

# Signs of the Times: Discourse Ecologies and Street Life on Oxford St., Accra

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## Abstract

*What happens when we stop seeing streets merely as geographical locations and rather interpret them as archives? What if, in focusing on an African street such as Oxford Street in Accra, we interpret this archive not as static, but as providing a transcript of dynamic transformations of discourse ecologies? The elaboration of a method for understanding the African street as an archive of discourse ecologies will be the main subject of this paper, with a particular focus on cell phone advertising on the street from 2006–2007. I do not stop at an examination of cell phone advertising billboards but relate these to the veritable galaxy of other cultural inscriptions to be seen in mottoes and slogans on lorries, cars, pushcarts and other mobile surfaces that can be encountered on the street. Such mobile slogans are a distinctive feature of Accra and of many African urban environments. The central mark of these mottoes and slogans is an improvisational character that is specifically tied to the local cultural mediations that have historically been drawn upon for them. Taken together the two dimensions of inscription—billboard and slogans—hint at the arc of urban social histories, while also invoking a rich and intricate relationship between tradition and modernity, religion and secularity as well as local and transnational circuits of images and ideas. [Keywords: Accra, Ghana, signs, discourse, advertisements, religion]*

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The street in contemporary urban studies is conventionally seen as the locus for the transfer of representations and cultural practices, the domain of a peculiar geographical and cultural imaginary, and the site for the collision of architectural forms. It is assumed that its boundaries feed into hinterlands of social and political relations. A division is also routinely made between residential and commercial streets. But what happens when we stop seeing streets merely as geographical locations and rather interpret them as archives? And what if, in focusing on an African street such as Oxford Street in Accra, this archive is interpreted not as static, but as providing a transcript of dynamic simultaneities? Whereas the postmodernist view that contemporary urban desire and aspirations may merely be the refractions of the images generated by the communications industry is easily illustrated, this truism is grounded on too narrow a focus on the relationship between technology, images, and self-fashioning. For the real task lies rather in demonstrating that the link between technology, representation, and

desire is mediated through especially variegated environments, the variegations pertaining to the nexus between apparently evanescent local traditions that coalesce into increasingly syncretic new wholes and the spectral globalized processes that materialize in commodities and their attendant imagescapes. These environments may be designated as discourse ecologies that are the result of variously interconnected elements that bring together writing, images, and sounds in a relationship different from what might be gleaned from Facebook or YouTube. Representations generated by these interconnected elements take place within citational networks and practices that need to be attended to in their specificity.

The elaboration of a method for understanding the African street as an archive of discourse ecologies will be the main subject of this paper, with the focus being not on the interaction of humans with the technologies that they use, in this case the cell phone, but on the discourse ecologies that surround these technologies. Settling on the term discourse ecologies serves to highlight the manner in which elements of discursive inscription on the African street provide a window into the interaction of apparently contradictory discourse ensembles that, though generated by commercial advertising pertaining to different cell phone products, yet describe discursive cycles that cannot be explained exclusively with reference to the technologies themselves. Through a reading of cell phone advertising on Oxford Street in Accra from 2006–2007 I want to draw some conclusions on the mediations of cultural circuits that are evident on this particular street and in the city in general. To further elaborate my understanding of the street as an archive, however, I do not stop at an examination of cell phone advertising billboards but relate these to the veritable galaxy of other cultural inscriptions to be seen in mottos and slogans on lorries, cars, pushcarts and other mobile surfaces that may be encountered on the street. Such mobile slogans are a distinctive feature of Accra and other African urban environments. The central mark of these mottos and slogans is an improvisational character that is specifically tied to the local cultural mediations that have historically been drawn upon for them. Taken together the two dimensions of inscription, billboard and slogans, hint at the arc of urban social histories, while also invoking a rich and intricate relationship between local and transnational imagescapes (Appadurai 1996). I also pay attention to aspects of the historicity of cell phone advertising and its slogans and mottos, which ultimately allows them to be read together in their mutual elaboration of a discourse of enchantment. The specific contour of the enchantment that brings the two apparently distinct discursive ecologies together is the rise of evangelical Christianity in Ghana from the late 1980s. These churches avow the possibility of complete self-renewal through elaboration of the idea of God as the paramount supplier of all material goods and the purveyor and guarantor of spectacular new identities. The spectacularity of the new identities preached by the new mega churches in Ghana implies the necessity for the creation of personal spectacle and display as proof of God's care for one's life, thus linking them both to the spectacularity of the billboard adverts and to the

increasingly Christianized sentiments of the vehicular mottoes and slogans. But first, let us take a stroll down Oxford Street.

Part I

Improvisational Characteristics of an Urban Fragment

The name Oxford Street is partly an improvisation and a chimerical projection of popular desire, for it is not the real name of the street under discussion and does not appear on any official maps of the city. Rather, it is part of a much longer road, officially called Cantonments Road.

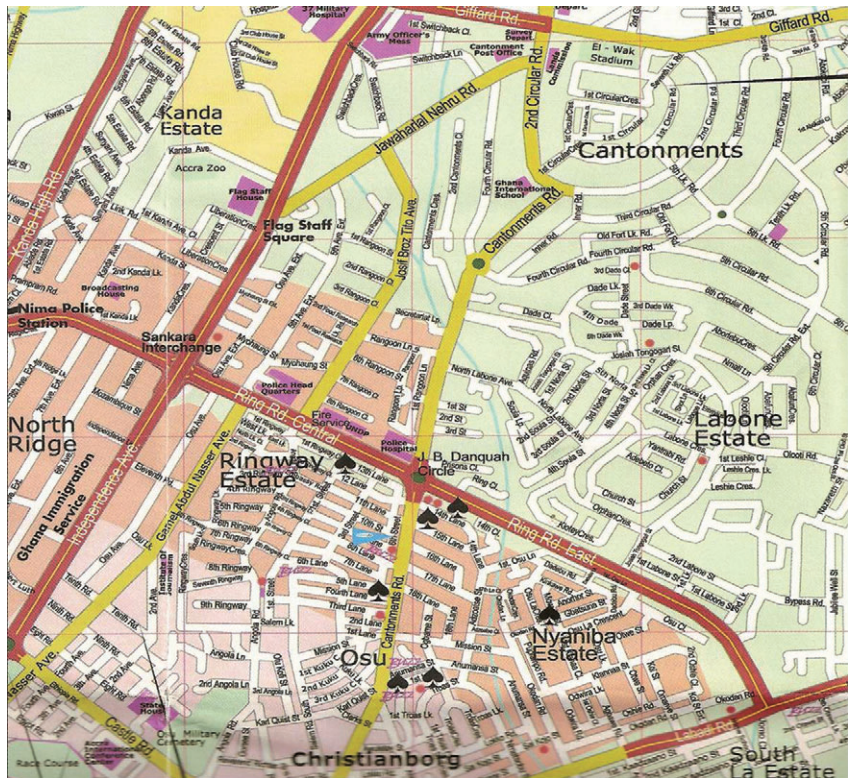


Figure 1. Map of Accra showing Cantonments Road and its immediate environment. From Accra City Map, Surf Publications, 2003.

It is not clear how exactly the nickname originated, but it appears to have been popularized after the return to the country of diasporic Ghanaians especially from London following the end of military rule and the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1992. Oxford Street is roughly the mile-and-a-half of Cantonments Road that stretches between Mark Cofie to the south and Danquah Circle to the north. Cantonments Road itself extends from the Oxford Street area and, merging with 2<sup>nd</sup> Circular Road, joins Airport Road to form a crucial south-north axis connecting

Osu RE, Labone, and Cantonments, which are among the most important neighborhoods in the city that since the colonial period have been the favored residential neighborhoods of the political and business elites. The farther south one goes along Cantonments Road and its connecting streets the closer one gets to the sea, and, more significantly, to Christiansborg Castle, the seat of government.

Apart from its name, the most visible, yet easy-to-be-missed dimension of the improvisational character of Oxford Street is actually beneath one's feet, that is, on the sidewalk itself. In the December 18, 1926 entry to his Moscow Diary, Walter Benjamin wrote

It has been observed that pedestrians [in Moscow] walk in "zigzags". This is simply on account of the overcrowding of the narrow sidewalks; nowhere else except here and there in Naples do you find sidewalks this narrow. This gives Moscow a provincial air, or rather the character of an improvised metropolis that has fallen into place overnight (1986:31).

Even though Oxford Street did not materialize overnight, it is true that there too one is forced to walk in zigzags. There is more to this, however, than the narrowness of the sidewalk. For the Oxford Street sidewalk is marked first by its almost determined non-appearance as a sidewalk (i.e. it looks anything but a sidewalk) and the fact that the distinction between it and the tarmac road itself is practically

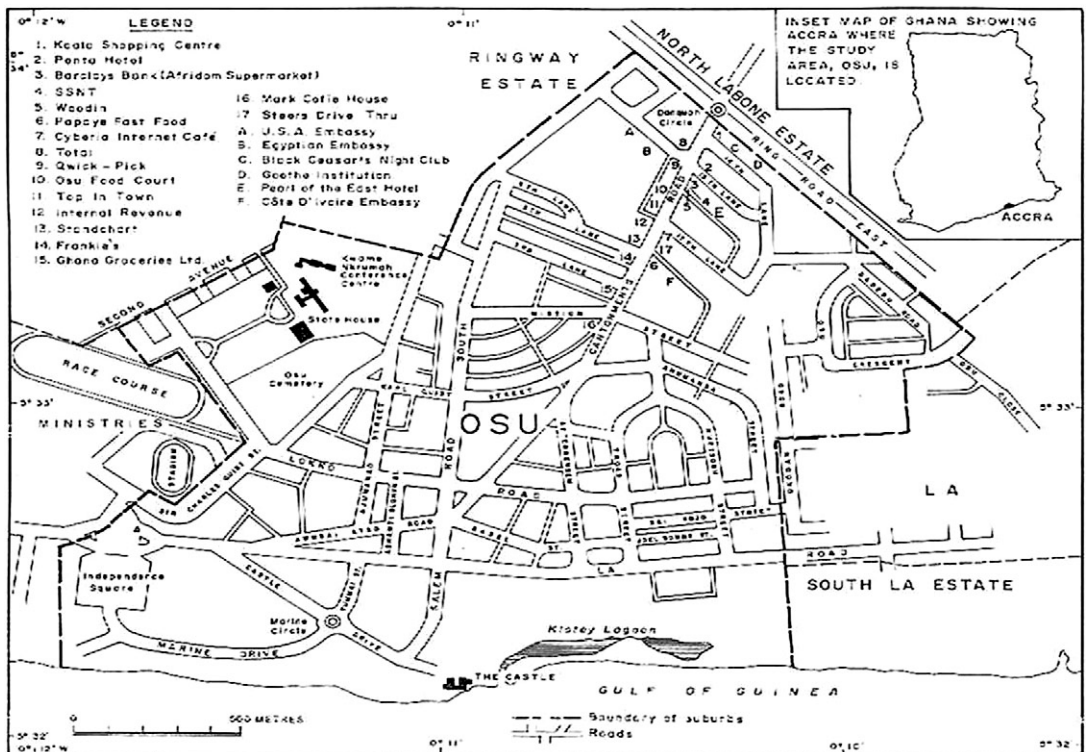


Figure 2. Details of places on Oxford Street. Obtained from the Geography Department, University of Ghana.

obliterated. One reason why the sidewalk does not look like one is that as Oxford Street evolved into the high energy commercial boulevard that it now is, the sidewalk progressively became not the strip specifically designed for pedestrians to traverse but merely the stripped down extension of the interior of the many commercial enterprises on the Street. Thus, the sidewalk in front of various businesses on Oxford Street is actually taken over by them, either in terms of the customer parking extending from demarcated parking areas (e.g. in front of Frankie's or Ecobank), or simply for the sprawl onto the sidewalk of business (e.g. various electronic goods stores). This colonization of the sidewalk by commerce is augmented by the presence of food vendors of various sorts, both itinerant (e.g. coconut sellers with their push carts) and stationary ones (vendors of print cloth and soccer related goods). What is more, even though the sidewalk seems to be demarcated from the tarred street itself by the notorious and practically ubiquitous open sewage gutter, the sidewalk and the road remain at the same height. The sidewalk is not raised a few inches above the road as may be found in the better planned and older neighborhoods of Accra (e.g. in front of the General Post Office in the city centre). On Oxford Street you do not have to step off or onto the sidewalk by the unconscious re-orientation of your gait to take account of a difference in height between sidewalk and street. Since much of the length of the sidewalks on both sides of the street has been taken over by the businesses and vendors, the experience of walking along Oxford Street involves a lot of zigzagging, moving off and onto the road, and the negotiation of one's perambulations amidst various kinds of vehicles and other pedestrians. What would appear to the uninitiated as quite a risky form of j-walking (which is what walking on the sidewalk perforce transposes into), is negotiated practically unconsciously.

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The sidewalk on Oxford Street, as elsewhere in Accra, is an object of improvisation. Even though it would be excessive to declare that the improvisatory character of walking on this street extends into the modes of sign-making and inscriptions alongside it, it is nonetheless instructive to read the dimension of traversing the Street side by side with the many other improvisatory inscriptions on it to see how these collectively engender a particular experience of street life that is markedly different from what one feels when walking along Oxford Street in London or other commercial boulevards in New York, Amsterdam, Athens, or Tokyo. Even though these other places share with Accra's Oxford Street its overcrowding, the experience of this particular crowd as it negotiates the improvisatory street environment is quite different.

On entering the Street from the northside (from Danquah Circle, see maps in Figs. 1 and 2) one is struck by how crowded it is with vehicles, people, large commercial buildings, and a proliferation of large billboards advertising everything from cell phones (MTN: "Everywhere You Go"; TIGO: "Express Yourself"), the United Emirates Airlines, Nescafe, to sanitary pads (Femcare: "Confidence between Your Legs") and DStv ("Glow More"; see Fig 3).

One enters a space where there is a permanent and insistent “invitation to treat,” to echo a concept in commercial law. This invitation to treat is also an aspect of the representation of the simultaneously interconnected and contradictory desires to be found on passenger vehicles decorated with mobile, colorful and unpredictable slogans and mottos. Cars and pedestrians, both African and foreign, mingle freely on the Street, with itinerant vendors trying to improvise a sale as they run alongside private cars and commercial vehicles that clog the street at all times of day. The vendors carry many items: second hand clothes, bags, shoes; fruits of all vintage, but with mango, papaya, and pineapple to be peeled, sliced or diced up on the spot; cold water in bottles or sachets (fondly called “pure water”); red snapper caught fresh from the sea. There are also vendors of manufactured products including dog chains, flash lights, soccer balls, shoe polish, or toothpicks.

Upon entering the Street one is confronted by a range of features that are recognizable from high streets everywhere in the world: magnificent advertising billboards, large shops such as Koala (a grocery store to rival Trader Joe’s or Tesco’s), Woodin (a large shop that specializes in the most gorgeous African print cloths), banks with up-to-date cash dispensing and banking facilities, several large Chinese and other high-end restaurants,<sup>1</sup> internet cafes, some of the best fast food places in town, a large and luscious Italian-themed ice cream parlour, hotels, B&Bs, currency exchanges, and others that make this stretch a visitor’s dream and the dispossessed’s mouth-watering nightmare. On adjoining streets to the east and west and within a roughly 500 metre radius are the American, Ivorian, and Egyptian Embassies, the Goethe Cultural Institute (Fig 2), and Ryan’s, reputed to be the best Irish pub outside Dublin, and other watering holes and dance venues (Figs 4 and 5). Since the summer of 2006 a mega-sized television screen has been mounted in front of the Osu Food Court streaming live TV reality shows such as Big Brother Africa on a 24-hour basis.

Despite the fact that Oxford Street is associated in the local imagination with high-end restaurants, shops, clothes and services, a detailed categorization of the local shops and their goods and services reveals that such shops and eating places are heavily outnumbered by electronic and household goods stores. Temptations to see Oxford Street as an almost postmodern transnational commercial boulevard are quickly tempered by commercial and cultural phenomena that reach back for several generations and that can be seen in varying forms in different parts of the city



Figure 3. DSTV billboard on Oxford Street. Photo by author.

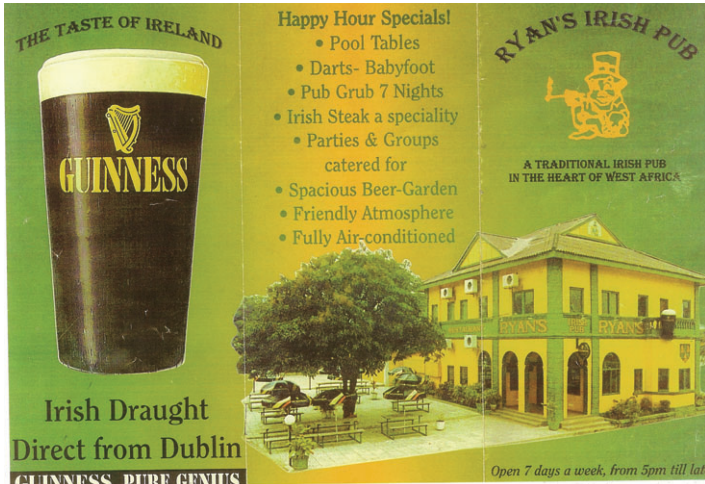


Figure 4. publicity flier for Ryan's Pub. Obtained by author.

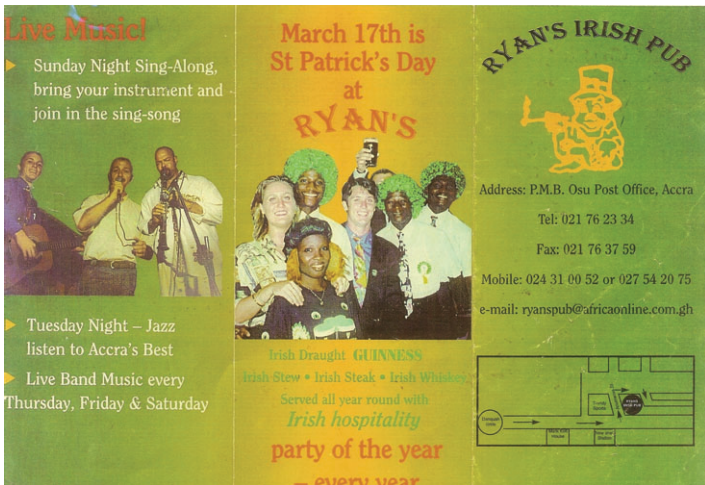


Figure 5. publicity flier for Ryan's Pub. Obtained by author.

and the country at large: the young man selling fresh coconuts whose skill for discerning the tenderness or hardness of the inside of the coconut seems to be purely esoteric; the woman that sells plantain roasted over a slow coal fire on the kerbside corner (for strategic reasons they often choose a corner); female hawkers nonchalantly walking with their wares balanced securely on their heads without the prop or support of hands and selling things as varied as ice cold water, oranges, roasted peanuts, or even cassava and plantain for the evening's *fufu*. Some may even have a young child strapped to their back. These variant features bring the mix of businesses and vendors on the Street much closer to commercial districts elsewhere in the city like the Central Business District, Kaneshie Market, Dansoman High Street, or Spintex Road, which are other beehives of commercial activity with

their own distinctive characteristics. Significant in the evolution and maintenance of the vitality of Oxford Street is its relative proximity to government buildings such as the now defunct State House, the Kwame Nkrumah Conference Centre, the Accra Sports Stadium, and the Ministries. Completed in 1924, this last enclave contains the headquarters of all government departments. Combined with the nearby upwardly mobile neighborhoods, Oxford Street is thus given the feel of a 24-hour hub of commercial activity, irrespective of the fact that it is not the most densely populated commercial part of town. That distinction is reserved for Makola and the Central Business District.

Until the late 1980s it was the vitality of its night life that defined Oxford Street for most city dwellers, yet currently it is the popularity of the fast food joints that secured its fame. For unlike commercial streets elsewhere in the world, Accra's Oxford Street is defined not so much by fashion stores as by fast food places that are transforming the take-out food habits of the general population. Whereas roadside food stalls

serving an assorted range of offerings such as rice and beans, *kenkey* and fish, and the delicious *kelewele* (ripe plantain marinated in a light mix of ginger, chili peppers, and salt and then fried) still remain popular as staple take home meals, it has now become increasingly common for the aspiring classes to travel from across the city to Oxford Street to buy beef burgers, fried chicken and chips, and the obligatory pop drinks. More importantly, meals for funerals and other communal occasions, in the past prepared by women of the extended family and providing an important occasion to exchange gossip about the extended family, are now often purchased as pre-packaged foods from outlets such as Papa Ye, Osu Food Court, and Frankie's. Most funerals in Accra in the last few years serve a pre-packaged meal. Pre-packaged meals also feature significantly at official departmental end-of-year soirées.

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## The Social Life of Slogans

Taking Oxford Street as an exemplary African urban archive, we find that messages and images identified as bearing a globalized provenance jostle with traditional mottos, sayings, slogans, and proverbs inscribed on many surfaces: on passenger lorries and taxis, as graffiti on walls and marginalia on public billboards, or as fragmentary advertising notations on barber shops, hair saloons, or communication centers. Writing in its full assemblage of calligraphic features, inflections, and forms, is the primary modality in which this discourse ecology of popular lore is expressed, with images providing a dialectical addendum that both affirms indigenous sensibilities whilst disclosing their inescapable syncretism. As Karin Barber has shown, syncretism, novelty, and, inventiveness are the signatures of popular cultural forms in Africa (1987). Improvisation is key to these forms of writing. The transcript of transformations of the social imaginary is everywhere apparent within this discourse ecology.<sup>2</sup> Taken in a holistic sense the writing on Oxford Street and elsewhere in Accra discloses different tiers of analytical significance. The signifying surface on which this writing is undertaken is not to be mistaken for the depthless surface that Harvey (1989), Jameson (1991), and others have adroitly adumbrated as part of the postmodern condition. Rather, the superficial markings of this local discourse ecology are often the foreground of intricate imaginary hinterlands that are cast in relations of historical light, ambiguity, and shade. The precise relation between these surfaces/foregrounds, and the multiple backgrounds that they conceal is often an oscillation between telescoped personal narratives and veiled social and public commentary. The articulation of the personal with a cognizance of social and sometimes political changes has altered steadily in the course of the last forty years, and its arc is best seen in the progressive shift from slogans and mottos of a largely secular kind to those of a predominantly Christian religious orientation.



*“All the World is  
a Stage”*

The surfaces on which the writing is to be found are appropriated as part of a cultural procedure for displaying distinctive experiences as object lessons to serendipitous and not-so-casual observers. Thus “Observers are Worried. Why?” inscribed on a house or lorry is a nose-thumbing gesture for people who might be questioning the source of the wealth that was used to build that house or buy that lorry. Other slogans of variant vintage declare: “Mama Chocolate”; “A Short Man is not a Boy”; “You Too Can Try”; “Envy Never Lights a Fire”; “All the World is a Stage”; “And Jesus Wept”; “Enye Easy” (It is not Easy); “Insha’Allahu”; “Gold Never Rust”; and, simply, “Auntie Agnes”, the last as tribute to the person that helped procure the vehicle. These slogans and inscriptions are often also the translation of global processes into a local cultural context. “Nike”, with a barely recognizable swoosh beside it on the back of a passenger vehicle is a clear sign of the global reach of the sportswear company. A barber shop display depicting haircuts of Barack Obama alongside Mike Tyson suggests that they both pack a mean punch whilst also enticing customers for a similarly “powerful” haircut. Images of Kofi Annan, erstwhile President Rawlings and Princess Diana are placed together on the same signart to suggest that they were all three “of the people and for the people,” problematic as this might seem to skeptics. Read correctly then, each signifying surface of inscription is a dramatic scene, where the writing and added images are nodal points and residues of much wider roles and discursive positions. All, in their own distinctive ways, invite viewer participation in the improvised scene laid out, whether the scene is exclusively written or a combination of writing and images. They are, in the words of George H. Lewis, writing specifically about the mottos on Ghana’s urban mammy wagons, “reminders of the individuality of the new African, as well as symbols that unite driver, passengers and street viewers within an African cultural context” (2004:166).<sup>3</sup> The participation indexed by these slogans, sayings, and mottoes differs markedly from that implied in the inscriptions and images to be found on the billboards of multinational corporations. As we shall see presently with respect to TIGO cell phone adverts on Oxford Street, like other multinational corporations such outdoor advertising depends for its efficacy on bypassing the contexts of local cultural mediation. These adverts route their invitations to consumption via a transnational circuitry of images and expressive styles. And yet, as I shall go on to show, the discourse ecology of the multinational adverts still intersects with that represented in the slogans and mottoes with respect to a particular modality of enchantment that is shared by both domains.

A second point of analytical significance for understanding the intersecting discourse ecologies of Oxford Street is that the specific writing surfaces evident on the street divide into two distinct categories: the stationary and the mobile. Under the stationary may be classed official road signs, designations of buildings, and advertising billboards of government and large corporations (Ministry of Health, Coca Cola, Barclays, MTN, etc.). We may provisionally include in this group the smaller signs advertising a range of goods, services, and even prohibitions in all manner

of languages and grammatical facility (“Shoes are repairing here” to herald the presence of a cobbler down the road; or “Urinating here is strictly not Allowed” on a wall to ward off potential defilers). The smaller signs bridge the divide between the often transnational and non-local semiotic of the large commercial billboards and the more syncretistic cultural sensibilities conveyed by mobile signs. Mobile signs are in many respects the more culturally expressive and as we have already noted comprise mainly slogans, wise saws, and mottos on passenger lorries and taxis. The mobile category also includes inscriptions on head pans carried by food vendors, or other forms of portage. The fresh coconut seller’s push cart in Fig 6 lays a claim to rightful occupancy of the road by way of a mock registration plate “BL—11.”

The drawings of the coconut trees on the tire flaps metonymically invoke the beaches from which the fresh coconuts are plucked, while the motto “Save Me ‘O’ God” quickly aligns it to religious sentiments to be seen on many vehicles in the city. Writings on mobile surfaces tend to be either fragments of longer sayings, transpositions from indigenous languages and sacred texts, or expressions of personal aspirations. They function as foregrounds of multiple social standpoints and desires in a world perceived to be in flux.

## Slogans and their Hinterlands

A number of methodological difficulties arise when we attempt to link the foreground of the slogan inscriptions to their varying personal and socio-cultural backgrounds or hinterlands, the most important of which is how to distinguish between what is merely ephemeral (i.e. no more than the disclosure of a passing wish to write something funny, catchy, or attention-grabbing) and the more significant slogans that act as windows into entire socio-cultural ensembles and processes. The two aspects of the background to these slogans are not necessarily exclusive, but for the sake of the analysis that follows I am going to focus predominantly on slogans whose socio-cultural discursive hinterlands can be disclosed by means of a creative contextualization. These socio-cultural discursive hinterlands may be perceived operating at two levels: first is when a slogan comes to encapsulate a specific social detail of universally acknowledged significance in the society, and second is where the slogan is generated through the workings of an inter-discursive transfer of significations from other cultural media such as music, popular theatre, and television onto the template for general



Figure 6. Coconut vendor pushcart on Oxford Street. Photo by author.

slogan making. Both instances are pertinent to understanding the social life of urban slogans and inscriptions.

The first type of slogan is that connected to food, drink, and their buying and selling. Whereas entry into one of the big stores, banks or restaurants on the street requires an economic demeanor more applicable to a Western metropolitan context of shopping, vending on the street defines a different relationship between vendor and client. The relationship is not to be understood exclusively through the discourse of haggling, which is fairly well known and is an absolute necessity for both local and foreigner if you do not want to pay several times the price available elsewhere in town. Rather, it is the fact that vendors and their clients often strike up varying relationships of trust grounded on an understanding of specific cultural codes of conduct that is pertinent to the improvisational and sometimes even carnivalesque character of commercial exchanges in the streets of Accra. These codes stipulate that the client is not solely an object of economic negotiation but rather a total complex of cultural dispositions, some of which are directly pertinent to their being economic subjects (i.e. buyers and sellers). In the area of buying and selling of food and drink this economic nexus is most creatively aligned to the cultural nexus. Studies show that an average of 32 percent of an Accra household's budget is spent on prepared food bought from the street, with the figure moving to 40 percent for poorer families (Maxwell et al. 2000). Money spent is a mixture of direct payments and purchases on credit, with exclusive credit purchases being widespread among the under- or unemployed. The arrangements for getting credit from food vendors involve the management of intricate cultural codes for engendering and maintaining trust between vendor and buyer. Thus, for example, a roadside *kenkey* seller may have a long list of clients who buy her food on credit.<sup>4</sup> Since there is no direct collateral to be placed by the buyer for the continuing extension of credit by the food vendor, what is given in exchange are stories of personal exigencies of various degrees of intractability. These stories, often not devoid of self-deprecating humor and even sarcasm, then become a reservoir of disciplinary instruments in the hands of the food vendor. The stories that a hapless husband might tell about how his mother-in-law is always going off to funerals for which she needs new print cloths financed by him can in given circumstances easily be broadcast by the vendor to create general humiliation for him and as a warning to other debtors. Even though this is not unknown to happen the social embarrassment is so great as to make it extremely rare for a buyer to willfully fail in meeting his obligations to the food vendor. They would rather do a "vanishing act" until such a time as they are able to clear their debts, and even this is not a guarantee against embarrassment. And since food vendors are highly adept at finding their debtors' network of social relations even when, as is common in the case of Oxford Street, they do not live in neighborhoods adjoining the Street, the adept creation and management of the norms regarding such transactions and the attendant checks and balances that come with them are replicated and indeed definitive in all continuing instances of buying

food on credit. As a rule credit is never extended to someone who has not been an old customer of the food vendor. Trust has to be well established before credit is extended. Sometimes roadside food vendors suddenly “recall” an incident of failed payments on seeing a client that owes them money after a long absence and to begin lamenting loudly to any person within earshot about the dishonorable nature of the targeted debtor. The extent and reach of food vendors’ memories and the range of information they are able to master about their clients is truly phenomenal, especially since they rarely keep written records of such transactions no matter how complicated.

The relationship between food vendors and clients described here is not exclusive to Oxford Street. Everywhere in Ghana’s towns and cities this is common. More importantly, in relation to the discourse ecology of street life the relationships between vendors and clients are also articulated in a number of popular slogans inscribed on lorries, trucks, and push carts and which are also adopted as popular attributions and nicknames. The name “Maame Dokonoo” (Maame *kenkey* seller) was adopted by a famous Ghanaian television star, before which it had been commonly deployed as a well-known slogan to acknowledge the significance of the *kenkey* seller’s role in the urban imaginary. Another one is “*Akpeteshie* Seller,” again to be seen as an inscription on *tro-tros* and other popular transport, and was made into a famous song by A. B. Crentsil in 1985. Crentsil’s song also raises the question of alcoholism in Ghana (Akyeampong 1995), *akpeteshie* being a very potent alcoholic drink made from sugar cane and very popular among urban youth and the poor. But the central premise of the song is the credit “arrangement” that pertains between the *akpeteshie* seller and the hapless alcoholic, who comes to her with sad stories about his salary not taking him till the end of the month and the difficulties he has paying his children’s school fees as a means of extracting more drink on credit from her. The song’s refrain—“*Akpeteshie* seller give me quarter [of a beer bottle], I go pay you tomorrow aaa-yay”—remains commonplace in Ghanaian popular culture to this day.

Another passenger lorry inscription, this time from a popular song, allows us to move to the second modality of the links between such slogans and their discursive hinterlands. The well-known *tro-tro* inscription “Ebi Ti Yie” (Some Sit/Are Sitting Well) is also the name of small goods stores, barber shops, and even simply scrawled on the wall of a public latrine. It was made famous by a song of the same title by Nana Kwame Ampadu and the African Brothers Band in the late 1960s. Ampadu is well-known for his clever deployment of Akan folklore in lyrics that are really veiled forms of social critique. “Ebi Ti Yie” told the story of all the animals being called to a big town hall meeting to discuss the fate of the jungle. The duiker had the misfortune of being seated right in front of the lion, who placed his right paw gently on the duiker’s shoulder. When the gathering was asked whether they had anything to say the duiker piped up, only to morosely declare: “some are sitting well, but some are not sitting well at all” (*Ebi ti yie, na ebi nti yie koraaa*). The subtle twist in the song comes from the fact that the word for “to sit” in

Akan is also a homonym for “to live,” so that the duiker’s complaint was quickly interpreted by listeners for what it really was: the gentle yet pointed criticism of the beneficiaries of the political upheavals that followed the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah in 1966, who had begun to amass wealth and were living extravagantly at the expense of the mass of the population.

Already we can make a number of preliminary observations regarding the discourse ecologies of Oxford Street. What is to be noted as its improvisatory and carnivalesque aspect is not to be limited exclusively to the way in which the sidewalk enforces a mode of zigzagged perambulation for the many people that crowd the Street, nor is it due to the jumble of contrasting human activities to be experienced on it. The improvisatory carnivalesque character of street life is in this instance also constituted by the network of citational practices that transpose and coalesce elements from a range of local discourses onto the writing surfaces on the Street. The salience of the slogans and mottos as part of the overall discourse ecology that defines such street life and the urbanscape in general is that they register the nature of variant relationships between foregrounds and backgrounds that are captured upon the surfaces of inscription. Even though the immediate source of a slogan or motto on a stationary or mobile surface may be a personal circumstance, a transliterated saying from an indigenous language, or a wry comment on some social behavior, my suggestion is that it is not merely its source that determines the salience of its message as a signifier of urban desire or indeed interpretation. Rather, the citational networks through which the slogan has passed in order to become visible on this or that particular surface is what defines its salience amidst the plethora of other signs to be experienced on the street. The street is thus an archive of multiple cultural articulations with the slogans on one side and the multinational billboard advertising on another. As we shall see below, the specific “cultural” inflection implied by the TIGO billboards is produced by the confluence of local forms with placeless cosmopolitan signifiers of image making and self-fashioning.

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## The TIGO cell phone ads: consuming the transnational, locally

Advertising for cell phone companies (MTN, OneTouch/Vodafone, Zain, TIGO) are particularly noticeable on Oxford Street because of their grand size and their strategic clustering on prominent intersections along the street. TIGO is the most fascinating because of the ways in which their advertising subtly reformulates the local into an instantiation of a transnational and scrupulously non-local signification. My remarks here focus on the outdoor advertising campaign the company ran in 2006 and 2007. TIGO is a subsidiary of Millicom International Cellular S.A. According to the Millicom website the parent

company originated in 1979 in the early days of the cellular industry as part of a company in Sweden. In 1982 Millicom, along with others in the industry, came together to form a company that later evolved into Vodafone.<sup>5</sup> The current relationship between Millicom and Vodafone is unclear. TIGO Ghana is one of sixteen Millicom subsidiaries in Central and South America, Africa, and Asia. With a 2007 subscriber base of 2,741,122 users it is rated the second largest cell phone company in Ghana after MTN.<sup>6</sup> Others that operate in the country are Kasapa, OneTouch (taken over in 2008 by Vodafone), and Zain. Each cell phone company styles its ads with a focus on distinguishing themes to mark themselves off from their competitors. OneTouch, the originally government owned company, models itself on a thematic of familial harmony (Fig 7), MTN focuses on the theme of fun-filled youth activity (Fig 8) and the inherent attractiveness of the movement involved in “getting somewhere” in contrast to that of standing still (Fig 9).

In their 2004–2006 campaign TIGO struck a more distinctive cosmopolitan and transnational tone. This was well captured in their billboards, but in ways that were far from straightforward.

The pictures of the TIGO billboards (Figs 10 and 11) were taken in the summer of 2006, during the Soccer World Cup in Germany to which Ghana had for the first time qualified. Both giant billboards were on either side of the same tall pillar at the entry into Oxford Street from Danquah Circle.

The siting of the billboards is highly suggestive, as it announces what will turn out to be a significant aspect of the cosmopolitan character of Oxford Street itself. And yet the first thing to note about the billboards is how unGhanaian the models in the pictures are compared to those on the MTN and OneTouch billboards. Prominent in contrast to the models used on the other cell phone billboards is the hue of their skin, which suggests that they are of mixed-race origins. They also wear well-known fashion labels. In the billboards under discussion this is marked by the young woman in the yellow CK t-shirt. Other billboards have a young man in a green Abercrombie and Fitch t-shirt in the foreground. The models sport either dreadlocks or some form of highly expressive hairdos, such as the one of the young woman at the foreground of Fig 11. The overall impression conveyed by their skin hue, their fashion sense, and their gestures and demeanor is that these are black youth well versed in an urban youth chic that might be found in large metropolises like New York, London, Milan, Johannesburg, Amsterdam or Toronto. This urban youth chic is not exclusive to black youth. An initial suspicion

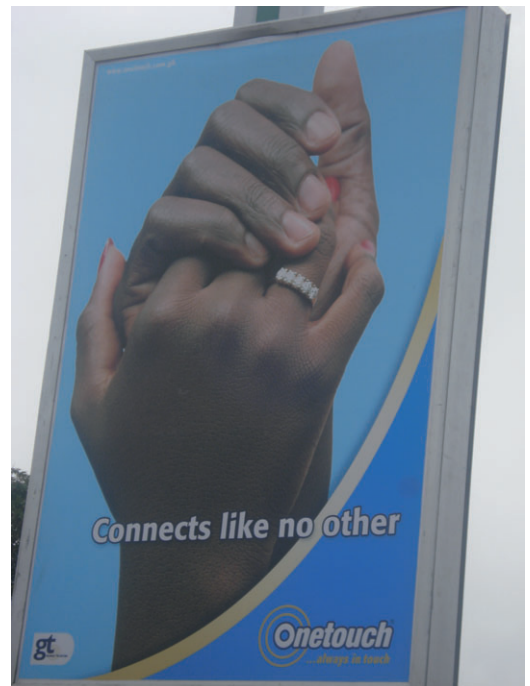


Figure 7. OneTouch advert on Oxford Street, 2006. Photo by author.



Figure 8. MTN advert on Oxford Street, 2006. Photo by author.



Figure 9. MTN advert on Oxford Street, 2006. Photo by author.

that the TIGO billboards were self-consciously advertent to a transnational rather than a local circuit of imagery was later borne out by the discovery that the firm in charge of their outdoor advertising was called Creative Eye and that their brief was markedly different from that of any of the other cell phone companies operating in the country. Creative Eye was founded in Dar es-Salaam, Tanzania in the early part of 2006 and had been specifically charged by TIGO with creating images of “Pan-African” youth for its outdoor advertising.<sup>7</sup> The particular billboard ads in Accra were run in Tanzania in the same period.<sup>8</sup> The idea of Pan-Africanism being deployed here has no relationship whatsoever to the ideals first espoused by Kwame Nkrumah, Gamal Abdel Nasser and other charismatic African statesmen of the 1960s. Rather, it pertains to an image of black youth that allows it to be assimilated to various categories of fashion that are (a) not easily localizable, and (b) not limited to an exclusively black ethnic identity. This content of the images may have something to do with the roots of Creative Eye, since Dar es Salaam and East Africa are well noted for their multicultural mix, having been home to South Asian community from the 1880s, along with various waves of Islamic and Arab trading influences since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Swahili, the lingua franca of the region, is a hybrid mix of Arabic, Persian, and local words and has a long and distinguished literary tradition. Furthermore, even though the concept for the billboards was put together by Creative Eye the assembling of the images into the generic format on the billboards was outsourced to a firm in Bangalore. That Creative Eye would choose such a placeless image of African youth makes complete sense in view of the fact that their understanding of what constitutes an “African” is subject to the highly hybridized and diasporic context of East Africa itself. For, given the waves of mass migrations that have defined sub-Saharan Africa since at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century it is not entirely clear how the referents of an unproblematic African identity can any longer be

sustained without serious examination. This is apposite not only when we think of Africa via the well-known and explicit cultural hybridities of East Africa, South Africa and Madagascar, but also become pertinent when taking account of the cultural identities of the vast populations of diasporic Africans scattered all over the world, the ranks of which are filled by people who can no longer be identified with an exclusively ethnic black Africanness.

In addition to the transnational image of black youth in the billboard images there is also evidence of a Caribbean flavoring to the collage. This is registered especially in the coconut trees and the clear blue skies that seem to envelope the entire frame of the images. In Fig 11 even the building in the picture has its all-glass exterior reflecting the bright blue of the sky. The blue skies and palm trees framing the models serve as metonymic insinuations of the sun-soaked beaches that are contiguously associated with such images. Given that in Ghana much of the sea front is liable to be used as God-given latrines than anything else, the invocation of the blue sky and coconut tree motifs would point away from a Ghanaian or indeed West African evocation within the overall semiotic of leisure and urban chic signaled by the totality of the representations. In other words, we are obliged to read the blue sky and coconut tree motifs as part of an overall semiotic of leisure, thus invoking the sun-soaked landscapes of the Caribbean, which have historically entered the global imagination as the natural site for such beaches. For in the structured space of the TIGO ads, space has itself become a form of merchandise, invoking as it does a spatial ideal that is already associated with a Caribbean location of leisure and consumption. The evocation of the Caribbean provided by the palm trees and the blue skies also situates the images within another intersecting grid of blackness, one associated with the diasporic black “brethren.” Whether these brethren are the descendants of the blackfolk transported across the seas through the dastardly memorial of slavery or ones born from the more



Figure 10. TIGO advert on Oxford Street, 2006. Photo taken by author.



Figure 11. TIGO advert on Oxford Street, 2006. Photo taken by author.



recent processes of post-colonial diasporization is not exactly the point. It is the simultaneities of identities—African/Caribbean/Euro-African etc.—coupled with the invitation to local TIGO product consumers to imagine themselves within the images proffered by the billboards that is the central performative effect sought after.

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Yet, concealed behind these invitations to the consumption of TIGO products as an avenue to forms of transnational self-fashioning, is also a critique of an assumed blackness. For in contrast to the OneTouch and MTN billboards we have seen the images of the TIGO ads put ethnic African blackness in question by eliding them with images of racial hybridity. The semiotic efficacy of the TIGO ads operates on multiple levels, starting from the direct invitation to consumption, which is no different from any other invitation to consumption proffered by multinational companies in Ghana like Coca Cola, Barclays, or Adidas. The difference in the TIGO ads lies in the fact that the invitation is proffered through a particular image of blackness that is severed from any locality and thus made *transnational* (in the sense of crossing nations). In TIGO's discourse hybrid blackness, ethnicity, and fashionable youth are just a few of the commodifiable vectors of image-making, as are those of leisure and the vague diasporic longings suggested in the metonymic implications of the blue skies and palm trees thematic. Whether we follow a theoretical route mapped out by the famous Anglo-Ghanaian philosopher Anthony Kwame Appiah (1992, 2006) or by the equally well-known Afro-Canadian writer Lawrence Hill (2001, 2007), the modalities of what constitutes an African or indeed black identity are increasingly being put under scrutiny. It would be too much to say that the TIGO ads are fully conscious of such debates, but there is no doubt that in their image-making they have opted for a version of Africanness that would not be easily assimilated to a normative ethnic blackness, however we decide to define this.

## Part II

### "No Time to Die": the discourse of enchantment

If by a routing of semiotically complex images of black youth the TIGO ads seem to bypass the local cultural mediation that sustains the other writings (slogans, mottos) that crisscross the Street, they also dialectically meet these writings on the terrain of a shared enchantment. The enchantment is not what might be attributed to magic or witchcraft, a social detail that some commentators on contemporary African cities assume to be endemic to African urban forms (de Boeck 2003; Simone 2004). The terrain of coincidence is rather to be discerned in the message of prosperity that has undergirded the rise of new evangelical mega churches in Accra, and additionally, in the emergence of Oxford Street itself alongside such churches as the place where such enchantments are

materialized in the form of the commercial boulevard. As mentioned earlier, the ratio between social and religious commentary captured in vehicle slogans has shifted decisively over the past 40 years in favor of the religious. This has not been accidental. In Kojo Gyinaye Kyei and Hanna Schreckenbach's 1975 *No Time To Die*, a collection of poems using inscriptions and slogans on Ghana's passenger lorries for inspiration, we find that only seventeen of the 141 they collect for their photo book have a religious inspiration. The vast bulk of their slogans were in English, with just ten in local languages. In contrast, of 246 such sayings I had collected over a four day period in Accra in October of 2007, 133 had a direct reference God, Jesus, or other religious themes (see appendix A). This represents over 50 percent of my sample. The main difference between the current range of mobile inscriptions and the ones captured by Kyei and Schreckenbach is that whereas theirs detailed in the main a veritable zodiac of secular and traditional aspirations and desires, the current Christian-inspired ones act predominantly as forms of religious testimony. They are coded as succinct reminders of God's activity on earth and what relationship owners or drivers of vehicles have with God. Thus the colorful inventiveness of the Kyei and Schreckenbach collection increasingly make way for a more staid set of inscriptions of a straightforward religious kind: "Inshallah"; "Yesu Mmo" (Congratulations, Jesus); "God is Great"; "My Savior Lives"; or some such saying directly adapted from scripture whether in English or indigenous languages.

It would be a mistake, however, to see the religious character of the writings on passenger trucks in opposition to those on large billboards. Even though we have noted the inescapable fact that the images on the billboards attempt to sidestep local cultural mediations and so come across as very different from those of say the coconut seller (Fig 6), there is another level at which the multinational billboard messages are locally mediated and that is at the level of the attribution of prosperity to personal choice, and, more importantly, to a grasping of enchantment opened up by transnationalism. This makes Oxford Street, as a commercial boulevard with the many ads to be found on it an *expressive spatial and material analogue* of the ideology of prosperity that underpins Accra's influential mega churches. This coincidence is conceptual and historical.

To conceptually place Oxford Street in general, the invitations of the TIGO ads, and the increasingly Christianized mobile inscriptions on the street in direct relationship to one another and to the mega churches in Accra is to concede that far from them being on the different sides of a field of aspirations (one side loudly declaiming the pleasures of capitalist consumption and the other calling for reverence and gratitude to God, i.e. God vs. mammon), they collectively define complementary dimensions of what the Comaroffs describe as millennial capitalism: "a capitalism that presents itself as a gospel of salvation; a capitalism that, if rightly harnessed, is invested with the capacity wholly to transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000:292). For the Comaroffs millennial capitalism is marked by the

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ever increasing relevance of consumption and speculation over and above production. With respect to Oxford Street, these complementary dimensions are to be seen operating via different yet intersecting categories: the commercial boulevard as the space for the display of cosmopolitan desires; the billboards that convert transnational ideas of ethnic identity into instruments for the marketing of goods and services; the vehicular and mobile inscriptions that display a zodiac of syncretic ideas yet that now lean heavily toward a Christian ethos; and finally the mega churches themselves, which though not directly present on the street represent a significant shift in the overall social imaginary of self-making. The fact that these categories appear distinct (geographical, advertising, vehicular, or religious spaces) should not obscure the fact that they may all be collectively read as aspects of the same discourse of enchantment. The coincidence is most starkly marked in the relation between the ethos of Oxford Street and that of the mega churches.

It is significant that the emergence of new evangelical churches in Accra touting the message of prosperity coincided with the *pamscadization* of the country at large. This word is ludically derived from the acronym for the IMF's Program of Action to Mitigate the Social Cost of Adjustment, or PAMSCAD, and registers the laugh-to-prevent-yourself-from-crying motif that was one of the marked Ghanaian responses to the vicissitudes of the 1980s. The effects that PAMSCAD was meant to address were prevalent since the Rawlings' government's first introduction of the IMF-inspired Economic Recovery Program (ERP) in 1983. Inflation peaked at 123 percent by the mid-80s and women, the rural poor, and jobless workers were the victims of the economic upheavals. They often did not benefit from the skills training and material support that was introduced as part of PAMSCAD programs for cushioning the most vulnerable. As Agnes Apusigah (2004) notes, the

“stress on job creation, above all else, was indicative of its [PAMSCAD's] neo-liberal roots and emphasis on efficiency. Ignoring the deficiencies of the reforms in the ways that they contributed to the heightening of vulnerability and intensification of exclusion, the plan found an ‘easy way out’ through compensatory programs that provided a quick fix, not sustained relief.

Given that the Cedi rapidly depreciated relative to the US \$ (from 2.75 Cedis per US \$ in 1983 to 9000 Cedis per US \$ in 2003) and that the economy was heavily dependent on imports, the situation in the country was dire.<sup>9</sup> In this environment the mega churches were founded, Nicholas Duncan-Williams's Christian Action Faith Ministries (CAFM) in 1979, Mensa Otabil's International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) in 1984, Charles Agyin Asare's World Miracle Bible Church in 1987, Dag Heward-Mills's Lighthouse Cathedral in 1991, and Salifu Amoako's Resurrection Power Evangelistic Ministry in 1990. These churches, especially the first two, have been extraordinarily successful, with hundreds of

branches across Ghana and in the diaspora. ICGC has established a highly successful university, with Mensah Otabil consolidating the reputation of being as much a thinker, social critic, and teacher as he is a pastor (Gifford 2004:113–140).

Not coincidentally, Oxford Street began to take its current form from the early 1990s following the government's decision to loosen foreign exchange controls toward the last quarter of 1989. The immediate impact of this IMF-instigated policy was the rise of several currency exchanges in the city. The more decisive effect for Oxford Street was the appearance of high-end shops, restaurants and banks, that seemed to mushroom out of nowhere along the part of Cantonments Road that appeared the most amenable to commercialization. This was not entirely accidental, since it directly reflected the fact that Cantonments Road had historically been the corridor servicing the neighborhoods that housed the ruling elites and their satellites since the colonial period. Most of the landmark businesses on Oxford Street date from the late 1980s and early 1990s: Quick Pik (a major grocery store), 1988; Tip Top Chinese Restaurant, 1992; The Trust Hospital (a hospital set up by the Social Insurance Trust), 1993; Barclays Bank, 1994; National Investment Bank, 1994; Papa Ye (the famous fast food restaurant, see above) 1995; Frankie's (famous fast food restaurant, with a bakery and ice cream parlor), 1997; Kwatson's (large electronic goods store), 1997; Standard Chartered Bank, 1997; Osu Food Court, 2000; Agricultural Development Bank, 2001; Ecobank, 2005; MTN, 2005; and AMAL Bank, 2008. This is only some of the most well-known places on the Street. With the speed at which Oxford Street developed to rival Makola Market and the Central Business District, which themselves evolved slowly from the mid-50s, it is not hyperbolic to conclude that the street is the explicit materialization of the dream of prosperity invoked in the prayers of the evangelical churches themselves. And the overall impact of the prosperity message of these mega churches is to have subtly but decisively altered the character of urban writing and moved it more and more towards a religious sensibility. If the emergence of mega evangelical churches and of Oxford Street is not to be taken as mere coincidence it is because they were determined by the processes unleashed by the introduction of the IMF-inspired policies of the 1980s.

Historically the opulent effervescence of Oxford Street and the mega churches developed as products of the same IMF policies of the 1980s. As with Oxford Street, there is much spectacularity and display in Accra's mega churches, as for them God is a God of wealth. Paul Gifford gives a detailed description of the prosperity thinking that is articulated at Sunday service, prayer meetings, and bible classes in these churches. In one instance, he reports, a priest asks congregants to visualize making out a huge cheque to themselves which they will then pray to come to fruition in the real world (Gifford 2004:49–52). Even more significantly, as Ruth Marshall (2009) shows for Nigeria, prosperity churches also put into circulation elaborate displays of Americanized accents along with globalized models of wealth and success that are meant to register to the

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congregants their access to a global repertoire of self-fashioning through the ideology of prosperity. Accra's mega churches are thus both local and transnational in a practical sense that transcends the fact of having branches in the diaspora. On this account we might even venture to formulate a slogan that might serve Oxford Street, the multinational ads to be found on it, the mega churches themselves, and that may one day conceivably find itself inscribed boldly on a passenger lorry: "Shopping is believing!" For the proof of belief and good standing with God is ultimately being able to put oneself on "display" through the weekly rituals of testimony that are commonly found in such churches. Such displays themselves become invitations to treat, proffered to non-believers and believers alike so that they might intensify their church related activities (and financial contributions, which often turn out to be the real measure of participation).

To read all the categories that we have encountered so far (street, slogans, ads, churches) dialectically and as dimensions of the same discourse of enchantment, we are obliged to read them beyond their discrete autonomous domains. This essentially requires a form of defamiliarization, because their historical significance can no longer be read separately, but as part of a series of intersections. In other words, we are now able to read all the elements as part of intersecting discourse ensembles, all of which, despite appearances to the contrary, intersect as an aspect of the larger integrated history of a discourse of enchantment. Thus with the TIGO ads, even if we agree that at a primary and explicit level they succeed in bypassing the mediations of local culture we still have to concede that they meet with the mobile inscriptions that traverse the street precisely at the intersection of their increasing appeals to religiosity. For its part Oxford Street is the expressive analogue of the desire for prosperity which not co-incidentally is a core part of the message that has been broadcast by the mega churches from their inception. The discourse of enchantment shared by all these vectors is intensified and rendered a *historical necessity* by the terrible effects of IMF policies, articulated in a fragmentary fashion by the forms on the Street and in a more coherent manner in the prosperity discourse of the mega churches. Thus street, billboards, urban slogans, and prosperity churches need to be read in terms of mutually imbricated social processes for a full understanding of their historicity as articulations of a discourse of enchantment.

## Afterword-as-conclusion: faith and the cell phone in an era of multinational capital

If there were any lingering doubts about the proximity of the cell phone company's invitation to self-fashioning and those suggested by the evangelical churches in Ghana this is thoroughly dispelled by TIGO's November 2008 campaign which explicitly linked their products to the discourse of prosperity hitherto exclusively associated with the churches. This, from their website:

Nothing is beyond your reach

Put SOUL into your life, passion into your LOVE and RELAX with our tips from our new, exciting Be Alive service. We strengthen your FAITH, help you get

RICH, mend your broken HEART and bring you inner PEACE when you subscribe to Be Alive.

Keywords:

Relax. Bible. Faith. Peace. Soul. Love. Vital. Family. Rich. Happy. Heart. Cheer.

The message is further expanded on clicking on the introductory page:

With TIGO's BE ALIVE promotion, you stand the chance of winning CASH prizes, iPods and Cell Phones! Just Send any of the keywords JOB, RICH or

EXCEL to TIGO short code 444. You will receive a daily inspirational message on the keyword to enhance either your chances of getting a JOB, how to save and get RICH or how to EXCEL in life! Each text received is 10p.

The more inspirational messages you receive the greater your chances of winning US\$ 400, iPods and cell phones in weekly draws! Your name would [sic] be drawn and you will be contacted by a phone call to collect your prize at the TIGO Head Office. This is the only location your prize can be claimed. Win prizes whilst possibly winning some great prizes! [sic] TIGO! EXPRESS YOURSELF . . . . .

This promotion will end on the 28th of November 2008. To DEACTIVATE or

UNSUBSCRIBE send STOP XXXX (the service you subscribed for) to 444 i.e: Send STOP JOB to 444<sup>10</sup>

The key element to this promotion is that you only get a chance to be put in the raffle on receiving a certain number of inspirational messages. But to get the inspirational messages you have to text the relevant keywords to TIGO for which you will part with 10 Ghana *pesewas* a pop.<sup>11</sup> And since the magical quantitative threshold of inspirational religious messages is to be determined by the cell phone company without reference to the consumer, the direct material benefits of prosperity ultimately accrue to the firm itself. An endless loop is generated whose main elements are need, desire, faith, clever commercial product advertising, and the continual deferral of the customer's satisfaction to an ever-receding horizon. If it is true that another customer has been successful on this faith-based raffle (from the rumors that generally circulate about these things), then

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what about me?! Thus commerce is dressed in the garments of faith, the laborer's appetite works for him and hunger drives him firmly into the bosom of the capitalist circuit.

The question of individual agency may be raised to counter what has appeared in this analysis as an ultimately skeptical view of the relationship between the discourse ecologies here described and the consciousness of the ordinary Ghanaian. Yet any attempt to romanticize the possibilities of a countervailing individual self-consciousness in their interface with multinational capital would be ignoring a rather rude fact of present-day urban life in Accra, namely, that there does not seem to be any serious evaluation and critique of the ways in which multinationals such as TIGO and the other phone companies are helping to produce amenable subjects of capitalist consumption. Sure enough there have been voices raised against the cell phone companies, but these have mainly been to complain about the lack of efficiency in the delivery of their products. They take much money but give nothing meaningful in return, is the commonly heard complaint. If this essay has any value it lies in the attempt at unsettling the banal and commonsensical ways in which the discourse ecologies on the street are understood, and in seeing them as intricately connected to other domains of cultural and religious life that may at first appear utterly distinct and autonomous. The objective has been to read the street as an archive of lively discursive simultaneities, at the level of detail, culture, history, and concept.

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To close, then, two slogans: "Obra Ye Ko" ("Life is War"), and "Nothing Late" (i.e. Better Late than Never).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Even though Accra has no substantial Chinese population this has not prevented the establishment of quite popular Chinese restaurants, starting from the late 60s and early 70s. The Chinese restaurants in the area include Chikin' Likin', Tsing Tao, Noble Chinese Restaurant, Peking Restaurant, and Dynasty.

<sup>2</sup>On the social imaginary in Accra and its connection to urban mythology, see Quayson (2003).

<sup>3</sup>Lewis (2004) provides a useful typology of such sayings. My only disagreement with his categories is in the separation between sayings pertaining to "Pain and Trials of This World" and "Appeals to God or Heaven". The two leak easily into each other. For analytical purposes they can be seen as one category. The other failing of Lewis's only preliminary and brief investigation is that he does not list sayings in any local language. This would have forced him to alter the relative percentages he assigned to his categories.

<sup>4</sup>Kenkey is a popular local food made out of fermented corn meal. Purchased from food vendors it is normally eaten with fried fish and hot sauce.

<sup>5</sup>After a great deal of controversy, Vodafone bought a controlling stake in OneTouch, the government's cell phone operation. (Vodafone in Ghanaian Mobile Deal. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/7487821.stm> (accessed 28 January 2009).

<sup>6</sup>2007 Millicom Annual Report, [http://online.hemscottir.com/it/micc/ar\\_2007/ar.jsp](http://online.hemscottir.com/it/micc/ar_2007/ar.jsp) (accessed 28 January 2009).

<sup>7</sup>Interview with Syl Kowornu, Director of ADS Services Limited in July 2007. ADS had been in charge of TIGO's local advertising for seven years until 2006, when they lost their contract to Creative Eye.

<sup>8</sup>See [www.ceafrica.com](http://www.ceafrica.com) (accessed 2 February 2009). Creative Eye's advert campaigns have varied in content, with subsequent ones such as the Be a Fan focused on popular sports in the country (boxing, soccer, basketball). The Express Yourself campaign is centered on various forms of creative expressiveness (music, painting, singing) and the models have varied between a transnationally "placeless" black youth and those with a more recognizably local ethnicity. The emphasis is on a transnational imaginary, the overall artistic background to the pictures providing a decidedly non-local flavor to the ads.

<sup>9</sup>See Ghana Trades Union Congress policy discussion paper on Incomes in Ghana, [www.gpn.org](http://www.gpn.org) (accessed 3 February 2009).

<sup>10</sup><http://www.TIGO.com.gh/> (accessed 29 January 2009).

<sup>11</sup>Roughly 10 US cents at the time of writing. Apparently, these campaigns are so popular that they net between \$70- \$100,000 a fortnight for the cell phone company. Interview with Charles Ampaw, host of the "Your Guess is Right" game-show on GTv, August 2009.

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