

Death and male-mort in Benin voodoo: perception and management of this fatal death

Abstract

This violent, accidental, brutal death brings about a chain reaction of religious ceremonies. In the voodoo religion, these ritual ceremonies are much more advanced than during a so-called “natural” death, in order to purify the body and / or soothe the soul. The objective of this article is to study how a voodoo Beninese perceives, interprets and manages this type of death through consultations of the oracle Fâ, sacrifices and offerings to the *vòdūn* (deities), see, according to certain cases, to awaken the dead. This study follows a field survey of populations, accompanied by bibliographic research.

Keywords: post-mortem, male-mort, religious, voodoo, Africa

Volume 8 Issue 4 - 2020

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Received: July 20, 2020 | **Published:** August 28, 2020

Introduction

Death is part of the inherent circle of life. In some cultures, this “stage of life” is sometimes perceived as natural, sometimes perceived as a punishment possibly having a divine cause, or even evil. In many religions, dogmas are based on the principle that we must “die well”, that is to say that at the time of our death, we must have fulfilled all of the religious obligations which govern the beliefs that an individual adheres to for the passage into the afterlife to be correct. This type of principle creates a certain fear which dictates the behaviour of men on a daily basis. However, it sometimes happens that in certain religiosities, death is the harmful result of a fault committed during our lifetime (offense to a superior deity, possession/bewitchment, etc.). This fault leads to a death, which takes on an unforeseen and abnormal violent nature (e.g. toddler, disease, murder, etc.) and is opposed to the good death which is perceived as gentle, part of the continuity of life. (ex: old age); these are “malemort”.¹ These malemort lead to embarrassing deaths from which a whole post-mortem ceremony ensues, for which the family and relatives are in charge. These religious gestures, which follow these embarrassing deaths, have as their primary objective to bring spiritual peace to the deceased and to avoid vengeful justice beyond the grave. Sometimes stages of this ritual cycle aim to investigate a possible responsible for death, especially in case of suspicion of a spell.

The objective of this article is to present the way in which the practitioners of the voodoo worship in Benin face as ritually, religiously as psychologically this misfortune. We wish to begin our study by explaining the perception of death and the afterlife in voodoo to replace the framework of this article in the spiritual principles of voodoo. We will discuss the human sacrifices that are no longer taking place now, but which create wandering deaths for lack of ceremony. We will also discuss the sudden deaths following an accident or murder, as well as suicides. We will also be interested in deaths following an illness, as well as so-called “abnormal” deaths (pregnant women, young children, etc.). Finally we will end with

“special cases” (deaths in the bush, death of a person with a physical deformity, in this case a hunchback, the death of a stranger in voodoo land, as well as abortion).

The perception of death and the afterlife in Beninese voodoo

For a vodouisant, death is seen as a journey to find family ancestors and ensure family prosperity. In this religion, each animate or inanimate being has a soul called *yê* which leaves the body envelope during death to join the *Kûtòmè* which is the “land of the dead”.¹ In the event of natural deaths, the funeral takes place according to a defined principle. However in case of death considered as a malemort the ceremonial cycle changes drastically to ensure the good rest of the deceased and the tranquillity of the living.

Death is therefore a continuity of life with a higher spiritual elevation of the soul since it becomes a deity honoured in a sort of “family pantheon”. Note that not all *yê* can access vodun status; a ritualized religious ceremony allows the passage from “deceased” to “ancestor” that is to say to *vòdūn*.²

The provided dead: human sacrifices

The origin of these sacrifices remains rather unclear and is no longer valid. Some put forward the hypothesis of a pre-Alladonou origin, others a heritage of the Akan ethnic group. Human sacrifices could take place for a variety of reasons (raising an altar, building a palace, warding off an epidemic, rising of the day, eliminating disease,² etc.). This type of sacrifice counted between one and ten victims and is little studied.³ In contrast, much larger sacrifices took place during the Great Customs where a hundred men were then sacrificed and on special occasions. The sacrificed were generally prisoners of war, captives of the king. In addition to these commemoration sacrifices, each morning two slaves were slaughtered. This type of death also took place during a good commercial transaction, for the establishment of a new market, for the construction of a palace, during the departures of

¹The male-mort is a death considered violent, accidental, bad, abnormal (war, assassination, suicide, accident). She opposes a soft and natural death.

²The sacrifices could have a prophylactic virtue, especially in the event of an epidemic (Degbello, 1992: 242).

war expeditions, during the digging of a well, etc.⁴ Little information has reached us.

These practices having disappeared, we can only base ourselves on the anthropological and ethnological accounts that have come down to us. The main difficulty is that the Europeans have these sacrifices are essentially focused on those of the Customs and Great Customs and have generally left the “daily sacrifices” aside. Anyway, these human offerings are reserved exclusively for the king and must honour the deceased royals. To honour such a social rank, only human sacrifices are worthy enough. Some of the sacrificed had their heads exposed in strategic places in the city. The rest of the body was thrown into the bush. Others had different treatment. Their blood was collected in vessels, which were poured over royal tombs and altars of certain deities. The trunk was thrown into the ditch that surrounded the city, given to crows, vultures or given to flies.³

Deaths due to illness

This category includes accidental deaths and murders

These two types of death are attributed to *vòdùn* Gou. First of all, ceremonies must be celebrated in honour of this *vòdùn*; you combine a rooster, palm oil, two kola nuts (one white and the other red) and two *atakouns* (chili pepper). The liturgical leaves are macerated in water, then the body and the burial are sprinkled with this preparation before burial by the family. After a few days (seven for a woman, nine for a man),³ the priests return accompanied by the family, who bring back a male goat or an adult goat, two roosters, beans, five francs and five cowries which are placed in a bag, accompanied by palm oil. The priests grab all the sharp weapons in the hut and use white clay and *sokpeksokpekpê* (red material) to draw tattoos on these weapons, with the blood of a rooster. The rooster is then cooked and sprinkled with salt. We put a pot on a hearth in which we mix water, palm oil, cooked rooster pieces, corn flour and pieces of meat. This preparation is called *amiwo*⁴ and is regularly cooked after a sacrifice. It is a meal of sharing and conviviality that seals the religious rite. Once the pot is emptied we pour palm oil again and we start the fire. The participants take one of the weapons of the house with their left hand, raising their arms to the sky, shouting “*Akpagba!*” *Monhun*”. It is the battle cry of soldiers who once returned from war with human heads as trophies. This operation is repeated seven or nine times depending on the sex of the victim. Liturgical leaves are crushed in a vase and the house, bedroom and objects of the deceased are sprinkled. The priests leave by taking the offerings (rooster, kid, jar, money). If the family refuses, he is exposed to the curse of the priests.⁵ After these ceremonies, the parents go in search of the culprit. They call on the *azòdotò*, which will help them through *dudida* (magic of Gou) to find and punish the guilty.

The call for *azòdotò* remains rare, because the latter is feared, even looked down upon by the populations. He makes a pact with the victim by licking his blood (*kudiò rite*). He also made a statuette out of wood, called *bòcyó*, out of yam and a fragment of clothes belonging to the victim. He makes the deceased believe that the *bòcyó* is responsible for his death via the *vòdùn* Gou. This deception allows the *azòdotò* to prevent death from turning against it. Parents also seek to provoke the anger of the deceased by offering him forbidden food so that he can

³Seven days for women and nine days for men because according to a pagan belief, men have nine pairs of ribs while women have only seven (Kiti, 1937: 424).

⁴“Ami” means “oil”, “wo” means “dough”. Means a preparation based on palm oil “paste prepared with palm oil”.

provoke his anger at the culprit. In the village of Lissazoumnè, for the victims of accidents, rituals are performed for the deity Gou.

Suicides

The hanged

Individuals who die by hanging are called “*mè do jèkò*”, which means “*people who wear a pearl around their neck*”. We justify their gesture by explaining that they were lost by the *vòdùn* Da. They should never be said publicly that they were hanged. The announcement of the death is made with a leaf on the tongue, so the anger of the *vòdùn* falls on the leaf and not on the announcer. The *dokpègans* place various liturgical sheets at the feet of the corpse, then he unhooks the body, taking care that the feet do not touch the ground first. If not, the deceased can be resurrected in a harmful form. Note that the management of suicides is subject to religious practices. In this sense, the *dokpègans* must protect themselves by performing purification rites themselves through a decoction.⁵ As they descend the body they pronounce the following words.⁶ *When the sleep of death calls the wife of death, she does not refuse to go to bed; so it's not me (dokpègans) who puts you to bed or does something to you*”. These words allow those who drop it not to be held responsible by the deceased for his death. To perform funeral ceremonies, parents must make a sacrificial offering to *vòdùn* Da (they are said to “*buy a pearl*”, “*mi naxòjè*”). This sacrificial offering is composed of chickens, corn porridge, bananas and *Dāsě*.⁶

When we went to the village of Lissazoumnè we learned that for suicides and murders there are no particular rituals except for a hanged man. Those who untie him must protect themselves from retaliation from the hanged man who might believe that those who untie him are responsible for his death by placing hyssop leaves in their mouths.

The blasted

Before the French occupation, priests dedicated to thunder cut the wrists of those struck down by dancing around their corpses, before transporting the body to the bush. Once decomposed, the bones were recovered from the latter have the power to protect lightning.⁷ These victims are called “*mèjati*” which means “*felled people*”. They were victims of the *vòdùn* Heviosso. It is the priests of this *vòdùn* who come to take care of the body. There is only one Sonon on the Abomey Plateau. This is a charge that is normally hereditary from father to son, but another person can be appointed if the son does not wish to take over from his father or if the incumbent Sonon did not have a son before his death. They go to the kola nuts to find out which Heviosso college *vòdùn* the death is attributable to (Gbadè, Aklobè, Sogbo, Jakata, etc.). The priests prepare a decoction with liturgical leaves, then apply this preparation to the corpse (it is said that the corpse comes back to life long enough to confess its faults).⁶ Before European colonization, the body was tied to a rope and dragged through the village while being struck by sticks. We open the belly and place the body on a raised rack called “*agbaji*” where it breaks down in the open air; once fully decomposed, the priests return and take the skull with the mandible to transform it into a trophy by attaching it to large flutes used by the priests. The skull could be recovered by the family for a sum of money large enough to be buried downhill.⁵ Since colonization, this practice has been prohibited since priests have been accused of ritual anthropophagy. Since then, although this practice has been abandoned, this type of victim is considered infamous and

⁵It's composed of *sema*, *deslesigèma*, *kplaklesima* and *akikòma*.

⁶Àsèen for the *vòdùn* in the form of a wavy serpent (Savary, 1976: 211).

cannot achieve the status of family ancestors. Relatives must perform sacrifices to purify themselves, ceremonies, but also dances so that the *vòdùn* spares other people in the family. In the village of Lissazoumnè, followers of Heviosso take part in the burial ceremony.

The charred dead

On the designations under the term “*mèkuzomè*”. They were charred, but not struck by lightning. They may have perished in a fire, for example. The *dokpègans* must go and get the body, saying “*they are going to get the baggage*” (“*mi xweagbâgbegbe*”). On request to the family three vases to prepare the decoctions at the base of *xèxèma*, *siffama*, *axisixisima* and *deslesigèma*, necessary for the purification of the *dokpègans* and of the house.

Drowning victims

These victims are called “*atîkpo*” which means “*piece of wood*”. The *dokpègans* call upon people specialized in the recovery of bodies in water. To determine to which *vòdùn* this death is attributed two solutions: if the body is not swollen⁷ and draws a black spot in the bottom of the water, death is attributed to Dā. If the body is swollen and forms a red spot at the bottom of the water, death is attributed to the *vòdùn* Tohossou. The *dokpègans* compress the body to bring out the water and then interrogate the *vòdùn* with cola nuts. This consultation makes it possible to define how to warm the body,⁸ the time that will take the warming (period between three and seven days and know if the *vòdùn* accept burial within the family concession).

To begin with, the deceased must be awakened with incantations in order to know where he wishes to be buried (near the source, if he is a child of the source and the spirits are calling him - parents may not know that he is a child of the source - or so close to home, which would mean that it was a drowning by mistake, accidental so we proceed to a normal burial). If the deceased is buried near the spring, he will be buried without a coffin, just in a mat. The ceremonies take place in the same way as at home, except that at the end of the ceremony, one hears cries, the sound of drowning. A large fire must be put in place to warm the deceased. The fire must not go out for nine days for a woman and seven for a man. If this fire does not start, the deceased can come to haunt his parents. Time is much longer for a woman, she is feared for her great powers of witchcraft which she can possess and for their strong character. It is for this reason that they should not approach the spirits when they are sick.

The deceased is buried near the place of drowning a gourd which contains the victim's hair, clippings of nails and chickens, colas, cowries (sixteen or forty-one in number).⁹ There follow ceremonies of purification of the deceased, the family (by means of a preparation of leaves in three potteries)¹⁰ and for the *dokpègans*. During burial, the *yòkpo* is placed with the body. It is a piece of wood with prophylactic properties that should warm the body. Around the burial ground, the same type of wood is burned to warm all the drowned.⁶

⁷The swollen corpse is despised and deprived of a funeral ceremony. Currently to prevent a swelling body have plugged all the orifices of the cops immediately after death. If the body swells, the *asukagā* must compress the body in loincloths and the family must remain locked up to avoid crossing the spirit of the dead man (Savary, 1976: 217).

⁸Three types of wood are possible: *xèfi*, *fōfi* and *lisèfi* (Savary, 1976: 212).

⁹These figures are sacred. The number sixteen symbolizes the Fâ and the number "41" symbolizes the Tohossou.

¹⁰The first pottery contains a decoction of *siffama*, *affama* and *añāma* (the same as for "dead in the bush"). The second is composed of *zoma*, *axisixisima* and *deslesigèma*. The third is composed of *akòhūma*, *akikōma* and *xèxèma*.

The poisoned

Death by poisoning is defined with various signs (bloating, vomiting, diarrhea during the person's lifetime). As with accidents or murders, victims of poisoning receive the same funeral as a typical death. As with the murders, the family will seek revenge by calling on an *azòdotò*. In Benin, it is not uncommon for people to conclude too hastily that they have died from poisoning. It can be a death from illness and not from poisoning, due to a lack of medical diagnosis.⁶

Deaths due to illness

An incurable wound

This type of death is attributed to *vòdùn* Sakpata. The victim is generally a follower of this divinity and has not observed a prohibition. The rule is that she is buried in a coffin. Before burial, the deceased are questioned to find out where they want to be buried (N-S-E-W). The deceased chooses his position, in this way the great *dongan* can know what purification must be done for the village and its inhabitants in order to avoid that a person does not suffer from the same evil. We deposit the body in a huge mat and in white pecal like the king, the only difference is that the body is dragged to the bush. We put a mat in the bottom of the pit, we put the body down, then we put a mat on top. The wound is covered with a white cloth so that in the beyond he can say that this wound is not someone's fault so that he does not seek responsible and avoids revenge. Once the pit is closed, we bring the *bókòno* to consult the Fâ to know the time of duration of the ceremonies (being an abnormal death, the ceremonies are not immediate).

An incurable disease

We have chosen to group this type of death in the “*induced deaths*”, since in the consciousness of the vodouisants, the disease is caused by the *vòdùn*. A person becomes ill in retaliation. The corpses of people who have died from illnesses have special treatment. They are buried far from dwellings to avoid any contamination. This is the case of individuals who have succumbed to smallpox or leprosy. They are buried naked, simply surrounded by mats. Two or three years later, they are exhumed. The remains are then wrapped in a shroud and the usual funeral can take place. In addition to a measure of hygiene, a religious rule applies; Sakpata prohibits mourning the death of an individual immediately after his disappearance, on pain of being penalized by the *vòdùn*. It is for this reason that a sufficiently reasonable time is allowed between the death and the funeral. During this hiatus, it is said that the person has “*gone to a good place*”;¹¹ above all, it is not said that he is dead.⁷

First case, deaths caused by smallpox. These victims are called “*ye imèkpa*” which means: “*they went to the master* (note: the *vòdùn* Sakpata)”. The burial of these victims takes place in the bush. We put a cola nut and *atakū* pepper in a gourd, all wrapped in a white cotton cloth. The calabash represents the misfortune that is caused by the *vòdùn*. The fact that the calabash is closed expresses the anger of this *vòdùn* and the white fabric symbolizes it itself. The calabash, placed close to the body, can be opened only if the response of the cola nuts is favorable. During this period of time, the parents' daily life is governed by numerous prohibitions (going to the market, in the fields, etc.). These prohibitions must be observed over a period which may extend from seven to sixteen days. Once the period is over, it is the *dokpègans* who are in charge of the body due to the contagion of the latter.

¹¹“*Yè i fi dagbè*”.

The priests of Sakpata govern the ceremony “*e na h cérémonieho*”. Parents must make a purification sacrifice. If the *vòdūn* allows it, after consulting the cola nuts, the family can perform classic rites in order to honour the deceased and make them pass to the rank of ancestor. Note that they must replace the blood sacrifices with smoked meat. A variant exists for the initiates belonging to Sakpata, it is the priests who are in charge of the burial and not his family. It is considered that the deaths caused by scarlet fever (*nutonuwu*), measles (*azwi*), rheumatism (*hudwi*), encephalitis (*ta dwi*), heart infections (*xūdwī*), as well as all the diseases which create a development of plaques, pimples, nodules, tumors or edema are attributed to Sakpata. For these diseases, it should be noted, however, that the rites are the same, but the corpse can be buried in a shroud.⁶

Second case, deaths caused by leprosy. This disease is designated by the term “*azō vò*” which means “*red disease*”. It is attributed to Sakpata as for smallpox. The body is purified with sixteen¹² chickens and is rolled up in a mat, then buried outside dwellings and covered with leaves. A sacrifice is made at a crossroads which symbolizes the cardinal points, a meeting place of spirits. If the oracle is favorable, the family can perform the usual burial rites by replacing the corpse with a *bòcyó* made of *kpatīdehū* wood, adorned with a piece of clothing with a ritual ceramic head called “*lobozè*”. The *dokpègans* are in charge of distributing the personal effects of the deceased, taking care to put aside those that have been soiled. The family and the *dokpègans* are purified with *deselesigè* leaves. Palm oil is an element of contagion, so it is not recommended to use it in this kind of death.

Third case, the deaths caused by tuberculosis, also inflicted by the *vòdūn* Sakpata. The corpse is buried outside the dwellings in a mat as it would be for the body of a leper. Nevertheless, bloody sacrifices are prohibited since the tuberculosis patient, before dying, spits blood. Such a sacrifice would help bring the disease back. Close to the body, a calabash wrapped in a white cloth containing hair, nail clippings of cola nuts and *atak* pepper is buried. The home purification ritual is also performed with a decoction of *deslesigèma* and *axisima* leaves.

Abnormal deaths

In this category we have chosen to group together the deaths that affect very specific categories of people, namely pregnant women who bear life and children who should not be struck by death from their young age.

Pregnant and dead women in childbirth

This type of death, called “*tpetpe*”, is attributed to Sakpata. When death occurs, an autopsy is performed to separate the fetus from the mother’s body. The latter will be buried near his mother’s body. If the death occurs outside the place of residence, the *dokpègans* use a piece of wood called “*leti*” near the body and perform the usual rites with this wood which replaces the corpse. Precautions must be taken to protect the women in the family. A barrier of palm branches is erected in front of the hut where the body is buried. During the rites, pregnant women must not go out or fetch water. This prohibition ends with the purification, which consists of a leaf decoction applied to the body.⁶ In the village of Lissazoumnè, women who have died in childbirth are wrapped in a mat, without loincloth and without coffin. Currently the body is being collected from the hospital in order to carry out the usual funeral ceremonies without the presence of the pregnant women of the family to prevent misfortune befalling her.

¹²This is sacred number.

Newborns or infants

This type of death is called “quiet death”. This means that the newborn or toddler came to Earth, but what he saw did not please him and therefore left.⁸

When a child dies before having had its first teeth, it is said to be “*mètrotro*” which means “*hidden*”. He is buried near a hut or a wall and is wrapped in a banana leaf. No other ceremony is performed, as the child must not come back to his mother. For example, children buried with too much affection are blamed for miscarriages by their mothers. Note that children who do not have teeth are not considered full human beings.⁶

The method of burial differs according to the age at the death of the child. For children who die before having their first tooth eruption, a pit is dug in which the body is placed, which is covered by the *dokpègans* with a hyssop leaf and some secret ingredients. A sum of money is given as a gratuity to the *dokpègans*. A child without a tooth should not be buried in a coffin, otherwise he will be transformed into a Tohossou.

For children who have had a dental eruption, we use the *dokpègans* which calls the *yokounto* (gravedigger). The family locates the grave and symbolically gives the first blows of the pickaxe to indicate the chosen location for the *yokounto*. Frequently, he takes a bottle of water and a bottle of liquor as compensation. The body is wrapped in a loincloth (the coffin is for children from 3/4 years old). The body is usually buried under the mother’s room so that she can continue to look after him. A very small number of people are allowed to attend the burial; the *dokpègans*, the assistants and some relatives. The funeral for infants and children ends here. There are no more ceremonies, because it is felt that the child has not earned the right, in view of the short time spent on earth, to have more honour.

Death of a twin

The term “*xoxovi*” refers to the death of only one of the twins. In this situation, the *dokpègans* deposit near the body of the deceased twin a leaf of *deselesigè* rolled on itself in which are cowries and a little breast milk. We address the deceased twin saying “*here is your milk and here are the cowries to buy it*”. Afterwards, the hand of the living twin is placed on a wooden statuette that represents the remains of his twin, which he will have to keep with him all his life. The same care is given to the living twin and its statuette in order to prevent a possible return of the deceased twin which leads to death the living twin. The mother is subjected to a rite of purification; the *dokpègans* throw water on the roof of the hut which must run behind the mother’s back. One of the *dokpègans* touched his mother’s big toe with his left foot seven times on the mother’s breast and the ground to chase away the spirit of the deceased twin. This is a symbolic act, one does not eat with the left hand which symbolizes the dead. The latter act unlike the living.

Second case, the twins die at the same time. They say they went into the forest (“*mèizū*” or “*ye izū*”). The twins are considered to be the manifestation of the forest spirits.

As for the rites, they are the same as for the death of only one of the twins, but they are performed in duplicate and the statuettes are given to the mother. In a family, when a child is born after the death of its infant brother or sister, the ritual of *abikou* must be performed in order to prevent the latter from dragging their new brothers and sisters into death. A mark on the cheek is imposed on the *abikou* and

a pottery is dedicated to them in which there is a protective spirit.⁶ The term “*hohô*” indicates an assembly of small pots welded by two. We find this type of pot in homes that have had one or more twin births. In front of these pots are performed annual rites. These rites are addressed to living twins, but also to dead twins.⁹ We will come back to these potteries during the typological study of ritual ceramics.

Special cases

The “dead in the bush”

These are individuals who died in the bush, far from where they live. They are referred to as “*mèkujègbe*”. Their death is caused by a *vòdün* that must be identified. What we do know is that this type of death is due to a serious fault committed within the family or is attributed to a disease transmitted by *vòdün* - epilepsy (*adigbe*) or general madness (*mamajètò*). It is not the *dokpègans* who take care of the body, but the *asukagã*. They say they are going “to look for the animal in the bush”. This death is dangerous, we must wash with decoction; the first preparation¹³ is used to purify the corpse, the second¹⁴ is used to purify the *asukagã*. The remains are put in a bag and buried in the family concession. Several rites are to be observed; we “redeem” the children of the deceased so that they do not experience the same fate as him, we practice the rite of the scapegoat which will be hunted in the bush. If a person dies far from his place of residence, his body must be brought back by relatives and friends, by the *dokpègans*. The procession takes place at night. If a passerby crosses his path, he is obliged to give something and to accompany the procession for a certain distance so as not to bring misfortune home. If the body is not transportable, hair and nail clippings are sent to the family and loved ones to replace the body with *yòkpo* wood.⁶

The death of the hunchbacks

This death is designated by the term “*mènahũka*” which means “we are going to remove the calabash”. Before the arrival of the *dokpègans* and *assoukagan* he was not considered dead. They come and ask those who are sensitive to leave. For those who wish to stay close to the body, they are given irons in the form of blades. Cut the bump by forming a cross, then cut it out. At that time, the hunchback is really dead and the usual ceremonies can take place. If we bury him with his hump, the *dokpègans* will die with him. Arrived in the beyond, we will ask the hunchback why we put this load on his back. The ancestors will therefore seek the *dokpègans* and *assouka*. If a malformation has been present since birth, the individual is buried without performing an ablation. On the other hand, if it is a deformity due to life, we must rid the body of it before burying it. The bump will be placed in a white cloth with liturgical leaves of *huma* and *akĩkõma* and will be deposited from a *dakplai* tree which has the reputation of having strong branches and it is also one of the signs of *Fà*. The rest of the body is buried in a place in the middle of the bush. The family can perform the usual rites, but without the body.

The death of a stranger in voodoo land

During a visit if a foreigner dies, a burial rite is performed and a donation called “*jonosè*” is given to him, although he is not necessarily buried in the country. Three *àseen* are dedicated to him; the first for the eldest son, the second for the eldest daughter and the third for the

close friend, called “*cotosalu*”. The *àseen* and the burial rite serve to prevent the spirit of the foreigner from returning to incarnate in the family where he died.⁶

Abortion

When a woman becomes pregnant but wants to have an abortion, she must first consult the *Fà*. The oracle must decide whether the child she is carrying is a *Tohossou* or not. If it is it is that this child must have an important destiny and his coming on earth is primordial. Either way, an abortion is still seen as murder for voodooists. If despite *Tohossou* status the mother decides to have an abortion, she will be disturbed by the spirit of that child. He can block it in everyday projects, whether professional or personal, or even prevent the subsequent arrival of other children. Ceremonies to appease these children must be performed. Generally women wishing to have an abortion must go to a hospital. Another solution is to show them items that are prohibited to him that will cause the loss of the foetus.

Conclusion

The voodoo religion follows precise ritual cycles, especially when an individual dies. Each dead male responds to specific religious ceremonies, accompanied by the purification of the body, the soul, but also the living. These ceremonies not only have purifying virtues for the deceased and make it possible to ensure his rest, but also have prophylactic virtues to protect the living from possible vengeance from beyond the grave.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares there are no conflicts of interest.

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¹³It is composed of *sififama*, *afama* and *añãma*, the same preparation used to purify the family of the drowned.

¹⁴It's composed of *zoma* and *axisixisima*.