

the local out of their charmed circle of identity, or allowing the global in only at severe restrictions. There is a remarkable variation in the way in which local religious forms can be voiced in a context where globally mediated religious forms are clearly dominant. Here specific individual spirits are acknowledged and confronted, so that local identities (referring to the home village, the in-group, ancestors) remain part of the identity which is recognised to be ushered into the new Pentecostal environment. In Independent Churches in Francistown, Botswana, a very different situation obtains (van Binsbergen 1990, 1993c):

D. CHURCHES IN FRANCISTOWN, BOTSWANA. Admittedly, there is a large number of different churches at work on the Francistown scene, and although the liturgical and therapeutic style of most of them is remarkably similar, differences should not be ignored. My participant observation inevitably had to be limited to just a handful of such churches. Here at any rate ancestral spirits could only be mediated to the globally informed church environment in the most muted form possible: individual spirits were never named, but the church-goer (or in view of the fact that therapy is a prime motivation for church-going, 'patient' would be an appropriate designation) would collapse, moan and scream inarticulately, no attempt would be undertaken to name the troubling spirit and identify it in the patient's genealogy – its suppression and dispelling was the church leadership's recognised task.¹⁰²

An exploration of the wider social framework shows that the particular mix of global and local elements to be 'allowed in' is far from entirely decided at the level of these formal organisations alone. In Francistown, the church routine is only one example out of very many (van Binsbergen 1993a) to demonstrate that (as a result of the converging effects of state monitoring, on the one hand, and the population's self-censorship and informal social control, on the other hand) the public production of any time-honoured local cultural tradition is anathema within the urban environment of Francistown today – unless under conditions of state orchestration, such as urban customary courts or Independence celebrations. For most purposes, traditional culture has gone *underground* in this town. This also makes it understandable why rival therapeutic institutions available at the local urban scene: herbalists (*dingaka ya setswana*) and spirit mediums (*basangoma*) offering more secluded sessions for private conversation and therapeutic action, continue to attract a larger number of clients than the population's massive involvement in healing churches would suggest. Ethnicity does play a role here, since Francistown is in the heart of Kalanga country, and the Kalanga constitute the most vocal and privileged ethnic and linguistic minority to challenge Tswana hegemony in Botswana. Yet this cannot be the entire explanation: Kalanga is not the *lingua franca* in Francistown (that privilege has been accorded to Tswana, which is also the mother tongue not only of the distant Tswana majority to the West and the South but also of some communities near Francistown), and from the 1960s on the town has attracted such large numbers of Tswana urban migrants that Tswana are now in the majority – but also *Tswana* expressions of traditional culture are barred from the public

¹⁰² Such mutedness may be also recognised in the *Wosanna* variant of the Southern African *sangoma* cult, where the adepts (contrary to the ancestral variant) do not ritually dance and sing, but when in trance display a catatonic, silent perplexity. Both variants may be found within the same cultic lodge, as was the case in MmaShakayile's lodge at Monarch township, Francistown, where I received most of my own *sangoma* training; here the lodge owner's daughter was the principal representative of the *Wosanna* variant. Elsewhere I have gone into the question whether the name *Wosanna* derives from the Biblical *hosanna* as a pious expression of adoration (van Binsbergen 2003b: 167 n. 1).

urban scene. More important, churches are about the least ethnically divided domain in Francistown society: many churches here are emphatically bilingual or trilingual in their ritual practice, and whereas it is sometimes possible to detect ethnic overtones in the conflicts which often lead churches to split, in general adherents live up to their stated conviction that ethnic bickering is not becoming in a context meant to express common humanity before the face of God (van Binsbergen 1994b).

Creating identity – ‘a place to feel at home’, to borrow Welbourn & Ogot’s apt expression first applied to Independent Churches in Western Kenya,¹⁰³ – means that the church members engage in a social process that allows them, by the management of boundaries and the positioning of people, ideas and objects within and outside these boundaries, to create a new community which in principle is independent from whatever pre-existing community attachments the people involved may have had on the basis of their kinship affiliations, rural homes, ethnic or political affiliations. How can we understand such a home outside home? The new home made afresh on the basis of chosen attachments in a voluntary association, often in a new social and geographical environment, partly disqualifies the old home, yet reminds of it and from this reminder derives part of its meaning and emotional satisfaction. The concept of virtuality helps us to understand these important operations in the domain of identity and self-organisation.

However, before we can meaningfully discuss the virtualisation of meaning in the context of globalisation, let us first consider the concept of meaning with more than the standard ethnographer’s empiricist naïveté.

1.2. Introducing virtuality

1.2.1. Virtuality provisionally defined

In my view virtuality is one of the major underlying themes in the context of globalisation.

The terms *virtual* and *virtuality* have a well-defined and illuminating history, which in its broad sweep of space and time, its multi-lingual aspect and its repeated changes of meaning and context, reminds us of the very globalisation process we seek to illuminate by the use of these terms.

Non-existent in classical Latin (although obviously inspired by the word *virtus* there), they are late-medieval neologisms, whose invention became necessary when, partly via Arabic versions of Aristotle’s works, his Greek concept of δύναμις *dunamis* (‘potentiality, power, quadrate’) had to be translated into

¹⁰³ Welbourn & Ogot 1966; for an application of this concept to urban Zambia, cf. van Binsbergen 2000 *f.*