2015 | *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5 (2): 101–120

Beyond occult economies

Akan spirits, New York idols, and Detroit automobiles

Jane Parish, *Keele University*

While it has been extensively recorded how the West African occult economy allows for a metanarrative critique of modernity, this article analyzes a convergence between witchcraft discourses and the capitalist market, looking through the local lens of Akan spirit shrines in New York City. Rather than being in awe of the "mysterious workings" of the marketplace, Akan occult practices fully engage with American mass production and neoliberal orthodoxy. In this process, the American automobile, the object par excellence of the American dream, embracing an ideology of escapism and individualism, has become, I argue, a local symbol against the extravagant consumerism worshipped in New York and at more established shrines. Young shrine priests, I explain, hold up as an alternative beacon of opportunity an age of Detroit automotive production in order to spiritually manufacture a different type of industrialism—the (re)cycling by Akan shrines of the iconic Pontiac automobile.

Keywords: Akan spirit shrines, cosmology, capitalism, witchcraft, automotive

> *Look at this Buick engine . . . stare real hard madam at this flowmaster pipe. The 81' model had a cylinder deactivation system. Rocker . . . covers over two cylinders always broken. Pressure, pinging, the whole damn engine was a piece of crap. . . . I want to take it apart, the engine blocks, suspension, ignition, grille, transmission. Me . . . me, an auto wrecker. Me, an auto dismantler. I'm an auto salvager. Me . . . I be the Lord . . . and I be with Satan. I'm going to rebuild the world with my image . . . but super different. Look and believe the new energy with . . . each piston and plug in the glory . . . give me the space to worship and glorify with its image. This is like life. We got too used to broken ways and we split with our broken selves. We gotta change man . . . and I can help your fate . . . with power.*
>
> —AJ, Shrine Priest, Brooklyn

ISSN 2049-1115 (Online). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.14318/hau5.2.009

In the African postcolony, the popularity of occult narratives as moralizing discourses about modernity and materialism assumes new heights. The perception exists of witchcraft discourses and the wider "occult economy" as representing an "exotic" turning to magical protest, however unrealistic and futile, against "illicit" material ends (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). For example, African witchcraft narratives thrive as commentaries on "selfish" wealth, "immoral" accumulation, and "excessive" consumption (Rowlands and Warnier 1988; Sanders 1999; Ashforth 2005). The highly visible diaspora of West Africans throughout the United States since the early 1980s, and especially over the last fifteen years, has led to Akan spirit shrines and witchcraft narratives slowly spreading to cities such as New York, home to one of the largest Ghanaian populations outside of Africa (Parish 2011). Yet, amid the extravagant spending, riches, and conspicuous material consumption found in Manhattan, how to reflect the incredible occult imagining of Akan shrine practitioners in the New York consumer marketplace? In this article, I show, how the notion of the "occult economy" obscures a time-space compression whereby transnational Akan shrines in New York City draw on different cultural elements from Ghana, New York, and other American cities and periods of history. This includes a time of American mass manufacturing production, eighteenth-century Peoria Native American conflict, and a social trajectory in present day New York where enormous accumulation is equally admired and disdained. Furthermore, I argue that rather than assuming the "occult economy" to be at the mercy of the "immoral" and "mysterious mechanisms of the capitalist market," magical interpretations of modernity are to be seen as the subject of critical discourses locally. If at shrines a critique of private capitalism and excessive materialism is made, this is to focus upon a type of venture capitalism evidenced particularly in New York and in other consumer capitals. Yet, among some young shrine priests concerned with the worship of "unobtainable" wealth, especially by priests at more established shrines, their response to the social issues caused by a dysfunctional marketplace is not a moral dismissal of the ethos of wealth and accumulation per se but a recalling of an older model of industrial manufacturing. Moreover, at all shrines, the ideology of economic competition is seen as something that is challenging, rewarding, and empowering, even as the neoliberal economy falters and huge discrepancies in wealth become clear across the New York landscape.

The notion of the occult economy therefore conceals not only complex cultural undercurrents but also very significant ideological dynamics. As older Akan priests advise clients in pursuit of self-gain and younger priests seek to heal the body of their clients through an appeal to a historical stage of mass production, the American dream is propped up and its ideology reinvented, not least through the metaphor of the automobile. This is able to happen, I contend, because there is more than a simple amalgamation of Akan spirits and industrial processes to produce a hybrid religious imagination. Instead, Akan spirits forcefully tackle neoliberal orthodoxy head on, I argue, as shrine priests appear able to recycle their own versions of the magic of commoditization and "read economic conceptions through a thick cosmology" (da Col 2012: 192). Examining the relationship between indigenous cosmology and Western political ideologies, June Nash (1993) identifies how traditional Andean cosmologies and American political rhetoric have been integrated without dissonance into the same belief system that plays a fundamental role

in creating the Bolivian mining landscape. Stephan Palmié (2002), in discussing the meanings associated with Afro-Cuban tradition, argues that Marx's monstrous world of commodities points to a world that has spread beyond the conceptual space occupied by Western modernity to produce a subterranean convergence with Caribbean cultural practices that are part of the same complex history of Atlantic modernity. Or, as Peter Geschiere (2010) highlights, when talking about belonging in a globalized world, the same preoccupations can acquire great mobilizing appeal but in different settings (Geschiere 2010: 45). This is particularly true, argues Roger Sansi, of the discourse of the fetish and he describes capitalism as not only comparable and adaptable to African sorcery but as part of the same fetishism of modernity (Sansi 2011: 19). In an age of recession and destitution but also the extreme veneration of objects and the commodification of people—the worse paradoxes of industrial America and global mass culture—I suggest, are refracted through Akan occult narratives. The "intraconnective" nature of Akan shrine practices encompasses the movement of American mass-produced commodities and transports these things into the spiritual realm where "beings are more subject than object to one another" (Handleman 2008: 182). I consider how shrine discourses flow far beyond an occult economy and into the fetishized marketplace of corporate America, as shrines make their own particular realities, and "esoteric registers are shifted to material registers and back again as presences pour into objects" (Johnson 2014: 3).

While at more established shrines an obsession with celebrity and conspicuous consumption is rampant, among young shrine priests that reality is put aside in favor of privileging an iconic America through a golden era of industrial motor manufacturing. In *Sex, drink and fast cars*, Stephen Bayley (1986) describes how the production of cars enabled the American consumer to assert mass individuality through the infamous manufacturing techniques of the assembly line after Henry Ford introduced the continuous production belt in 1914 (1986: 12). Detroit, the home of American automotive production, became a center of "visual entertainment but working in chrome rather than celluloid" (Ingrassia 2012: xiv). The car turned into an object of desire, "interlocking social and cultural practices" that stretched far beyond the car as an object of emotion and memories and a "vehicle of conspicuous consumption" (Urry 2006: 26). Among young shrine priests, classic automobiles such as the Pontiac Firebird and Torpedo personify the American dream of freedom and prosperity but also a dynamic relation between the spiritual and material realm (see Tassi and Espirito Santo 2014). By recreating cars, young Akan priests are depositing spiritual contingency and uncertainty into the standardized American productive process of cause and effect established by Ford (see also Ishii 2012).

There are many different African religious practitioners in New York. Among these are a number of Ghanaian shrines set up in the 1970s—and the years since—to promote African Traditional Religion and Akan philosophical ideas about sacredness to a wider African American audience. Few in number, the Akan spirit shrines discussed in this article are not to be confused with these formal organizations. Rather, the secret and clandestine activities of spirit shrines described here, based on fieldwork carried out between 2005 and 2011, operate very much "underground," and are concerned primarily with witchcraft, an extremely taboo topic rarely spoken about in public. Clients attending the shrine do so in extreme

secrecy, seldom revealing this to family or friends. Some shrine clients are also Pentecostal Church members and describe how critics of spirit shrines believe "fetish priests" to be "evil," "satanic witchdoctors," and "criminals" who practice "ju-ju."

I originally conducted fieldwork on witchcraft and shrines in Brong-Ahafo Region Ghana in the early 1990s; as part of the growing African diaspora I traced a number of Akan shrines to Europe over the next ten years. Through these links and Ghanaian contacts in West Africa and the United States, I was eventually able, over a period of six or so years, to set up fieldwork in New York among a small number of shrines. At Akan spirit shrines, many shrine priests are immigrants who arrived in the United States since the 1980s as illegal migrants from Ghana. Younger shrine priests at less established shrines are usually more recent migrants, largely arriving since the turn of the twenty-first century (Huewelmeier and Krause 2010). All priests are employed in a variety of business activities, which are not always on the "right" side of the law, especially if priests have few shrine clients and need to supplement their income. They trace their ancestry to the Ghanaian spirit shrines (*obosom-obrafo*) that flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century against witchcraft and to the Akan linguistic group, which includes the Twi speakers of the Asante region of Central Ghana and the Brong-Ahafo region of Western Ghana (Ward 1956). Among the Akan, the spirit (*sunsum*) of the god (*obosom*) is found hidden in stones, twigs, and other things in the densely vegetated African bush. In New York, the spirit (*sunsum*) of the god has called out to priests from various objects such as a clock, a walking stick, a pair of jeans in a department store, a candy wrapper, or even the inner tube of an old bicycle. In other cases, the god has been pulled from the Hudson River, concealed in a pebble, or buried in a paper bag discarded in a refuse dumpster on the Lower East Side. Rescued by the priest, the bag was covered with leaves and dirt and placed in a brass bowl that became its altar in a boarded up liquor store once managed by the priest's uncle. Indeed, shrines are found hidden in a variety of covert locations throughout New York City and apartments in Brooklyn, Harlem, Queens, and the Bronx, frequently moving around and shutting down only to appear in a new guise, months or even years later.

Akan shrines activate in a series of social relationships, priests, materials, and invisible spirits (Ishii 2012). This is accomplished, in New York as in Ghana, during possession, which is the dominant activity at Akan spirit shrines (Goody 1957). Possession involves a set of exchanges that signify the presence of the god in order to hear the details of a client's case. In New York, during possession the shrine priest carries the spirit of the god (*obosom*) held over his head—at one shrine, in an old milk carton on which he has stuck the picture and description of a missing person. The spirit (*sunsum*) of the missing person is believed to assist the god in his day-to-day living arrangements—buying the god whatever he desires, helping him dress and keeping him fed, and keeping guard over magical talismans (*asuman*). In this complex world of spirit-objects, the Akan describe how witchcraft (*obayi*) within the kin group works like an owned object (Ishii 2012). Since by virtue of the blood (and the womb) a person belongs to the matriline, lineage ideas determine the individual's place in the matrikin (Ishii 2012). This also gives the witch (*obayifo*), commonly believed to be an envious and greedy woman in the kin group, the right

over the individual and, according to witches, to "kill" him or her or cause misfortune, as and when they want (Rattray 1927; Debrunner 1959).

Robert Weller (1987) explains how worship at ghost shrines in Taiwan expresses a world of individualistic, utilitarian, and amoral competition. Embracing the obsessive pursuit of unimaginable wealth, Akan shrine priests in New York in the early twenty-first century became the poster boys for a type of American neoliberalism. They embodied the American dream of late 1980s and 1990s America—of Wall Street, money markets, and commoditization. The dynamics of shrine discourses about wealth drew upon an explicit relationship between witchcraft and private accumulation that flourished during colonial times among the Akan (McCaskie 1981; McLeod 1981). James Ferguson summarizes how wealth in West Africa is either "the kind that feeds the people or the kind that eats them" (2006: 73). Among other things, cocoa money in the early twentieth-century fueled excessive individual accumulation at the expense of kinship obligations and witchcraft accusations escalated, fed by increasing guilt, depression, and conflict among relatives (Field 1960). In Ghana, the conflicting perceptions of the family as the locus of support during times of economic insecurity and as a drain on the wealth of prosperous relatives results in wealth being seen as both a blessing and a curse (Parish 1999). In other words, although money may have a liberating effect for its owner, it can lead also to an asocial denial of community and accusations of witchcraft (Van der Geest 1997; Lentz 1998). Akan shrines appeared and disappeared very quickly (Field 1940; Goody 1957) as shrines in Ghana tried to manage the anxiety that came with the pursuit of new forms of accumulation (Drucker-Brown 1975). Rumors flew in Ghana of "greedy" relatives participating in blood money rituals (*sika aduro*) to obtain "immoral" and "selfish" prosperity. In response, at Ghanaian shrines were found many magical objects (*suman*) and sacred medicines (*adura*) used to protect individuals' accrued savings from witchcraft forces (see McCaskie 2008).

Michael Taussig (1980) portrays the intertwining of the commodity fetish and magical beliefs mediated through the image of the devil whereby men sell their soul for untold wealth and riches. In New York among shrine clients, many of whom seek economic success, fame, or celebrity and see the witch as preventing this, the defeat of witchcraft has come to be based on a private dream, private interest, and the market logic of the cult of the winner (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). In New York City, the sacred space of Akan shrine divination is made relevant by gods who understand that the shrine is not a closed microcosm but that its religious spirits and materials compete for attention alongside the fetishization of luxury objects that appear to have a life of their own amid fantastical consumer spending. Indeed, the city itself is no longer a location. Rather, the modern quintessence of New York City appears to be, as Mayor Bloomberg once proudly observed, a luxury product and nowhere perhaps is wealth more keenly spent than on Fifth Avenue. Shrines and clients revered the cutthroat business practices and economic individualism of corporate America and the shrine became a place that, especially among its young African client base, epitomized the relationship between the conspicuous consumption of commodities and social status.

In New York, Akan spirit shrines thrive as people secretly visit them not only from the New York metropolitan area but from across the United States, with all

sorts of economic desires and problems. Shrines deal with many different types of anxieties—loneliness, drug addiction, adultery—often centered on feelings of anger, resentment, and revenge and presented in clusters by clients so that it is difficult to entangle one problem from another; shrines in New York predominantly deal with economic misfortune and individuals who feel that they would be more healthy, both physically and financially, if witchcraft was not blocking their path to success. Fears found at shrines about West African witchcraft highlight the idea that intimate relationships can be extremely dangerous although progressively operating at a distance as kinship networks assume an expanding horizon (see Geschiere 2013: xvii). In his work on Malawi, Harri Englund (2007) demonstrates how witchcraft discourses increasingly mediate relationships by enabling subjects to imagine and theorize sociality on an indeterminate scale. Certainly in New York, among some young shrine-clients, the social relationships that make up the transnational kinship network now extend to include an altogether different type of familiarity, as they aspire for more than they currently own and believe that their hidden talents remain undiscovered. This is the intimacy of fans with their idols through Internet blogs, and Twitter, television, and celebrity magazines. This is significant because in the contemporary entertainment age we have established close relationships with stars we have never met but feel that we personally know (Parish 2013). The Akan spirit shrine, through popular witchcraft discourses, pulls the mass-produced aesthetic of celebrity together within the ever broadening intimacy of kinship/family networks in the African diaspora through the body of the witch who hides behind the make-believe images of fame in the shadow of celebrity (Parish 2013). Witchcraft therefore links persons and mass-produced subject/objects through the imaginary.

The focus of the priests' knowledge is on the wealthy and how to be like them—whether Manhattan socialite, CEO, or Hollywood movie star. Shrines produced photographs from American celebrity magazines to indicate that only they could see the "secret" witch perched on the shoulder of the rich and famous. In one of the most modern cities in the world, shrines represented being ahead of the game and a place where, for a fee, clients could also access this "sacred" knowledge and pursue their private dreams of fame (Parish 2011). Young black African clients came to the shrine wanting the money for Balenciaga leather purses or Louis Vuitton's trash bag purse (which cost $2000) or the Air Jordan VII sneaker, "otherwise I go quench." Others wanted help to achieve their dream job working for PR agencies and to personally represent stars like Beyoncé. Some wanted to live in a downtown apartment in the East Village or Midtown but felt that witches in their family were obstructing these dreams and were jealous of their clothes and lifestyle. They felt that "sly" relatives, out of jealousy, desired them to scale down their ambitions and secretly saw them as wasting money on shoes and fashion accessories. They wanted the "ju-ju man" to bring them "disappearing medicine" or make them "bank" and a "triple dollar" talisman to "ginger my swagger." One young Ghanaian woman, who worked as a cashier in a liquor store in Queens, illustrated what a lot of her peers at shrines felt was pressure from relatives to look for mundane, low-paying jobs: "Tweaa. . . . Don't disturb they say . . . you gotta get a real job . . . they throw shade . . . girl for wanting me a loft . . . advise oneself . . . but I ain't getting out of my home

. . . less than $500 a day." Another, who answered phones for a cab firm in the West Village, said, "I ain't carrying no bolo bag. . . . I want Hermes."

Clients usually fall into two camps. A large proportion of shrine clients are the young sons and daughters of immigrants and unregistered aliens from Ghana and other West African countries who only migrated to the United States since the 1980s and especially in the last fifteen years (Stoller 2001). Given the rapidly increasing mobility of people, Geschiere (2010) points to the notion of "belonging as assuming great preoccupation" (2010: 53). Jemima Pierre (2004) looks at how migration and the ethnic identity process in the United States is based within a larger ideological framework. "Celebratory discourses of equality and opportunity became a corner stone of ethnic identities" (Pierre 2004: 143). The ultimate success or "bootstraps model" of all ethnic groups functions as proof that the American dream is fair, "reasonable and attainable by all, ignoring the significance of racism and the position of blackness in America" (143). Buying into the myth of African American ghetto culture, they see their own cultural repertoire as superior and separate. Some have graduated from high school and are studying for further educational qualifications. While their parents and older relatives are employed in typically African occupations in the United States as taxi drivers, traders, and nurses, young shrine clients see themselves as much more ambitious and want to work in better-paid and more glamorous occupations (Parish 2011).

The other most clearly identifiable group of shrine clients is composed of older African American men and women (Parish 2011). They resent the fact that although they have worked all their lives—often in menial and unskilled jobs—and respected the decisions of their elders at home and their superiors at work, they have not achieved the economic status in life that they had hoped for: running their own business, becoming a supervisor, or progressing up the promotion ladder. Moreover, and in opposition to the African migrant, they regard themselves as model citizens with a very strong work ethic.

The magic of the American dream

In the pursuit of the American dream there is always some other interpretation and formulation at shrines that draws upon multiple coexisting worldly spaces. Recognizing that Akan shrines are actors in a broad economic stream that includes not only the realities of immigration and its aspirations but also a wider history of witchcraft and magic, how has the car become representative of a magical politics of hope at Akan shrines, given the collapse of the manufacturing economy in the United States? While the financial meltdown of Lehmann Brothers in 2008 merely temporarily slowed the process of material accumulation, the Occupy protests in New York (and throughout the world) are a sign of protest about greed, and also indicative of a sense of injustice and exploitation that the global rich are becoming wealthier at the expense of the masses. In this socio-economic environment, shrines look to magical discourses to make sense of the poverty and inequalities between clients and it is here that shrine approaches begin to diverge.

Under a predatory type of neo-liberalism some younger priests, in response to the deteriorating social and economic status of their clients, began to reinvent themselves as "Bonnie and Clyde" type characters by robbing the rich to feed the poor, even while they still professed an adoration for America, and particularly, its blue collar industrial legacy. The classic economic individualism espoused by older shrines in New York in the early twenty-first century was increasingly condemned as an ethics of greed and selfishness. Young priests felt that the old gods had grown insatiable for cash (like the fat cats they protected) and they had lost their moral compass. They used the analogy of cattle eating so much that they vomit, only to eat this later, savoring the same meal over and over again. The old gods did the same. They ate their own shit. They became swamped by money. They shouted how the gods were now too fat and slow to trap witches. They retreated into their own bubbles of success and were now returning to Ghana as wealthy men. They were likened to hedge funders who robbed the poor of their actual savings. They spoke of how the old gods could be spied gorging at night on the life savings of their clients as they exited their limousines, caught in the glare of the headlights of luxury cars such as the Lexus, BMW, Mercedes, and Lamborghini. Indeed, many priests spoke of how these gods possessed fleets of luxury cars and would have witches as their chauffeurs. They spoke of these gods patrolling, no longer the night skies, but the roads—Lexington, Fifth Avenue, and Broadway—in limousines. The well-known five o'clock shadow in Midtown on a Friday, and the darkness caused by fleets of limousines whisking business executives away to The Hamptons, is mimicked in the world of the gods, who are too lazy to stay in New York to work.

In effect, these young shrine priests reject the ethos of a new form of venture capitalism proffered by the few most established shrines. They view this as a type of "quick" wealth that comes from "nowhere." Alternatively, these newer shrines promote an economic model of hard work and production rather than the consumption of luxury items and celebrity images. Witchcraft in Ghana, they argue, always embraced the individualistic pursuit of wealth at the cost of reciprocal kinship relations, as witches in Ghana were simply fighting for their status alongside other types of new capitalist enterprises that grew up under canonicalization. They wrecked the wealth of others, including innovative entrepreneurs, in order to protect their own empires, just like the fat cats of the American corporate landscape and the venture capitalists who make a profit from destroying the business of rivals. Today, these witches are firmly enmeshed in the corporate landscape, helping the rich become more so at the expense of the poor. Therefore, the role of the newer shrine is to pursue and destroy the mega rich and the witch who helps them, and, in this process, aid the poor economically and socially through encouraging those enmeshed in poverty to work hard and realize their own dreams in their day-to-day jobs (not through the support of rampant material desires, which the witch embodies). While everyone desires to "truly make it in America" and aspires to wipe the slate clean, to start again, or to triumph over the forces that are keeping them from attaining their true potential, this is no longer possible without the help of shrines because of what young priests call a culture of cannibalism practiced in the United States. At New York shrines, the city of Detroit became illustrative of this culture and of a "1% versus 99%" style of class warfare and a profound, growing disillusionment with the more recent venture capitalist style of American capitalism. Indeed,

among the shrine clients who had travelled from New York's outer boroughs or from cities such as Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Cincinnati, the bubble of conspicuous consumption synonymous with Manhattan seemed far removed from the realities of their daily lives.

At newer shrines a spatial desegregation began to occur between young African clients from New York obsessed with material consumption and other African and African American clients who travelled to shrines in New York from less wealthy cities who did not care about owning the latest designer clutch purse. Nor were they envious of those who had achieved this, for the material side of capitalism had begun to exist independently of their human existence. One client told of how her boyfriend was never home and, since she had lost her job, she had no money to pay for heating her small apartment that also housed her two young cousins. Another client, Gwen, described how the walls of her studio sublet were damp with sewage fluids from the bathroom above. These clients wanted jobs. They wanted money to send back home. They hoped the shrine could weave its magic by selling them sacred talismans, *asuman*, to achieve this and fight witchcraft and misfortune and bring about a change in their economic circumstances.

Among the many low-waged and unemployed black African and African American shrine clients, young priests heard about the poverty among their extended families in cities such as Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Detroit. Priests began to travel to these cities, lodging with entourages and with family and friends. They "passed word about," warning individuals to be wary of "trading their souls for blood money" and a "quick" wealth that is conjured out of nowhere by the witch. Those on the breadline were told to remember to buy magical *asuman* in order to be alert to witchcraft and, instead, carve "fresh and exciting" employment openings. In Detroit, many new migrants from Ghana, Nigeria, and other West African countries come to the city for educational and professional opportunities; they speak English and try to take advantage of a prosperous niche markets by starting businesses such as hair braiding, restaurants, and import-export firms (Cunningham 2006). They do this however within a decaying metropolis. By the economic meltdown of 2008, General Motors and Chrysler asked for federal aid and filed for bankruptcy, Chapter 11, but started producing again after a two-month shutdown and massive restructuring (De Lorenzo 2006; Rattner 2010; Ingrassia 2011). Shrine priests use the Detroit motor industry to attract the business of both the young unemployed and low-paid worker, but also more prosperous black Africans who "respect" the ostentatious and luxury brands of European motor such as "wab" (Mercedes Benz). The popular Ghanaian movie *Zinabu* (1987) is referred to in order to warn individuals of the danger of selfish desire and of not sharing their wealth among their less prosperous kin. Carmela Garratino (2013) describes how in the movie, Kofi, a poor auto mechanic, exchanges what he refers to as "his manhood" for unlimited wealth offered by a beautiful witch, Zinabu, on the condition that he agrees (with his life) "to abstain from all sexual relations, with her or any other woman" (2013: 72). The "almost instantaneously affluent Kofi" is seen driving a new car but eventually finds "sexual temptations too great" and is killed by Zinabu, "asphyxiated in his new vehicle" (73). In other words, money is associated with esteem and consumption but also needs to circulate in the productive economy. It is corrupting and linked to immorality if "selfishly splashed out on big mansions, gold chains, polished shoes and Italian clothes" (74).

Among the newest shrines and youngest priests, they have reinvented the American dream—especially a belief in hard work and opportunity in what they see as a retrograde type of American capitalism—which is ironic given the wealth and inequality generated by this older form of industry. At these shrines this is symbolized by the Detroit automobile where cars are a self-symbol, writes Jeannette Mageo, for most people in the United States and "Americans have a cultural model of the self as a free individual" (2011: 41). A forty-year-old priest, Sonny, an illegal migrant from Ghana, had several times visited Detroit and taken requests from people wanting the help of his god. Outside of his shrine in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, he told me that it was important to celebrate the pioneer spirit of the early founders of the "Motor City" and the hard working ethic of the work force and not the European and Japanese car companies and the workers he considered to be suspicious strangers:

> Garbage, garbage. . . . Detroit is in a hole . . . killed the labor, the good men making autos here. We need to remember the spirits with souls . . . pioneer spirit. . . . Chevrolet, big men like him . . . mavericks . . . not government . . . not big men from NYC . . . the big apple. . . . No government contracts . . . heal Detroit. We have to remember the autos with the blood . . . made them . . . the creative process

For those clients in Detroit, young shrine priests stories center on the fighting spirits of indigenous Native Americans in the Michigan area. This is summed up at shrines by priests who chant the popular slogan that in Detroit it is only the weak who are killed and eaten. Indeed, a traditional Native American headdress adorned the front of the 1950s Pontiac Chieftain, which was discontinued in 2010 so General Motors could concentrate on the Buick. Of specific importance here to priests is the spirit of Chief Pontiac, an Ottawa Native American who led the rebellion against the British in 1763 in the Great Lakers Region. He was assassinated in 1769 by a Peoria Native American. To be murdered by a fellow American is an illustration of the distrust of young priests of the current American corporate landscape stalked by anonymous global entities. These priests preach that the American dream is not working in its current state: it is based on the mass slaughter of men such as Chief Pontiac and the American and African working class. They see the Pontiac motor as representing a rebellious character that they desire their clients to identify with as they seek to repair the make-up of both the car and body of the client.

American cars and idols

Shrine priests prefer clients to visit them in New York where the shrine of the god is located. It is here, at shrines, that my interviews took place between 2005 and 2011. Although some young priests have travelled to various cities, no shrine (to the best of my knowledge) has set up a practice in Detroit. Some priests use the images of Detroit without ever having been there, but see cars made in Detroit parked in New York and use these as a reference point. For Sonny, it is "Yankee" automobile brands that are the center of his attention, especially Pontiac, armed with the spirit of Chief

Pontiac, embodying a "fighting"," rust-and-dust Detroit legacy. Sonny cried that Chief Pontiac had disappeared. He pictured a Pontiac brand, which was now too big and clumsy to compete with the more streamlined models of automobiles made by Japanese car manufacturers. In an attempt to repair this broken industry, Sonny pulls apart the automobile piece by piece and then infuses a small talisman (*suman*) made from a fender, gas pedal, or hood pad he has picked up in a scrap yard with intangible *sunsum,* amid a complex cluster of images and concepts. Sonny told a client, in my presence, that he had spoken to the spirits of the dead men who had worked on the car assembly lines in Detroit. Likewise, AJ, a twenty-eight-year-old priest in Brooklyn, described to me how it was important not to see just the product of the car, but the souls and hearts of the workers:

> Detroit you already know . . . caught in a gaffle . . . zombie workers whose blood and flesh has been screwed . . . over . . . by executives . . . everything is broken . . . strip it all down and you see bull . . . hoodrats. . . . And the worker is exposed with no union rights, pension, nada . . . so I can protect him. . . . Exhausts and mufflers with impact protect the engine . . . possess my clients extra protection . . . them resistant to life and the harsh economic climate out there in the projects. They're not with the noise. . . . Look say my brother, make a noise man . . . feel mans' place in the world. We can build good money . . . great autos together, not like the past and with our own business strategy. Rebuild and recharge with the future. Transmit and engage . . . long lasting service and challenges . . . strip the auto down and stare at the man who built it.

AJ had looked into the humanity of workers and saw the care and energy that they put into work. Likewise, AJ constructed narratives for every car component as he striped the motor down—the rocker covers of the Buick Century, he said, were made in Pontiac City by men with strong arms who sweated blood and tears and drank hard but knew the meaning of hard work. Each car component becomes "a symbol for agency to achieve" (Mageo 2011: 19). The suspension and giant engine of the Buick Skylark represents the strong backbone of blue-collar workers everywhere and the hard journey that they make each day. The ignition of the Pontiac Firebird symbolizes the "switched on brain of a man" who will not accept his poverty or dehumanization. The tail fin of the Chieftain represented the swooping African bird who "gonna no be caught by no man." In this process, the body of the worker becomes both producer and product (see Martin 2001). By focusing on the imaginary space between people and things and by conceptualizing the assembly of the car as a series of metaphors for the desired self, AJ attempts to show how the imagination of the shrine client can travel faster armed with this technology that conducts new meanings and powers (Sneath, Holbraad, and Pedersen 2009). Special attention is given by AJ to this process:

> I'm bruva Randolph Hearst. I'm bruva his homie Rockefeller with options. Bring it on. . . . Me . . . I'm my own captain of industry to take down Wall Street. . . . I'm gonna take what I've got, look around and take your body and build . . . my . . . machine. . . . I . . . gonna take . . . wiper blade and . . . suspension shock and implant it in . . . guts . . . make my bruva a superjack like your papa remembers . . . an auto with no guilt

> . . . a thousand bucks fuel injected super system . . . of bruva blood and horses and metal. . . . I . . . make me a supermonster to take down them rich fuckers . . . them that ride of the backs of the devil

AJ illustrates how smell is important in this process of deconstruction, of protecting and rebuilding the client so that they are open to positive ideas, using mufflers and automobile air fresheners to fix the client and their "broken parts" and make them feel like "new" men. During one interview at his shrine he described the following:

> Strip burning sensations from your nostrils . . . it's the smell of gasoline. . . . Godzilla will burn down spewing his radioactive breath. Burning rubber . . . barf . . . muffle my nose. . . . California car scents . . . I'm bashing with . . . Hawaiian Garden . . . Palm Springs Pineapple . . . Colorado Cherry . . . smell . . . rejoice with the hood . . .

The alienated worker becomes a worker who cannot smell and whose nose must be unblocked by car air fresheners in order that he or she truly recognizes his or her plight. By reveling in and celebrating the concrete form of the Detroit product, the automobile, Sonny and AJ seek to restore anew the American ideal of a land of freedom and opportunity by moving objects—exhausts, suspensions, brakes—from the place originally assigned to them. As one priest said "I can drop stuff here and everywhere . . . meet ma superhero when I be driving hard." The car becomes an even swifter, moving object that both allows a private journey and also becomes a metaphor for the fantasies of the self, a so-called "technology of the imagination" (Sneath, Holbraad, and Pedersen 2009: 5).

A case study

Take the case of Andrew, a young Ghanaian shrine client in Detroit. Andrew came to AJ's shrine in New York several times in 2010. I was present at one such visit over a period of three days. Andrew was born in Germany but, as a very young child, resettled in Detroit with his Ghanaian mother and his father, who was already living in the United States. Housed in AJ's studio apartment, the shrine was indistinguishable from piles of cartons of take-out food, coke cans, and old sneakers. Here, the god's altar, surrounded by gifts—kente cloth, cigarettes and eggs, and cooked *oma tuo* drizzled by the hot Ghanaian sauce, *shito*—brought by grateful clients, will hear cases of misfortune and give his replies and help during possession times through the mouthpiece of the priest. In my presence, Andrew spent several hours with AJ, each day paying a fee of $50 for which he also received two meals a day including goat shank stew, okra, and black eyed peas. He had heard about AJ's shrine from word of mouth among his cousins. AJ, he thought, was a "radical" priest like Osama Bin Laden who understood that life was "hard in the hood." His god, he had heard, was like an invisible Godzilla, a plastic lizard that had been pulled from the sewers underneath DUMBO, Brooklyn. Godzilla was full of "African venom" and "Yankee" anger against corporate America that had undermined "real" American values and beliefs about entrepreneurship and opportunity. Godzilla had played a role in bringing the US banking system to its knees a few years ago. He was also

impressed that AJ was a member of a major street gang in Flatbush, but that when AJ had wanted to leave Godzilla had protected him from fellow gang members and kept him alive both "on the street" and later, allegedly, in jail.

Andrew loved living in Detroit but he complained that his family increasingly found this difficult and he despaired that he would ever obtain residency. His father had lost his job as a mechanic after the auto repair shop he worked at for many years, run by a cousin, went into liquidation. He had subsequently suffered ill health since 2007. He had no medical insurance to pay for the treatment he now required for diabetes. There was no alternative full-time work in Detroit and Andrew told AJ that he felt choked to death by the suffocating decay of Detroit and the rottenness at its core. At the shrine, when talking about the city of Detroit, he said to me:

> What up doe? Get the drop on the taste of metal in my mouth . . . in my nostrils. I'm a loser and stink like some loser. . . . Crunk. . . . It's the smell of me falling off the edge of the world . . . like the autos pilling up in the stock yards. . . . I'm trash . . . smell like a decaying corpse . . . the walking dead . . . that's me man . . . autos bright and shiny . . . cruise round my neighborhood. . . . We all suffer from the same terminal disease . . . all of us dependent on government handouts . . . trash . . . well out of gas.

Andrew, on the second day of his visit to the shrine, spoke to me of how he admired the cars and the way in which his relationship with his father and, indeed, America was filtered through the car, but that the American brand, like Detroit, was now in terminal decline. Andrew looked at the social apartheid that characterized Detroit. His father, he felt, had never obtained work at the General Motors Plant because he was African. He remembered visiting in his youth a car showroom with his father and being taunted by the African American salesman that Africans could not drive cars, only ride camels. He also recalled gunshots being fired at his father's garage by rival African American car dealers who painted graffiti of monkeys on the pavement. However, as the automobile industry went into decline, the work dried up and African Americans were also left with no alternate employment and so gave up the leases on their automobiles, meaning that his father's work repairing motors also dried up. He described at the shrine how his family members had "outlived their market value" and that he was now seen "as useless to the market."

Andrew told to me how he worked as a cashier in a local convenience store that kept him out late, and how he and his girlfriend and their child survived on less than $400 a month. His savings account contained $35. He and his girlfriend fasted on alternate days to ensure that her child could eat. Often, food consisted of a bag of potato chips, which they would measure out to last several days. A reminder of his limited employment prospects appeared as he walked past the derelict and redundant motor plant. Andrew felt that wherever he went, he took the stench of decay of moldy litter and the crumbling of his family's lives with him as Detroit fell apart. This smell he said "clouded my judgment" and "like bad breath ate away at confidence." In spite of looking for work as far afield as Mississippi and Florida, he felt tired and worn out and was unable to find any work beyond the most menial and temporary. He felt harassed as a Muslim, and as an African he was harassed by

African American youths. He stopped wearing "African clothes" in order to blend in more, especially at night when he felt most conspicuous. He told AJ,

> I'm a working man . . . anonymous. . . . How do I compete . . . big men. It's like fighting Godzilla. Shit . . . stunt . . . money corporations. He crushes me with his giant lizard feet. I can't even blind the big guy—face . . . faceless douchebags . . . mop up. . . . L. Brooks Patterson eating my soul. All stunt. . . . Everyone vanished gone. . . . Nobody left once them douchebags ran off with the stash . . . gone. Factories, [auto] shops, homes, gone . . . my drive home and hope and care and my papa who worked to give it me . . .

On the other hand, as the above quote illustrates, Detroit also represents a squandered legacy of Detroit politicians such as County Executive Patterson who AJ believed "did not work for the black man" and corporate executives and suppliers who "bled the black man dry" cried AJ. Andrew, during his stay at the shrine, spoke of the fragility of Detroit—"the douchebag of corruption" as he called it as the auto industry got bigger and bigger "and the wheels came off." AJ sought to expose the dark side of corporate power—that the market quickly moves production to a new, cheaper location with lower labor costs—from the inner city of Detroit, to the suburbs of Flint to Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and India. AJ asked Andrew, like with other clients, to look out for conspiracies on the news and on the Internet about the large global corporations that stalk the American landscape, such as Enron and AIG.

At shrines, the automobile represented a little piece of creative enterprise of the maverick inventors whom Andrew's father worshipped, who worked in the great car plants on the Torpedo model. Like the founders of the motor industry, Mr. Chevrolet and Mr. Cadillac, the shrine gods compare themselves to these romantic, iconic figures, coming from poor rural areas to make their fortune as the Akan gods did in nineteenth-century Ghana from cocoa production. These spirits became entrepreneurs but lost their fortunes to the British, who wiped them out just as Chevrolet suffered at the hands of General Motors. The objective of AJ became to rearticulate and to reinvigorate the spirit of the Pontiac model, which now literally, to him, had festered into a bulkiness and unwieldiness; a rotten object that seemed out of touch with more innovative models. The object of desire, the automobile, is made magical again by distancing it from the industry that made it and the associated structural inequality, infusing it with magic, and relating it to Andrew's personal experiences and private memories. On the last day of Andrew's visit, AJ told him,

> Wash away the stink of corruption . . . it's the urine trails of dogs stinking up the sidewalk. Stank . . . the trash piles up and manholes add . . . the stank of damp and heat in the summer. Wash this away man . . . from the wheels. . . . Keep those hubs fresh man . . . with the promised land.

In an effort to combat the lingering odor of decay and crumbling that smothered Andrew, AJ asked him to reveal his favorite smell and touch from his love of the Pontiac and recreate a new aroma and environment. Andrew told AJ how the old Torpedo felt to him and captured him in its scent when he visited car shows to look

at vintage models—the silky shape characterizing the Torpedo, the curve of the fender and tail fin bent in one beautiful piece of bright polished metal. The interior felt like velvet to the touch and smelled like his grandfather's tobacco and boot polish. He recalled the white electric clock on the dashboard "that made the sweetest ticking sound." As he spoke to AJ, Andrew fantasized about the smell of candy he associated with his childhood, sitting in cars parked in his father's garage:

> Smell wild memories like boy, candy in a tub. Jaw breakers, Nik-L-Nips, suck the goodness out of here. Circus peanuts mixed in a fruity cloud of fluff . . . marshmallow as you like from the back of a classic Torpedo . . . sitting in luxury on leather cushions, banana flavor swell my nostrils and make my big heart huge.

On his final day at the shrine, Andrew is transported by AJ back into a realm of optimism and expectation by recreating the smell and texture of the Torpedo, recalled by him in his youth—a new setting and imagination that links to the nonmaterial realm and creativity (see Sneath, Holbraad, and Pedersen 2009). In the last few hours of his visit to the shrine, Andrew is asked by AJ to remember this sense and to value this as the basis of a new life and new fortune. These intangible feelings are captured by the priest and blended into a magical *suman*—a small piece of fender metal—that Andrew is told to wear about his person. In this sense, the *suman* can be regarded as a thing that refuses the dichotomy between things and spirits, or between materiality and power (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2006, cited in Ishii 2012). The magical metal object acts as a positive conductor for wealth, AJ conveyed to Andrew, "like belong to Mr. Henry Ford and Mr. Firestone" and an enterprising promise that is kept intact by a number of rituals designed to aid an "industrial spirit" and ward off witchcraft. These rituals include touching the fenders of three black cars every morning, rubbing one's hands in dirt from the street in the morning and evening, inhaling the smoke of a cigarette before bedtime, chewing flavored gum no more than twice a day, and lighting scented candles around his bed. In taking the car apart, its unwieldiness is removed and the fear and violence and other structural inequalities suffered under recession, including witchcraft, are replaced to reveal countless circumstances for personal enchantment and excitement. This opens up Andrew's world to endlessly pursue happiness and prosperity afresh.

Conclusion

Miho Ishii (2012) illustrates how the efficacy of shrines in Ghana may only be judged in how they worked or not through the linking of spirits, things, and social relations. In New York, Akan occult narratives function at shrines as a magical framework for the capitalist workings of the free market and encompass the extreme economic inequalities found in the United States, and the excessive veneration of wealth and celebrity in locations such as Manhattan since the global recession of 2008. While New York City is proudly declared by its political leaders to be the ultimate luxury product and Manhattan has become a fetishized space of ostentatious wealth and conspicuous spending, the workings of economic power

has become increasingly spectral as the fascination of producing something from nothing seems ever more desirable in an abstract economy and consumerism gains appeal as part of this neoliberal ideology. In an age of consumer excess that grew at the expense of America's manufacturing infrastructure, Akan shrines provide alternative frames of hope created from their own materials, an "intraconnective" universe of beings and objects (Handleman 2008). By focusing on how a "technology of the imagination" between people and things is realized, we can see how at shrines the realm of the material and the spiritual intersect (Sneath, Holbraad, and Pedersen 2009; Tassi and Espirito Santo 2014). Akan occult discourses and witchcraft practices engage with free market mechanisms to include new mass produced subject-objects such as the celebrity and spirit-objects such as the car that also acts as a metaphor for the body. While established shrines venerate wealth and encourage the pursuit of personal riches and fame among shrine clients obsessed with the fetishization of mass produced celebrity and conspicuous consumption, young shrine priests, more recently arrived in New York, look for an alternative dream and the worship of a different commodity. In order to materialize the occult economy in a more radical manner, young priests invoke a vision of the industrial that characterizes the old automobile industry in Detroit: a celebration of the politics of the concrete over the abstraction of financial capitalism in centers such as Los Angeles, Miami, and New York and a rhetoric of substance and loss that can be mapped onto the American industrial landscape—Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Cleveland, and Detroit.

The American car represents at shrines the great dream of individuality and escapism and a golden industrial era of lost "legitimate" values rather than the pursuit of "selfish" wealth, fame, and celebrity. By demystifying the capitalist fetishism of the big Detroit automobile producers—Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler—shrines challenge these clients not to fearfully perceive themselves as dehumanized workers or as human waste and disposable, but to take on the cavalier and exciting spirit of the great American motor industrialists and their legacy represented by the iconic Pontiac. By animating materials and manufacturing a new miraculous commodity-fetish, priests are infusing the contingent and unpredictability of spirits into standardized, Fordist, automotive production (Ishii 2012). As a metaphor for the body of the shrine client, the rotten, bulky, and slow vehicle that has become corrupted by unscrupulous business practices and bankruptcy and that can no longer compete with sleeker Japanese models is made magical again and its engine parts revitalized (Mageo 2011). The "effects" of this are that in spite of the hardship that clients suffer, rather than rejecting the American ideal, it has instead been rejuvenated and the American dream has lost none of its allure. The industrial history of Detroit, as one of a city of opportunity, is humbly declared by young shrine priests to represent the glory of America's past. Through a process of auto-making, the shrine bequeaths to clients a new world of enchantment and magical connections denied by the collapse of an older type of capitalism in major manufacturing cities in the United States. They reinvigorate capitalist ideology and make magical the individual experiences and memories taken from producing a mass commodity—the smells and desires invested in this—to open up a fantastical world to the sharing of wealth and to new prospects and possibilities among impoverished

clients who desperately cling to the American dream during the current economic recession in the United States.

References

Arthur, John A. 2000. *Invisible sojourners: African immigrant diaspora in the United States*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Ashforth, Adam. 2005. *Witchcraft, violence, and democracy in South Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bayley, Stephen. 1986. *Sex, drink and fast cars*. London: Penguin.

Comaroff, Jean, and John Comaroff. 1999. "Occult economies and the violence of abstraction: Notes from the South African postcolony." *American Ethnologist* 26 (2): 279–303.

———, eds. 2000. "Millennial capitalism and the culture of neo liberalism." *Public Culture* 3: 122–56.

Cunningham, Jonathon. 2006. "The new African-Americans." *Detroit Metrotimes*, http://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/the-new-african-americans.html. Accessed February 2013.

da Col, Giovanni. 2012. "The poisoner and the parasite: Cosmoeconomics, fear and hospitality among Dechen Tibetans." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18: 175–95.

Debrunner, Hans. 1959. *Witchcraft in Ghana*. Ghana: Presbyterian Book Depot.

De Lorenzo, Peter M. 2006. *The United States of Toyota*. Portland, OR: Inkwater Press.

Drucker-Brown, Susan. 1975. *Ritual aspects of the Mamprusi kingship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Englund, Harri. 2007. "Witchcraft and the limits of mass-mediation in Malawi." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13 (2): 295–311.

Ferguson, James. 2006. *Global shadows: Africa in the neoliberal world order.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Field, Margaret J. 1940. "Some new shrines of the Gold Coast and their significance." *Africa* 13 (1): 33–47.

———. 1960. *Search for security*. London: Faber & Faber.

Garritano, Carmela. 2013. *African video movies and global desires: A Ghanaian history*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Geschiere, Peter. 2010. "Autochthony, belonging and exclusion: The pitfalls of a culturalization, citizenship." Forum Conference, Strangeness and Familiarity, University of Groningen: Groningen.

———. 2013 *Witchcraft, intimacy and trust: Africa in Comparison*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Goody, Jack. 1957. "Anomie in Ashanti." *Africa* 27: 356–63.

Handleman, Don. 2008. "Afterward: Returning to cosmology. Thoughts on the positioning of belief." *Social Analysis* 52 (1): 181–95.

Henare, Amire, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell, eds. 2006. *Thinking through things: Theorising artefacts ethnographically*. London: Routledge.

Huewelmeirer, Gertrud, and Kristine Krause, eds. 2010. *Travelling spirit: Migrants, markets and mobilities*. London: Routledge.

Ingrassia, Paul. 2011. *Crash course*. New York: Random House.

———. 2012. *Engines of change: A history of the American dream in fifteen cars*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Ishii, Miho. 2012. "Acting with things. Self-poiesis, actuality, and contingency in the formation of divine worlds." *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2 (2): 371–88.

Johnson, Paul Christopher, ed. 2014. *Spirited things: The work of possession in Afro- Atlantic religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lentz, Cara. 1998. "The chief, the mine-Captain and the politician: Legitimating power in Northern Ghana." *Africa* 68: 46–67.

Mageo, Jeannette Marie. 2011. *Dreaming culture: Meanings, model and power in US American dreams.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Martin, Emily. 2001. *The woman in the body: A cultural analysis of reproduction*. London: Beacon Press.

McCaskie, Thomas C. 1981. "Anti-witchcraft cults in Asante: An essay in the social history of an African people." *History in Africa* 8: 125–54.

———. 2008. "Akwantemfi—'In mid journey': An Asante shrine today and its clients." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 38: 57–80.

McLeod, Malcolm. 1981. *The Asante*. London: British Museum Publication.

Meyer, Birgit. 1998. "The power of money: Politics, occult force, and Pentecostalism in Ghana." *African Studies Review 41* (3): 15–37.

Nash, June. 1993. *We eat the mines and the mines eat us: Dependency and exploitation in Bolivian tin mines*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Palmié, Stephan. 2002. *Wizards and scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban modernity and tradition*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Parish, Jane. 1999. "The dynamics of witchcraft and indigenous shrines among the Akan." *Africa* 69 (3): 426–48.

———. 2011. "West African witchcraft, wealth and moral decay in New York City." *Ethnography* 4 (3): 136–51.

———. 2013. "Chasing celebrity: Akan witchcraft in New York." *Ethnos* 3 (4): 85–102.

Pierre, Jemima. 2004. "Black immigrants in the United States and the 'cultural narratives' of Ethnicity." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 11 (2): 141–70.

Rattner, Steven. 2010. *Overhaul.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Rattray, R. S. 1927. *Religion and art in Ashanti*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rowlands, Michael, and Jean-Pierre Warnier. 1988. "Sorcery, power, and the modern state in Cameroon." *Man* 23 (1): 118–32.

Sanders, Todd. 1999. "Modernity, wealth and witchcraft in Tanzania." *Research in Economic Anthropology* 20: 117–31.

Sansi, Roger. 2011. "Sorcery and fetishism in the modern Atlantic." In *Sorcery in the black Atlantic*, edited by Luis Nicolau Pares and Roger, 19–39. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Sneath, David, Martin Holbraad, and Morten Axel Pedersen. 2009. "Technologies of the imagination: An introduction." *Ethnos* 71 (1): 5–30.

Stoller, Paul. 2001. *Money has no smell: The Africanization of New York City.* Chicago: University of Chicago.

Tassi, Nico, and Diana Espirito Santo, eds. 2014. *Making spirits: Materiality and transcendence in contemporary religions.* London: IB Tauris.

Taussig, Michael. 1980. *The devil as commodity fetishism*. London: Routledge.

Urry, John. 2006. *Mobilities, geographies, networks*. London: Ashgate.

Van der Geest, Sjaak. 1997. "Money and respect: The changing value of old age in rural Ghana." *Africa* 67 (4): 534–59.

Walters, Mark. 1999. *Black identities: West Indian immigrant dreams and American realities.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ward, Barbara F. 1956. "Some observations on religious cults in Asante." *Africa* 26: 7–61.

Weller, Robert. 1987. "The politics of ritual disguise: Repression and response in Taiwanese popular religion." *Modern China* 13: 17–39.

Au-delà des économies occultes: les esprits Akans, les idoles New-Yorkaises, et les automobiles de Detroit.

Résumé : S'il est solidement établi que l'économie occulte d'Afrique occidentale permet une critique métanarrative de la modernité, cet article se propose d'étudier la convergence entre les discours associés à la sorcellerie et le marché capitaliste, par l'analyse du cas des maisons des esprits Akans dans la ville de New York. Les pratiques occultes Akans, loin de se tenir à une distance prudente du « fonctionnement mystérieux » du marché, abordent frontalement la production en masse américaine et l'orthodoxie néolibérale. Dans cette optique, l'automobile américaine, l'incarnation par excellence du rêve américain, d'une idéologie sous-tendue par la désir d'évasion et l'individualisme, est devenue, selon l'interprétation défendue ici, un symbole local s'inscrivant en faux contre l'extravagant consumérisme new-yorkais également associés à des lieux de culte plus établis. Les jeunes prêtres des maisons des esprits brandissent l'ère de la production automobile à Detroit comme la promesse et le projet d'une autre forme d'industrialisme—le recyclage par les temples Akans de l'iconique voiture Pontiac.

Jane Parish is an anthropologist at Keele University researching West African witchcraft and Akan spirit shrines among Ghanaian communities in the United States and Europe.

Jane Parish
School of Sociology and Criminology
Keele University
Keele
Staffordshire ST5 5BG
United Kingdom
j.a.e.parish@keele.ac.uk