

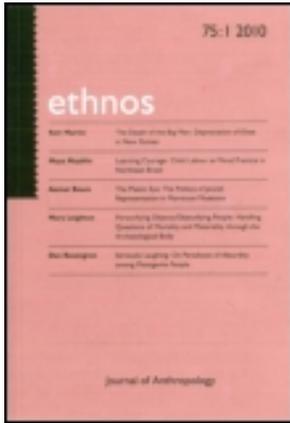
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Touched by the Spirit: Converting the Senses in a Ghanaian Charismatic Church

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ABSTRACT *This article discusses the bodily mass reproduction of divine touch in Ghanaian charismatic Pentecostalism and argues for an understanding of conversion as an ongoing bodily process that ‘tunes’ the senses to specific sensory experiences. Presenting a case study of the International Central Gospel Church in Accra, it asks how the church’s explicit appeal to the body relates to its strong suspicion of bodily mediation and its ideology of conversion as an inner transformation of the spirit and only secondarily of the body. It shows that the learning of the church doctrine that grounds born-again subjectivity in spontaneous and immediate experiences of being touched by the Holy Spirit goes together with repeated performance and gradual embodiment of sensory and bodily ‘formats’ that evoke such experiences, but also raise concerns about their authenticity.*

KEYWORDS *Senses, embodiment, mediation, Ghana*

Introduction

‘Welcome to Solution Centre’ I read in coloured, animated graphics projected on the screen in the Christ Temple. In front of it, the pastor on the stage motivates people to lift up their voice and pray to God. About 300 praying voices fill the auditorium. It is my first day in Accra, Thursday 7 March 2002, and I have come to a Power Point supported anointing service. After three praise and worship songs backed with drums, trumpets and guitars, Pastor Dan starts preaching loudly in the microphone. Hidden behind the large loudspeakers, a technician sits at a laptop to lard the pastor’s stage performance with attractively designed Power Point slides.

To anoint means to:

- remove the burden
- destroy the yoke
- receive the power of God

It helps you to:

1 Samuel 16:13, 14, 16

Suddenly a power cut puts an end to both the beamer and the mike. Pastor Dan resorts to calling the people to prayer in preparation for the anointing. Walking among the congregation, he loudly prays in tongues – rabachakabarutuka reemmmparamuratarabuka – until the light returns and the sermon continues. Five minutes later the light goes off again. Now he carries on without the mike. Standing on one of the front row seats he shouts at the top of his voice:

When we anoint you, what you receive is the power of the Holy Ghost, divine deliverance. The anointing humbles the Devil. We anoint you with physical olive oil, but the Spirit comes upon you. It is physical smearing of oil, yet what comes upon you is the Spirit of God.

Then he calls people to come forward for the climax, the anointing. From behind, people start lining up and I consider whether to go or not. When the end of the queue has reached my row, I stand up and join. Three pastors stand in front of the stage with cups of olive oil. Upon their turn, people lift up their hands and close their eyes. The pastor dips his right hand in the oil, places it on the head of the person and starts praying for God's power to come upon him or her. Most people fall backwards and are caught by the ushers behind them. Some start trembling upon the pastor's touch. It takes a mere 20 seconds before the person is pushed away again and returns to his/her seat, one after the other. Despite this 'assembly line production', people's faces and entire bodies speak to the intensity of their experience. Some appear as if they were drunk and have to be supported as they walk back to their seat. I do not know what to expect and start feeling nervous the closer I get to the pastor. Upon my turn, I step forward, stand before the pastor and do what I have seen the others do. I lift up my hands and close my eyes and feel the oily hand on my forehead. The strong pressure of the hand pushes

me backward a bit and I surrender myself to the firm hands of the woman behind me holding my upper arms. The pastor screams 'may this anointing bring the power of the Holy Ghost upon you' and before I realise I am pushed away and walk back to my seat. People look at me. What do they see? A new person full of freshness and newness? Divine touch? I have not felt it. I smell the olive oil in my hair and feel a drip running down my forehead. I quickly wipe it away with my handkerchief and wonder whether this would be sacrilegious.

After the service, I discuss my experience with Lydia, a young lady who has been a church member for five years and a frequent visitor to the Solution Centre. 'It was like that for me in the beginning,' she told me. 'I felt awkward when I saw people falling when the pastor touched them ... speaking in tongues ... I wasn't used to it. I thought it couldn't be real. But gradually I started doing it ... you know, I raise my hands and I have that desire, to be touched with the Spirit. You know, you have to open up before the Spirit can fill you. You have to open your heart to the Spirit. That is why you raise your arms, your palms, your face, to open up your body. And then, when the Spirit touches you, you feel it deep deep inside. You can't describe it. It is so powerful. You too, you can experience it. You will.'

This article discusses the bodily mass reproduction of the divine touch in Ghanaian charismatic Pentecostalism and argues for an understanding of conversion as an ongoing bodily process that 'tunes' the senses to specific sensory experiences. The experience of being touched by the Spirit forms the basis of charismatic-Pentecostal subjecthood, of being born again. Much of charismatic religious practice is directed at achieving such experiences and fully engages the body as a medium for being 'in touch' with a divine presence. Through the repeated performance of encoded, learned bodily behaviour, the body of the believer is made into a medium to connect to the power of the Holy Spirit. This holds true for the application of oil to the body and falling down or shaking on reception of the power of God as much as for the bodily practice of listening to a sermon. At the same time, pastors and believers taught me that being born again centres on the spontaneous, personal experience of the power of the Holy Spirit. A tension thus exists between on the one hand, an understanding and experience of conversion as a total transformation caused by the spontaneous touch of the Holy Spirit and, on the other hand, the disciplinary, institutionalised formats of religious performance that not only mould people into 'good Christians', but also evoke such subjective spiritual experience.

Conversion is generally understood as a personal choice based on inner conviction and belief, a complete and radical break with a past state of being. 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: 266–7; see also Asad 1993; Buckser & Glazier 2003). Such an understanding of conversion implies a notion of personhood that rests on a conceptual split between mind and body. Whereas the Catholic Church nurtured a highly sensuous engagement with the sacred, Protestantism came to devalue the body and the senses and focused instead on the mind's capacity to receive the Word of God and to believe (Mellor & Shilling 1997). Separated from the sinfulness of the human flesh, the 'spirit' was to establish contact with God. With the body thus disenchanted, conversion became a matter of the spirit rather than the body.

Charismatic Pentecostalism, as a much more recent and very different version of Protestantism, is again marked by a strong sensualisation of religious experience. It explicitly engages the body in the search for contact with God. At the same time, however, it extends the modern Protestant separation of mind and body and the related dualisms it produced. Charismatic-Pentecostal discourse constantly reinforces and mobilises dichotomies between 'charisma' and 'institution', 'Holy Spirit' and 'structure', 'spontaneity' and 'ritual', 'inner' and 'outer' person, 'spirit' and 'body', 'content' and 'form', always privileging the former of these opposites. Charismatics reject, or at least mistrust organisational and ritual structures for blocking the free flow of the power of the Holy Spirit and thus challenging authentic religious experience. As much as these categories are relevant for the people concerned and appear as oppositions in their analysis, however, we cannot take them as analytical dichotomies. Having their origins in Protestantism, such oppositions have become inherent to Western, but thoroughly globalised concepts of religion and personhood (Asad 1993; Meyer 2004). They should be understood, however, as part of a religious language of authentication that grounds religious subjectivity in the individual's 'inner person' rather than in communal bodily ritual and in 'immediate' rather than 'mediated' religious experiences. How, then, can we understand the ritual reproduction of bodily forms in a type of religion that expresses such a strong suspicion of ritual and bodily mediation? How does the pronounced engagement of the body relate to the Pentecostal ideology of conversion as a transformation of the spirit and not so much, or only in the second place, of the body?

The current revival of interest in the senses across the humanities offers intriguing avenues for pursuing these questions by helping us recognise that experiences that are authenticated as spontaneous and immediate and generated by the Holy Spirit are necessarily mediated by what Meyer has called 'sensational forms': 'authorized modes for invoking and organizing access to the transcendental that shape both religious content (beliefs, doctrines, sets of symbols) and norms' (2010: 751). As a socially organised practice of engaging with an extrasensory realm, religion depends on the senses as media that make that realm experienceable and real. Sensational forms, then, 'are part of a specific religious aesthetics, which governs a sensory engagement of humans with the divine and each other and generates particular sensibilities' (Meyer 2010: 751). The bodily performance of the anointing ritual described above, for instance, is such a sensational form, geared towards generating in the participants a powerful sense of God's presence.

Scholars of religion, especially in the fields of anthropology and history, are increasingly observing how religious traditions organise the sensory mediation of divine presence, through particular regimes of mobilising and disciplining the senses and the body (e.g. Chidester 1992, 2005; Csordas 1997; Norris 2003; Mahmood 2004; Hirschkind 2006; Meyer 2008, 2010). Much of this interest is inspired by Bourdieu's (1990 [1980]) elaboration of the notion of *habitus* and Mauss's (1973 [1934]) work on techniques of the body. For Bourdieu, *habitus* is the structure of embodied dispositions, acquired through upbringing, that operates beneath the level of consciousness, organises perception and action and thus mediates between socio-cultural patterns of behaviour and subjective experience. Bourdieu's emphasis on the unconscious power of *habitus*, however, leaves little room for exploring the explicit practices through which a *habitus* is acquired (Mahmood 2001). Recent anthropological work on religion and the senses has focussed on the body as a site of training and has shown how particular religious traditions discipline the body and tune the senses through conscious learning and rehearsal of bodily and sensory techniques (Hirschkind 2001; Alvez De Abreu 2005; Van Dijk 2005). I wish to emphasise that the sense of touch, including touch as it is implicated in sound and image, is particularly well tuned in charismatic Pentecostalism (De Witte 2011). The crescendo of multisensory stimulation of Pentecostal services tends to draw people into a powerful experience of the affective presence of the Holy Spirit. At the same time experiences of being touched by the Spirit thus induced the need to be authenticated as spontaneous and immediate. This article takes the touch as an entry point to the question of the relationship

between body and spirit in Ghanaian charismatic Pentecostalism. Presenting a case study of the International Central Gospel Church's Christ Temple in Accra, it argues that the process of conversion and the constitution of charismatic-Pentecostal subjectivity is characterised by a tension between bodily formats and a sense of divine touch.

Message, Miracle and the Touch of the Spirit

Official and popular representations of 'religion in Ghana' generally slice up Ghana's diverse and volatile religious field into the categories of 'Christianity' (69%, Ghana Statistical Service 2000), 'Islam' (15.6%) and 'African Traditional Religion' (8.5%), even if in practice the boundaries between religious categories are far from rigid. Traditionally, Ghanaian Christianity has been dominated by the former mission churches: Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist. Since the early twentieth century, the so-called African Independent Churches, or 'spiritual churches', broke the Western hegemonic shape of Christianity with more African forms and orientations. Today, the mainline churches remain significant, but as in many sub-Saharan African countries, their presence has been overshadowed by a new type of Christianity: African-founded and African-led, but globally oriented charismatic churches. During the last three decades, the popularity of charismatic Christianity has been fast growing, especially among young educated upwardly mobile people in the urban areas, where almost half of all Christians regard themselves as charismatic Pentecostal (Ghana Statistical Service 2000). With extensive media activity, charismatic churches have established a strong public presence that attracts broad and diverse audiences that cut across class and ethnicity. This 'paradigm shift' (Gifford 2004) towards charismatic Christianity has influenced not only other Christian denominations, but also non-Christian religions (De Witte 2005).

Charismatic churches are so diverse in orientation and practice that we can hardly speak of one Christianity and *its* modes of worship. What they have in common, however, is an emphasis on success, understood in terms of this-worldly, material wealth, physical well-being and social status (Gifford 2004; Asamoah-Gyadu 2005). The key to achieving this success is the deep spiritual transformation brought about by the acceptance of Jesus Christ as 'personal Lord and Saviour' and the subsequent 'Holy Spirit baptism', of which speaking in tongues is considered the first outward manifestation. In charismatic Christianity, religious subjectivity centres on conversion as a personal choice, motivated by the personal experience of the Holy Spirit. The emphasis is on divine inspiration and authority, charisma, spontaneity, immediacy; institutional

authority is suspect. Charismatic churches thus advocate a direct, personal relationship with Jesus Christ and an immediate access to the power of the Holy Spirit, that is, contrary to the Catholic tradition, unmediated by ordained priests, sacralised church buildings or elaborate ritual. In Ghana, this means that they also strongly oppose religious specialists such as traditional shrine priests or Islamic spiritual healers known as *mallams*, who equally function as indispensable intermediaries between their clients and the supernatural realm. Instead, charismatic churches offer their followers a way of directly receiving the spiritual power needed to live a successful life and fight malevolent powers: without recourse to traditional and thus 'demonic' remedies. Despite this theological emphasis, however, Ghanaian charismatic Christianity increasingly emphasises the role of the supernaturally gifted, or 'anointed', 'man of God' in transferring the power of the Holy Spirit needed to overcome problems and achieve success in all areas of life (cf. Gifford 2004).

Charismatic 'men of God' differ greatly, however, in their modes of mediating the spirit, and thus in their practices of shaping born-again Christians. There are prophets and healers who focus on divine healing and deliverance from demonic forces that hinder one's personal success. But there are also teachers, who focus on the development of one's God-given talents and on making the right choices in order to lead a productive life. Ghanaian charismatics themselves usually distinguish between miracle-oriented and message-oriented pastors. Gifford (2004) prefers to speak of a spectrum with at one end those, such as Bishop Dag Heward-Mills, who is first of all known for his miraculous healing and deliverance performances, and at the other end those known for their 'profound teaching', such as Mensa Otabil, who's social awareness, African consciousness and emphasis on education and cultural transformation have become trademarks (see De Witte 2003). But also within one church, or even within one pastor, there are different modes of mediating spiritual power, as we shall see in the case of Mensa Otabil's International Central Gospel Church.

While charismatic churches thus vary in their practices of shaping religious subjects, they share an emphasis on experience and, in particular, on the sense of being touched by the Holy Spirit, as crucial to the conversion process. The touch of God through the Spirit makes a fundamental change in a born-again Christian's life. This experience is commonly expressed in terms of tactile sensations, of feeling. On a video tape showing a miracle healing service, the popular miracle preacher Dag Heward-Mills, for instance, preaches: 'I see the healing of the Lord moving into your body right now. Some of you may feel

it like a warm passing through. Or something you feel, but you don't know what it is.' Testimonies captured on this video include people describing their experiences to the audience as feeling heaviness, heat or coldness in particular parts of the body or as 'just feeling something'. Other frequent descriptions include the feeling of electricity running through the body or having goose pimples. I would argue that such descriptions of 'being touched by the spirit' or 'feeling the power of the Holy Ghost' should not be understood only metaphorically, but quite literally, as indeed a bodily experience. The sense of being touched is evoked by the experience-oriented character and multisensory appeal of religious events. Much of religious performance is literally tactile. Laying on of hands, applying anointing oil to various parts of the body, falling to the floor, clapping, stamping, going down on one's knees, holding hands among the congregation; but also sound acquires haptic qualities as the vibrations of a preacher's amplified voice or the drums of stirring worship music fill the hall and produce strong tactile sensations. The same holds true, if to a lesser extent, for the visual spectacle of many charismatic events.

The Ghanaian theologian Bediako (1995: 106) understands African Pentecostalism, in resonance with African traditional religion, as 'a system of power' and living religiously as '*being in touch* with the source and channels of power in the universe' (my emphasis, M.d.W.). In taking this, 'being in touch' literally and stressing the tactile dimension of African charismatic-Pentecostal practices of religious mediation, I do not want to oppose African religiosity to the 'system of ideas', that Bediako holds Western Christianity for. Surely, such an understanding of Pentecostalism is not limited to the African context. Embodiment of the power of the Holy Spirit and the fight against demonic powers are important ingredients of Pentecostal lives everywhere. Neither is the emphasis on touch typical of 'African' religiosity, as the long-standing stereotypical opposition of detached Western modernity and African embodied authenticity would have it. Rather, I wish to emphasise that 'touch is a bodily experience deeply encoded in Christian culture' (Sennett 1994: 225, see also Classen 1998) and strongly emphasised in Pentecostalism worldwide, including Western societies (e.g. Roeland 2009; Klaver 2011).

In the West African context, this tactility of Christianity, and Pentecostalism in particular, has come to resonate with indigenous religious traditions. Despite its marked globalism and explicit distancing from African traditional religion, charismatic Pentecostalism is close to indigenous religions in several respects. While an analysis of this proximity in terms of people's religious itineraries and practices falls beyond the scope of this article (but see De Witte 2008,

2009), I will mention four aspects that are particularly relevant here: first, a religious imaginary that recognises the direct presence and influence of spiritual beings in people's daily life world; second, a practical, this-worldly (rather than otherworldly) focus that is directed at spiritual problem-solving and physical, material and social well-being; third, an emphasis on the role and power of divinely elected religious specialists as intermediaries between human beings and spirit powers (despite the Pentecostal rejection of such mediation) and, by extension, a competition for clients between such religious specialists; and fourth, and most important for the present discussion, a bodily regime; that values expressive, emotional modes of worship and authenticates the body as a primary medium of interaction with the spirit world. This proximity to African traditional religion is important to understanding Pentecostal conversion as a bodily process in the African context. The bodily and sensuous aspect of conversion to charismatic Pentecostalism as a long-term process is remarkably close to models of religious transformation in African traditional religious practice, most notably that of 'initiation', which suggests a ritual transformation, usually over a long period of time, not only of the spirit, but of the body as the locus of spiritual power (e.g. Preston Blier 1995; Lovell 2002). An important difference of course is that whereas in traditional religions the embodied human-spirit relationship primarily serves the community, the embodiment of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal conversion effects the transformation of (or into) an independent individual.

Spirit and Performance in the Christ Temple

The 4000-seat Christ Temple in Accra is the headquarters of the International Central Gospel Church, founded and led by Mensa Otabil. With over 7000 members, about 100 branches all over Ghana, in other parts of Africa as well as in Europe and the USA, a weekly prime time TV programme and daily radio broadcasts, the ICGC is one of the largest and most influential charismatic churches in Ghana. Mensa Otabil's well-established media presence and flamboyant appearance have earned him celebrity status. His 'life-transforming teachings' strike chords with a broad audience across Ghana's religious field and he is widely perceived as 'the teacher of the nation'. Otabil's passionate plea for knowledge, education and critical thinking and his criticism of the spiritualist tendencies of many of his charismatic colleagues set him somewhat apart in the field of Ghanaian charismatic Pentecostalism today (see also Larbi 2001; Gifford 2004). At the same time, he also depends (for his celebrity status, for his followers and thus for his income) on the charismatic wave that

sweeps the country. His rationalist message of self-development does not easily fit with charismatic practices like exorcism, divine healing and reliance on divine intervention, but he has to tolerate them in his church.

The ICGC thus offers both message-oriented events that are most often led by Otabil, that is, Sunday worship service and Tuesday teaching service, and miracle-oriented events such as the Solution Centre and the prayer meetings. These events present us with modes of mediating spiritual power – teaching and healing – that at first sight are entirely different in terms of performance and audience participation. Message-oriented events are framed as engaging the intellect; miracle-oriented events engage the senses and the body. On closer inspection, however, we see that both are spatially and bodily organised according to a ‘script’ and involve the bodily performance of specific roles by both the pastor and the audience.

Sunday service

The format of the two hour Sunday service has several stages and at each stage the interaction between performer and audience plays a different role in mediating between the physical and the spiritual world and establishing a relationship between the individual believer and Jesus Christ. The first half hour is ‘praise and worship’ time, led by the praise and worship song team on stage with backing from the church band. The first few songs have a fast and stirring beat and are aimed at lifting up the people and invoking the Holy Spirit in the auditorium. The crowd participates by clapping, dancing and singing along with the song texts projected on the screen. This is followed by a few slower songs, during which people lift up their hands in surrender to the Lord, singing along, praying aloud, at times crying. A few up-beat songs then bring back the excitement again to get people ready for the Word of God and for giving a large ‘seed’ to the church. During the first offering, the church choir or one of the other musical groups perform, but here the people sit down and listen motionless, even though the music can be quite danceable too. This is the time for the ushers, who stand still and supervise the crowd during worship, to perform their ‘choreography’ of collecting and taking away the money with remarkable efficiency.

The main ‘act’ of the service is the one hour sermon by Mensa Otabil (Figure 1). He appears on stage in an elegant and elaborate African lace gown and delivers the Word of God as a lecturer and an entertainer. Otabil’s preaching style is remarkable. With his deep voice and dignified authority, he commands respect



Figure 1. Mensa Otabil preaching in the Christ Temple, 2010. Photo courtesy ICGC.

and attention with calm confidence and clarity, not with shouting, as do many of his colleagues. He does raise his voice when he becomes passionate about something, but never does he lose his self-possession. In response to Otabil's teaching, the audience adopts a 'learning mode': they sit and listen attentively and take notes of the bible references and the key points of the sermon, helped by a Power Point projection of the sermon outline. Otabil keeps his audience active and awake by having them look up passages in the bible, repeat words or phrases after him, or say things to each other. He entertains them as an experienced storyteller, evoking laughter and applause with good jokes and stories, enacting little sketches and skilfully making use of theatrical body movements and variation in his voice.

The whole show takes place against a giant, digitally created stage backdrop that is changed annually. Printed in full colour and themed 'supernatural', the 2009 version – a creative appropriation of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* – dramatically showed the touch of the divine hand as it transfers the spark of life in the shape of a lightning bolt to the first man (Figure 2). In front of this visual spectacle, Otabil fills the wide stage with his flamboyant presence and large, flowing *agbada*. He uses the wooden pulpit in the centre for his sermon notes, but involves the whole stage in his performance, walking up and down and underlining his statements with his whole body. Not in the agitated manner of many of his colleagues though; like his speaking, Otabil's body movements are always controlled and dignified. Over the full width of the stage steps lead up to it, but never does Otabil come down



Figure 2. *Christ Temple auditorium, 2009. Photo courtesy ICCG.*

to walk among the audience, address individuals or touch them, as is common practice in many churches. He always remains one level higher and avoids direct eye contact even with people he knows. He thus enacts his authority and maintains a strict hierarchy. The closest contact is after the sermon, when he makes an 'altar call' and calls forward all those who have not yet given their lives to Christ and want to do so now. The spontaneously converted assemble at Otabil's feet and he calls upon the entire congregation to join him in prayer for them. As the 'welcomers' lead them away, the 'project offering' is taken. People sit down, take out their money when the basket passes and check their notes with the Power Point presentation that is repeated on the screen, or just listen to the music provided by the band. Then, first-time visitors are asked to stand up to be welcomed by Otabil, church members sitting close to them greet them with a handshake and ushers hand out invitations for the newcomers reception afterwards. Before service closes, Otabil asks everybody to stand up and hold hands while he speaks his benediction over the crowd, always ending with his 'signature phrase' 'in Jesus Christ you are more than a conqueror'.

During Sunday service, then, the power of the Holy Spirit is mediated primarily by the message, by the Word of God. Of course the whole, multisensory atmosphere in the auditorium contributes to the sense of being touched that people express after listening to the sermon, and is specifically designed to do so. It is first of all Otabil's words, however, that are experienced as touching and empowering. Church members frequently told me how the message had encouraged, motivated and reassured them. Some even spoke in more physical

terms of being moved, hit, pierced, pushed forward, chastised or even knocked down by the power of his words/His Word.

Solution Centre

To meet popular demand and compete with other churches, every Thursday the ICGC runs the 'Solution Centre', the healing and prophecy meeting led by Pastor Dan. This is 'Miracle Time' for people, not only church members, to come with all kinds of problems and be healed or find a spiritual solution. The atmosphere set here is very much unlike that on Sundays, much more dramatic and impulsive. The use of the auditorium space is entirely different too. Whereas Otabil's performance is characterised by distance, Pastor Dan hardly remains on the platform but, after a short sermon, comes down and walks among the congregation while prophetically calling individuals or groups forward. 'There is a lady here who has been struggling with a stomach problem for several years; I want to minister to that lady.' Or: 'I see a number, it starts with 3785, I don't know whether it is a credit card number or a visa application number, but if this is your number, come forward and great things are going to happen to you.' Whereas Otabil never touches, nor even makes eye contact with individuals in the audience, Pastor Dan engages them in intimate, physical contact. Laying his hands on their heads or on sick body parts and shouting in their ears and in the microphone, he casts out any demons that may be causing their sickness or failure in business or marriage and prophesies victory in the form of a visa, a villa, a pregnancy or a husband. Sometimes anointing oil is applied to the body, either by the pastor or the believer herself, so as to create 'points of contact' with the Holy Spirit. Music or sound effects from the band intensify the drama of the performance, as does Pastor Dan's frequent tongues speaking. Sometimes too people who are not directly ministered to suddenly 'explode in the spirit'. After intensive and solitary, but not silent prayer, often in tongues, reinforced by shaking the head, rapidly moving hands or fists up and down, or stamping the feet, a person may suddenly jump up, cry 'Jesus!' or just 'aaaaaaahh' and fall backwards onto the chairs, sometimes pushing others down at the same time.

In the 'Solution Centre' spiritual mediation thus happens mostly through touch, vigorous physical movement and what Marks (1999) has called 'haptic sound'. It is not so much the symbolic quality of sound (the meaning of words spoken or sung), but its physical quality (uttering meaningless sounds, the sheer volume of shouting, the rhythm of music) that evokes a sense of

she started participating in what she saw other people doing, she felt a growing desire to have the obviously powerful experiences that others showed in their behaviour and confirmed in their testimonies. Finally, she experienced this herself. For Lydia, then, becoming a born-again Christian and attaining the personal experience of the Holy Spirit that caused this transformation, was partly a process of 'getting used to' new postures, gestures and somatic reactions, becoming convinced of the reality of such expressions – the Spirit power behind them – nurturing a desire for the Spirit, and gradually embodying this reality herself. In her own terms, it was a process of opening herself up to the power of the Holy Spirit. She assured me that despite my not having experienced a divine touch, the experience would become available for me, as it does for everyone.

Format and Mimesis

At first sight, the 'miracle mode' of the Solution Centre seems to be much more body oriented than the 'message mode' of the Sunday sermon, where the audience sits still and takes notes of the message. Yet, during the sermon too, it is a specific bodily way of listening that facilitates the flow of spiritual power. An upright, active way of sitting and paying attention, reacting at the right moment in the right way with clapping, laughter, turning to one's neighbour, lifting up one's hand or interjecting amens and hallelujahs are all part of a learned, bodily discipline of listening to the Word of God. Interestingly, it was in the church's editing room, where the TV broadcast *Living Word* was made, that I became most acutely aware of this. In making the raw video footage of the Sunday sermon into a television broadcast, the editors were particularly concerned with visualising the non-verbal communication between Otobil and the congregation (De Witte 2003). They, thus, cut in audience shots showing people responding to the sermon. In selecting these shots from the raw recordings, they looked at posture, gestures, facial expression and attire and added the appropriate bodily responses to Otobil's words. They made sure to cut out any inappropriate body language or attire, such as yawning, sprawling, distracted looks or low-cut dresses. Such images, one of the editors explained, do not 'fit the format' of bringing across Otobil's message.

In media practice, such as in the ICGC studio, the concept of 'format' is used to refer to a more or less fixed set of stylistic features and sequence of ingredients applied to arrange and/or to (re)present media content. Watching the *Living Word* editors select those body images that support their programme format, I realised that the process of 'formatting' the church audience already started in church, as people's bodies are made to conform (or unconsciously

conform themselves) to what is deemed appropriate bodily behaviour. I have thus extrapolated the term format from its specific media-related use to include the performative aspects of religious practice and in particular, ritual. Ritual involves 'the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances encoded by someone other than the performer himself' (Rappaport 1999: 118). It thus shares with media formats the relative fixity of a particular form, but also their repetition and reproducibility. A format is a form meant for repetitive use. Continuous repetition is what makes a format powerful, because it makes the format become less apparent and recognised unconsciously, and the content it presents convincing. When people are continuously exposed to particular media formats, they become so accustomed to these formats that they get naturalised and shape people's sense of what is convincing and what is not (Van de Port 2006: 455). Ritual, a church service, for instance, is also a repetitive form that draws its convincing power from being repeated all the time and thus being naturalised, enabling people to experience the presence of divine power. Formats, then, play a central part in the processes by which (religious) mediations get authorised and authenticated.

The different modes of interaction between the 'man of God' and the religious subject all involve the performance of encoded, bodily formats by the participants. There is a format for worship, for prayer, for anointing, for prophesy, for healing and also for listening to sermons. In order to be fully part of the social and spiritual community of believers and to take part in the blessings bestowed upon this community by God through the pastor, an individual has to participate in the interaction with the pastor according to the specific formats of clapping and dancing, sitting and standing, saying 'amen' and 'hallelujah', praying aloud and raising hands at the appropriate moments and for the appropriate lengths of time. Much of this behaviour remains implicit and is hardly explained or talked about. Indeed, it is supposed to be spontaneous, and incited by a spiritual touch. As a new convert (or an anthropologist), however, one also observes and mimics (whether consciously or unconsciously) how and when to sit, take notes, stand, raise one's arms, kneel, fall down, jump, pray in tongues, dance and clap to the music and how to 'trample on the Devil' with one's feet or stretch out one's hand to 'receive a miracle'. Through mimetic performance, one gradually internalises a shared and prescribed format of bodily behaviour and develops the mannerisms characteristic of the different 'genres' of charismatic practice. It is this proper participation in the authorised bodily and sensory formats of collective ritual that makes one part of, and indeed able to participate in the religious community *and* to experience the

inner transformation that conversion is thought to be. Or, in charismatic terms, to 'feel the Holy Spirit at work'. Conversion, then, does not precede a change in bodily forms. Rather, the experience of – and desire for – inner transformation goes hand in hand with the adoption of new bodily practices. Authenticated as occurring spontaneously, the feeling of the Holy Spirit touching is produced by adopting and repeatedly practising certain bodily forms (cf. Mahmood 2001, 2004). Such new bodily forms do not result from conversion, but constitute its very process: they tune the senses to the touch of the Spirit that underlies the transformation.

Despite the charismatic emphasis on spontaneity and divine agency, the fact of practising and acquiring bodily techniques is not necessarily seen as contradictory or 'fake'. Rather, conscious and directed action on the part of the spirit-desiring believer is deemed necessary in order to be able to receive the spirit. The expectation of a miracle, for instance, is to be embodied as literally as stretching out one's hand to receive it. Such religious formats enable believers to sense a connection with a supernatural presence. Continuous repetition of these formats naturalises them and conceals the work of mediation they do, so that believers attribute this experience to divine agency. And yet, the performance of religious mannerisms does pose a tension with the miraculous touch: it is not obvious when 'performance' becomes 'divine touch' and when it fails to become 'divine' and remains 'mere acting'. Critics often dismiss charismatic bodily practices as 'mere performance' or 'just pretending'. As Otábil writes in his booklet *How to be filled with the Holy Spirit*, 'Some of the questions [about "Holy Spirit Baptism" and "speaking in tongues"] have to do with whether the experience is real or if people are faking it' (Otábil 2006: 6). Lydia initially thought it could not be real. Many pastors themselves are concerned that the increasing mass mediatisation and popularisation merely attracts people to an 'outward style' of charismatic worship without instigating the deep, life-transforming experience that the spiritual rebirth is supposed to be. A tension between the mediating power of format and people's sense of divine touch thus underlies the conversion process. This tension is not only a theological problem (of Holy Spirit versus church organisation), but is implicated in struggles for and over religious authority, and in bodily and sensory practices.

Conclusion

With the growth of the ICGC into one of the largest charismatic churches in Ghana, the experience of the power of the Holy Spirit has come to be

embedded in the church's well-organised religious events and strictly governed membership procedures. The church itself is concerned that organisation threatens to block the operation of the Holy Spirit. Yet, we have seen that in religious practice, the working of the Holy Spirit is experienced exactly if one submits to and incorporates certain bodily regimes, behavioural scripts and explanatory models. To escape resilient dichotomies between 'content' over 'form', 'spirit' over 'body', 'spontaneity' over 'ritual', 'immediacy' over 'mediation', I have proposed to distinguish between church discourse, which reinforces such dichotomies, and bodily practice, which turns out to conflate them. This is not a plea to privilege practice over discourse and to take what people do as more true than what they say. Rather, it is to understand bodily practice and theological discourse as mutually informing and as such shaping the process of conversion.

Becoming a born-again Christian involves two forms of knowing and two modes of learning that are inextricably related. Through language, one acquires cognitive knowledge; through mimesis, one acquires embodied knowledge. In the ICGC conversion implies submitting oneself to religious teaching and instruction, as for instance in the obligatory and highly formalised 'discipleship classes', sermons and explanation of doctrines. One thus gains *theo-logical* knowledge, understanding of what it means to be born again. Official charismatic discourse teaches that being born-again entails a deep inner transformation, caused by a very personal, immediate relationship with Jesus Christ and a spontaneous 'baptism' by the Holy Spirit. Ghanaian Pentecostal teaching presents conversion as a radical transformation of the spirit caused by the individual choice for Christ, based upon a deep inner conviction. Conversion does not require any transformation of the body; it will only be followed by changes in bodily appearance and behaviour. This teaching is largely indebted to the modern Protestant legacy and the separation of the mind from the body.

At the same time, the born-again Christian subject is formed by gradually embodying the specific bodily and sensory formats of sound and silence; movement and stillness; touch and avoidance of touch appropriate to listening to a sermon, worshipping, being delivered or prophesied to. Such charismatic mannerisms are acquired by mimetic performance, that is, the bodily reproduction of ritual formats, and evoke particular sensational experiences. One thus gains what we could call 'theosomatic knowledge', knowledge of God or spirit being(s) gained through and stored in the body. Theosomatic and theological knowledge are mutually constitutive, because it is through religious instruction that one has learned what to expect, to feel, to desire, how to interpret one's bodily responses to religious ministry and how to talk about these sensations.

And conversely, 'feeling it in the body' is taken as an indicator of the true presence of the Holy Spirit. Bodily behaviour such as speaking in tongues is authenticated as occurring spontaneously, involuntary, that is, resulting from divine, not human agency: the Holy Spirit touching. In practice, then, conversion involves a ritual and sensual transformation of the body. The ritual performance of postures and gestures and the training of somatic responses transform the body into a medium of contact with the Holy Spirit.

Religion organises people's engagement with divine presence through particular sensory regimes that tune their senses to this presence. Together with the assimilation of new meanings and concepts, the embodied forms and sensibilities that come with long-term participation in religious practice shape religious subjectivity, belonging, imagination and experience. Body and language, the word and the flesh, are thus entangled in a way that challenges the mind-body split that still informs hegemonic understandings of religious knowledge and conversion.

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