic side, as the religious field has become a marketplace where people no longer automatically inherit their religious affiliation by birth, but shop around for spiritual solutions and where religious organisations or specialists compete for followers and thus income. In this competition, claims to spiritual power have become crucial to attracting people. Afrikania too has realised that what people are looking for is not only cultural identity, but also access to spiritual power and has joined charismatic-Pentecostal pastors and prophets in the game of convincing the public that they provide access to the real sources of spiritual power. The use of symbols, substances, and attributes that vaguely hint at 'traditional spiritual power' to this end may be convincing for the larger public because of the widespread belief in the power of spirits and deities and limited familiarity with their human mediums. Here it is important to stress that even if, as I argue, Afrikania's representations are first of all symbolic and far removed from shrines' modes of dealing with spiritual power, they may be perceived very differently by the public and resonate with very real beliefs, experiences, and fears people have concerning spirits and powers. Although I have not examined the reception of Afrikania's images and rhetoric by the predominantly Christian public, one indication of such resonance is the fact that Afrikania's 'spiritual consultation' is well patronised by people belonging to various Christian churches. Afrikania's challenge in claiming spiritual power, however, is not to play into the hands of those who want to portray African traditional religion as indeed powerful, but evil. After all, its techniques of authentication are quite similar to that of the latter.

Yet, if Afrikania's practices of authentication might work out for the media public, they do not convince the shrine priests and priestesses that Afrikania tries to mobilise. Many of them contest the mission's claim to represent all traditional religion and some even see it as Christianity in disguise. Most of them do not share Afrikania's political discourse of African emancipation and its concern with cultural identity. Their concern is to deal with spiritual powers, but the clean and orderly form that Afrikania has adopted to reframe existing religious practices hardly leaves

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room for that. To them, Afrikania's claim to spiritual authority has no basis, as it lacks the long processes of initiation into secret knowledge that justify their power claims.

Shrine priests in Afrikania

Changing attitudes towards shrine priests

The issue of whether or not and how to involve shrine priests and priestesses has been a longstanding debate within Afrikania. During Damuah's time the Afrikania branch in Accra had no traditional priest among its membership (Boogaard 1993:245). Damuah did have contacts with traditional priests and organisations such the Traditional and Psychic Healers Association (founded in 1966 under Nkrumah), but they did neither play an active role in nor attended the Sunday services or other activities. Only the rural branches had some traditional priests among the members (ibid.:68), but these branches operated quite distinctly from what Damuah and his followers did in Accra. As Boogaard noted during her fieldwork, despite Afrikania's public discourse of 'being proud of our chiefs, traditional priests and priestesses' and 'preserving our spiritual traditions,' there was in practice very little interest in what these traditional priests and priestesses had to offer among the Afrikania leadership and urban membership. There was even a certain fear of them, especially of their tendency to get possessed by spirits during meetings (ibid.:246).

One of the major reasons for the general disdain towards traditional priests was that 'they don't know anything.' The Afrikania leaders and many of the members were all well educated and thus saw themselves as superior to traditional priests, many of whom were not. Intellectual, written knowledge as taught in the modern school system was valued much more than the practical, spiritual knowledge that was orally and experientially transmitted in shrines. This practical knowledge was even dismissed by Damuah (ibid.:249). Paradoxically, then, Afrikania blamed, and still blames, the 'foreign' European educational system in Ghana for teaching Ghanaians foreign values and alienating them from their own cultural traditions, but at the same time valued the kind of knowledge this system transmitted as far more authoritative and relevant than the knowledge transmitted by these very 'cultural traditions.'

Another reason for the reluctance to involve traditional priests were aesthetic values. The appearance (dress, amulets, beads, body paint) and behaviour (especially spirit possession) of traditional priests and priestesses was generally not considered 'modern' and 'civilised' by Afrikans and thus countered Afrikania's claim that traditional religion was equal to other 'civilised' world religions. As long as priests would not adapt their appearance, behaviour, and practices to 'modern standards,' they would not be welcome to Afrikania's activities, many Afrikans reasoned. Afrikania saw it as its task to help them 'develop' and 'civilise' themselves through information and education. Boogaard sums up Afrikania's attitude towards traditional priests at the time aptly when she states that 'the priests are not a source of knowledge, but an object of modernisation' (ibid.:254, translation MdW). Clear is that what informed this ambivalent relationship with traditional priests and priestesses was

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Afrikania's primary aim of representing ATR to 'the public' that clashed with the ways of traditional religious practice.

Thirdly, Afrikania leaders' caution vis-à-vis shrine practitioners was informed by their doubts about the sincerity of the latter's claims to spiritual power (ibid.:257). Aware of the strong competition between shrines and the money involved, they suspected many of them to be impostors and found it hard to distinguish between genuine spiritual specialists and quacks. As Osofo Boakye also pointed out to me when we witnessed the priestesses' possession dance at the above described wake-keeping, this distinction is hard to make because 'they know the signs of being possessed.' In other words, just like the charisma of Pentecostal pastors such as Otabil, the convictive power of shrine priests hinges on specific formats and styles of dance, speech, dress, and other behaviour. Afrikania leaders mistrusted such learned performance. While acknowledging that there surely are genuine priests and priestesses, they lacked the means to verify this and preferred keeping distance to all of them to being 'fooled' by those who just 'know the tricks.'

The relationship towards shrine priests was one of the major points of disagreement between Damuah and Ameve. Despite his explicit efforts at establishing contacts with traditional priests, Damuah was reluctant to involve them in Afrikania at that point in time. He did hope, however, to establish a productive relationship with them when time would be ripe. This would be a gradual process. His deputy Ameve, on the other hand, did not see the necessity of involving them at all. He argued that such an emphasis on the shrine priest is a result of a taken-for-granted and invalid parallel drawn between traditional religion and Christianity, an institutionalised religion organised around the mediating role of the pastor or priest in the church building (ibid.:260).⁹ By disputing the importance of 'religious specialists' in African traditional religion, he thus distanced himself from priests and their shrines and felt that Afrikania had to concentrate on traditional religion outside of these institutions, because 'traditional religion belongs to nobody' (ibid.:264), yet is present in every aspect of life. Therefore he did not see it as Afrikania's task to reform existing traditional religious practice, but instead argued for intensive, scientific study of the religious-philosophical knowledge system behind this practice without necessarily involving the practitioners themselves. Although a decade later Ameve still placed much emphasis on the study of ATR as a religious-philosophical system, for example in the Afrikania Priesthood Training School, he seemed to have radically changed his attitude towards shrines and priests. During his time in leadership, he made the mobilisation of shrine priests and priestesses a core concern and succeeded in involving them in many aspects of the movement. The conflicting sets of values concerning knowledge and aesthetics that Boogaard described, however, still cause tensions and will be discussed in greater detail below.

Mobilising shrine priests

As part of its 'evangelisation' efforts, Afrikania has during Ameve's time tried to mobilise traditionalists all over the country, take over existing traditional shrines or

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establish links with them. As Ameve told the general public in front of the camera during a worship service in Accra for TV3 in April 2003:

The shrines are now being mobilised to meet every Sunday to organise their members, to teach them, to guide them, to present God to them in a way that the modern world can now accept.

It is striking to note how much this echoes Damuah's approach of shrine priests as an object of modernisation, rather than a source of knowledge. Nevertheless, Ameve has been relatively successful in mobilising them for Afrikania. As mentioned above, there are many more traditional, or, in Afrikania's terminology 'divine,' priests and priestesses among the Accra membership than in the past, they are officially recognised in the organisational structure in the 'council of divine priests,' and they are involved in all kinds of Afrikania events and practices. As Ameve made use of his personal network and ethnic background in contacting shrine priests, most of them are Ewe originating from the Volta Region, who are now living in Accra. Some are attracted by Afrikania's ideology, others by the Sunday worship service. Many of them are attracted by Afrikania's strong voice for the defence of ATR in the public sphere and have joined Afrikania to stay strongly united in the face of increased Christian hostility and even physical attacks on shrines.

Okomfo Abena is a practicing Ga priestess in downtown Accra and an Afrikania member. She comes to Sunday worship at the Arts Centre branch almost every week and is a regular participant of other Afrikania activities. I visited and interviewed her in her house in Jamestown. She told me that when she was thirteen years old, *akom* (spiritual possession) took her. Since her whole family was Christian, they took her to various churches and pastors, but nothing could heal her. When they finally realised that it was *akom* that had taken her, they sent her to a Tano Shrine outside Accra to be trained as a priestess. After three years of training she came back to Accra and has been practising as a priestess for 34 years now. She receives clients in her house for spiritual consultation and makes use of rituals, herbs, and possession to solve their problems, ranging from marriage and fertility to business and travel. Eight years ago she joined Afrikania. I asked her why.

Everybody in my family and in this house is Christian. Every Sunday they say they are going to church. I am sitting here all by myself. One day an Afrikania priest gave me an invitation, saying that this church does tradition. I said well, if that is the case, I will go. So I went to meet them on a Sunday and I saw that there is wisdom in the things they are saying and doing. When you worship God like that, you see how he really is. That is why I came to Afrikania. And it is true, ever since I joined Afrikania, nothing has happened to me. My everything goes well. Afrikania really helps me.¹⁰

This underscores the point made in the previous chapter that being religious in Ghana has come to be equivalent to going to church and that in order to be recognised as belonging to a 'religion' many traditionalists also want a 'church.' While for Okomfo

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Abena the first drive to visit Afrikania was thus a wish to also belong to a church to go to on Sundays, it was the content of the preaching and the worship that motivated her to stay. When I asked her how exactly Afrikania helps her, she stressed the cooperation among Afrikania members versus the competition between individual shrine priests and their spirits.

Our spirits are very many and sometimes some can challenge others. With Afrikania, they come there different different different. Sometimes you have a work that the spirit cannot do. Then there will be another spirit that can help to do the work. That is why I like Afrikania. And also, when you are with Afrikania, witchcraft cannot destroy you. When you are with Afrikania, evil spirits cannot harm you. You get protection. That is why I like Afrikania and I will never leave. Even when I die, my spirit will join Afrikania.

Apart from the cooperation that Afrikania offers, Okomfo Abena thus also feels she gains spiritual protection from belonging to Afrikania. The only thing she does not like is that some of the priests 'are not disciplined.' She says that when you are called by God, you have to leave sin behind and do good, but some priests can get angry quickly, especially when you are critical about something. Apart from such minor irritations, she really likes Afrikania as a whole.

Another reason for shrine priests and priestesses to join Afrikania is the institutional protection the organisation offers. Osofo Fiakpo explained:

Many of the traditional priests are illiterate. And they are attacked by Christians, especially during their annual festivals. Then they are not able to defend themselves properly. Afrikania can write on your behalf. They can publicise your case in the media. They can take the offenders to court. Because Afrikania are many people organised, when you belong to Afrikania the Christians are afraid to attack you. If you are a member of Afrikania you stand stronger, you are better protected, and Afrikania can help you to get justice.

During Sunday worship service the Afrikania leaders call upon people like Okomfo Abena and her fellow priest(esse)s Okomfo Pobee, Nii Nabe, Hunua Akakpo, and Torgbe Kortor to perform specific spiritual tasks. While an Afrikania priest officiates the service, the present divine priests perform libation, bless, distribute, and sprinkle ancestral food, and bless money offerings. Although divine priest(esse)s thus perform rituals of spiritual communication selected or designed by Afrikania, the form of spiritual communication most common in shrines, that is possession, is not allowed during service, as I will discuss below.

Torgbe Kortor is an eighty-year-old *bokor*, who was spiritually called into priesthood at an early age. He has a shrine in his house in Accra, where he practices *afa* divination and healing. He joined Afrikania some years back and was appointed by Ameve to give 'spiritual consultation' when the new building was finished. Osofo Fiakpo, an Afrikania priest, assists him. I visited them regularly in their consultation room (fig. 6.11), where they told me about *afa* and showed me how they would con-

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Fig. 6.11 Spiritual consultation given by Osofo Fiakpoi (right) and Torgbe Kortor.

sult the gods. *Afa* divination does not rely on spirit mediumship, but on a system of signs that are interpreted by the diviner. While waiting in the hall, I often heard the rhythmical tapping on the wooden *afa* board, invoking the presence of the gods. Inside the room, Torgbe Kortor and Osofo Fiakpoi showed me how to cast the *agumaga*, a double divination string with four large seed pods each. The

combination of front and back sides cast on the mat would form patterns of single and double lines, *kpoli* life signs. Each of the 256 possible signs refers to a sacred text that is interpreted by Torgbe Kortor and clarifies the future, explains the causes of misfortunes, or provides direction to those seeking guidance. By casting the *agumaga*, cowry shells, various seeds, and other small divination objects, Torgbe Kortor and Osofo Fiakpoi also found out from the gods what kind of rituals to perform for a client. Although I was never allowed to witness a divination session for a client, I once attended healing rituals.

In the big class room at the back of the building Atiso and Kwasi sat on a bench with their chests bare. On the mat in front of them stood two earthen bowls with cooked red beans. Torgbe Kortor poured corn flour on the wooden board, drew the client's *kpoli* signs in it with his fingers and tapped on it with the wooden stick. While Osofo Fiakpoi prepared bowls of herbs, Torgbe Kortor performed 'air force' rituals, *anaxexe* in Ewe, for Kwasi, rituals against witchcraft. He gave him three pairs of one anthropomorphic and one abstract red clay figurines, which he had to take pair by pair and move around his head and over his body while talking softly about his sickness. He placed all the figurines in a plastic plate. Then Torgbe Kortor gave him a calabash full of cassava and plantain pieces and corn kernels. Kwasi took three handfuls of this mixture, also moved it about his body, and poured it over the figurines. When Kwasi finished, Atiso had to do the same. Then Torgbe Kortor sprinkled the flour from his board over the beans and over the figurines and food pieces. Two guinea fowls were brought in. The two men had to stand up and hold the fowls in their hands, holding the head very close to their mouth and softly speaking to it. Osofo Fiakpoi took the fowls back and moved them about the men's body, touching their skin with the feathers. Then he moved them through the air, whispering to the gods. He cut their throats and poured the blood and some palm oil on the beans and the clay figurines.

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Then both men had to bath with herbal water behind the building. When they came back, still a bit wet and with a few leaves on their back, Fiakpo took a small bottle with a light yellow liquid and poured a bit into their hands for them to rub it on their bodies. I recognised the strong, spicy scent of Florida Water and asked to see the bottle.¹¹ Fiakpo asked me whether I was menstruating and when I said I was not, he

handed it over to me. 'We have put some herbs in the bottle; that makes it powerful. It is good for protection and success in marketing.' He also had some 'fresh' bottles without herbs. 'The Christians use it like this, but it doesn't do anything when you don't add the herbs. Anyone can hold it, also menstruating women.' While Atiso and Kwasi put on their shirts again, Torgbe Kortor swept the floor, put the bowls and plates aside and cleaned the blood stains on the tiles. Both men knelt in front of the mat and prayed with a bottle of schnapps in their hand. Fiakpo brought the intestines of the fowls and put them on top of the beans. Both clients put 10,000 cedis under the bowls. When they had left, Fiakpo consulted the gods again with his *agumaga* to know whether they had not forgotten anything, because 'when you omit the smallest thing, the whole thing is useless.' Fiakpo and Kortor started laughing at the answer; the gods said they wanted a drink. Of course! They had not poured some drink on the beans. They did what the gods asked for and consulted them again. The gods now said they had finished. They laughed

again at how perfect it all worked. They now had to ask the gods where they wanted to receive the offerings and the watchman would bring it there in the night.

Witnessing the rituals I was struck by the stark contrast they posed with the public Afrikania performances that I had attended. While the latter centred on strong rhetoric, here the whispering over the ritual objects was not even audible for human ears. And while in Afrikania's representations the body featured first of all visually, as an image of beauty and neatness or as a symbol of traditional religion, here the body was the medium for engaging with the spirits, foremost through the sense of touch. When I came back a few days later, I saw the bowls with the beans and the plates with the clay figurines by the roadside under Afrikania's signboard (figs. 6.12, 6.13). It exemplifies a central tension within Afrikania: the large, brightly coloured signboard depicting the traditionally dressed bodies of three men pouring libation and symbolising ATR, assertively caught the eye of anyone passing by; right under it, but hidden in

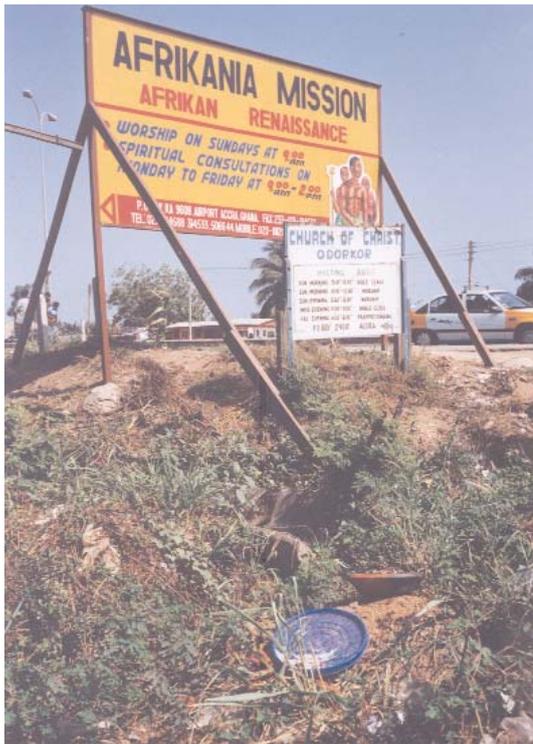


Fig. 6.12 Offerings to the spirits placed under the Afrikania signboard at the crossroads.

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the weeds and hardly discernable for the passer-by, laid the half-rotten food offerings and clay figurines, having touched and thus spiritually connected to the bodies of Atiso and Kwasi. Although Afrikania's leaders are ambivalent about such spiritual practices, for reasons that will be worked out in detail below, they hesitantly accommodate them behind their public image. Torgbe Kortor is thus given the opportunity to employ his experience with and knowledge of *afa* within the framework of Afrikania. This is a significant departure from Ameve's earlier stance that Afrikania can do without traditional religious specialists. Although they are thus much more than in the past involved in Afrikania's activities, there remains a strict division between those called 'divine priests' and 'Afrikania priests.'



Fig. 6.13 Offerings to the spirits placed under the Afrikania signboard at the crossroads.

'Divine priests' versus 'Afrikania priests'

The division between 'divine priests' and 'Afrikania priests' is enshrined in the movement's constitution. The organisational structure has a 'council of priests' and a 'council of divine priests.' A divine priest can never become an Afrikania priest and an Afrikania priest can never go for initiation in a shrine. Osofo Atsu Kove explained this when I spoke to him after his installation as the head of the Afrikania Mission:¹²

We have a law that if you are a divine priest you cannot be Afrikania leader or priest. The leader must only be chosen from the priest council and our priest council system is different from the divine priest council system. We [the Afrikania leaders] learn one or two things about traditional religion, and how to organise management and those things. What is taught in the school, strictly like that. The two can't mix. You cannot go to any shrine to be trained as a divine priest. No, the spirit get possessed of you, even in some places, the spirit themselves direct you, you see. Torgbui Hogbator shrine, you cannot go and acquire Torgbui Hogbator spirit. Akonnedi shrine, Kwaku Firi, Torgbui Adzima, those ones you cannot go in to acquire. Their leaders are not trained, the spirit itself get possessed of them and teach them what to do. There is a laid down regulation at the shrine already, a form of ritual, a form of prayer, that the divine priest, if the old one pass away, the new one must follow that system. The elders of the shrine normally keep it. So ours is not like that system. As I am here [as the head of Afrikania], there are a lot of things I don't know about shrine matters. In Afrikania we have a separation between the leaders, who are more occupied with the intellectual side of it, and then the divine priests, who are more occupied with the spiritual side. But we are all in

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the same work. It is just like an office of government. This minister is playing this role, that minister is playing that role, the same thing we are doing here. So we don't interfere with their work.

I asked him why one person cannot be involved in both the spiritual and the intellectual side of Afrikania's project.

If you go to our shrines, most of them are not educated. So when it comes to the intellectual side, they can't. For example, one of them get a letter from the government that Kufour say they should come and meet him. They can't; they will be afraid. So we the Afrikania people handle that intellectual side. If somebody want to frighten them, like the *trokosi* matter for example [see chapter 7], we come in to defend. Even they don't read the papers to see what is being written about them. They are just there in the shrines, unconcerned, but we are here, we see those things, and quickly we react. We report to them, they come together with us and then we fight.

[Also] if you are a divine priest you cannot be Afrikania priest, because you will not get time. Those people, the spirit can snatch them at any time. You will be at the table, conducting service like this, somebody will raise a song and [finger click] off. He has fallen into trance. Into trance straight away and everything is scattered there. And sometimes when the spirit is coming, they have to scatter a lot of things before the spirits cool down. So that is another reason why we don't accept them [as leaders]. Apart from that, they are queens and kings, they have a high position in Afrikania. Higher than Afrikania priests. So somebody like komfo Abena, komfo Pobee, togbui Dzati, togbui Adzikpodi from Klikor, or togbui Kortor can never come down lower at the table to serve people.

Osofo Asu Kove thus stresses a division of work between Afrikania priests and divine priests within a common project. Both are supposed to have their specific talents, kinds of knowledge, capacities and experiences and to co-operate in a single struggle against suppression of ATR. Osofo Ameve formulated it as follows:

A *tigari* priest may be trained in *tigari* proper and know everything, but he cannot explain its philosophy, what *tigari* is about. If you ask him questions, he will say 'this is how they gave it to me.' But we want to go beyond that, into the intellectual side of it. Because if you don't know the intellectual side, you cannot defend it in the world nowadays. The world is no longer satisfied with 'this is how it was given to me.'¹³

What is behind the division between Afrikania priests and divine priests, then, is the question of public knowledge and representation 'in the world nowadays,' that is, the question of 'the public.'

I soon discovered a tension within Afrikania between Afrikania leaders and divine priests, especially the more educated ones. Not many people were prepared to

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talk about such internal tensions, however. Only Hunua Akakpo, whom I visited at his shrine just outside Accra, hesitantly voiced his discontent about the attitude of the Afrikania leaders.¹⁴ As a child Hunua Akakpo went to a Roman Catholic school and thus was made a Catholic. But when he got to the middle school, around 1975, he fell seriously ill. After failing treatment in the hospital, his grandfather, a divine priest himself, found out by divination that he had to be initiated into the afa cult in his hometown in the Volta Region.

I thought that it was just a healing method of my sickness and I forgot about it. But when I got to the university, first year, I had another problem and it turned out that I need to be involved in the shrine of an uncle of mine, who used to be a divine priest. I need to take charge of this shrine, because I had earlier on been initiated into the Korku shrine by this uncle. When they enquired from the shrine, I was pointed to be the one who can take over. It coincided with my university education, when I was pursuing my first degree in pharmacy, from 84 to 88. Every holiday at the end of every semester I need to go home and assist this uncle of mine in shrine administration, to see how things are done. When I finished university in 1988, I started working and in 1995 I got enstooled as a divine priest of the Hu Korku shrine.

Three years ago, Hunua Akakpo came to his current place, after several years of small-scale practice in a rented two bedroom accommodation in Dansoman (Accra). In his own house in Kasoa, just outside Accra, he uses two rooms as a temporary shrine, one for consultation and divination, and one for his three divinities. He plans building a larger shrine on the compound, so that his divinities, who all have particular rules to obey and ideally should not be invoked in each other's presence, do not have to share a room. But for the meantime, 'they understand the situation.'

Hunua Akakpo joined the Afrikania Mission in 1999, after he had established his current shrine.

Even though I heard of it, I wasn't too sure whether they were really propagating any message or any information on the shrine and what not. I thought it was just some religious movement like the others. So initially I was a bit hesitant, especially when the leaders were not priests themselves. Later on I realised that the doctrines of the mission were just in line with mine and I decided to join. Even though the leaders are not priests, they seek advice from us the priests and priestesses. In fact, their prime objective is to rally us together, put us under one umbrella. They are not in to destroy any aspect of our practices, but they warn us against those that are not humane. They warn us against vices that are anti-social and I think it is good for a body like that to be checking us, to serve as a check and balances for us.

Even though Hunua Akakpo is the chairman of the Sakaman branch he does not consider himself as part of the leadership, because 'if you don't invite me, I wouldn't come forth.' What he means is that the leaders do not involve people like him

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enough in the public representation of ATR, especially in speaking on the radio or on TV.

When it comes to radio programmes or TV programmes..., well of course, the need for priests and priestesses on the programme is not always necessary, but any problem pertaining to the shrines, I don't see why we are not involved. That is one thing we need to address. Nobody has ever questioned me on my contribution towards a programme. Even if people do, when I listen to them on the air, I don't see what they are really talking about. Sometimes they are only using their head to argue. But the one questioning knows what he is talking about. So if you are not the one who is experienced enough to defend what they want to say, then you are in trouble. The more we are depending on literature, the less efficient our tool of defence. Rather we need some practicality, we need to be involved.

In a similar vein, he criticises Afrikania's leaders for not involving experienced traditional priests in teaching in the Priesthood Training School.

You know the school that they organise over there? I sometimes think that the curriculum is fibrous. What has to go into one becoming a priest of the tradition is not there. It is very empty. But they will not invite you. Well, they have their own doctrines they are operating with. If you want somebody to be a leader of a religious movement, you should look at the components of the movement, the people who are going to comprise the movement. And therefore the leader should seem to have an idea of everything that goes on. I don't see why they don't invite people like me to come and present. They should create a subject for me. If you are not a priest you cannot talk about priesthood. When someone is talking about witchcraft, the question is: are you a wizard yourself; are you a witch yourself? Have you exorcised somebody of witchcraft before? Do you know the manifestation of witchcraft? So how can you talk about it? Right now, the priests that we have, that we say we have trained, what are they doing? What are they supposed to be doing? I don't know how much they take there to become priests, I don't know, I don't see it at all. If you don't have a standard as a qualification for people, the programme will be shallow. So our leaders, even if they are not priests, it does not mean that they cannot do well, but they need to seek advice. They need to seek direction and wisdom from the people whose cause they seem to defend.

And that, according to Hunua Akakpo, does not (yet) happen enough. Kofi Hande, an active Afrikania member and a 'spiritual scientist' who produces and sells 'binding charms,' 'mouth power,' and other 'charms' (fig. 6.10) and has a small shrine in his house, put his criticism of the Afrikania School teachers even more outspokenly. 'These people don't know anything. Theory without practice is worthless.'

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Tensions and contention

Although quite some shrine priests like Torgbe Kortor, Okomfo Abena and Hunua Akakpo have joined Afrikania, many others are resistant to Afrikania and dispute its claim of representing all the various shrines and cults and their priest(esse)s and devotees. In this section I discuss some of the tensions that Afrikania's project produces. My knowledge of traditional religions is limited to Afrikania's rendering of these and the narratives of divine priests in Afrikania (who also, at least partly, speak the Afrikania discourse). Unfortunately I have had only little opportunity to follow their narratives in practice, but they tend to correspond with what has been described in ethnographic studies of West African religious cultures (De Surgy 1988; Field 1960; Lovell 2002; Meyer 1999; Mullings 1984; Preston Blier 1995; Rivière 1981; Rosenthal 1998).

Conversion and initiation

A corollary of the 'protestantisation' of ATR described in the last chapter is the possibility of 'conversion to traditional religion.' Most Afrikania leaders are 'converted' from Catholicism. Ameve told me that a Presbyterian moderator once asked him why he does not let the 'real traditionalists' lead the movement instead of former Christians. He had answered him that

You can convert to traditional religion just like you can convert to Christianity. After being exposed to different ideas, and learning and gaining knowledge, one can decide to convert to traditional religion. That happened to Damuah and also to me. Unfortunately I am not initiated into any shrine, but I am a convert, just like among the Christian leaders there are many who are not born into Christianity, but converted from traditional religion and grew to become leaders.¹⁵

Conversion is generally understood as a personal choice on the basis of an inner conviction and belief. But, as anthropologists have argued, this understanding of individual religious transformation 'is founded on a Protestant Christian heritage imparted to social-scientific theories of religion, theories that tend to reify (systems of) belief and abstract them from the social practices and power relations that give them meaning' (Pels 1998; cf. Asad 1993; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). The concept of conversion, then, is foreign to African traditional religion, which is not a 'belief system' one can convert to. In African traditional religious practice, as in many other religious traditions, religious transformation occurs through very different models, most notably that of 'initiation,' which suggests a ritual transformation not only of the spirit, but of the body. Moreover, this transformation is not initiated from within, by personal choice, but from outside.

As in the stories of Okomfo Abena and Hunua Akakpo recounted above, a person does not choose to be initiated as a priest(ess) out of his/her own will, but is called by a deity, usually through an illness or other crisis (cf. Lovell 2002:10, 49-50; Meyer

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1999:185). This physically manifested calling is usually followed by a long period of training and gradual initiation into the 'secrets' and spiritual knowledge of a particular shrine or cult (Lovell 2002:53), culminating in the full initiation into priesthood. This ritual transformation of an ordinary person into a priest(ess) is usually marked by seclusion (Ibid.:44; Rosenthal 1998:214-216), restriction of knowledge, and the passage of time (Ibid.:169). Also, the body plays a major role in this transformation, starting with the bodily crisis signifying the spiritual call or spirit possession and ending with the treatment of the body as a magical object during the initiation ceremony. For example, the body has to be ritually bathed with herbs, smeared with white clay, or a fowl has to be slaughtered on the initiate's feet. This bodily process of going through affliction and healing and the fusion of human body and deity forms the basis of spiritual authority.

As none of Afrikania's leaders are trained or initiated into any shrine or cult, people who do not accept their spiritual leadership. Some even suspect them to be 'just another Christian group out to destroy us' or to 'steal secrets.' Hunua Akakpo:

Some feel that maybe the leaders of the mission are just in to steal their knowledge. Either they think they are coming to take some information from them or they want to identify them for tax. Some operate fraudulently, and they are afraid to associate themselves with any society, as their fraudulent deals or incompetent practices would come out.

Afrikania does organise some kind of 'initiation,' the ordination, including 'initiation rituals,' of priests and priestesses into Afrikania priesthood described in the previous chapter. This ordination, however, is disputed, because the basis of Afrikania priesthood, the two-week, publicly accessible and scholarly course is nothing like the long process of one-to-one initiation into secret spiritual knowledge that is required for traditional priesthood. Moreover, Afrikania readily ordains foreigners into priesthood, especially African-Americans, but also myself. Because I attended the classes, Ameve and the other leaders saw me as a priestess. And although I refused and did not go through the initiation rites, they assured me that I was still a priestess, because, as Ameve told me,

what happened in seclusion at the back of the building wasn't much. They were just bathed with water with some ordinary herbs. The same herbs you see in the water in the bowl at the entrance. After that they came out and got some medicine on their head and a stone to eat, that is all. The only thing you need is a white costume. You can just make one for yourself.

This easy initiation into ATR has proved attractive for visiting African-Americans searching for their spiritual roots. Many of them find in Afrikania the source of inspiration and African authenticity they long for. Some skeptics even say that Afrikania's worship services are staged especially for the purpose of providing American roots-tourists with an easily accessible piece of African religious identity in exchange for American dollars.

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Clearly, Afrikania's initiation into priesthood is first of all a symbolic initiation, whereby the herbs, medicines, and white costume *symbolise* the initiate's new status instead of constituting his/her body as the location of spiritual power, as happens with initiation into traditional shrines or cults. This also points to the different notions and practices of religious subjectivity and personhood implied in conversion and initiation respectively. For Afrikania, both conversion to ATR and initiation into Afrikania priesthood are first of all cerebral processes, brought about by education and information *about* ATR, and by consciousness and willpower. The emphasis is thus on self-control and self-realisation. As far as the body plays a part in the transformation process, it is mainly as a symbol, as a screen for projecting a symbolic representation of ATR. Traditional religious practice, by contrast, constitutes religious subjectivity by treating the body as the locus of spiritual power. Spiritual beings are not represented, but are part and parcel of bodily practice and experience (Lovell 2002:20). Far from being self-controlled and bounded, the religious subject is open and susceptible to outside spiritual forces (cf. Preston Blier 1995:171 ff). Here we can see an interesting parallel with charismatic-Pentecostal conversion and religious subjectivity described in chapter 3. Although becoming 'born again' is discursively presented as a personal choice for Christ, based upon a deep inner conviction, it also implies a ritual and sensual transformation of the body, whereby the body becomes the locus of the Holy Spirit, manifested in involuntary bodily behaviour such as speaking in tongues. Moreover, conversion is often preceded by a (bodily) crisis, which is signified as a call by the Holy Spirit, who then heals the person. This seems to be much closer to the initiation processes of traditional religiosity than Afrikania's symbolic attitude towards conversion and initiation.

Church and spirit possession

In the previous chapter I discussed Afrikania's Sunday worship service and its reflection of the current trend that mingles religiosity and entertainment. Many members themselves also see the Sunday service as entertainment. Okomfo Abena:

For me, I see Afrikania as worship of God (*Nyamesom*) and every Sunday we come to communicate with him (*ye ne no badi nkutaho*). But many others see it as a social club (*ekuo*) where you go to entertain yourself (*yeko gye y'ani*).¹⁶

The reason that many people, especially shrine priests and priestesses, see Afrikania's Sunday service as mere entertainment, is that in traditional religious practice communication with the spirit world requires formats that are very different from the formats of 'church service,' such as spirit possession or divination. The issue of possession has always been controversial in Afrikania. During Sunday service, people are not allowed to get possessed, because 'this is church.' The drummers, then, play only entertainment drumming styles, such as *agbadza*, *borborbor*, or *kpanlogo*, not rhythms used to call the divinities. As Bokor Togbui, an *afa* specialist in Accra, pointed out to me:

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Afa or *brekete* drumming, we don't beat it in Afrikania, because it is church. We don't want the gods to come. The rhythms are connected to the stars. If you beat a particular rhythm, the god of that star comes to take possession of people. Some *bokors* don't want to come to Afrikania, because of the drumming in Afrikania.¹⁷

When the gods are nevertheless called by the rhythms and people show signs of impending possession (rolling eyes, shaking movements), they are quickly calmed down and forced to remain seated. Okomfo Abena explained why:

When a spirit comes in someone, he will speak. That can be like quarrelling (*ntokwa*) or like a madman (*kwasea*). Maybe he will do bad things. When he speaks, he speaks in public (*krofo anim*). That is why when that happens, we don't want them to speak. It doesn't fit church (*enfataa asore*).

The unruly, sometimes even violent ways in which spirits behave, then, is the reason for not inviting them during 'church service.' Rosenthal beautifully describes the excessiveness, carnivalesque, unruliness, and 'uncanny wildness' of *gorovodu* possession ceremonies and writes: 'rules and conventions, powers and identities, all sort of hierarchies are put into question during such ritual, and the taking apart does not always take place along prescribed lines and according to rehearsed acts' (1998:58). This 'aesthetics of ecstatic excess' (ibid.:59) forms a stark contrast with Afrikania services, which are performed according to the rules and conventions of a prescribed and rehearsed liturgy, sometimes with the printed liturgy sheet in hand. This does not mean, however, that possession is always disapproved of. On other occasions it is often tolerated, sometimes even encouraged.

For the 'all night prayer meeting' that was part of the celebrations of Afrikania's 20th anniversary, many traditional priests and priestesses had come to the mission headquarters. Drumming and dancing went on all night and one person after the other got possessed and behaved in the frenzied and unruly ways characteristic of the specific spirits (fig. 6.14). Particular drum beats evoked particular spirits (someone explained that every spirit has his/her own 'signature tune') with their particular styles of dressing, dancing, speaking, and movements. While in the beginning only women got possessed, later there were men too. This was one of the few Afrikania events where full expression was given to 'the powers seated in possession trance, an altered state and time during which worshipers are fused with their deities' (ibid.:75).

On another occasion, when teaching prospective Afrikania priests, Ameve praised the power of traditional music to make people possessed and stated that contrary to traditionalists, Christians only pretend they get possessed.

The words and rhythms in the drumming will make somebody possessed. One of the students in the last course got possessed when we were singing a song. So if you change the wording in a song [as some Christian churches do with traditional songs], you have nothing. That is why they [the Christians] do not get possessed. They do not get possessed, but they pretend.¹⁸

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Fig. 6.14 Priestess possessed by a spirit during the 'Night Vigil' at the Afrikania Mission Headquarters.

Possession as such, then, is no longer a taboo in Afrikania, but it does not fit the format of a Sunday worship service. As already indicated in the previous chapter, this seems to change now under the leadership of Atsu Kove. A colleague researcher of Afrikania, Kwame Zulu Shabazz, witnessed 'frenzied' possession at both Afrikania branches in Accra. Apparently, possession is limited to shrine priestesses. No Afrikania priest(ess), nor, for that matter, any male devotee, has to Shabazz's knowledge been possessed during a Sunday service.¹⁹ The increased accommodation of spirit possession is a very interesting development that deserves further investigation. Could it be that Afrikania is changing its public image? If so, what circumstances could be contributing to this change? During Ameve's time, spirit possession did certainly not fit the image of ATR that Afrikania sought to portray to the general public. The nightly prayer meeting was clearly not directed at the public. No media were present or invited and filming or sound recording was not allowed.

Public knowledge and secret knowledge

The differences between conversion and initiation and between church service and possession point to different kinds of knowledge. The kind of knowledge that Afrikania values mostly and teaches in the Priesthood School is first of all abstract, intellectual knowledge about ATR as a religious-philosophical system, accessible to anyone who is interested and able to pay the course fees. The religious knowledge that is valued and taught in traditional cults is practical knowledge about the spiritual

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powers that harm or heal and how to influence the balance between these powers. Access to this kind of knowledge is restricted by long processes of initiation and transmission of spiritual 'secrets' from established priest to initiate. The public knowledge Afrikania teaches serves its project of organisation and standardisation on a national level, necessary to compete with Christianity and Islam as a modern world religion. This is hardly compatible, however, with the small-scale, face-to-face oral transmission of knowledge in traditional religions (cf. Boogaard 258-259). It is exactly the inimitable, individual and often secret knowledge, that forms the basis of traditional religious practitioners' authority. On 24 August 2001 Osofo Ameve instructed future Afrikania priests:

Because we have no written history and no sacred book for the shrine, we have no way of improving and developing it. You must organize the people to write down what they have. They must write a sacred book to be kept nicely, so that when one person dies and another comes to power, it is there. When we don't write our things down, our things will be losing power. Writing the history and tradition down will promote effectiveness. So if you are an *okomfo* and you know how to write, start writing things down.

One of the students, however, objected that 'some things cannot be written down because of secrecy; only when you reach a certain rank in the hierarchy you may see or hear it.' Afrikania's aim of organising ATR and the public knowledge facilitating this, then, is at odds with the secret knowledge at the power base of those it wishes to organise. In other words, the reformation of ATR as a public religion conflicts with traditional religious practice, where spiritual power is closely linked to secrecy and concealment, a point that will be worked out in depth in chapter 8.

At this point it may be useful to return to the distinction made by Laura Marks (1999), and referred to in chapter 3 in the context of ICGC membership, between two modes of learning, two kinds of knowledge: a symbolic mode of gaining representational knowledge and a mimetic mode of gaining embodied knowledge. Afrikania's highly formalised classes that educate future priest(esse)s about ATR as a coherent system of deities, spirits and ancestors that 'we believe in,' but also its public modes of preaching and teaching about the importance of ATR and the meaning of certain rituals and symbols clearly testify to a symbolic, representational approach to knowing about the spiritual. One can know by listening, reading, seeing, and understanding. In traditional religious cults by contrast, as Nadia Lovell argues for *Vodhun* in Southern Togo, 'the body mediates directly in the experience of the *vodhun*. Indeed, there are no other ways of knowing about the gods' (Lovell 2002:54). In this approach, then, knowledge of the spiritual can only be generated by mimesis, spirit possession, and bodily experience. One can know by feeling, moving and being moved, that is, through the senses that a symbolic approach neglects.²⁰ Rosenthal also points to the incompatibility of representation and embodiment when she writes:

[T]he "Real" unleashed during Vodun possession [...] cannot as such be represented and therefore is not a text. Outside the symbolic system, it is the fullness

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of being prior to and underlying langue. [...] The possessed host cannot speak in a normal way. [...] S/he takes the floor in dance and joyful crying out. S/he can only "be" the Real; s/he cannot represent it (1998:3-4).

In the case of the ICGC I argued that symbolic and embodied knowledge form a symbiosis that constitutes the born again Christian subject. Here I suggest that these two modes of knowledge form a tension that parallels the tension between public knowledge and secret knowledge and informs Afrikania's ambivalent relationship with shrine practitioners. This is not to suggest that the religious knowledge of priests and priestesses is exclusively secret or private. As Lovell (ibid.:58) writes, 'knowledge of vodhun is simultaneously overtly public and intensely private.' Nevertheless, she continues, 'to demonstrate too much public knowledge of a deity with whom no special and sanctioned links had been established was deemed highly suspect and potentially punishable.' It is exactly such special, embodied links with deities that Afrikania leaders lack.

Beauty, hygiene, and spiritual power

For Afrikania, the reformation of ATR is very much about beautifying it, that is, eliminating any elements that are considered ugly, dirty, unhygienic, unruly, or uncivilised. Osofo Ameve, teaching student-priests about the purpose of Afrikania:

Religion is beauty. People follow a religion because it is more beautiful than another. We must present our religion so that it is beautiful and attractive, to particularly the youth. Not only the pictures, but the whole religion. Yewe is a war divinity. There is a time that they parade it through the streets like the Catholics parade the sacrament. When the Catholics do this, you see the beauty and dignity with which they do this. But when they are carrying Yewe, people are running around, shooting, and shouting. How can this attract people? Dignity versus disorder. The theory behind both parades is the same. We can do it better than we are doing, to attract our children. They have to sit down and look at how to do it better. Not that it should be quiet and copy the Catholics, but it can be more beautiful. The point is to beautify the thing. That is our target.

Another example that often comes up is the untidiness of many shrines, especially due to the use of animal blood during rituals and the failure to clean up afterwards. Okomfo Abena:

Sometimes when you visit a traditional priest, you see that the place where they have consultation is very dirty. We want them to make it all very neat, (*yeepe se womo ye bibiara kama, fine*), but some of them slaughter a fowl and leave the blood just like that and the whole place turns filthy. So we train them not to do that. When someone has come to you for consultation, afterwards you have to sweep well.²¹

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Other points of contention in the struggle for beauty and hygiene are the fermentation of herbs in water (to gain healing power), leaving food offerings to rot (for the deities to eat), and the use of incisions on the face and body for healing purposes. Although Torgbe Kortor and Osofo Fiakpo do not incise their clients' bodies for healing, they do often place ritual food offerings in the vicinity of the mission house, such as cooked beans and guinea fowl blood and intestines in the above described example.

Afrikania's leaders disapprove of this, but tolerate it as long as it remains out of sight.

This concern with beauty and attraction has always been of importance within Afrikania. Boogaard describes a discussion over the appearance of traditional priests:

Some Afrikanians think that priests should dress more beautiful and neat, *like representatives of other religions* (no bare breasts and strange, sometimes dirty clothing), and not smear themselves with clay or chalk, because that would make them look gruesome and primitive and *alienate the public* (Boogaard 2003:255, original in Dutch, translation and emphasis MdW).

Opinion on the topic was divided, however, with others arguing that accepting the appearance of priests is part of the mental decolonization that Afrikania strives for. At present 'primitive' dress is no longer an issue. As long as they do not look dirty, priest(esse)s decked out in traditional costumes, beads and white clay are welcomed at any Afrikania event and their look appreciated as authentic. Still, the concern with cleanliness and beauty vis-à-vis 'the public' has remained very much the same. In order to be seen as a respectable religion and to attract more people, Afrikania wants to make ATR look neat, clean, and civilized, just like any other modern religion.

The practices of particular cults and shrines, however, often do not fit the form Afrikania has created in Accra and some shrines oppose the 'Afrikanianisation' that Afrikania's leaders try to impose. Ameve maintains that this form is only meant for the Accra branches, where different ethnic groups worship together, whereas in the rural areas 'the real thing still exists' and should be used in worship. Yet, also in the rural branches, Afrikania tries to shape existing religious practices into a new format that includes regular fellowship on Sundays and a concern with public image, with cleanliness and beautification to make ATR attractive to 'the people.' This concern with cleanliness can conflict with the spiritual power of, for example, animal blood used in rituals or herbal medicines. At the same time, however, Ameve claimed that 'blood sacrifice is good, because blood is powerful. Blood sacrifice is within our culture, that is why it works' (Ameve 21 August 2001). He equally praised the power of alcohol used in libation. Yet, for the sake of a common form, Afrikania pours libation with water, a pointless act for people making use of the spiritual power of alcohol in communicating with the ancestors (Akyeampong 1996). Afrikania's leaders, then, are ambivalent about 'the real thing' of blood, alcohol, possession, and the like. They refer to it as spiritually powerful when they claim power for ATR, but do not accommodate it in Afrikania's public performances for reasons of unity, hygiene, beauty, or representativeness.

In the public face of traditional religion, what really matters for many practitioners and adherents, namely its spiritual power, seems to be lost. Afrikania's project

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remains intellectualist and far removed from what occupies the shrine practitioners that the movement tries to mobilise. Recently Afrikania has accommodated spiritual practices, including spirit possession and healing rituals. Yet, these do not form part of Afrikania's public image and Afrikania leaders still approach the spiritual symbolically in order to represent ATR and its adherents to the public. I argue that this excludes the bodiliness and sensuality of the latter's ways with spiritual power. Afrikania's leaders are aware of the tensions and objections, but they argue that while traditional priests know how to practice traditional religion, they miss the knowledge, the abstractive capacity, and the organisational skills to explain their religion to the general public and defend it vis-à-vis unsympathetic outsiders. This, they say, is crucial for the survival of ATR in this modern era of religious plurality and conflict.

This tension between an intellectualist discourse *about* traditional religion and traditional religion as a (not always 'beautiful') practice comes to the fore most explicitly in the positions and experiences of shrine practitioners within Afrikania. Hunua Akakpo is a trained pharmacist and uses his abstractive capacity and organisational skills to teach visiting American student groups about ATR at his shrine. Yet he is not invited by Afrikania leaders to teach future Afrikania priests. Torgbe Kortor is appointed to give spiritual consultation to (mainly Christian) outsiders who face challenges or difficult decisions, but he is never consulted by Afrikania leaders about the challenges or decisions the movement faces. Okomfo Abena is 'respected as a queen' for being a divine priestess, but her divinity is never welcome during Sunday services. Some of these people, such as Hunua Akakpo, do indeed experience this tension as problematic. Others, such as Okomfo Abena and Torgbe Kortor, did not seem to bother much about it and talked about the difference between 'church' and their own practice in quite a matter-of-fact way. Yet, all of them operate in Afrikania's two parallel registers at the same time: the public register of representation and the hidden, but nevertheless present, register of spiritual power.

Conclusion: mediating between the public and the priests

In this chapter I have examined Afrikania's difficult position as mediator between the public sphere and the practices and concerns of shrine priests. As a movement that strives for reevaluation of indigenous religious traditions, it engages in the mediation of traditional religious practices and beliefs to the general public, envisioned primarily as Christianised and (thus) alienated. This mediation entails the creation of a new, Christian-derived format for the representation of ATR as a world religion. At the same time, it calls for strategies of authentication to convince this public of both the truly African character and the real power of this new form of traditional religion. These strategies hinge on symbols that refer to the spiritual power of ATR and present it as essentially Other to Christianity.

While we have seen that this double strategy attracts both people who share Afrikania's politically motivated, anti-Christian discourse (as members) and people who seek spiritual solutions for their problems (as clients), Afrikania's relationship to those it claims to represent and aims to mobilise remains thoroughly problematic.

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There is a big gap between the intellectualist reformation of ATR that Afrikania brings to the attention of the general public and the practices and concerns of shrine practitioners. Afrikania's aims of modernisation, organisation, and beautification conflict with the practical, bodily, and often secretive ways of working with spiritual power that characterise African religious traditions. As a result, shrine priests, even those among the membership, perceive the movement as offering at most ideological leadership and organisational protection, but certainly not spiritual leadership. Afrikania is thus caught between the requirements of the Christian dominated public sphere, that presuppose certain formats for what 'religion' is and should look like, and the standards of traditional religious specialists. Mediating ATR is a matter of carefully manoeuvring between the two.

On a deeper level, a fundamental tension exists between Afrikania's very project of public representation and the everyday, embodied character of African religious traditions, that is, between Afrikania's public register of representing gods and shrine practitioners' more private registers of dealing with the presence of gods. Afrikania engages primarily in public discourse of talking about spirituality and has, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, developed a strong public voice for the defence of traditional religious practices. It remains very limited, however, in more private registers of engaging with the spiritual. The spiritual consultation it offers now is still a marginal side-activity. Afrikania's symbolization of traditional religion through visual representations contradicts religious traditions that are not about symbols and representations, but about embodiment and experience. The division between public and private registers of relating to the spiritual remains strong and points to a difference in the role of the body and the senses in the constitution of religious subjectivity. While Afrikania's symbolic approach foregrounds the visual and the vocal, it neglects the other sensibilities, notably touch, and the experientiality that constitute traditional religious subjectivity through practices like initiation, healing, and spirit possession.

Afrikania leaders also notice these frictions and limitations, which are a major source of insecurity about what they have to offer. Hence the constant need for authentication, for convincing the public, their followers, and also themselves that what they do is not an empty or shallow representation, but connects to a powerful presence. Their slogan *Sankofa! Biribi wò ho!*, endlessly repeated during services, meetings, classes, and when Afrikans meet in the street, thus serves as a constant reminder that really 'there is something there.' At the same time, it is exactly the gap between Afrikania's intellectual discourses about ATR and the excessiveness and uncapturability of what this 'something' can be that sustains the ultimate authority of African spirit power. This gap reproduces the idea of ATR as not to be represented, framed and thus controlled, but as always remaining volatile, and thus powerful. According to traditional religious semi-otic ideologies, spirit powers not only refuse to be captured by audio, visual, or material media (as will be worked out in chapter 8), they refuse the very register of representation. They can only be absent or present. And in their presence they subject human beings to their always unpredictable ways. Their absence from Afrikania's representations thus ultimately affirms their potential presence and power. From this perspective, the gap that confronts Afrikania with a major dilemma in mediating between the public and the priests could actually be its major authenticator.

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Notes to chapter 6

¹ Photographs referred to here were taken the following morning during the funeral and thus do not depict the exact events as they occurred during the wake-keeping.

² Clearly, this 'fetish drummer' did not share Afrikania's preoccupation with the derogatory connotations of this term. Rosenthal (1998:1) similarly observed that the term 'fetish' has been co-opted by *vodu* worshippers in Togo as a synonym for *vodu* and *tro*, meaning deity, spirit, or god-object, and holds no pejorative connotations for them. Afrikania uses only *tro* (and its Twi equivalent *obosom*), because that is the term most widely used by Ghanaian Ewe, but also because of the historical and political load of *vodu* (or 'voodoo') and 'fetish.'

³ Remarkably, Afrikarians seem to perceive no contradiction between such rhetoric and Afrikania's concerns with having a church building and a 'bible.' Original in Twi (translation MdW):

Afrikania n'asem ara ne se Nyame baako na yen nyinaa yesom no. Na yen, yede yen dee na nam yen ammammre so. Efiri se asòre biara a ewò awiase nyina ara no, baabi koro a asòre no bae no, wòde eho ammammre na deyè asòre. Na yen Afrikaniafuo, obi bebisa yen se 'asòre ben na òbema akomfo aye asòre?' Eno na eye question a kurofuo bebisa. Na yepe se obiara te ase se tete ho asòre biara nni awiase, chapel dan biara nni awiase. Okomfo no, baabi a òbò mpae? no, ehò na eye asòreyeso. Amen Rah! Oburoni bae na òse yensi asòredan. Na yenkò asore danmu. Na asòreyeso, ehò na yefre Nyame. Amen Rah! Wei ena yepe se yekyere mu. Wohu se okomfo no ònkuta bible. Na se òkuta bodua a, bodua a òde kasa kyere Onyankopòn, Onyankopòn te n'asee.

⁴ The woman had been an Afrikania member for a long time, but had not come to Afrikania anymore for about two years due to a family conflict. She had told her children, however, that when she would die they must call Afrikania to come. So they did, but the Afrikania leaders asked them to first pay the monthly dues over the past two years (just as in Christian churches). They paid and so Afrikania came.

⁵ The situation was different in the rural branches, where many more shrine priests, priestesses, and initiates had become members. Because of the predominance of women in traditional cults, this automatically meant that in the rural areas the gender balance in Afrikania's membership was significantly more female than in Accra.

⁶ See appendix IV for more detailed membership data.

⁷ Other Afrikania members also reported on the difficulty of openly adhering to traditional religion. Hunua Akakpo was refused membership of the land owners association in his neighbourhood for being 'an occultist.' Senyo had trouble at school for not having a Christian name to put on his forms. A priestess who works in Accra's public hospital, chooses to keep her religious affiliation secret at her workplace.

⁸ Interview 22 November 2002.

⁹ It is interesting to note that Ameve criticised the creation of homologies between ATR and Christianity at the same time as drawing upon such homologies all the time to gain respect for ATR.

¹⁰ Interview 4 March 2003, translation from Twi MdW.

¹¹ Florida Water is a 19th century formula for a commercially-prepared toilet water that blends an array of floral essential oils in a water-alcohol base. In Ghana it is imported and widely used in rituals of spiritual cleansing, both in traditional religion and in Christian churches.

¹² Interview 17 March 2005.

¹³ Afrikania course, 20 August 2001.

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¹⁴ Interview 16 January 2003.

¹⁵ Interview 17 December 2003.

¹⁶ Interview 4 March 2003.

¹⁷ Interview 16 January 2003. Rosenthal (2005:49,113) writes on the *gorovodu* order that while the *agbadza* rhythm is used, its distinguishing feature is *brequete*, so much so that the *gorovodu* order is sometimes called *brequete*, as in the Ghanaian Volta Region.

¹⁸ Afrikania course, 22 August 2001.

¹⁹ Kwame Zulu Shabazz, personal correspondence, 16 July 2007.

²⁰ Approaching *vodhu* religion as a system of body, or a set of techniques for sensory manipulation, Geurts (2002:171ff) argues that the sense of *seselame* ('feeling in the body') plays a vital role in knowing about and sustaining ties with ancestors, gods, and supreme being.

²¹ Interview 4 March 2003.