The London School of Economics and Political Science

ACCRA'S PROFESSIONALS:

an ethnography of work and value in a West African business hub

Anna-Riikka Maaria Kauppinen

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of the London School of Economics
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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on Ghanaian young professionals and entrepreneurs whose lives unfold at the interstices of the capital Accra's private sector business scenes. By following professionals to the realm of family, friendship, workplace, religious community and the urban public culture, I show how professional status, and the quality of 'professionalism', emerge as objects of desire that transform into multiple types of value – economic, moral, ethical, and spiritual – within Ghanaian knowledge-intensive capitalism. These value transformations are underpinned by Ghana's post-1980s neoliberal restructuring, expansion and privatisation of higher education, liberalisation of the media and the public sphere, increasing popularity of Charismatic Pentecostal Christianity, and the emergence of private sector companies as sought-after workplaces among Accra's middle-class youth. In line with the post-independence vision of Ghana as the promised land of black capital growth, diverse political, commercial and Christian stakeholders construct a public narrative of Ghana as a place where one can access professional status, become middle-class, and – on a broader scale – build 'professional', privately-owned infrastructure of value creation.

With the national and historical public culture of professionalism as the backdrop, this thesis documents the uncertain, intimate trajectories of delivering on post-1990s liberal democratic promises of the value of professional qualifications and professional status. In the era of Accra's jobless growth and global imageries, and audit measures, of 'professional quality', professional life becomes a mode of existence characterised by the intensity of co-operative work, circulation of new ideas of productivity and ethical subjectivity, and discordant desires of moral belonging. By attending to how these interlocking processes shape co-operative work in diverse microcosms within Accra's media industry in particular, I show how the 'desire for professionalism' ultimately connects with longer genealogies of middle-class social reproduction, namely, the process of being and becoming particular type of citizens, families and communities. This proposition builds on the framework of 'work as mediation', which contributes to anthropology of capitalism by expanding the category of work to include flows of sociality that structure modes of value creation among Accra's professionals. These flows constitute what I propose to call *an economy of flow and blockage,* which is a particular form of social reproduction that manifests through distinct ethical action and ritual performance. This action includes, but is not limited to, tangible flows of cash and care, eating and feeding, the production of beauty, joking, prayer, and Christian fellowship. From this premise, considering work as a practice of mediation sheds new light on 'capitalisms from the south' by understanding *work itself,* and knowledge-intensive work performed as professionals in particular, as an object of popular desire. Hence, this thesis argues that new middle-class projects of social reproduction are central to the analysis of the content and form that new economic infrastructures take in a post-colonial African context.

To my two families in Finland and Ghana

In memory of Elli Annikki Kauppinen (1932–2001)

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Acknowledgements

This thesis tells a number of stories about being and becoming a professional in a West African capital, Accra. In this expanded section of acknowledgements, I start the inquiry into the process of becoming a professional, pursuing a PhD in Anthropology as an example, which includes encounters and exchanges with institutions, mentors, peers, friends, families, and other close ones. Thanks to these many exchanges that have resulted in the kind of permanent debts that exist at least for a lifetime, this thesis has come into an existence.

Firstly, I want to thank the numerous Ghanaians who have taken me as part of their lives since 2010. They have not only told me stories and involved me in their life projects, but they have been co-analysts, teachers and advisers. I am grateful to the business companies, NGOs, media stations and other institutions that have opened their doors for my earlier research projects, freelance work stints, and eventually PhD fieldwork. In the course of the years, I have also got to know numerous neighbours, taxi-drivers, church leaders, beauticians, traders, gardeners and security guards whose friendship and countless insights on Accra, Ghana, and *abrokyire*, 'foreign lands', have been invaluable. I wish I could individually thank everyone who has guided me through the intricacies of living in Accra, however, most names in this thesis are pseudonyms, including company names in order to protect their interest.

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Akpe na me bɛ me fiam bɛ me nyɛ mia tɔ .

…

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…

Besides the significance of the role of people in one’s area of expertise, this thesis is also the product of the influence of people and places beyond one’s area of speciality. As an anthropologist, my conviction is that anybody, including one’s parents, siblings, friends or random strangers met in public transport 'at home', can provide valuable insights into one’s research project. This is especially true in the case of this dissertation that contains ‘professionalism’ as one of the key words. I want to thank my dear friends outside academia with whom we have shared the successes and struggles of materialising professional desires in the contemporary moment. In Finland, many hugs of thanks to Auli Miettinen, Eija Kärkkäinen, Maria Kornienko and Roupen Bastidjan, Elisa Itkonen, Talvikki Tenhunen, Mikaela Kurppa, Anna Venäläinen, Meiju Keksi, Salla Mäkelä, and Rasmus Paltschik. Hilialumi Moreno, thank you for showing me what it means to be there for one another, and sharing ever more unruly intuitions about the human condition. Sirkka Mikkola, ever since you showed me the link between Keith Basso's (1996) *Wisdom Sits in Places* and Pocahontas's Grandmother Willow, I knew I would learn from you enormously. In various other corners of the world, Minna Raitapuro, my fictive twin sister, thank you for co-presence across time and space. Audrey Desiderato and Rachel Visscher, you don't know each other but discussions with both of you incredible women have always been a source of inspiration. Many thanks to Sandra Rospigliosi, Juan-Pablo Casapía and Diego Espinosa for accompanying me on this journey from across the oceans. José Velázquez, thank you for everything, and Siyka Radilova (and Diego!) for being there. Thank you Sarah Lee, Roberto Del-Monte, Federica De Santi, Ziyan Wang, Katerina Glyniadaki and Kiran Phull for the good spirits during my two years as an LSE subwarden. Another special friend in London and Accra throughout these years has been John Vanderpuije, who has influenced this thesis in unprecedented ways. He has pushed the limits of my thinking with his uncompromising questions about the Western academia, race, anthropology, fieldwork and friendship. This thesis hardly lives up to what he would expect from me as an analyst, while I hope that the effort already counts.

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Last, I want to thank my family, who this thesis is dedicated to alongside Grandma, Grandpa, Edem and my sisters in Ghana. My mum and dad, Terttu and Ahti, thank you for being with me on every step of this trajectory. Thank you for giving me all the imaginable support that you could give, not least by encouraging me to follow a path that took me far away from you, while you kept me close, in your prayers and thoughts. My parents have also been a constant source of analytical insight. Before and throughout writing this thesis, they have shared with me many stories of their own journeys. As the youngest children of their farming families, after basic school they entered vocational schools of administration and got to ″work with papers″ and ″circle the pen,″ as my farmer grandparents described their jobs. I never got to know my grandparents, but knowing about my parents' journeys has taught me many lessons about the desires of conceiving children "as professionals" in post-war Finnish rural families. *Kiitos äiti ja isä luottamuksesta, rohkaisusta ja monista tarinoista. Olette rakkaita.* Next to my parents, my big brother Jani has been my backbone before and throughout this project, to the extent of visiting me in Ghana in the midst of fieldwork. Jani, thank you for being my *iso-veli.*

This thesis is written in memory of Elli Annikki Kauppinen (1932-2001), my dad's eldest sister who took up the role as our grandmother. She worked her life as a home-aid to disadvantaged families and the elderly in my dad's home village in Eastern Finland. In a comparable manner to many elder sisters I met in Ghana, she supported the beginning of my dad's professional trajectory by housing him in her small rented studio when he started working in an office-job back in the 1970s. She eventually moved in a red wooden cottage with blooming flowerbeds and a potato field, and never got married. I spent many school holidays with her in her cottage where we listened to an old and scratchy radio and spent hours drawing cartoons. I wish she could have lived longer to accompany me on this journey that has resulted in this thesis. The journey started by observing her skill of listening, which parallels with what my Ghanaian colleagues called "hearing loud and clear." She never travelled further than Sweden, but she was the first anthropologist I ever met.

…

Johannes Fabian (2007) has stated that anthropology needs time[1]. The time of collecting the material for this thesis spans approximately seven years of ethnographic research engagement with Ghana. However, this time probably has a longer span if the role of people and places before these years is taken into account. This time includes moments such as waiting for my mum to close from work in one of the public sector offices in our rural home commune in the beginning of the 1990s. Or when my close friend, who opted out of formal education after basic school, struggled with portraying the idea of a successful professional person in a Helsinki-based private company. Further, as Fabian infers in *Time and the Other* (2014[1983]), the unique potential of anthropology is to render coeval distinctive historical trajectories, concepts and spaces people inhabit in seemingly distant locations, which I believe can also render what we understand as home newly strange every day. This persistent experience of strangeness at home, I hope, can also facilitate full engagement with the lives and desires in Ghana's capital Accra.

London, February 2018

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[1] Here I am referring to Fabian's 2007 unpublished keynote speech at the annual meeting of the Netherlands Association of Anthropologists about the significance of long-term in anthropological knowledge production. In Fabian's understanding, long-term does not only refer to the engagement with one's field site, but to the time-span of one's life trajectory before and after the field that shapes one as a person, and consequently also one's questions and mode of analysis.

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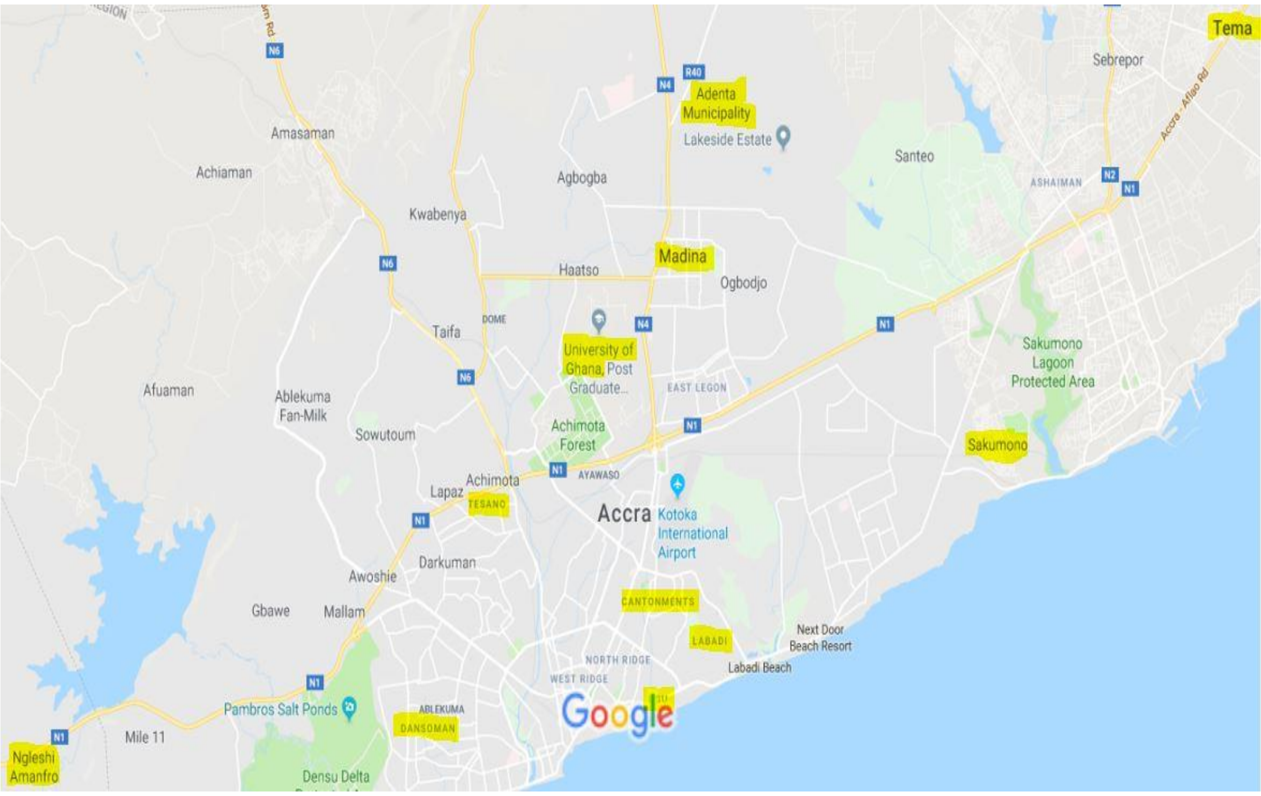
Note on style

All the names of individuals and institutions in this thesis are pseudonyms, unless separately indicated. I use footnotes throughout the text to clarify the meaning of vernacular words and expressions. The majority of fieldwork was conducted in English and varieties of urban slang, ranging from Pidgin English to the most commonly understood lingua franca in Accra, Twi. The value of the Ghanaian Cedi in 2013-2014 was in constant inflation, and stood for approximately 1£ = 5-7 GH₵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East Legon
Afuaman
Ablekuma Fan-Milk
Sowutoum
Achimota Forest
Sakumono Lagoon Protected Area
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Achimota
Lapaz
Tesano
Ayawaso
Accra
Kotoka International Airport
Darkuman
Awoshie
Gbawe
Mallam
Cantonments
Labadi
Next Door Beach Resort
Labadi Beach
North Ridge
West Ridge
Pambros Salt Ponds
Ablekuma
Dansoman
Mile 11
Ngleshi Amanfro
Densu Delta
Accra - Aflao Rd
Google

Illustration 1: Map of Accra (source: Google Maps). The highlighted place names stand for some of the locales where the fieldwork took place. Many of the media businesses were located in the triangle between Cantonments, Osu, and Dansoman. I also conducted fieldwork in Sakumono and Tema, while many NGOs and private universities were located in East Legon. The fieldwork involved extensive movement in the city, and beyond Accra, from my homes in Northern Accra and Labadi.

Prologue: to be a professional (notes on desire)

February 2010. Gertrude and I met one afternoon in a fully crammed *trotro*[2], stuck in a notorious Accra traffic jam. She wore the informal uniform of a professional: a folder in hand, a black pencil skirt and a white-pink striped collar shirt. In the back minibus seats around her were elderly female traders with woven baskets of oranges and young men listening to popular Ghanaian music. Suddenly the driver ordered all of us to leave the vehicle as he was going to turn back due to traffic. The passengers sneered and scoffed. This was a common occurrence on the trotro – Accra's most popular form of public transportation and accordingly crowded – and left the passengers to either walk to their destinations or find a more adventuresome driver to brave the (slow or fast-moving) traffic of the Ghanaian capital.

As we were walking by the roadside in the sweltering heat trying to stop another trotro, Gertrude said she was late meeting her boss. She worked at an insurance company in Central Accra, where her job involved touring the city, marketing life insurance schemes to employees working for private companies. These schemes promised salary compensation to each employee's family in case of unexpected death. By the close of the day Gertrude would report back to her office and register new clients. She received a commission-based salary at the end of each month. "It's not easy – people think we are cheats," she confessed a month later when we were having a bottle of Coke and meat pie after her work day.

Gertrude sometimes told stories about her previous jobs. After receiving her diploma, she had worked as an accountant in a small Ghanaian private company where an old friend – the CEO – initially hired her. However, problems emerged soon. "I was pedantic," she said. "I would ask questions, and I saw he was not doing the right thing." Soon a rumour circulated that he was planning to fire her. She was not going to wait for the announcement and handed in her resignation letter soon thereafter.

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[2] An old second-hand mini-van imported from Europe transformed into a minibus by fitting in seats where passengers sit tightly packed next to one another. Each trotro is accompanied by a driver and a *mate*, most often a young man who collects the ticket fares.

We became friends. Gertrude introduced me to her new boyfriend, James, who worked for a multinational telecommunications company. One Saturday afternoon we visited him in his small flat in a popular neighbourhood close to his family house. As we sat outside, Gertrude talked about her career dreams of working as a newscaster or an actor, or (alternatively) to work for an NGO. To move towards these goals, she was saving money to start a Bachelor's degree program in Media and Communications. She already had a certificate in Administration, while James held a Bachelor’s in Computer Science and was planning to do a Master’s of Business Administration. When James went inside, she lowered her voice: “James already has a degree, so at least he should date someone with a degree as well.” Upon leaving, Gertrude pointed at the empty kitchen space, and told James to buy a stove and utensils so that she could cook for him.

…

February 2011. “Meet me in my house on Saturday. My mother will prepare you *fufu*[3],” Gertrude told me on the phone. I was back in Ghana to live and work and eager to meet, as Gertrude and James were expecting their first child.

The journey to her family house in the outskirts of Accra, beyond Ngleshi Amanfro (see Illustration 1), took close to two hours by trotro. She commuted this journey twice every day! Gertrude came to meet me on the roadside, walking slowly. She was almost due. She led us off the main road via an untarred path deeper to the leafy green bushland, greeting neighbours on her way. We arrived at the open compound, where James was talking with Gertrude's mum. Gertrude's youngest brother, Believe, was chasing a chicken. Her two teenage brothers were fixing a bicycle, and greeted us politely. Gertrude was the eldest out of the seven children in her late twenties, and also the only ”professional” of the family. For now, she was also the only one who had finished high school, let alone had some tertiary-education. The family house was uncompleted overall with some finished rooms, such as Gertrude's, which James had recently helped to tile. The terrace was used for cooking while the big living room stood roofless, an empty stone space with a direct line of visibility to the yard. Gertrude's mother sold sachet water and hand-made leather sandals their uncle sent from Kumasi[4]. Gertrude's father appeared aloof. Gertrude said he used to work in construction, but lost his job due to a drinking problem and health issues.

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[3] A Ghanaian staple made of pounded, boiled cassava and plantain, which are mixed together and enjoyed with spicy soup with meat.

When we emerged from Gertrude’s room, James signalled he had to leave. On his way out he discreetly gave some cash to Gertrude's mum. As we started peeling the plantain and cassava for the fufu, I asked if they were planning to live together soon. Keeping her eyes fixed on the plantain, Gertrude said there were ”issues.” James accused her of falling pregnant without his consent and had started going out with another woman. Due to her pregnancy, she could not work as a mobile insurance marketer, and was dependent on money from James when he occasionally visited. Believe's school fees were constantly pending, which worried her. She hoped to be able to return back to work shortly after giving birth.

…

Their son, Nii[5], was born two months later. They would continue living in the unfinished family house for many years to come. James had another son with another woman, whom he also supported and occasionally visited. Soon after giving birth, Gertrude returned to her insurance job, while her mother took care of Nii during the days. In 2012, things deteriorated. James lost his job in the multinational telecom during downsizing that followed a change in ownership. He attempted a move to America to further his education and work, but was returned back to Ghana from the airport. Gertrude attempted a romance with a Danish man she met online, to no success. After many tears and rows and family meetings, Gertrude and James got back together in 2013, as amid the couple expecting their second child. James remained unemployed, while Gertrude started studying for her Bachelor's Degree in Media and Communications alongside the insurance job. Her dream of working as a newscaster, or maybe an actress, remained alive.

…

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[4] Gertrude's mother was Fante by ethnicity, whose family lived along the Southern coast.

[5] Nii is a common first name given to a first-born son among the Ga, James’s ethnicity.

April 2016. ″It's Nii's birthday!″ Gertrude announced on the phone. ″I've told him you are on your way with a present and a birthday cake.″ It was Saturday at 7am and I was on a short visit to Accra. I quickly got out of bed and took a taxi via a supermarket. After many years of detours, Gertrude and James finally shared a small rented flat close to James' family home. Gertrude still worked for the same insurance firm, in the same position. She had finished her degree but hadn’t secured a job in the media or in an NGO. She came with Nii to greet me on the roadside and led us inside an old neighbourhood with untarred roads, open sewers and old family houses. We entered their flat – part of a single-story compound house – and James emerged from the bedroom (along with the hum of the air conditioner within) and greeted me with an embrace. We sat on the couches watching Nii and their younger son, Edwin, play with their new colouring pens and books.

James told me he was still unemployed. I wondered if he still went to church three times a week as he had done back in 2014, when we had last spoken. Back then, he had laughed that unemployment had made him ″very religious.″ He had also said that his church ″wants you to prosper, they don't want you to bring disgrace to your family and yourself, so you go to church a whole lot.″ Now neither he nor Gertrude mentioned their Charismatic Pentecostal churches. They mainly talked about moving abroad. Before, Gertrude had largely dismissed the very possibility of foreign travel. She grew dreadlocks, listened to reggae music, and proclaimed that Ghana was the place to be. Now she said: “We could do any work, any work at all. Anything is better than Ghana at the moment.” James echoed her words.

I asked if I could use the bathroom, located at the back of the bedroom. The air-conditioner was still on, throwing cool air to this one room where nobody had been for two hours. A laptop was on in the middle of stacks of papers on the bed. As I came out, I asked about the air-conditioner, but James didn’t move to turn it off. In a neighbourhood where most residents hardly ever entered air-conditioned spaces, one room consistently maintained the temperature of an office. Before I arrived, James had been preparing a job application. An application to be a professional in Accra, again.

…

The assurance that ”hard work” results in achievement is a persuasive promise of liberal democracy (Moore & Long 2013). From the 19th century onwards, public discourses of achievement have celebrated the middle-class status of *professional,* an individual who pursues education, strives for professional excellence, and who is committed to a set of professional standards and ethical dispositions[6]. The formation of systems of professions – staffed by formally employed individuals with specialised knowledge (Freidson 1986) – has been the backbone of modern division of labour (Abbott 1988; Freidson 2001; Parsons 1939; Perkin 2003). The horizon of such a world of professionals entails imageries of freedom from manual labour accompanied by financial independence, upward mobility, and meritocratic recognition of individual talent (Littler 2013, fc. 2017), as well as the capacity to transcend one's family's historic educational background, class, gender, race or geographical location. This folk theory of labour presents hard work as an alluring method to achieve self-realization.

Young people in Ghana's capital Accra, such as Gertrude and James, also desire to access and inhabit the kind of world of professionals where their hard work could take them to a ”different place,” as they often told me. This place preferably stood for a better house in another neighbourhood in Accra. Foreign travel was their last resort, a possibility that was evoked in moments when they most intensively confronted the limits of professional status to deliver to its global promise. Their predominantly informal-sector (or unemployed) family members also hope to see at least one of their own working as a professional. Their trajectories have involved getting and losing white-collar jobs; strategizing educational steps; and dreaming about occupations markedly different to those of their parents. They have also fell in and out of relationships; had children; and been encouraged along the way by each other, their families and churches. Yet their hard work – and the hard work and financial investment of their families – has not been a guarantee of access to the world of professionals. Perhaps Gertrude’s family hoped her earnings could help complete building the family home. Perhaps she could support Believe all the way to university. Their desires remain difficult to materialise, in as much as they have come to understand that the presence in the world of professionals can be temporary and subject to abrupt denial of access.

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[6] See Evelev (2006) for an illustrating historical account of Herman Melville navigating access to the world of literary professionals in the 19th century New York. How to distinguish oneself as a professional person was the crux of Melville's efforts and daily challenges.

This thesis explores trajectories of being and becoming a professional in Accra. As the example of Gertrude and James has shown, the conditions in Accra challenge global imageries of what professional status is supposed to deliver, and what professional formation has (allegedly) already delivered in Europe and America: upward mobility rooted in the institutional sacralisation and reward of individual talent and hard work. In Accra, the status of a formally employed professional is rare, while unemployment or employment in the informal sector is the norm. Even the formally employed may work for an institution their entire life without promotion. Or, roam the streets looking like ”upwardly mobile” professionals with smartphones in their pockets, and keep on returning to an unfinished family house where one's professional desires, or the achieved professional status, exists in stark contrast to one's family members. Yet Gertrude, James, and many others live their lives as if at least something about this world were accessible in their home city of Accra. The ways by which this plays out I take as productive for unravelling an alternative story of professional formation from an anthropological perspective. This story entails interrogating theoretical assumptions about the kind of social contexts, life trajectories and historical antecedents that shape the value and meaning of both professional status, and professionalism as a quality that can be recognised in persons, institutions, and work itself.

The following chapters illustrate how the process of becoming a professional is a constant experiment of trial and error. I propose thinking about professionalism as a desire: a potential yet to materialise that is characterized as much by the experience of its absence as well as its presence. Professionalism as a desire entails the transcendental promise of overcoming pasts and orienteering towards a different future; in short, desire places subjects in time and space. While drawing attention to how professionalism can be framed as a neoliberal regime of governance in anthropological theory, as well as by Ghanaian state planners and private elites, I maintain that – analytically – professionalism is much more than a fetishized instrument of power within modern capitalism. Gertrude’s and James’s life trajectories and desires illustrate broader, non-linear forces at play in Accra's world of professionals, which this thesis follows from family compounds to shiny offices and spectacles in a 21st century West African business hub.

Introduction: professionalism and its others

The smart professionals in three piece
Sweating away their humanity in dribblets
And wiping the blood from their brow
We have found a new land
This side of eternity
Where our blackness does not matter
And our songs are dying on our lips.
(…)
And in the new land we have found
The water is drying from the towel
Our songs are dead and we sell them dead to the other side
Reaching for the Stars we stop at the house of the Moon
And pause to relearn the wisdom of our fathers.
- Kofi Awoonor, “We Have Found a New Land” (2014[1971])

This thesis is an ethnography of work and value among professionals employed in Accra's private sector media and service industries. As the capital city of a West African nation hailed for its successful democratic development, Accra has emerged as a regional business hub where numerous stakeholders promote a vision of a world where hard work leads to success and knowledge is the key to economic development. The upcoming chapters illuminate the stakes involved in such promises by considering everyday professional life in Accra as the window to what Kofi Awoonor in the 1970s described as Ghana's “new land.” His poem evokes an imagery in which professionals wear inappropriate clothes for the tropical weather and grapple with colonial legacies and complex questions of belonging. This thesis shows how similar – but also new – questions pertain to another type of new land of professionals that is shaped by global flows of technology, media, expertise and private capital, economic liberalisation, and Ghana's trajectory of neoliberal restructuring since the 1980s. Next to these currents, each chapter explores how this new land is also crucially shaped by the kind of desires, modes of sociality and logics of productivity made visible through long-term ethnography.

On one hand, I conceptualise intimate professional trajectories as a historically contingent outcome of neoliberalism's intersection with Ghana's public culture of democracy. Since the British colonial era, this public culture has cast formal education and "white-collar," office work as markers of modernity and middle-class identity that transcends ethnic belonging among other possible sources of hierarchy (Coe 2005; Foster 1964; Skinner 2009; Nieswand 2014). The first part of this thesis shows how young people increasingly confront an urban labour market in which professional qualifications and attendant professional status do not necessarily translate to economic capital, middle-class status, and social adulthood. With Accra's urban conditions as the backdrop, I explore the action that goes into negotiating the value of *professionalism* as both a social status, and recognised attractive quality of work and persons (Graeber 2001: 49-89), which extends way beyond personal projects of professional achievement and private accumulation.

On the other hand, I adopt a conceptually open interpretive framework (Ricoeur 1970, in Scott-Bauman 2009) that seeks to account for the plurality of forces and expectations that shape the value of work among Accra's professionals. In doing so, I follow them to a number of domains, including public events, family life, friendship, churches, and media companies located within Accra's porous boundaries (Candea 2007). In order to enable this openness, this thesis builds on recent anthropology of capitalist worlds of work as sites for moral, ethical and political engagement (Bear 2015; Bolt 2015; Boyer 2013; Cross 2014; Ho 2009; Kondo 1990; Miyazaki 2013; Mollona 2009; Shipley 2013; Yanagisako 2002; Zaloom 2006). Anthropologists have persuasively shown that these worlds of work, including Wall Street investment banks (Ho 2009) and India's Special Economic Zones (Cross 2014), are shaped by the kind of life projects and socially emergent aspirations that challenge assumptions of rational calculation, and supply-demand relationship, as *the* systemic logic which lies at the heart of Western economic theory. In particular, I take inspiration from recent feminist substantivist approaches to the study of capitalism (Bear, Ho, Tsing & Yanagisako 2015a) by suggesting that Ghanaian middle-class projects of social reproduction, which includes but is not limited to pursuits of social mobility, constitute a key analytical framework to theorise the content and form of new economic infrastructures in Accra. Instead of accepting knowledge economy as a global form that spreads from a metropolitan core, as implied by the work of globalisation theorists such as Manuel Castells (2010[1996]), this thesis shows that the emergence of knowledge-intensive capitalism and professions is tied to a particular historical genealogy and political project. These projects can be scaled up from the level of individual professionals and their families to the level of national economic policy-making.

This approach is particularly helpful for discussing what could be called counter-intuitive metaphysics of the workings of late-capitalism “from the south” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012). Accra's professionals in private media businesses may seem like the kind of people who agents of power – such as the World Bank – celebrate as “Africa's rising middle-classes[7].”. In the first part of this thesis, I draw attention to the fact that their journeys into capitalism's “dream-zones” exist in relation to various other zones (Cross 2014). Many of these professionals are the first office workers of their families who move between diverse material infrastructures and webs of social relations as part of their day-to-day lives. The zones they traverse include life with their families, whose concentrated effort, investment, care and nurture enabled them to be (or aspire to be) professionals in the first place. Besides people's roles as media experts (Hasty 2005a; Boyer 2013), the actors in this thesis are therefore considered by their other social roles: as sons and daughters; colleagues and acquaintances; boyfriends and girlfriends; husbands and wives; parents and in some cases grandparents. I establish a dialogue between the multiplicity of possible values attributed to professional status and work depending on one’s structural position, which generates relevant answers to two organizing questions of this thesis: why attempts to enact 'professionalism' matter? And what kind of value – economic, moral, ethical, and spiritual – do Accra's professionals produce?

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[7] For critical engagement with the very discourse of 'rise of the middle-classes' as an actually existing category in the global South, see Kalb (2014).

As a contribution to West African economic anthropology, this thesis accounts for both the ubiquity of informal economy in African cities (ex. Hart 1973; Meagher 2010), and long-standing historical processes of formalising economic activity (Guyer 2004, see also Appel 2012). The second part of this thesis builds on the afore-discussed analysis of values of work and professionalism by regarding the emergence of new sites of economic production, namely Ghanaian-led knowledge economy businesses. These businesses have become a particular world of work after Ghana's transition to democratic government in 1992. For most part, I focus on the employees and entrepreneurs in the private media sector, which is a prime example of knowledge-intensive value creation. Although the Ghanaian media industry may appear insignificant in terms of the national GDP, these companies are analytically illustrating since they are predominantly in Ghanaian hands in a city where the larger actors in the formal sector are either state agencies or foreign economic powers. We shall meet political entrepreneurs with grand plans of building a new city; young Charismatic Pentecostal start-up entrepreneurs who call themselves “spiritpreneurs”; and a female Methodist CEO leading a family-owned business that publicly promotes meritocracy, anti-corruption, and other global standards of professionalism. By shifting the ethnographic lens from the perspective of one 'group' to another, this thesis illuminates the plurality of actors shaping Accra's knowledge economy characterised by companies that can be simultaneously involved in advertising, fish-farming, recruitment, publishing, and IT.

In an effort to illustrate the analytical convergence between social reproduction and emergence of new kind of knowledge economy infrastructures, this thesis proposes a novel conceptual approach to what Bear (fc. 2018) terms 'vitality of labour[8]'.

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[8] Bear (fc. 2018) argues that considering work as an experience of 'vitality', which in many ways has been implicitly the approach in newer anthropology of capitalism, involves reviving Karl Marx's (1844) philosophy of work as laid out in *Philosophical Manuscripts.* Early Marx discussed work as an engagement with one's material surroundings that entails a potential for liberation, and revolution. This notion can be extended to an analysis of work in capitalist sites of production where the potential for an emergence of critical political subjectivity is integrally related with what Bear (fc. 2018) calls 'materialist ethics', namely engaging with the products of one's labour in an existential manner that evades simple conclusion of 'work as alienation' under capitalist conditions of production. Erich Fromm (2004 [1961]) similarly argues that the 'spiritual' dimension of work that early Marx

Throughout this thesis I shall illustrate how professionalism, as a historically contingent object of desire, shapes life trajectories and negotiations on the value of work performed in new sites of late-capitalist production. For this objective, I consider work as a *medium* of being and becoming particular kind of persons, families and communities (cf. Bear & al. 2015). In dialogue with a familiar analytical strand in Africanist ethnography of healing (Taylor 1992), I show how professional persons are made, next to practices of formal accreditation through specialised education (Freidson 1986), through the circulation of vital flows of sociality that include care, feeding, drinking, joking, prayer and Christian fellowship that occurs in professionals' social networks and knowledge economy businesses. Enabling these flows to circulate constitutes the ethnographically accessible process through which Accra's professionals qualify themselves as ethical subjects (Laidlaw 2014), while they also encounter causes of social 'blockage' and moral breakdown (Zigon 2008: 18). I call this process of circulation as *the economy of flow and blockage*, which offers a useful analytical lens to both generative powers of capitalism (Bear & al. 2015ab), and people's relationships to new structures of access and resulting social hierarchies across diverse settings (Haynes 2017; Haynes & Hickel 2016; Hickel 2015). As an overall conceptual contribution, I propose the framework of 'work as mediation' to ask *what* work generates in these settings, and what kind of activity can count as work in the first place. By considering work, including what seems like "hard work," as a generative *practice* of mediation between self and other enables me to leave the question of *what* is being produced empirically open, and pose the question from people's perspective. In this thesis work produces diverse type of value and incorporates the productive potencies of a variety of human and non-human entities, and it is this multiplicity, rather than causal mechanisms of neoliberal restructuring, that underpins the notions of 'formality' and productivity at play in Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism.

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highlights has been constantly neglected. While Marx's philosophy of commodity fetishism and labour exploitation has gained most prominence in the history of social sciences in the 20th century, alongside staggering income inequalities (Graeber 2011; Hickel 2017; Piketty 2014), Bear suggests that it is helpful to keep in sight both sides of Marx's philosophy. This openness may also serve as ground to engage more fully with people's actual experience of work under (late) capitalist conditions of private accumulation. See also Lentz's (2015: 17) discussion on Marx's class theory (1907) as laid out in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

The rest of this introduction is divided into five sections. First I outline the context on Ghana's economic and political development, and how this trajectory currently manifests in the country's capital, Accra. By discussing Ghana's trajectory, I next outline how this thesis contributes to regional debates about 'neoliberal Africa' and the making of African middle-classes. This context paves the way to discuss the theoretical approach of this thesis by outlining an agenda for an 'anthropology of professionalism'. I finally discuss the strengths and limitations of my chosen mode of anthropological knowledge production, which incorporates many sites within a single city. I connect this discussion with the seven-year story of my engagement with Accra's professionals, which has integrally shaped how the material of this thesis came to be collected.

Accra's world of professionals: an empirical background

That the social fabric of Gertrude's and James' daily life could intersect and cross diverse 'zones' in Accra attests to the intimate trajectories lived in the interstices of Ghana's recent political, economic, and religious transformations. In this section I outline how these transformations resulted in the creation of both new opportunities and infrastructures for education, namely professional accreditation (Freidson 1986) and knowledge economy workplaces. Above all these transformations have resulted in the creation of skilled labour surplus in Accra, as in other African metropolises (Bolt 2015: 26; see also Mann 2014), which is an important political economic context for this thesis. Chapter 1 will adopt a longer historical perspective to unpack how professional status has become a valued asset since the colonial history.

Ghana's near-past economic history: brief overview

Ghana's post-independence path of economic and political development has been marked by constant fluctuations between “Afro-optimism” and “Afro-pessimism” along with the rest of post-colonial Africa (Ferguson 2006: 113-115, see also Jerven 2013; Onwudiwe & Ibalema 2004; Piot 2010). Kwame Nkrumah's declaration of Ghana's independence in 1957 from Britain started with high optimism. Ghana inherited a relatively stable fiscal standing from the colonial era and an abundance of gold, cocoa and minerals of which market prices were high (Aryeetey & Fenny 2017). This optimism expedited the expansion of public infrastructure and industrial production during the first years of independence. The public sector and military offered waged jobs for young people migrating to the cities. While Nkrumah is currently widely regarded as the nation's founding father (Shipley 2015: 204-205), his increasingly authoritarian tendencies and popular unrest led to his overthrow in 1966. Successful democratic elections were organized in 1969, followed by a short-lived civil government led by Dr. Kofi Busia until 1972. Civil rule was then overthrown by military leader General Ignatius Acheampong, whose era was marked by falling prices of cocoa, deepening economic crisis, President's own conspicuous consumption, and rising public debt. Acheampong's era came to an end in 1979 as a result of another coup led by flight lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings. Promising to counter corruption and rising to fame as a charismatic political leader, he started with a program of Nkrumah-style state-socialism, but faced with soaring public debt he was pressed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to adopt structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and liberalise the economy. Rawlings eventually also oversaw Ghana's transition to a democratic constitutional republic in 1992 when he won the multi-party elections and ruled for another two terms, until 2000, as the Republic's democratically elected president.

This brief outline illustrates the interplay of state socialism and market liberalism that has characterised Ghanaian economic policy-making towards political democratisation. After independence, Nkrumah-led socialist economic policies and incipient industrialisation was brought to halt, not least due to political turmoil, the legacies of imperial colonialism, falling global market prices of raw material exports, and eventually the SAPs and other neoliberal policies. This means Ghana is – now as in the past – dependent on raw material exports and industrial imports while mass-scale industrialisation never quite happened from within[9]. Although the various regime changes were bloodless[10], ordinary Ghanaians witnessed the public optimism of independence's aftermath gradually decrease, hand-in-hand with the few factory buildings that gradually became defunct. Similar to many other African nations, the SAPs contributed to general economic downturn, as well as rising unemployment as thousands of public servants were made redundant. From the 1980s onwards, many citizens turned to the ever-expanding urban informal sector (Overå 2007), or left the country as economic migrants to the former colonial powers in Europe or elsewhere in Africa (Nieswand 2014: 405-407).

Since the SAPs, Ghana's economic policy-making has attracted major interest among mainstream Western economic theorists and development economists (see Killick 2010), who have seen Ghana as a veritable 'case study' of neoliberal restructuring. In the 1980s-1990s, economic liberalisation was indeed in full force, which led to privatisation of various state assets and earned Ghana the nickname of a 'model tutee' (Quarshie-Smith 2012: 10) of structural adjustment and neoliberal state-making (Chalfin 2010). While some economists consider the impact as more successful than others, evidently the currents of economic privatisation have not generated structural transformation of the economy. The country's macro-economic conditions remain dependent on global market prices of cocoa, minerals and gold of which exports constitute the bulk of Ghana’s GDP (Whitfield 2011a). In addition to these raw materials, the discovery of the oil in Ghana's coastline in 2007 led to the development of the offshore petroleum industry, which has generated vibrant commodity trade in coastal cities such as Sekondi-Takorade. At the same time, the oil discoveries have also reinforced Ghana's position as the 'natural business ally' of key global industry players such as the United States (McCaskey 2008: 331), while ordinary Ghanaians still await oil revenue to visibly manifest in job creation and infrastructural development (ibid. 332).

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[9] The fact that mass-scale industrialisation and manufacturing did not develop in Ghana during the British colonial era (Whitfield 2011c: 23), and hence can hardly be isolated into a distinct ‘phase’ or 'age', in this thesis I refrain from using the term ‘transition’ to describe the emergence of knowledge-intensive economic infrastructures – transition from *what*, and *where*, exactly? Instead of ‘transition to knowledge economy’, which is familiar to Manuel Castell's analytical language, this thesis rather highlights the materiality of the present, and the fact that new type of desires, careers and economic organizations are coming into existence in post-colonial Africa and call for scholarly attention. In dialogue with other social sciences, I consider the task of the anthropologist to remain sensitive to the specificity of the historical trajectory under focus and ask where particular desires come from, and what kind of future they are geared towards (Kipnis 2011: 1-2).

[10] Absence of civil war in Ghana is credited to a number of factors – Coe (2005) shows how the Ghanaian state has sought to purposefully create a 'national culture' through a variety of social engineering programs, such as teaching 'ethnic culture' and 'traditions' in state schools. Although the current political parties, namely NDC that evolved from Rawlings' PNDC, and NPP that has historical links to Busia's Ashanti-led support, are marked by ethnic polarization, these fault-lines are not violent.

The continuing dependence on raw material exports increases the vulnerability of Ghana#s macro-economic conditions. The majority of my fieldwork occurred during yet another period of macro-economic instability and a major energy shortage that escalated from 2012 onwards (Yunger 2016), which the professionals and enterprises in this thesis experienced as yet another 'crisis' within what in business language was called 'Ghana's challenging business environment'. These macro-economic currents undoubtedly shape the structural conditions in which professionals and private sector businesses operate, while they also exist among a multiplicity of other forces and influences specific to Accra which I explore in the following sections. Further, in dialogue with Chalfin's (2010) observations on the effects of neoliberal restructuring of Ghana Customs Service, Chapters 1 and 4 discuss how the state exerts its influence in the privatising economy, let alone the framing of Ghana as a "knowledge society," even if its presence seems withdrawn from public life. My fieldwork occurred during the period when Ghana was under the rule of National Democratic Congress (NDC) that began in 2009. Throughout two terms in office, the party has striven for branding the country as an attractive site of both Ghanaian-led private sector development, and foreign direct investment, which took rather spectacular, technology-driven forms following Ghana's new World Bank country status as "a lower middle-income economy" in 2011. Although state narratives are often widely regarded with cynicism, both in the academia as in the Ghanaian public culture, such narratives help to map the multiplicity of discourses and political traditions that shape economic future-making in a particular context.

Accra's structures of access: liberalisation of the economy and higher education

While Kwame Nkrumah was determined to limit the power of foreign economic agents in Ghana (Murillo 2011), economic life in Accra has been marked by the strong presence of foreign traders and businesses since the Portuguese first started trading along Ghana's coast in the 15th century (Quayson 2014: 41). Fast-tracked to the present, African economies have been called the "last frontiers" of global capitalist experimentation[11], where new arenas and infrastructures of private accumulation rapidly emerge. In many ways, Accra appears as a typical site of these experiments and has amalgamated into a veritable 'Wild West' of business and public culture, awash in global media broadcasts, imported commodities, and global circuits of capital that visibly manifest in the growth of gated communities and shiny sky-rise buildings. These global circuits of capital have also resulted in the emergence of distinct knowledge economy industries that have become attractive workplaces among Accra's middle-class youth, most especially foreign-owned outsourcing companies (Quarshie-Smith 2012) and telecommunications, including Vodafone and South African MTN, which have established their presence in Accra. The growth of the foreign-funded NGO sector in West Africa after the Cold War (Piot 2010) is also an important part of Accra's knowledge economy, since it employs educated professionals and constitutes another desired realm of work among the country's graduate youth.

Knowledge-economy businesses underpinned by *Ghanaian capital*, which I focus on in the second part of this thesis, exist in Accra most notably in the private media sector, which has grown rapidly since the post-1990s transition to democratic rule and liberalisation of the public sphere (Shipley 2009a: 633). Yet, being a Ghanaian entrepreneur, and capital owner in particular, entails its own complicated history and political economy, which emerges out of the complex nexus of political power holders and capitalist classes that has characterised Ghana's post-independence era (see Chapter 1). In the prior decade(s), private businessmen were publicly persecuted under

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[11] A quick google search returns such mediatised tropes of Africa as the "last investment frontier," "final frontier of global brands," "emerging Africa," and "last frontier of growth."

Rawlings' military rule as the cause of recurrent economic crises (Whitfield 2011b: 18). This resulted in the exile of a number of prominent business families and a popular sense of private business as a dangerous endeavour. When Rawlings handed power to New Patriotic Party (NPP) after the democratic elections of 2000, the newly elected president John Kufuor proclaimed the beginning of a "Golden Age of Business" (Whitfield 2011b: 31), which framed Ghana as a business-friendly country[12]. The new millennium marked the beginning of waves of Ghanaian returnees to Accra and included skilled entrepreneurs in various knowledge economy industries such as banking, finance and media. Facilitated by faster broadband speeds, local entrepreneurs and Ghanaian returnees started establishing businesses that rely on digital technology and creative labour (Avle 2014; Meyer 2015; Thalén 2011). Some high-end manufacturing industry also emerged, including natural cosmetics, leather shoes and fashion garments utilizing traditional and contemporary designs that can be marketed as "made in Ghana" for the urban middle-classes and for export (ex. Kauppinen & Spronk 2014; Langevang 2016). In sum, instead of large-scale industrial production, the kind of Ghanaian-led private sector infrastructure that emerged in Ghana post-1990s has been geared toward knowledge economy and cultural production, including high-end commodity manufacture, which requires less initial capital investment.

Despite these changes and the influx of both speculative and diaspora capital to Ghana, in Accra private sector knowledge economy is a niche business, and access to its world of professionals remains rare. Annually 300,000 young Ghanaians enter the labour market, out of which a mere two percent end up working in the formal sector[13] (2014

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[12] Whitfield (2011a) argues that nothing much changed in the era of NPP in 2000-2008; the party continued on the path of 'competitive clientelism' (see chapter 4), while of much greater significance is the fact that the public image of private enterprise has been gradually transforming since the 1990s; entrepreneurship has become a widely mediated aesthetic and style of life that is celebrated in the liberalised public sphere (Shipley 2013).

[13] In Ghana, some knowledge economy businesses can appear 'formal' in their outlook, while they practically operate in the informal sector and remain unregistered. Formally registered companies, for one, can informally employ professionals whose salary is paid in envelopes. Statistics that delineate a strict boundary between 'informal' and 'formal' sector work are therefore inherently problematic. Yet, people may explicitly desire to 'formalise' and be recognised as 'formal sector', in which case the very idea of formalisation becomes an ethnographic object (see Appel 2015).

Ghana Labour Market Profile, see also Owusu-Ansah & Poku 2012). Unemployment or work in the informal sector remains the norm, including work in beauty salons, dress-making stands and phone repair kiosks. While macro-economic conditions have not produced professional formally waged jobs, of direct relevance to this thesis is how the proliferation of new private providers of professional qualifications, from certificate courses to universities, has become an industry unto itself in Accra and often led by Ghanaians themselves. These new tertiary-level educational institutions diversified the infrastructures that provide professional accreditation beyond the monopoly of the state and amplify the imagery of Ghana as a place where obtaining professional jobs and becoming middle-class through university education is possible, irrespective of one's pedigree (see Chapter 1). By contrast, in the 1960s, access to the few universities in existence such as University of Ghana was competitive and reserved for the nation's elites. In the 21st century Accra, many more universities, of various kinds and levels of accreditation, are competing for students: non-accredited small institutes offering qualifications from accounting to human resource; accredited evangelical universities affiliated with Charismatic Pentecostal churches; and branches of foreign universities that charge high tuition fees and mostly cater for the upper middle classes.

Families in both rural and urban Ghana have been keen to invest in these new platforms with hopes for their children's future success, resulting in a demand for university placements (Rolleston & Oketch 2008) and rapid increase in the number of graduates (Morley, Leach & al. 2007) that outpaces available jobs, resulting in high graduate unemployment. This may be a phenomenon not unique to

Webster UNIVERSITY
Ghana Campus
American Bachelor's & Master's Degrees
Cantonments, Accra
Your Dreams, Within Reach
Apply Now! Start in 2014
0302-774-250
webster.edu/ghana

Illustration 2: The street advert of the Ghana branch of Webster University in the elite neighbourhood East Legon, where it opened in autumn 2013. (photo by author)

Accra, as other African cities have seen a similar expansion in higher educational opportunities accompanied by creation of skilled labour surplus (Mann 2014). The professionals in this thesis are highly aware of this context. They understand through their unemployed and/or informal sector neighbours and siblings that their presence in the world of professionals is rare and can come with wider social expectations. In the next section, I turn to the role of Charismatic Pentecostal churches as another set of important institutions that are shaping the structures of access to professional status in Accra's urban economy.

Charismatic landscapes: churches as models of infrastructural growth

Gertrude enrolled in a Bachelor's Degree program in Communications in autumn 2012. She chose the University of Pentecost, a university affiliated with a Ghanaian Charismatic Pentecostal church, the Church of Pentecost (see Daswani 2015). The university was conveniently located between her family house and central Accra, where she commuted for work.

The emergence of educational institutions – such as Pentecost University College – is the latest step in the trajectory of Ghana's "New Christianity" from the 1980s onwards (Gifford 2004). For the past 30 years, Ghanaian Christianity has been prominently characterised by the appeal and popularity of Charismatic Pentecostalism, especially in Southern urban Ghana[14] (Meyer 1998ab, 2004a). These churches are popular due to a number of factors. Charismatic Pentecostal theology emphasises the direct, felt experience of God while downplaying rules and doctrines (Asamoah-Gyadu 2014).

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[14] Global Religiosity Index conducted in 2012 reveals that 97 % of Ghanaians identify themselves as religious. Christians comprise close to 70 % of the population, while Muslims count as 16 %. Charismatic Pentecostals are around 30%, other Protestant denominations such as Methodists and Presbyterians at 18 %, and Catholics at 13 %. These numbers are subject to constant debate. The number of "traditionalists" is difficult to count due to the fluid ways in which Christianity can blend with forms of Ghanaian indigenous religion, most notably in the regions (Meyer 1999). Moreover, the Ghanaian Muslim coalition frequently states that the total number of Muslims is counted less than in reality. URL: [http://redcresearch.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/RED-C-press-release-Religion-and-Atheism-25-7-12.pdf], accessed 20.5.2017.

This theological emphasis connects well with sermons that offer practically-applicable advice on personal issues such as financial troubles, marriage problems and unemployment. In the 1980s economic crisis years, while SAPs were being implemented in Ghana, the popularity of Charismatic churches started to steadily increase in urban centres. As Meyer has persuasively shown (1998b), Charismatic Pentecostal churches acknowledge and help people to make sense of less visible forces of causality. They take spiritual presence, curses, and people's concerns of jealousies and witchcraft from close kin seriously, at times staging spectacular deliverance rituals to 'cleanse' the believer of evil spiritual presences.

Another important reason to the popularity of Charismatic Pentecostalism in Ghana is the liberalisation of the public sphere and the media after the transition to democratic rule in 1992. Charismatic Pentecostal pastors enthusiastically embraced new opportunities offered by private broadcasting stations to spread the Gospel way beyond the confines of the church (De Witte 2003). Some pastors transformed into veritable “religious celebrities” (De Witte 2013) that further contributed to the growth of their institutions. The global spread of the third-wave, post-1990s Pentecostal prosperity gospel (Hasu 2012: 68) is indeed clearly discernible in chapters 4-6, which attest to the complex local engagements with the very concept of prosperity that has been a focus of much recent, rich Africanist scholarship (ex. Akoko 2007; Comaroff 2009; Daswani 2015b; Haynes 2017, 2012; Lindhardt 2009; Maxwell 1998; Meyer 2007; Ukah 2011, 2007; Van Dijk 2012). The unpredictability that characterises these engagements is also present in empirical scholarship on faith-based organizations, such as religious NGOs in Africa (Bornstein 2003, 2002, see also Deacon 2012; D. Freeman & al. 2012), which have illustrated concrete ways in which organizational formats and religious formats converge. Christian ritual practice has become integral of organizational life in some of the knowledge economy businesses of this thesis, which raises broader questions on the line between the 'religious' and 'secular' in Ghanaian late-capitalist worlds of work.

While Accra is a site of ethnic and religious plurality, the urban landscape is dominated by Christian images, church advertisements and church buildings (De Witte 2008). Given the well documented pattern of Christian mission churches in African infrastructural and educational development (Comaroff & Comaroff 1997; Stambach 2010ab; Ustorf 2011), we can contemplate whether Ghanaian-led Charismatic Pentecostal churches can be considered as models of *non-state,* “formal” infrastructural growth (compare Robbins 2007a). In Accra, churches have grown at a much higher rate than Ghanaian-led business enterprises from the 1990s onwards; they are also ”professional institutions” with specialised departments, heads and employees. While most churches in Accra are small, community-level units that offer a possibility for regular ritual participation, Ghanaian mega-churches continue to grow in wealth, size and following. Both ritual formats, and churches as infrastructure are themes in the second part of this thesis, when I consider current efforts to build knowledge economy infrastructure in integral relationship to this broader urban context.

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Developing the Spirit, Mind and Body
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MASTER OF COMMERCE & MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION programmes
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Illustration 3: Advert of Gertrude's university, Pentecost University College, in Sowutom, Accra (photo by author)

While this thesis considers Christian – particularly Charismatic Pentecostal – infrastructures as an empirically important context, the question of whether religious actors and institutions expedite capitalist development (Berger 2009), let alone 'professionalism', is beyond the focus of this study. Rather than utilizing elective affinity as the primary heuristic device (Van de Kamp 2016), let alone framing Charismatic Pentecostalism as a source of neoliberal productive ethics of the self (Van Dijk 2012), I am more interested of how people experience and make sense of the presence of spiritual and other non-human entities in the professional realm, and as a consequence, how ritual formats and materials get modelled onto new spheres of social action. I consider Christian ritual practices and materials – such as formats of prayer, collective fellowship, books, and broadcasts – as frequently important material mediums in Accra's worlds of professionals. Having said this, this thesis highlights Accra as a site of religious plurality, which amplifies Meyer's remark (2015: 14) on Christianity, and Charismatic Pentecostalism, as only a partial representation of Accra's urban complexity.

Although my methodological focus is on professional networks and companies, I consider churches as material infrastructures and institutions that connect with knowledge economy businesses through a variety of social networks. Christian adherence can also be a form of value creation, while, echoing Haynes (2014), I maintain that this adherence can link with less apparent logics of sociality. I next expand on this proposition by outlining the key argument of this thesis with respect to the study of African middle classes and knowledge economy capitalism.

Accra's professionals in comparison: middle class and knowledge economy capitalism

The aforementioned changes in Ghana's political, religious and economic landscapes have provided some occupational opportunities in new, non-state institutions. Most of these opportunities are only available in the capital Accra that is the centre of foreign capital investments, and of which population is rising hand-in-hand with Ghana's urbanisation – currently 54 % of nearly 27 million inhabitants lives in cities, of which close to 3 million in Accra and its surrounding districts. This access, however, stands in contrast to how much more greatly these changes have amplified professional status and middle-class lifestyle in the Ghanaian imaginary. I consider these changes in relation to the growing sociological and anthropological literature on the formation of new African middle classes (Fumanti 2007; D. James 2014, 2012; Lentz 2015; Spronk 2012, 2014; Mabandla 2013; Melber 2016; Nieswand 2014; Phadi & Ceruti 2011; West 2002). These studies take African middle classes as more than “mere abstraction, a discourse, a metaphor, but a social formation 'out there'” (Lentz 2015: 15). In a similar vein, I consider the middle class as a matter of actual existence of Africans who cannot be classified as poor, political and economic elites, or traditional power authorities. At the core this thesis unravels how people such as Gertrude and James, whose professional status exist alongside their family houses in urban slums, fit into this picture.

The first part of this thesis zooms into the kind of characters who could be described as what Saskia Sassen (2013) calls “modest middle-class.” They are typically the first white-collar professionals in their family trees. Their families had, however, acquired material signs of middle class status, such as their own house, which in some cases was also thanks to remittances from family members abroad (Nieswand 2014: 412). The modest middle-class professionals are an intriguing group to study, as young people from these backgrounds may enter Accra's knowledge economy businesses without existing intimate models of what working for these new companies entails. They invent their understanding of professionalism along the way as they navigate a variety of existing and emergent social and moral expectations. In this sense, my research closely links with Rachel Spronk's (2012) study of new ideologies of sexuality among young professionals in Nairobi, who counter pathologizing accounts of African sexualities while enacting identities shaped by expectations of equality of pleasure and intimacy. Similarly, the young people in this thesis are inventing ways of being a professional as the latest step in the longer trajectory of shifting forms of Africanist self-writing (Mbembe 2002; Werbner 2002). They can be acutely aware of globally and locally circulating racial stereotypes of 'African' and 'Ghanaian professionals' and produce counter-narratives of the kind of action that qualifies a professional person.

These discourses can emerge through both self-reflective speech and especially co-operative work that this thesis explores in detail. As a contribution to on-going scholarly analysis on African middle-classes, this thesis focuses on concepts and values of work, which has received relatively less attention compared with educational, leisure and consumption practices in the study of middle-classes on a global scale (Lentz 2015: 29). This scholarship has illuminated the self-reflexive "boundary work" in which middle-classes engage by living in particular houses and having particular qualifications and occupations, which links with insights from the global history of middle-class formation as a struggle to achieve and display 'distinction.' In these accounts, middle-class as a social formation is approached from a Bourdieusian (1984) framework of social distinction as the base logic of reproducing class-status, which occurs through acquiring, and transmitting social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital. Similarly, acquiring professional qualifications and becoming an office worker can be approached as distinction strategy that – given Ghana's jobless economic growth – positions *work itself* as an object of desire, which entails the promise of both class consolidation and social mobility.

In dialogue with this newer literature on social prestige and middle class in Africa, the first part of this thesis makes two propositions: one, that the role of material conditions cannot be divorced from individuals' attempts to embody a particular lifestyle and distinguish themselves as particular kinds of persons; and two, that in as much as economic conditions are important to explain how people accord value and recognition to professional status, the particular form that professional lives and knowledge economy businesses take requires attention to the multiplicity of forces and life projects, including the meanings and uses of material resources such as money, that generate Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism on the ground (Bear & al. 2015). Echoing Piot's (1999: 10-17) critique of enduring structural-functionalist legacies in anthropological theory, this thesis considers social mobility as not a function nor the ultimate 'end-result' of human action, but one possible desire that can productively accompany other type of desires.

By drawing attention to the host of desires that shape life projects among Accra's professionals, this thesis pushes further anthropological debates on the nature of relationship between knowledge economy workplaces and 'new middle-classes' on a global scale. A rich body of scholarship on India's IT boom and the globalisation of outsourcing businesses has shown that knowledge economy industries are not only abstract vehicles for producing economic profit or facilitating 'transition,' but these industries fuel a variety of fantasies and tangible projects of social reproduction. These projects can pertain to class mobility for some, exclusion for others (Fuller & Narasimhan 2009, 2014), and navigation of social adulthood in locales such as Bangalore, which has become the hub of materialising state-level aspirations of India as a knowledge society (Nisbett 2009, 2013). The rich ethnographic literature of call centres and BOP businesses (Freeman 2000; Mirchandani 2012; Patel 2010; Quarshie-Smith 2012; Upadhya & Vasavi 2008) attests to the new possibilities of income, status and social mobility made available to women (Patel 2010), while these workplaces remain structured along gendered hierarchies and disciplinary regimes (especially Freeman 2000; Quarshie-Smith 2012). In this pioneering work, knowledge economy industries offer a platform for a variety of life projects that interact with both national public debates, and the material realities and rhythms of flexible production and capital accumulation (Harvey 1990).

While the globalisation of knowledge economy infrastructure is undoubtedly a potent site for the realisation of middle class projects of upward social mobility, William Mazzarella (2003a), has drawn attention to Indian middle-class as an object of active construction and performance, instead of objective definition (especially Mazzarella 2005). He demonstrates how this negotiation shaped the content production in Indian advertising industry after the post 1991 reforms of economic liberalisation. But perhaps even more importantly for my purpose here, Mazzarella's work points at the ambiguities that accompany the national imagery of 'adequate middle-class', which he approaches through the trope of 'Indian consumer' that becomes the main object of knowledge among advertising professionals. In some microcosms of this thesis, imagining the contours of a 'Ghanaian professional', and its adequacy within a global political economic hierarchy of professionals (see Mirchandani 2012 for 'authenticity work'), becomes the idiom that expands the scale of social reproduction from the level of individuals and families to the story of respectable nationhood. Similarly to Mazzarella, I approach the middle-class as an object of constant political debate, which takes up particular registers in a given ethnographic context.

Drawing on these existing debates in the anthropology of globalisation, this thesis makes a distinctive contribution to the analysis of the nexus of middle class social reproduction and knowledge economy by showing that knowledge economy businesses and careers are *more* than a stage or platform for pursuing class mobility; rather, I argue that projects of social reproduction shape, structure, and indeed 'formalise' Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism from within. In other words, I do not assume a preconceived systemic, globally diffusing 'logic' to knowledge economy capitalism that generates uniform knowledge economy infrastructures irrespective of location, but follow how this form comes to be generated in concrete microcosms affiliated with Ghana's media and service industries.

Engaging with the study of African middle-classes through the lens of feminist approaches to knowledge economy capitalism ultimately calls for new type of analytical approaches to neoliberalism as the explanatory framework to economic transformation and formalisation in Africanist ethnography (Ferguson 2006). The social impact of neoliberal logics of privatisation and accumulation has provided the overarching analytics to explain a variety of phenomena in post-colonial Africa, from the resurgence of witchcraft accusations to the increasing popularity of Charismatic Pentecostalism in the continent (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999; Jean Comaroff 2009; Meyer 2007). While recognising Ghana's neoliberal restructuring as an important contextual element on many fronts, in each chapter I show that the presumed 'logic' of neoliberal economic governance does not alone explain the generative processes at play in Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism, which includes its power to include some and exclude others. At the same time, following Yanagisako (2002: 188), an adequate anthropology of capitalism does not simply replace 'the global' with 'the local', but rather identifies archives, sites, interfaces, and events where "people produce capitalism through culturally meaningful actions that at the same time produce families and selves with particular desires, sentiments, and identities." This thesis follows those actions across a variety of settings that in one way or another converge around the desire for professionalism, which I turn to next.

Three faces of professionalism: achievement, desire, mediation

The theoretical approach of this thesis is grounded in triangulating three main conceptual propositions about work and value, approached through the lens of Accra's media and service industry professionals:

a.) professional status as a collective achievement
b.) professional subjectivity as a dialectic between desire and discipline
c.) economies of flow and blockage: a framework of 'work as mediation'

a.) Professionalism as a relational status achievement

The promises of professional qualifications are currently crumbling worldwide, from South African black working-class families taking risky educational loans (D. James 2014) to North Atlantic youth struggling with converting educational capital to economic capital (Groh-Samberg et al 2014; Mau 2014, cit. in Lentz 2015: 23). The first part of this thesis shows that professionalism is much more than an individual status achievement; rather, professional status is a result of complex family genealogies and networks of social relations that shape how the *value* of professional status is collectively recognized and negotiated. Individuals' particular journeys into professional status also shape and structure their experience of work as a professional in Accra's knowledge economy business scenes. To substantiate this claim, I lean on the rich corpus of anthropological literature on the continuing salience of kinship in domains such as the workplace (Cannell, McKinnon & al. 2013: 3). This is evident in existing ethnographies of workplaces, such as factories (Mollona 2009; Parry 1999; Ong 2010[1987]), family businesses (Kondo 1990; Yanagisako 2002), data-entry companies (C.

Freeman 2000), commercial farms (Bolt 2015), and special economic zones (Cross 2014), which have shed light on both vernacular logics of capitalism at play in these sites, as well as the social expectations workers themselves carry. These studies show how capitalist workplaces are inherently relational sites of ethnographic inquiry as they mediate between global flows of capital and grounded aspirations, desires and communities of belonging.

Many of the people discussed in this thesis are the family members of formally employed professionals, informal sector siblings and neighbours, public sector agents of the state, and divine and spiritual entities. By highlighting how the value and meaning of professional status is negotiated in relation to these multiple 'others,' this thesis shows how professionalism itself is a relational quality of both work and a person – in other words, professionalism as an achievement entails its own ethnographically specific social life (Moore & Long 2013) that shapes the very experience of professionalism as a structuring mode of human existence that extends to interactions with one's non-professional friends and family. Taken together with the presence and influence of 'professionalism's others', this thesis is therefore also in dialogue with the growing corpus of anthropology of expertise (Boyer 2008; Harvey & Knox 2015; Hull fc. 2017; Summerson Carr 2010), that considers practitioners of professions and their desires as a window to broader social transformations. Further, ethnographies about professionals have revealed the vulnerabilities that come with professional status, not least due to globalizing audit and measurement practices of professional performance (Strathern & al. 2000; see also Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 2014; Tidey 2013). Ethnographies of bankers (Ho 2009; Miyazaki 2013; Zaloom 2006), for example, have shown myriad ways in which practitioners may grapple with professional anxieties that, as Ho (2009) states, produces broader redistributive, material effects on a global scale. Echoing Stout (2015), the variety of professional anxieties within Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism are also fully relational in the sense that they do not recognise boundaries between Weberian notions of "private" and "public" domains, but can be negotiated in the realm of the family, street-joint, car-park, church, workplace, and divine worship. In this sense, this thesis calls for a feminist-oriented anthropology of expertise that starts from the long-standing premise on the mutually constitutive role of relations of reproduction within relations of production (Meillassoux 1981), and extends this premise to the analysis of systemic-level processes within worlds of professional practice (Bear & al. 2015a; Appel 2015).

Many ethnographic microcosms in the following chapters are connected with Accra's private media business sector. Yet, I consider the media as one possible infrastructure, among many others, of Ghana's knowledge economy capitalism. Overall, my approach to media as the professional, institutional context of this study connects with Brian Larkin's (2008) approach to media as a material infrastructure and entry point to urban public culture. While Larkin analyses how Northern Nigerians have forged particular relationships to media technologies, such as cinema halls, since the colonial history, this thesis takes up media and other knowledge economy business offices as the infrastructure that has drawn people from a variety of backgrounds into professional worlds since the past 25 years of transition to democratic rule. In other words, this thesis is not as much about the *content* of particular professional practice, such as development of journalism as a profession in Ghana (Hasty 2005a) and news-making in Germany (Boyer 2013), as it is about the emergence of Ghanaian-owned knowledge-intensive businesses, media among them, as an infrastructure, among other infrastructures such as churches, NGOs and global outsourcing businesses, through which people attempt to access professional status. However, in terms of the broader story that this thesis tells, media is one scene of activity, while the analytical trajectory starts from outside the media office, namely from the historically shifting valuations of professionals and their work, and proceeds to the realm of the family, household, friendship, and enterprise. In other words, instead of being the chief object of analysis, Accra's private media business scene is rather one, highly porous and networked infrastructure within broader forces operating in the city.

Next, I turn to discuss the usefulness of the concept of desire to get to the ”skin of professionalism,” namely the projects of self-making that emerge in the course of accessing and achieving professional status.

Self and Other: professionalism, desire and discipline

Professional life in Accra is a visceral mode of existence that entails bodily movement between a variety of zones and spaces. One of my first insights about this life was the constant movement between different temperatures. On work days I would wake up in a non-air conditioned house at 4.30am (when the temperature could be only +25 C); take a cold bucket shower; make a journey to Accra's centre in a crammed minibus as the temperature gradually rose to +30; and finally enter a cool, air-conditioned office to work in the +20 degree indoors. Daily lunch breaks would sometimes take us to an open-air food joint in the hot and humid +34 degree daytime heat after which getting back to the office was a relief. Some of my colleagues reminisced how they used to sleep in the office, especially in their junior years, enjoying the air-conditioning that some of them experienced the first time in their lives. Electric black-outs were the most irritating. Fans would not work. One could not sleep properly, charge one's phone, and iron one's office clothes. Especially during the 2013-2014 energy crisis, colleagues would call each other at 6am trying to find out who had electricity and rush to each other's places to iron their clothes before picking a public transport to the office.

Professional life engages all the senses through neatly ironed clothes, polished shoes, painted nails, and artful hairdos. In the low-income neighbourhood where I lived, impeccably-dressed women and men emerged out of modest houses carrying a bagful of folders and walked along the untarred road to the nearest bus stop. The women would change their sandals to black leather, heeled shoes the moment they got out of the trotro. The world of professionals, in other words, was a bodily experience, in as much it could be a challenge of the mind, soul and spirit that could emerge as an object of reform in Charismatic Pentecostal universities promoting "integrity" of professionalism, or training programs organized by Ghanaian returnees proclaiming to provide the tools to broaden one's "scale of ambition."

Over the course of seven years of getting to know Ghanaians from company CEOs to young professionals, informal sector traders, taxi-drivers, carpenters and beauticians –

often family members or friends of my colleagues – I started to understand professionalism as an object of desire that could link with a variety of other popular desires in Accra, and scaled horizontally to the level of institutions, public discourses and systemic infrastructures. Desire in this thesis is therefore a fundamentally relational concept (H. High 2014) that expands itself to the past, present and future. Desire opens the body of the person outward, and links the ″body personal″ and ″body social″ (Comaroff 1985: 8). Professionalism, for one, can be an object of desire in a similar way to beauty, love, sex, wealth and influence (Edmonds 2010). This desire of professionalism, following Moore & Long (2013: 15), therefore does not necessarily only reside in an individual ″psychology of achievement″ that neoliberal restructuring takes as the object of reform, but in a nation, a family, friendship, workplace, religious community, among others.

Yet, at the same time, the spectre of discipline is equally important to keep in sight. Since the globalization of a variety of audit measures (Srathern 2000), Ghana has seen the emergence of the kind of public culture of professionalism, discussed briefly in Chapter 1, that pronounces Ghanaian professionals are not disciplined enough; namely, that they lack in terms of ideal modernity (Mazzarella 2003: 144, 159). Anthropologists have shown how the globalization of neoliberal ethics of professionalism – such as transparency, honesty and efficiency – has generated unexpected outcomes in different ethnographic contexts (Tidey 2013), such as Islam's intersection with human resource management in an Indonesian state-owned factory (Rudnyckyj 2010). A major line of questioning here asks how far we can read people's attempts to discipline themselves as evidence of the power of neoliberal structuring forces. The idea of professionalism as an object of desire in this thesis – along with its attendant association with religiosity – builds on a particular interpretative reading of Weber's (2011[1920]) *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* Weber argues that the attempts of the 17th century Pietists to accumulate worldly material success stemmed from a fundamental anxiety and uncertainty of whether their body and soul was predestined for heavenly paradise. Weber charts the rationalisation of hard work (and material accumulation, taken as a sign of divine favour) as the ascetic, religious ethic that was sublimated into secular modern institutions, such as private sector companies, amid the emergence of modern capitalism. My curiosity about *Protestant Ethic* boils down to what could possibly concretely occur *before* ”hard work” emerged as an explicit ethical ideal among the Pietists – namely, feelings of anxiety of losing one's body and soul to the fires of hell and desire to inhabit a heavenly paradise.

I will therefore conceptualise ”professional ethics,” hard work among them, as a possible aftermath of desire. This suggestion entails rendering empirically open the multiplicity of possible desires, both religious and non-religious, that direct people's attempts to be recognised as professionals, and/or work hard. In this case, the dialectic between discipline and desire also connects with the Durkheimian spectre of moral discipline – the desire to be recognised as moral persons in particular communities of belonging. This thesis therefore fleshes out a conceptual space for desire in the anthropology of ethics (Faubion 2011; Keane 2015; Laidlaw 2014; Mattingly 2014; Robbins 2007; Zigon 2008; M. High 2016), which I engage with from a markedly materialist standpoint: I take bodily practice, or what may seem like aesthetic practice, as ethically-loaded practices in their own right. On the core, I do not consider ethics, or discipline, only as a means to 'domesticate desire' but place them both as part of a mutually constitutive dialectic that leads to ethnographically grounded responses to why professionalism as a seemingly ‘generic’ quality of work and persons comes to matter. Further, while professionalism offers a novel prism to understand the diversity of realms in which ethical subject-making takes place (Laidlaw 2014), I show how attempts towards ‘the good’ (Robbins 2013) occur in complex political and economic interfaces that link with broader projects and politics of world-making (Bear 2015; Pia 2017; Zigon 2014), such as post-colonial nation-building and new African middle class social formations. By adopting this standpoint, my aim is to generate analysis that connects evidence that appears like desire for power, private accumulation and Bourdieusian ’distinction’ to a wider horizon of possible interpretations (Piot 1999: 10-17; Evens 2008). The framework of 'work as mediation', which I turn to next, will support this objective.

Economies of flow and blockage: work as mediation

This thesis explores economic action in what is often termed ”late-capitalist” institutions of economic value production. This type of capitalism is characterised by the ”prominence of service and information sectors, move from mass-production and mass consumption to flexible production and specialised consumption, and the centrality of lifestyle in class groupings” (Illouz 1997: 12). Advanced capitalism is also characterised by the rise of experts who assist capital owners by producing and managing information. In cultural sociology, a familiar approach to late-capitalism draws on what Featherstone (2007: 64) calls the ”aestheticisation of everyday life,” which shifts attention from questions of labour and production to lifestyle, consumption and individual self-fashioning, which Lentz (2015) remarks has dominated existing accounts of African middle classes. In this thesis questions of work and production are central, while Accra’s professionals’ daily work lives involve a variety of activities that escape neat dichotomies between “immaterial” and “material labour” (Hardt and Negri’s 2000, see Yanagisako 2012 for critique). This life involves typing, editing and attending meetings, but also activities such as intense praying, fish-farming and physically exhausting movement under the scorching sun of the tropical city.

I therefore consider work in its multitude as a *practice of mediation* that helps to unearth a wide variety of cultural logics of late-capitalism at play in Ghana. Sociologists of late-capitalism have argued that these cultural logics are ”less a matter of content than a restructuring of relationships between subordinate and dominant elements” (Jameson 1984, cit. in Illouz 1997: 12). Ethnographic methods enable us to ask what forms this restructuring of social relationships can take beyond individual self-fashioning, and what the 'dominant' and 'subordinate' elements are– namely, who people themselves understand as agents of power in a given context. To anthropologically engage with such questions, each chapter details particular forms of co-operative work. My analytical approach builds on both recent anthropologies of capitalism and Africanist literature on the dialectic of “flow and blockage” that has been influential in the analysis of changing concepts of healing and medicine (ex. Crentsil 2007; Nugent 2010; Taylor 1992; Van Der Geest 1998, see also Scott 2005). Although transported to the world of Accra's knowledge economy capitalism, where bodily metaphors were an ubiquitous feature of my field notes, this literature offers useful conceptual vocabulary to theorise how work, desire for professionalism, and everyday material and immaterial flows between the self and other can produce diverse type of value next to economic value (Pietilä 2007; Shipley 2013). These flows of sociality can take a number of forms including eating, drinking, money, linguistic exchange and Charismatic Pentecostal prayer. They incorporate the realm of the divine and non-human (see especially M. High 2016). Further, in some cases, these flows of sociality may also become ”blocked,” which generates moral anxiety, and – in some cases— moral break-down and ethical self-reflection (Zigon 2008: 165). On the core, the vocabulary of flow and blockage helps to consider capitalist workplaces, similarly to villages, churches or neighbourhoods, as “social bodies,” building on Jean Comaroff's (1985) classic formulation on the dialectic between the body social and the body personal (ibid. 8). I will highlight how Ghanaians themselves adopt metaphors of the body in order to conceptualise the conditions, desires and discordances of moral belonging, and in doing so make an anthropological contribution to broader sociological literature on the cultural logics of advanced capitalism.

From this standpoint, the value of achieved professional status and professional quality takes a number of different forms in this thesis. To illuminate this plurality, I consider work as a practice of mediation that opens up the category of work to incorporate a wide range of possible activities that eschew dichotomies between material and immaterial. To cast work as a practice of mediation can be compared with the rich anthropological corpus of 'religion as mediation' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005; De Witte 2008, 2011c; Engelke 2007, 2010; Hirschkind 2006; Meyer 2015; Meyer & Moors 2006; Pype 2012). This literature has widened the concept of religious practice to incorporate a wide array of possible activities, including watching entertainment video films (Meyer 2015), television production (Pype 2012), to conceptualising the human body as an important technology of religious mediation (De Witte 2011c). Engaging one's mind and body in prayer, listening to cassette sermons, and watching Charismatic Pentecostal broadcasts are practices of mediating between the realm of the immediate and the realm of the divine, of which desired outcome is an experience of unity – God's presence, the invisible, as constitutive of the visible. Opening up established concepts such as religion, and work, to a broader set of possible activities echoes Bear's (fc. 2018) observations on shipyard workers in Howrah, for whom ships are not only commodities, but incarnations of divine life-force. Similarly, in this thesis work incorporates a variety of activities and engages bodies and minds in families, friendships, and offices. Ultimately, focus on co-operative work offers an intriguing lens to theorise the multiple forms of value generation in Ghanaian companies and, following Olivia Harris (2007), critically interrogate the kind of activities that count as work within Ghanaian knowledge-intensive capitalism.

Follow the value: the promises and pitfalls of studying a 'network'

As a methodological contribution, this thesis is an experiment in producing anthropological knowledge through an analysis of a network with many moving parts within or in close vicinity to one city, instead of focusing on a single microcosm that stands as a metonymy for the entire system (Engelke 2009: 14). Various examples exist of the anthropologist shifting the ethnographic lens between a wide range of characters and institutions who occupy varying structural positions within the system under investigation (Anand 2017; Andersson 2014; Bear 2015; Edmonds 2010; Meyer 2015; Shipley 2013). The challenge of this type of analytical strategy is to strike the balance between depth and breadth. By no means is it possible to study all the possible relevant agents in Ghana's private media and service business industry. Nonetheless, the microcosms of this thesis can be imagined as an example of a web of connections that has been accumulated over seven years of research engagement with Accra's professionals and business companies, also beyond the media. In this section I briefly outline how I methodologically navigated fieldwork in Accra, which ended up as a study of value.

Before embarking on fieldwork in Ghana in 2013, I already had visited the country three times, during which I had gained more than a year's experience working as a production assistant in a Ghanaian-owned media station, which I call TV Central, helping with research at an NGO, and doing occasional consultancy work for foreign media companies alongside my Accra-based colleagues. This experience had already enmeshed me in a complex network of young professionals, families, offices, and friendships, which I outline more fully in the next section. I officially started the PhD fieldwork in August 2013 in Charismatic Pentecostal churches' business departments outside Accra, inspired by Max Weber and what I then framed as the 'influence of Charismatic Pentecostalism on the Ghanaian economy'. However, it soon became apparent that this focus was limited. I was also growing uncertain whether "the influence of Charismatic Pentecostalism on the Ghanaian economy" was the right way of theoretically framing the project.

Above all, this project started from an interest in religion, basing on my experiences on working in Ghanaian companies where religious banter routinely intersected with moments of intense cooperative work. I was curious about doing anthropology of religion in field sites where people from various religious and denominational backgrounds intermingled and that were not explicitly affiliated to a church. Charismatic Pentecostal university campuses turned out to be auxiliaries to their mother churches, with Charismatic Pentecostal-dominated student bodies. However, this initial fieldwork at Central University College was integral to placing evangelical, private universities as part of a wider infrastructure of accessing professional status (and the creation of Ghana's labour surplus) through the expansion of higher education. The agents of these universities pronounced their objective to produce "God-fearing professionals" who were the "salt and light" of Ghana, the kind of actors who recognized it as their Christian duty to instil morals and God's presence in the business sector. The university students', professors', and pastors' stories were among the first I encountered at the convergence between Christianity and the production of professional 'selves'. This subsequently led me to a number of other stories I discuss especially in the second part of this thesis.

Eventually, I shifted the methodological emphasis from churches to Ghanaian-owned media and service business companies in Accra, to which I gained access thanks to my previous contacts and work experience. A friend of mine recommended me to work with another friend of his, who was seeking to expand his advertising company, Mepex, to new avenues. The CEO, Sammy, accepted me as an intern. My time there offered me a privileged view of the continuing importance of the Ghanaian state in private sector infrastructure building. While working at Mepex, I discovered ″spiritpreneurs″ (Chapter 6), a group of Charismatic Pentecostal start-up entrepreneurs who also ran hybrid media-service businesses with strong belief in the ″God factor.″ These spiritual entrepreneurs opened access to another interesting company, City Services, led by a Methodist female CEO, Mrs. Sackey. City Services was involved in human resource management, recruitment, outsourcing as well as publishing latest news and ″best practices″ about the ″Ghanaian world of work.″ I ended up working with them for two months, supplemented by occasional visits afterwards for interviews and other events. Later on, I worked in an Accra-based radio station and event management company, where I had known people since 2010, in addition to conducting 50 life history interviews amongst my colleagues and friends.

Throughout my fieldwork, the directors and employees of these companies knew about my status as an anthropologist and student of London School of Economics doing a project of what I back then conceptualised as ″everyday lives of Ghanaian young professionals.″ This fieldwork was characterized by 24/7 type of participant observation while doing the actual work, such as participating in meetings, sitting by the computer typing scripts, doing data-entry, producing media, and other administrative and writing tasks. Besides this work, I accompanied people to their rounds outside office, visited homes, churches, bars, birthdays, weddings and other ritual events, much like what I had done with other colleagues since 2010 who remained as close respondents. Above all, it is important to stress that I was not documenting the content of professional practice as much as I was documenting the *process* of work, material surroundings, office debates and banter (or absence thereof), dress, discussions, jokes and forms of cooperation in and outside the office. At times these discussions had to do with work, professional practice, and its ethics; at times they didn't, which the chapters of this thesis aim to disentangle.

Before formally starting to work in these companies, I had begun to document Accra's public culture of professionalism, including motivational events and training programs, for my own interest. I attended a number of public events and performances of a number of professional icons in Accra, who advised young people on how to market themselves and build their "brand" in the information society. This public culture involved a variety of elite voices from state agents to Christian leaders and diaspora returnees, who attempted to mediate the message of the power of knowledge, and hard work as the route to success. The more I heard such elites mention the value of hard work, the more I grew convinced that the repetition grew out of uncertainty of *what* the value of work exactly was. Daily hours spent in public transport proved another fruitful site, as I engaged in discussions about a variety of topics with the passengers, sometimes asking about the books they were reading which included religious and motivational self-help books and newspaper articles.

Some vignettes in this thesis grew out of only two months of fieldwork in one site, while other characters I have known for seven years. Above all, at the moment of fieldwork, I did not know that I was studying knowledge economy capitalism, let alone professional lives. This project has therefore been overwhelmingly inductive, but my conviction is that this ensures that the analytical concepts discussed come from my participants' most prominent concerns. It appeared that my fieldwork was ultimately about "following a value" within a network, which I later came to identify as 'professionalism'. At all sites, I was documenting professionalism as a popular desire, and witnessed how people valued and made sense of professionalism as both a social status, and a set of ethical and aesthetic dispositions.

Taking inspiration from Meagher's (2012) critique of social network as an anthropological unit of analysis, this thesis aims to study network in a manner that does not flatten the diversity of experiences that the different "actants" within this network may uphold (see also Huang 2016: 19). The agents in this thesis have varying relationships to capital ownership, access to the public sphere, and other particularities that influence how the value of professionalism and professional status comes to be negotiated. Further, I would argue that focus on the broader network – and multiplicity of microcosms within this network – enables a rich illustration of the different outcomes of work beyond the media products themselves: namely, social divisions, and ethical and political subjectivities in addition to the material infrastructures being shaped as a result.

A note on the professional ethics of anthropology

'Every thought I confided in her analyzed,
every intimate feeling set down and examined,
every action cross-checked and indexed.'
- John, in Joe De Graft's "Through a Film Darkly" (1970)

Since first conducting ethnographic research in Ghana in 2010, fieldwork has appeared to me to be an endless negotiation of proximity, distance and intimacy. This also resonates with the fieldwork for this thesis, which taught many lessons about social proximity that shaped the research methodology, which is important to explicitly lay out. Such lessons are obviously present since our first research projects. As an undergraduate, I studied an elderly women's oriental dance group in Helsinki through the prism of sexuality and visibility of the ageing female body in the Finnish public sphere. When sitting on the river bank with one of my 83-year old respondents and sharing a moment of silence after hours of listening to vivid memories of reasons why she had decided to stay single her whole life, I thought it took courage to be an anthropological respondent. What did it mean to decide to trust a stranger and allow this stranger to document one's everyday life? What was the line between personal and professional in these encounters? If that line was de facto "thin," what were the kind of ethical demands and responsibilities that emerged as a result?

Anthropologists have recognized the ambiguities inherent in the relationship between the fieldworker and the interlocutors at least since the post-humous publication of Malinowski's field diaries (1989[1967]) while there are also, both real and fictional examples of such trust gone terribly wrong. A Ghanaian playwright, Joe De Graft's play, *Through a Film Darkly* (1970), is a fitting example. The play focuses on tensions that emerge when two married couples, Serwah and John, and Fenyinka and Janet, meet through a common friend. Puzzled by John's dislike of Janet, who is a white English woman, Serwah discovers that when John was living in England he fell in love with Molly, a white English anthropology student. Eventually John found out that his loved one, Molly, was secretly documenting ”every thought, every intimate feeling, every action” that occurred in the midst of everyday life that was thought to be private. He found her hand-written notebooks full of details about himself, and felt he had become a ”specimen for a thesis in anthropology,” and ever since harboured hatred towards whites.

I discovered the script of *Through a Film Darkly* in 2011 when living in Ghana as a freelance media worker. The primary reason for my move back then was Edem[15], a young Ghanaian media professional who I had met the previous year while doing master's thesis fieldwork on Ghanaian popular culture of beauty. Edem became my host-brother, close friend, and eventually my partner. When embarking on my second stay in Ghana, I thought I could decide not to be an anthropologist; I would be a fiancée, a respectable in-law and a freelancer whose primary occupation was to gain professional work experience, which I thought being different to academic experience, and learn local languages. One free Saturday afternoon early on in my stay when the electricity was off and we were sitting outside under the mango tree, Edem showed me a crumbled hard copy of the script of *Through a Film Darkly* that he had read during his undergraduate studies. We started reading it aloud. This play was staging dilemmas that came to shape my own research engagement with Ghana.

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[15] All names in this thesis are pseudonyms.

To decide ″not to be an anthropologist″ was proving difficult. In 2011, my life in Ghana as a ″non-anthropologist″ involved participating in everyday life in Edem's family house, such as listening to Edem′s mother′s stories about her village and working as a domestic help for Indian families in 1960s Accra; taking in Edem's father's stories of serving as a soldier under Jerry John Rawlings' military regime in the 1980s; accompanying Edem's informal sector dress-maker sister, Elyenam, on her various rounds of visiting former customers in a number of public and private sector offices; hearing gossip and miraculous stories of riches, as well as losses, unexpected deaths and the dangers of living in Accra, and of their migrant friends and relatives in Europe and the US; working in two different Ghanaian offices as an intern and production assistant and establishing professional networks in Accra; and participating in ritual life, such as in the family's and colleagues' baby outdoorings[16], weddings and funerals. I found myself documenting, namely writing down the stories that emerged as life unfolded. I told myself these were ″personal diaries,″ the kind of material that would never appear in any potential future academic work. Wary of the example of Molly and John, I was concerned that my personal life, and my professional life as an anthropologist, would merge as seamlessly as in the case of Molly in *Through a Film Darkly,* and the consequences this would have for my closest ones.

These concerns were also very much present when I eventually commenced PhD fieldwork in August 2013. My first proposal about business departments in evangelical universities was not only inspired by academic interest. I thought that locating fieldwork outside Accra would establish a boundary between my personal life and the life as an academic anthropologist. Yet, early on I had doubts about conducting fieldwork on a separate campus that appeared removed from the buzz of Accra. After days of observing in classes and interviewing predominantly Charismatic Pentecostal teachers, students and principals, I would come home by sunset, take a shower, eat, and leave the house into the darkness of Accra's night. I often joined Edem and his friends and colleagues in a drinking spot to watch football and for late night productions in their media stations, where colleagues, and occasionally friends and girlfriends from outside the company, from various denominational and religious backgrounds, joined in shared banter. They would gossip about their bosses, complain about the government, develop theories as to why the Ghanaian economy was not growing, ridicule the excessive expenditure of Ghanaian Charismatic Pentecostal celebrity pastors, and plot how to make informal money to supplement their salaries. Sometimes I would help them edit scripts and do research for a number of productions, and accompany them on nightly errands to defend mothers from witchcraft accusations and be present during child births in public hospitals. After a few months of this type of lifestyle, I had two digital folders named “Observations” and “personal diary.” This separation was my attempt to enact what I had come to understand, perhaps falsely, as the virtue ethics of a professional, academic, or what my colleagues in Accra would have perhaps termed a ”serious anthropologist.” However, the “personal diary” document constantly appeared more meaningful than the “observations” document, which eventually resulted in a shift in both theoretical and methodological emphasis.

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[16] Outdooring in Ghana stands for presenting the new-born baby to the wider kinship network, and often times also neighbours. These occasions also involve giving the full name.

The existence of these two digital field notes folders, and their eventual merge, encapsulates the ambiguities of intimacy and trust that characterised John's and Molly's experience in *Through a Film Darkly*, the epistemology and production of anthropological knowledge, and the methodology of this thesis. The material in the upcoming chapters came to be documented by virtue of the fact that my fieldwork engagement with Accra’s professionals did not recognize boundaries between the personal and the professional, which echoes the insights of various anthropologists writing about subjectivity in the field. Although before and since the “writing culture debate” (Marcus & Clifford 1986), great attention has been devoted to ethnography as a research methodology shaped by the researcher’s subjectivity, the role of personal intimacy remains a contested terrain (Kulick & Wilson 2003 [1995]). Above all, the line between production and reproduction in anthropology as a vocation and mode of knowledge production has appeared to me to be impossible to establish, while I hope that the attempt already counts. My fieldwork involved participation in a network of companies, families and colleagues with whom I envisioned sharing a future, buying land, building a house and starting a family, which also extended to periods of absences from Accra. In spite of the fact that life took a different course, or perhaps with even a greater reason, these questions remain and gradually reach a clearer form.

Having said this, the ideal of intimacy as a precondition for anthropological knowledge production is also necessary to problematize, as echoed in Olivier de Sardan's (2015) call for a more systematic effort to understand the role of ″the personal″ in relation to the translation of fieldwork data into a scientific text. Indeed, no causal link exists between the “depth” of intimacy, let alone the myriad interpretations of what can count as intimacy, and the kind of theoretical work that emerges as a result. Yet, controlling the depth of intimacy does not only rest with the anthropologist, but this depth is tied to the desires and motivations of various others. And the fact that life happens. Above all, the anthropologist may not necessarily be leading the kind of ″heroic life″ (Featherstone 1992) in which the research virtuoso appears in complete control of the outcome of fieldwork actions, and who stoically unmasks the underlying ″reality″ of material conditions, inequalities, ontologies and cultural logics (compare Ricoeur 1970). Neither does this mean blindly subscribing to the overtly risk-taking, emotionally driven entrepreneurial hero-figure of the late-capitalist era characterized by multiple ″affects of precarity″ that frame emotional intensity as a late-capitalist virtue in its own right (Jokinen & Venäläinen 2015). To reiterate, I have written this thesis with the conviction that the middle-ground of these two positions involves being mindful that the desired ‘control’ of the ethnographer is subject to the circumstances and agency of others.

Given these ambiguities of anthropology's own professional ethics, or what I assumed such ethics to contain, ultimately my responsibility lies in writing a thesis that does justice to my respondents' life worlds while protecting their interests, as also stated in the ethical guidelines of the UK Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA). I would hope that Edem, his family and various other friends and colleagues recognize their input not as ″content,″ as the ones whose lives the anthropologist has documented, but as ″co-analysts″ (Andersson 2015: 286; Miyazaki 2013: 9). Some of them might have wanted to see their names printed on these pages, but I have chosen to use pseudonyms. They are above all professional actors with public profiles, including Facebook, LinkedIn, and records of performance reviews, while this thesis explores the murky terrains that accompany these profiles and narratives of achievement.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is structured as a sequence of chapters and interludes. The purpose of the interludes is to facilitate a sense of a shared dialogue between different social groupings and characters of this thesis, as well as give a sense of how the fieldwork and the story of this thesis unfolded from one microcosm to the next. Across all these settings, I follow how the *economy of flow and blockage*, namely the circulation of various flows of sociality within middle-class projects of belonging, structures modalities of being a professional person and the multiplicity of value that work in the knowledge economy generates.

Chapter 1, “Nation's Professionals,” discusses access to professional status as a long-standing matter of state policy by considering Accra's vibrant public culture of professionalism in relation to Ghana's colonial and post-colonial history. The chapter outlines Ghana’s political economy of race and ethnicity and in so doing, shows how access to professional status has been accompanied by complex status negotiations, across scales, from the colonial era onwards. I will extend the analysis to contemporary examples of the continuing significance of citizens' qualifications for agents of the Ghanaian state following the 2011 ‘lower middle income’ World Bank country status.

Chapter 2, “Office Children, Other Children,” shifts the lens to a lower middle class family residing in a popular neighbourhood in Accra's outskirts, that grapples with the realisation that their collective investment to the professional status of their children, which they have learnt to understand as a route to secured financial standing, is not converting into contributions to the family as a productive unit. This generates a number of discordances that stem from professionalism's broken promises, the value of work, and the regeneration of the family as a moral community.

Chapter 3, “Kin Out of Colleagues,” follows the son of the previous chapter to the realm of friendship between colleagues, which has become a significant community of belonging in Accra's media business scene. The value of work takes up particular forms in the conditions of late-capitalist media production, which the chapter follows from the realm of the workplace to vibrant informal economies that surround the office.

The second part of the thesis shifts the lens from young professionals and their families to formal sector business owners. Chapter 4, “Mafia Meets a Man of God,” is an ethnography of a political enterprise. The value of work, in this chapter, links with negotiating the company's relationship to the Ghanaian state, as well as the social relations between the key figures in the enterprise whose career ambitions were markedly different, yet not irreconcilable.

Chapter 5, “Queen Mother of Professionalism,” considers professionalism in relation to Christian ethical visions of respectable modernity. I zoom into the complex assemblages that combine Christian ethical narratives and ritual formats with private sector workplace rhythms and praxis in a family-owned company that presents itself as a model of modernity and professionalism to the wider Ghanaian public.

Chapter 6, “God's Professionals,” brings the themes of the previous two chapters together by introducing an approach to Ghanaian knowledge-intensive capitalism called “a prayer theory of value.” Through the lens of young Charismatic Pentecostal start-up entrepreneurs who called themselves “spiritpreneurs,” the chapter considers being a Christian believer in integral relationship to being an entrepreneur who also recognises himself as a respectable professional person. Further, the chapter places prayer at the centre of anthropological theories of value by discussing prayer as distinctive kind of ‘work’ with its own generative potency.

In the concluding remarks, I consider practices of formalising economic action through the prism of economies of flow and blockage and outline the key contributions of this thesis to existing debates in the anthropology of new economic infrastructures and middle class social formations. I consider these economies as both a lens to theorise the value of work in Accra's late-capitalist conditions of capitalist production, as well as a potential comparative approach to theorising people's engagement with macro-economic conditions and global class politics.

PART I

Certificate Craze: interlude

January 2014: Business Grooming Seminar Diploma. Ten-day Oil and Gas Management Certificate. Diplomas in Marketing, Logistics, Gender and Conflict Resolution, Brand Development, Human Resource Management, and many other certificates and credentials that Isaac is trying to remember as we are driving in his car on his way to pick up his wife from her evening classes. In 2013 alone, a year after finishing his Bachelor's Degree in Marketing at what he called "the mature age of 40," Isaac had attended over ten of what he called "professional courses" alongside his job in a public sector logistics institution.

"Certificate craze," as the popular trope goes. A phenomenon that has taken Accra by storm. Besides young people, 40-50 year old Ghanaians are enrolling to study for a Bachelor's Degree and considering a Master's or Doctorate. One-day certificate courses provide the fastest route to lengthen the CV of professional qualifications, and they are plenty available in Accra. Human Resource this week? Maybe Branding next month? Depends on the money in your pocket. One could always try and show up at the last minute and plead a reduction, which course organizers were enticed to agree on if not enough participants had registered.

Isaac and I had met a few months before in one such one-day certificate course advertised in *Daily Graphic*[17]*'s* weekend issue, "Business Grooming Seminar" convened by a female beauty salon entrepreneur and image consultant. Isaac was the only man among the 12 or so participants (the consultant had wished for at least 30), who were mostly young female secretaries sent by their bosses, plus two female traders. On lunch break when we were offered a plate of chicken and rice, Maggie told me that her kiosk shop was next to a new private university. She wanted to "add value" to both her shop, and herself: "It's not because of the money. It's because of serving the people there, and serving them well." As a return of the 50 GHC course fee, for eight hours we learned about appropriate dressing and etiquette in the professional realm, such as, when to present business cards, and how to talk to people higher up the professional ladder. Why did this matter? According to the image consultant:

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[17] An Accra-based, state-owned newspaper.

> “We live in a society where qualifications matter. Before, you could get a job without. Now, if you have a master's degree and the other one doesn't, then you get the job. (…) But in Ghana here, what kind of people do we respect? You cannot buy respect, but you have to command respect (…) Image is everything. Right image commands respect. (...)Your value increases, because people want to be seen with you. (…) For interview, best to go in business formal, because sometimes there are hidden networks, parents have called already, so it's good to look absolutely your best. Never wear black for an interview! It signals authority. Do you want your boss to think that you are about to challenge him? If you dress in black, who is the boss? You? You show you are not in charge, *they* are in charge. Grey is good. But girls, don't wear trousers. Within our sociocultural setting, you never know who may be interviewing you. Some old women, they may not like it, and they say, hey, no job!”

It was a tricky new world. Qualifications mattered, yet there were “hidden networks.” Parents could call. Old women did not like trousers. Isaac found the courses useful precisely for these reasons: “The courses polish you, they put you on your toes, they refine you. It broadens your mind, how to do things, even about choosing friends,” he explains, and adds: “Many of these principles are directly related to the Bible, like leadership and entrepreneurship. Ah, leadership, I like leadership! You see, Ghana in particular is all about entrepreneurship.” Indeed, Ghana is all about entrepreneurship: on a short public transport journey, roadside sellers, newspaper agents, herbalists, and Charismatic Pentecostal pastors, are offering their products to the commuters. In an air-conditioned cafeteria, an impeccably dressed young man can approach and ask if I am interested in investing in a new real estate development. Currently Isaac is also in the process of brainstorming the kind of company he would like to start-up, which his eclectic course choices reflect. Maybe in Oil and Gas. Or maybe in logistics, which he has experience on from his workplace. Or maybe the company could do import-export business on the side, he contemplates and asks me if there are products in Finland I could consider importing to Ghana.

Isaac wants to make a transition from a public sector employee to the private sector. He desires to “never to work for anybody.” He presently works in a state-run logistics company, but is unhappy about his stagnant salary, constant conflicts and the “politics” of the workplace. He asserts that he is not going to work for another ten years without promotion. He esteems that acquiring as many formal credentials as possible will enable his transition to the private sector. Degrees and courses appear to hold much value and promise, while Isaac discreetly admits that his wife at times criticises the expenditure on course fees. He says that she has also been influenced, however, and has recently enrolled in a Bachelor's Degree program as an evening student at Methodist University College, which is affiliated with their church. Isaac himself earned his Bachelor's Degree from Central University College, which was established by a Ghanaian Charismatic Pentecostal church. He is hungry for more credentials, more courses, more qualifications. Year 2013 had been their year of “personal development.” “But in 2014, I hope we will have a child,” he says as we part.

Chapter 1
Nation's Professionals: a story of value through time

Introduction: a public culture of professionalism

Lots of achievement, professionalism and leadership was going on in Accra. Motivational events and certificate programs were organized in the city every day by private and public stakeholders, including state departments, beauty salon entrepreneurs, Ghanaian returnee entrepreneurs, foreign corporate CEOs and Charismatic Pentecostal pastors. Numerous self-help books on job hunting, entrepreneurship, and wealth generation filled stands in street corners and bus stops. The Charismatic Pentecostal prosperity gospel that encouraged ambition and self-investment reached the urban public through a variety of media, from TV and radio broadcasts to billboards (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005, 2007; De Witte 2008, 2003). Increasingly it travelled through smart phone applications, such as Twitter, YouTube videos and WhatsApp messages. Next to sermons, the airwaves were filled by Ghanaian and Nigerian hip-life music that encouraged entrepreneurial do-it-yourself lifestyle (Shipley 2009a), while smart-phone access to talks delivered by Steve Jobs and other global entrepreneurial hero figures crept inside hot and sweaty commuter journeys in a fully crammed trotro.

These landscapes of success were supplemented by imageries that warned about the dangers of too much self-investment, defining the terms of moral virtue. On one hand, popular films, that responded to popular Charismatic Pentecostal sensibilities (Meyer 2015), could showcase professionals working in ultra-modern offices while grappling with jealousies and curses from close kin, friends and colleagues. Rumours of untimely deaths as a result of such conflicts circulated in office corridors, market places, churches and family compounds. Next to such rumours of dangers in Accra's worlds of professionals, new private universities – especially Charismatic Pentecostal ones – proclaimed the offer of “holistic education” that produces “professionals with integrity.“ A new TV sitcom, “Office Palava,” had been attracting wide viewership since its first episode aired in January 2014. The producer, Edem Tamakloe[18], framed the show as an "educational program" to discourage professionals from committing vices like corruption and chronic lateness. Edem was himself Charismatic Pentecostal, and he and his close colleagues (who I met in April 2016) viewed the show as his contribution to the nation both as a citizen and a Christian believer.

This was the visible environment of Accra's public culture of professionalism, a seemingly self-contradictory urban spectacle that engaged all the senses and excited popular desire. This public culture merged with commerce, in which people like Isaac, who was a public sector employee, to informal sector kiosk owners participated to accrue credentials. While there seemed to be much evidence on global ideals of professionalism as an object of aesthetic cultivation, knowledge and training, the term professionalism itself was hardly used among people themselves, except in rare occasions, such as in the English-speaking media. The popular terms that came closest to the generic meaning of professionalism in the English lexicon were "serious" and "level-headed." To be "serious" meant dressing well, displaying competence, and delivering one's work in a timely fashion. Persons described as "level-headed," especially in Accra's media scenes, were inquisitive about their work and contributed original ideas. However, being level-headed also played with crossing the thin line of becoming "too known" – the kind of person who boasted about success and challenged authority, which could also be a source of danger.

Above all, this public culture entailed a strong emphasis on character-building. Shows such as "Offica Palava" displayed professionals who came to the office late and CEOs who evaded taxes, which insinuated that Ghanaian professionals "lacked" in both character and exemplary middle class professionalism (compare Mazzarella 2003). This public culture of professionalism was indeed a platform to mediate what Zigon (2008: 163) has aptly termed "public morality" discourses about professional virtue and character, which in Ghana's public sphere seamlessly integrated with Charismatic

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[18] Name is real.

Pentecostal modes of address (Meyer 2004a). This public morality centred on virtues such as high ambition, conscious refusal of corruption, and commitment to time-management, paying taxes, and (very importantly) looking neat. Indeed, crucially, the body was as much an object of cultivation as the soul and spirit. In the Twi lexicon, the expression for “being clean,” *ne ho te*, also stood for being beautiful and morally pure (Van Der Geest 1998: 9) – hence beautiful and 'neat' professional bodies could mediate moral value (cf Overing 1989: 159). Similar to the importance of the beautified, ordered bodies in Accra's broader urban context – where small kiosk beauty salons and barber shops dotted popular neighbourhoods and central business districts – projecting an aesthetically pleasing image was an object of explicit discourse in Accra's public culture of professionalism, which had generated a market niche for the likes of business grooming seminars.

The most visible agents of these landscapes were the political, religious and commercial stakeholders whose message was to convince the urban public of two central conditions of possibility: one, that it was possible to reach professional status and get promoted as a result of “hard work” and having the “right image”; and two, that to do so also qualified them as good, valuable citizens and Christian believers. This was the infrastructure that fashioned access to the world of professionals as a real possibility, while also casting work in the professional realm as a matter of moral value in the eyes of both the state and the Christian God.

…

This chapter takes Accra's present-day vibrant public culture of professionalism as the starting point and moves back to unpack a longer genealogy of Ghana’s economic future-making, and the complex role that social class, race and ethnicity have played in this history. I suggest that the message of contemporary public, private and Charismatic Christian stakeholders who promote professionalism displays much continuity with the legacies of Ghanaian colonial and post-colonial state narratives of moral citizenry as the precondition to political and economic self-governance. Since Kwame Nkrumah’s era of Pan-Africanist state-socialism, these narratives have been mediated through the idiom of the disciplined, “hard-working” post-colonial subject whose work is a contribution to African liberation and decolonization (Ahlman 2017: 27). In line with this ethical vision of which purpose is to overcome divisions of race, ethnicity, class and pedigree (cf Bear 2007: 3-4), increasing one's educational qualifications has been connected to ideologies of a 'good citizen', which has taken diverse disguises from the colonial era onwards.

The emergence of knowledge economy capitalism and professionalism as a popular desire must be therefore considered within this longer genealogy of Ghana's economic history that dates far prior to post-1980s neoliberal restructuring. This genealogy entails attention to the repercussions of domestic and international slave trade, the role of colonial officers and missionaries as mediators of ideas of colonial modernity, and the post-independence, anti-colonialist vision of Ghana as the centre of black capital growth. While colonial racial hierarchies framed the link between middle class and professional qualifications as a matter of adequate Victorian middle class comportment, the emergence of new structures of access to colonial modernity also generated complex status transformations, in which the value of professional status was negotiated in relation to wider communities of belonging. After the independence, this trajectory has been a tumultuous journey towards the ideal of strong 'national unity' (Coe 2005: 26, 32) in a multi-ethnic nation characterised by two powerful political factions, currently embodied by Ghana's two dominant political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP). These factions have followed first class, subsequently ethnic divisions, and established differing relationships to the Ghanaian domestic businessmen and older 'intelligentsia', which led into a number of, at times violent, tensions during the post-independence era (Nugent 1995; Opoku 2010). In this chapter, I historicise this political economy of race and ethnicity to illustrate how economic future-making is cast as governance of racial and ethnic difference, which employs narratives of genealogical origins as the central tool of power (Mbembe 2004; Povinelli 2006, 2011; see also Shipley 2015: 25-26). The various projects of professionalism and entrepreneurship that this thesis tells therefore return to the historically repeated question, how is it possible to create a middle class in Ghana, who are the 'rightful' middle classes, and why being recognised as a 'land of professionals' matters? What are the collective failures and struggles that projects of professionalism in the postcolony attempt to overcome?

The second part of this chapter illustrates how the legacies of this political economy manifest in contemporary state-administered mechanisms and spectacles of opening access to professional status, a message which has been taken up by newer private providers of professional qualification and accreditation. I first explore Ghana National Service Scheme (NSS), through which 64 000 Ghanaian graduates were posted in job placements in 2015-2016. Since 1973, Ghanaian graduates from accredited tertiary institutions have started their professional trajectory from the GNSS, which could be considered as a state-funded 'first internship,' the value of which is intensified in the current context of vast youth and graduate unemployment. While multiple new commercial actors have entered Ghana's educational, internship, and recruitment fields (see Mann 2012, 2014 for Sudan), the Ghana National Service Scheme has remained the mechanism through which most graduates gain their first work experience[19]. On a broader scale, National Service Scheme is also a rather remarkable state 'hand-out' program of the type at the centre of recent anthropological debates on state welfare in Africa (Ferguson 2015). At its core, the continuing relevance of GNSS shows how access to professional status remains a matter of state governance towards the ideal of national unity, in which (future) professionals are esteemed to play an important, socially productive role. Yet, it is equally important to emphasize that actual engagements with state-administered programs and performances are also shaped by changes in the Ghanaian public culture where people pronounce subversive desires and ideologies of what their work as professionals is supposed to generate (cf Shipley 2015: 15-16). While agents of the state can frame work as a contribution to the wealth of the nation state, along the Nkrumahist ethical vision, people can challenge these expectations while continuing to desire access to the world of professionals for other reasons, whether facilitated by the state or another powerful entity.

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[19] States devise a variety of mechanisms to facilitate and restrict access to professional status. Some examples include conceptions of higher education as a public good à la Scandinavian welfare state; or alternatively, facilitation of access to educational loans in contexts where higher education is a private good and state-funding is largely non-existent (see James 2014).

Finally, Accra's public culture of professionalism must also be historicized in the present political economic context of neoliberal restructuring and state interest in private sector development. As an illustrating case of these interests, I zoom into a professional training program called the West Africa Business Expo, which was organized in September 2013 by the ruling NDC government in partnership with foreign multinationals and local media partners. I shall suggest throughout this chapter that while diverse projects of professionalism undoubtedly may serve as market devices that convert national subjects into entities who serve private capital accumulation (Muniesa, Millo & Callon 2007), and consequently post-colonial nation-building, it is useful to remain conceptually open about what the individuals involved experience. If market devices (such as professional training programs) are examples of formalising economic subject-making, these formalisations entail their own social life (Guyer 2004). As anthropologists studying entrepreneurial schemes as market devices of development have argued (Dolan 2012; Huang 2016, 2017; Wilson 2004), the effects of these disciplines and skills are far from linear, but emerge out of complex networks of social relations and ways of being a person. This is similarly the case among Accra's residents who participate in such schemes and programmes, and/or become their loose publics through urban landscapes, mass media broadcasts, sermons and self-help books. The language of desire is helpful for unpacking what participating in programs of professionalism can mean for people themselves – namely, why do they find participation in such programs valuable? As I argue in this chapter, the desire for professional skills and qualifications entails engagement with the historically constituted idiom of the state as the provider of access to upward mobility and the builder of economic infrastructure, which is shaped by citizens' expectations of what can be expected from the state as the locus of nation's wealth. These desires coalesce into what I have proposed to call an economy of flow and blockage, a system of generative circulation that continues to incorporate an idea of the state as an agent of redistribution. This crucially shapes the value attributed to professional skills and status in the various public and semi-public platforms of professional accreditation this chapter zooms into.

But first, let me start unpacking this genealogy by telling the story of a particular ‘professional exemplar’ whose ethical visions for Ghana remain important historical sources for understanding professionalism as an ethnographically specific ‘imagery of democracy’ (Ong 2002, cit in Paley 2002).

‘Big Men’ and ‘Small Boys’: Economic Future-making for National Unity

“Do you know Kwame Nkrumah?” a middle-aged man asked me in a trotro when we were passing the President's Palace, Flagstaff House, in April 2011. We were travelling along one of Accra's main arteries, Liberation road that connected the city’s central districts with its northern outskirts. He sighed: “Since Nkrumah, no politician has built anything. He built the university, this Liberation road, everything. Now nobody cares.” Ghana's first president had indeed framed Ghana as the “leading star of Africa” in the wake of the country's independence in 1957. He sought loans from the West to carry out large-scale infrastructural projects such as improving the road network (see J. Hart 2016), investing in primary and secondary education through building new government schools all over the country, and establishing Ghana Airways (Biney 2011: 99-119). My fellow passenger further lamented that currently there was “no discipline in the system,” which he contrasted with military leader Jerry Rawlings' era in the 1980s and 1990s. In his view, there was far less corruption when Rawlings was in power. But it was Kwame Nkrumah’s time that he fondly reminisced. Building physical infrastructure, such as Liberation road that we were travelling along, in this passenger's interpretation, spoke to Nkrumah’s legacy of spearheading national development. Nkrumah had been, in his mind, an exemplary of what could be expected of him as a political leader: to build the country's infrastructure and deliver visible, tangible outcomes.

Kwame Nkrumah’s spectacular journey into and fall from a position of power illustrates, on one hand, the emergence of the two dominant political traditions in Ghana, as well as the Pan-African influences that have shaped Ghana’s economic policy-making and ideologies of upward mobility, from the individual to national scale, since the colonial era. Here, I will discuss Nkrumah's trajectory as an illustration of the political economy of race, pedigree and ethnicity in Ghana which Nugent (1995) has described as an on-going power battle between 'big men' and 'small boys', which continues to manifest in the voting base of currently dominant parties, National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP). These historical debates are important for tracing the story of professionalism as a distinctive middle class status through time; to belong to the established professional class and being recognised as 'middle class' in the colonial era came with particular assumed entitlements that have been challenged since independence.

Nkrumah came of age in the British colony Gold Coast at a time when the established power elites were either the inland businessmen (typically Ashanti[20]) who had accumulated wealth thanks to gold and the 19th century cocoa boom, or the small but growing group of coastal families employed in professions such as law and medicine, that reproduced their position in prestigious schools established by the colonial government in the coast, such as Mfantsipim in Cape Coast and Achimota College in Accra (Nugent 1995: 21). These coastal professional groups largely dominated the national politics in the British colonial era (Nugent 1995: 22), while chiefs were appointed to rule in the rural regions according to cost-effective indirect rule (Apter 1955). Unlike the established 'intelligentsia' that descended from these coastal professional elites and upheld prestigious surnames, Nkrumah hailed from a rural village of a small minority group called Nzima in Southwest Ghana. He was academically competent, and his success was noticed in a Catholic Mission school, where he was recruited to elite Achimota College on a scholarship (Rooney 1988: 7), later being sent to study abroad. Nkrumah could be considered as one of the first 'exemplars' of the Ghanaian "meritocracy," who had to eventually confront a situation whereby hailing outside the traditional professional and business elites could turn against him (Asante-Darko & Van Der Geest 1982).

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[20] The Ashanti are still popularly called as the 'business tribe', a reputation that dates back to the 15th century when Ashanti chiefs progressed inland and cleared forest to establish permanent agricultural settlements. They also found gold, which they exchanged for slaves whose labour was used to clear more land inhabitable and expand the Ashanti kingdom (Nugent 1995: 19, see also McCaskie 1983; Wilks 1993). While the Ashanti are popularly depicted as the business-savvy ethnic group, part of the 'big men', the coastal peoples such as the Ewe and the Fante hold the reputation of investing in education as the route towards upward mobility; they are the 'civil servants' who speak better English and 'like education'.

After completing studies in Achimota in 1935, Nkrumah gained university scholarship to study abroad in the United States. In 1945, he left the States for the United Kingdom. During his stays in both countries, Nkrumah established extensive networks to influential black intellectuals, among them Franz Fanon, Richard Wright, George Padmore, Marcus Garvey, and C.L.R. James, who visited or spent extended periods of time in Ghana before and after independence. The 1930s and 1940s were decades of vibrant debate on the future of the colonial project that raised critical consciousness of European exploitation of resources in Africa and in the wider colonial empire. Among black intellectuals across the Atlantic, their critiques drew inspiration from W.E.B Du Bois' Marxist-Leninist analyses of European imperialism that had gained wide audience since the 1910s (Ahlman 2017: 35). Nkrumah became intimately connected with these intellectual circles, and became influenced by Pan-Africanist visions of African unity and black solidarity. This vision established a close affinity between African nationalists seeking liberation from the European colonial empire and the economic and political emancipation of black diasporas that had come into existence as a result of transatlantic slave trade (C.M White 2010: 303).

Endowed with, at that time, radical Pan-Africanist visions of African self-rule, Nkrumah returned to Gold Coast in 1947 invited by J.B Danquah, a lawyer and key figure in Gold Coast intelligentsia, to become the chairman of a newly established political party, United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC). The year 1947 was a year of large scale boycotts of European and Levantine firms and popular riots in Accra, which signalled an emerging popular consciousness of the unfair pricing and distribution of resources that the presence of foreign trading powers, including British colonial trading firms, had created (Ahlman 2017: 8-9). UGCC was established in this climate with the purpose of gradually working towards self-rule. Nkrumah, however, attracted a mass following of his own, as his style of address was far more radical and appealing to emotions compared to UGCC's largely elite, what Ahlman (2017: 52) calls 'measured' leadership exemplified by J.B Danquah's 'gentleman'-style. Nkrumah attracted ordinary Ghanaians with his message of "immediate self-government" that relied on his charisma, whereas J.B Danquah's path was that of "gradual self-governance" while ensuring the rule of law. Nkrumah's populist style started to soon frustrate the elite members of UGCC (Ahlman 2017: 52). The eventual separation of Nkrumah from UGCC and the launch of his own party, Convention People's Party (CPP) in 1949 marked the clear demarcation between the two dominant political factions that became the basis of Ghana's political system, the Danquah-Busia-line, or the 'intelligentsia', and Nkrumah's 'small boys' whose political style attracted the "common people" (Nugent 1995: 5). CPP's victory over UGCC in the general elections of 1951 turned the tables rather contrary to what could have been expected given the prominence of the professionals in colonial politics. Instead of the established professional elite that felt entitled to rule as the "pre-eminent citizens of the colony" (Nugent 1995: 5), Nkrumah's CPP consolidated electoral support in the course of the 1950s and led the country to independence from the colonial rule.

Nkrumah declared Ghana's independence on the 6th of March 1957 when the country was the world stage of African decolonisation, and the capital Accra its 'centre of gravity' that attracted prominent black liberation theorists, authors and activists to its vicinity (L. James 2015: 178). Pan-Africanist intellectuals were invited to participate in Ghana's nation-building, which in the 1950s became a veritable 'case study' of decolonization in the global imagination (L. James 2015: 179, see also Nugent 1995: 9-10). On the core, Nkrumah's Ghana was connected to wide transnational networks of black internationalism, and its central role within this project of emancipation was to perform the role of 'the exemplary' and show the rest of the world that a polity led by former colonial subjects was possible and could succeed.

For Nkrumah, Ghana's economic future-making and provision of mass-scale access to social mobility, beyond the established cadres of the intelligentsia, was part and parcel of this global struggle towards black emancipation as the route to building a counter Empire. His planning was characterised by what Ahlman (2017: 14) calls "anticolonial modernism” that assumed a teleological progress towards rapid industrialisation, creation of waged jobs and infrastructural expansion. Seemingly Western-originated ideas of economic development were therefore harnessed for national self-governance and creation of new type of citizenry that was committed to collective nationalist goals (ibid. 14, see also Ferguson 1999). Nkrumah set out to realise this vision through urban-centred state-socialism spearheaded by state-control of the primary means of production, schooling (see especially Coe 2005), and the wider public life. As one of the chief architects and influences to Nkrumah’s state-socialism was a Trinidadian journalist and Pan-Africanist George Padmore, who became his close confidant and Advisor of African Affairs during the immediate aftermath of independence in 1957-1959 (L. James 2015: 165). The goal of state-socialism was to decrease reliance on former colonial powers, which resulted in the policy of economic protectionism that in the 1950s enjoyed popular support (Murillo 2011). State-socialism also resulted in the creation of new type of party organizations such as Ghana Young Pioneers, that engaged rural and urban citizens through self-help projects, athletic competitions and “citizenship classes,” of which purpose was to address the “deeper, ontological burden of creating new, decolonized citizens” (Ahlman 2017: 18). Based on this historical record, the body, soul and the spirit of the ordinary Ghanaian citizen thus became the object of markedly nationalist reform since early independence, that Nkrumahist state agents considered as the prerequisite to ultimate freedom from colonial rule.

While Padmore saw nationalism, economic protectionism, citizenship education and strong leadership as the means to combat colonial imperialism and promote African unity, for Nkrumah, these efforts were targeted towards a more pressing goal closer to home: the creation of national unity in a multi-ethnic nation where different ethnic groups were opposing CPP’s modernist visions of development, and of which political system stood divided following the separation between CPP and UGCC (Ahlman 2017: 63-68). Similarly to the visionaries of Pan-African unity, such as Padmore who considered it necessary to combat ‘tribalistic’ loyalties, Nkrumah advocated a strategy of political centralisation, namely consolidating power to a “supra-national” entity not dependent on the support of one ethnic group (Adekson 1976). As one example, Nkrumah embarked on a mission to correct the ethnic imbalances created by colonial recruitment practices in state institutions. Despite their economic power since the 15th century, the demographically-dominant Ashanti had been under-represented in key political and professional positions during the colonial era following strong Ashanti opposition to the British colonial rule. Although the Ashanti, especially the businessmen and intelligentsia such as J.B Danquah, were Nkrumah's main political rivals, he increased their representation in state institutions, including the military, and balanced the over-representation of the Northern Hausa (Adekson 1976: 258-259). Besides the discourse of national unity, reforming state recruitment practices was Nkrumah's attempt to consolidate his own political power that eventually resulted in one party state where any form of dissent was silenced through coercion (Ahlman 2017: 179-187). The established middle classes and Ashanti domestic capitalists, the 'big men', harboured more suspicion towards Nkrumah's intentions.

While the 1950s was characterised by large scale infrastructural expansion that left a lasting memory of Nkrumah as that of an enabler of development, the tides turned in the 1960s as CPP faced depleted state coffers, withdrawal of US support sensing Ghana's amalgamation into one-party state, and increasing criticism of the main objective of Nkrumah's Pan-Africanist efforts: to grow Ghana, or waste resources on entire Africa (Ahlman 2017: 203). He was overthrown in 1966, led by strong Ashanti opposition backed up by the Armed Forces. The established intelligentsia eventually organized itself into Progress Party (PP) led by Kofi Busia, and continued along J.B Danquah's political tradition of "ushering in a return to order and respectability" (Ahlman 2017: 207), which won the democratic elections in 1969. For a moment, it looked like the intelligentsia and 'the professionals' were back to its historical position at the top of political power.

At this point, let me briefly illustrate how tensions between social classes within the realm of political power could take up rather surprising registers that centred on genealogical origins. Busia's critique of Nkrumah extended beyond Pan-Africanist economic policy-making and political centralisation to raising questions on Nkrumah's "real" descent and suitability to lead Ghana. David Apter (1972: 125) notes that in the immediate aftermath of the 1966 coup that threw Nkrumah out of power, Busia asserted that core members of CPP were descendants of former "slave sons." This informally relayed remark calls for some background. As perhaps one of the first mechanisms of opening access to professional status – a system of recruitment that was not based on ascriptive transmission of office through lineage and customary authority –Apter (1972: 120-125) describes how the system of "selective recruitment" was introduced by the British colonial administration in Gold Coast towards the end of the 19th century. Selective recruitment came to inadvertently transform former "slave sons" into nation's future professionals. This transformation entailed antagonistic encounters between village chiefs – most notably the demographically dominant Ashanti – and colonial administrators, who demanded chiefs to send their children to schools established by colonial missionaries. The chiefs refused to be given orders; instead of their biological children, they sent the sons they had conceived with female slaves. Endowed with the social capital of education and literacy, these "slave sons" were later recruited to junior posts in colonial administration, as well as employed as clerks in private European, Lebanese and Syrian firms, that had come into existence in Accra in the 19th century (Quayson 2014: 53). Busia implied that Nkrumah's genealogical origins did not qualify him to lead Ghana; the former status of the slave lurked behind the attained professional qualifications, foreign degrees and networks to Pan-African intelligentsia (cf Graeber 2007). In other words, Nkrumah's 'professionalism' and triumphant career did not overcome his genealogical origins, but rather served as a make-up that eventually crumbled after several economic failures.

At this point, it is essential to understand that these two political traditions descended from Nkrumah and Danquah-Busia are premised upon the tension between political and economic power that Nkrumah grappled with since the beginning of his regime, which essentially collided with his Pan-Africanist, transnationally oriented state-socialist vision of Ghana's political and economic development. The on-going tension between these political traditions, of which the Danquah-Busia line links closely with the interests of Ashanti domestic capitalist classes, continues in the form of a power battle between 'big men' and 'small boys' (Nugent 1995). These tensions carried on throughout Rawlings' 1982-2001 era characterised by IMF-administered structural adjustment, economic liberalisation, and gradual state withdrawal from public life. To the established intelligentsia, Rawlings was comparable to Nkrumah in the sense that he was radical in his style of address and drew popular support, while Nugent (1995: 23) remarks they considered him as an 'usurper' whose eventual rise to power came as a surprise. Rawlings started with an ostensibly Nkrumah-style socialist agenda designed to attract the "common people," of which purpose was to combat corruption, prevalent as it was during general Acheampong's era in the 1970s. A new term, *kalabule*, emerged to stand for illicit profit-making at the expense of the majority's hardship (Nugent 1995: 27-29). Initially, Rawlings targeted prominent business families in Accra, and even sent soldiers around neighbourhoods to check well-to-do middle class homes for the kind of conspicuous consumption items that qualified as signs of corruption[21]. This was a prime example of the "big man"/"small boys"-battle taken to the streets, which resulted in the exile of prominent Ghanaian business families to Europe and North America. Similarly, privatisation of state enterprises and austerity measures that decreased the size of the public sector generated mass-employment of former lower-ranking civil servants, who turned to the urban informal sector or left the country as economic migrants, against their self-perception as the educated of the country.

As this discussion has shown, rising in the class hierarchy as a result of successful private accumulation and professional status has not entailed solely benevolent consequences in Ghana. Upward mobility without a socially acknowledged legitimate basis, such as education or well-known pedigree, could become suspect from the onset. These evaluations emerge out of complex status hierarchies that have been taking shape since the pre-colonial history, when private accumulation among the Ashanti was essentially a social virtue premised upon the expectation of protection, and redistribution (McCaskie 1983), in other words, a logic of circulation at the heart of economic action. Fast-tracked to the present era, in the liberal public sphere entrepreneurship is framed as a virtue while the public culture of professionalism reminds new middle classes of their responsibility towards a shared good. The new industries, such as media, technology and service industries, promise to overcome past national failures of sustaining, rather than resolving divisive political culture, and focuses on the power of the young, 'emerging' middle classes to build a 'new Ghana' (see Nyamenna 2014). I next turn to historicize this new economy from the perspective of the popular history of education, which further illustrates how 'middle-class-ness' has been a matter of political debate.

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[21] Informally relayed memory by a son of a former prominent business family that had gone into exile, and subsequently returned to Ghana in early 2000.

Desire for qualifications: from colonial comportment to certificate craze

Given the aforementioned social divisions in Ghana's colonial and post-independence trajectory of economic future-making, the very category of middle class appears as fraught from the onset; the political debates on 'middle-class-ness' in Ghana seem to repeatedly return to the question, 'who are the middle classes' in a nation characterised by divergent social divisions, and how to define the legitimate, 'right kind of' basis of middle class social status in the postcolony. In these debates, education has maintained its place as the popularly recognized prerequisite of both wealth and social class (Nugent 1995: 21), which entails attention to the history of European civilizing mission as a process of racialization in Ghana (Pierre 2013: 12-13). Crucially, the popular desire for education must also be considered from the perspective of vernacular ideologies of social 'enlightenment' (Skinner 2009), which introduces an existential dimension to understanding contemporary phenomena such as accumulation of professional certificates as a strategy of qualifying as middle class in the 21st century Accra.

David Apter's example of the history of slave-sons shows how the colonial administration became a highly ambiguous realms of professions with new practices of recruitment that could change the life trajectory of a former slave. This was provided the slave was male; a significant omission in colonial recruitment practices was the public role of women. The creation of such new groups in possession of a professional status is one example of the unintended consequences that the creation of colonial bureaucracy in Ghana effected. Yet, the colonial era was but one period within a longer history, when different skills have become valued at different times. Ato Quayson (2014: 38-63) shows how Accra's urban formation and organization of economic life from the 15th century onwards has been marked by shifting negotiations over what kind of skills to value in the ever-evolving urban economy of the time. These negotiations have been shaped by transnational influences, as well as status transformations that could occur in the context of on-going domestic and transatlantic slave trade. For instance, in the year 1681 in Accra, a former company slave sold to the Dutch trading port was made a powerful political figure by the Dutch trading authorities, a "chief broker makelaar" who later on was appointed as the representative of the Ga King. The Tabon, for one, namely former slaves in Brazilian plantations who were freed and arrived to Accra in mid-19th century, possessed a variety of urban skill-sets such as arts and crafts that were becoming increasingly valued in Accra. These skills enabled them to rise up the urban hierarchy, and earned them places as trading brokers and future employees in the colonial civil service.

These processes illustrate the constant cultural negotiation that goes into valuing particular skills and persons over others within the shifting patterns of Ghanaian political and economic life. People's own narratives about how things changed can be marked with secrecy, rumour, and even open confrontation. David Graeber (2007) shows, in his ethnography of slave descendants and former slave owners in a Malagasy village of Betafo, that the history of these status transformations can be an object of competing narratives. Status transformation is above all a collectively recognized upward change in the "value" of the person in the local hierarchy, while local debates seem to address *how far* a particular acquired skill or act, such as knowledge of witchcraft medicine in the case of Betafo, can go in transcending the former status. Such utterances imply that the status of the slave is under constant rejection, while this former status can lurk behind the performance, and imagery of a new type of status that a person has acquired.

Building on from Graeber's suggestion, it is useful to consider education and literacy as similarly contested skills of which power to overcome racialized 'lacks' was at the centre of popular and colonial imagination from the 19th century onwards. While the colonial project in Africa has been recognized as a matter of endless internal contradictions, including power battles that emerged as a result of discordances between the personal ambitions and desires of colonial administrators, colonial missionaries and indigenous power authorities (ex. Burke 1993; Comaroff & Comaroff 1997; White 2000), it was successful in instituting a racial hierarchy in which middle class equated with Victorian-style comportment and impeccable English accent (Pierre 2013: 23). While the colonial bureaucracy could be popularly imagined as a locus of dark power led by white vampires who carried bucketfuls of blood sucked out of their African subjects (White 2000: 5), the colonial project was above all about instilling public morality along the lines of Victorian values[22], which entailed racialization of African subjects as 'lacking' in terms of ideal whiteness and rational-bureaucratic flare (Pierre 2013: 17). Africans became the objects of European civilizing mission with the paradox of keeping them comfortably at bay in terms of economic and political power. In this sense, the educated and the wealthier intelligentsia that had been emerging in Gold Coast since the transatlantic slave trade posed an existential problem to the formalisation of colonial rule in the late 19th century, that "depended on the establishment of official and institutional racism" (Pierre 2013: 23). As one outcome, the educated elites were stripped off their former prominent positions in the Gold Coast civil service, and replaced by European administrators. The colonial administration therefore refused Africans social equality on the basis of educational qualifications and professional experience; their qualifications were not enough to overcome their genealogical origins, echoing Busia's assessment of former 'slave sons'.

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[22] For instance, these Victorian modes of adequate middle class comportment placed women in the domestic sphere, which contradicted West African systems of social organization in which women fulfilled visible public roles as queen mothers, traders and priestesses with their own independent incomes (Akyeampong 2000).

To further illustrate the problem of educated Africans for the colonial rule, Shipley (2015: 34-52) describes how the difference between European and African ‘essences’ emerged as an object of governance in new elite schools established in the colonial era, such as Achimota College. These schools were “educational experiments,” “designed to educate a rising class of civil servants who when “properly civilized” could be entrusted to take over the running of the colonies” (ibid. 35). Yet, the very process of enabling access to education was a threat to colonial rule. One aspect of managing these anxieties was the conception of Achimota as an educational institution where Africans were to “acquire a good education, without loss of their natural attachment to their respective tribes” (Clarence-Smith 1994: 67, cit. in Shipley 2015: 39). “Learning culture” was therefore mandatory alongside traditional British boarding school subjects, which included “Tribal nights” when students danced and drummed. Yet, from the perspective of former students, the school was all about “aspir[ing] to live like the English. Get civil service jobs and be good administrators” (ibid. 40) while focus on Africanness was a “masquerade ball.” Given the alternative curriculums advanced by Achimota College, Gold Coast elites grew increasingly critical about the necessity of pairing high school education with “learning culture,” asking whether this was “second-class education” that did not further their social advancement (ibid. 47). In other words, existing Gold Coast elites asked whether acquiring professional qualifications as constitutive of respectable middle class comportment needed to be paired with cultural learning in the first place (compare Coe 2005).

Next to questions of racial equality and political economic advancement, there is a further layer to historicizing the popular desire for qualifications that links with even more long-term logics of virtue, and moral character. Kate Skinner (2009) describes how mass literacy campaigns in the 1950s among the Ashanti were mediated through a discourse of 'enlightenment'. The idea of qualifications as enlightenment is one outcome of Africa's missionary history, whereby pairing literacy with modernity in the 'eyes of God' was propagated in mission-established schools, in Ghana as elsewhere in Africa (Foster 1965; see also Stambach 2010b). However, Skinner shows that the discourse of enlightenment among the Ashanti also entailed its own vernacular logic:

literacy was constructed as an act of 'opening one's eyes' and 'seeing the light', which resonated with similar observations from other West African languages. Enlightenment among the Yoruba could literally mean: “a social state or process of increased knowledge and awareness which is a condition of greater effectiveness and prosperity. Now as the individual, unmetaphorically, becomes 'enlightened' by opening his eyes, a society does so through opening itself to experience of the outside world” (Peel 1978: 144, cit. in Skinner 2009: 482).

A key aspect of these discourses of enlightenment was to encourage the educated to spread her skills to the wider collective beyond the self. As a comparison, towards the end of the business grooming seminar that Isaac and I attended, the image consultant told us to “educate our friends” and spread the message of “standards” in the Ghanaian world of professionals. We had learnt appropriate skills, but we might have friends who could equally benefit from the knowledge. In other words, in these discourses, education – increasing one's qualifications – is framed as a virtue that connects the person with a wider community. Agents of the Ghanaian state have also embraced education as a matter of successful national development, and a means of transcending ethnic loyalties (Coe 2005). The history of Ghanaian media has equally been shaped by state discourses of the “educational function” of the media (Hasty 2005a: 37), casting media platforms as potent sites for increasing the educational attainment of the wider population. Media needed to broadcast 'educational programs', not pure entertainment, in order to legitimise itself in the eyes of the state.

From independence onwards, formal education and university qualifications have become widely constructed as the only legitimate basis for middle-class status in Ghana (Nieswand 2014: 407). Authenticating middle-class status therefore depends on the right source – the basis of wealth, in other words, if not inherited, must be underpinned by a socially recognized trajectory of professional qualifications. This takes time. If one suddenly gains wealth, but does not have 'qualifications' or right surname or royal pedigree, the source of this wealth is suspect. As Nieswand (2014: 408) shows, working-class Ghanaian migrants without education who gain considerable income are unsettling this picture. Chapters 2 and 3 will contribute further insight to these status ambiguities by showing that professional qualifications may not lead to the kind of economic capital that was expected in colonial and early independence era, contra widely held social expectations.

In summary, Ghana’s history of education connects with long-term anxieties and disputes over the rightful basis of middle class social status, which is animated by popular uncertainty on how to overcome historically constituted ‘lacks’ that can emanate from former status of a slave, a colonial subject, or inferior social class in complex vernacular hierarchies that have followed ethnic and racial lines. For the rest of the chapter, I discuss how professional status remains as a matter of moral citizenry in contemporary platforms where new type of professionals, who do not come from established elite backgrounds, grapple with expectations that emanate from multiple sources, including the state and the family. The characters in the upcoming chapters are engaged in similar negotiations over the value of their professional status and the work they do as professionals. In the beginning of this chapter, I described Accra's public culture of professionalism as a matter of producing a powerful imaginary of access to professional status independent of one's ethnic background, among other possible social identities, while warning against the moral vices of quick private accumulation. This transcendence is imagined to effectively happen through the medium of individually performed “hard work,” which amplifies the image of the private sector as the realm of upward mobility. Taking a longer-term historical view aids the understanding of how the locus of these realms may have been shifting from colonial administration to the expanding public sector of the post-colonial state and post-1990s emergence of Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism, while similar questions on the ambiguous value of newly acquired skills and status transformations prevail.

Nation’s New Professionals, part I: National Service Scheme

National Service Scheme (NSS) offers an excellent transition from the world of organized learning to the world of work, and has become the major conveyor belt through which most urban born and educated Ghanaians first encounter and appreciate life in the rural areas, as

> *well as, an opportunity for national service personnel to reflect about their career options. The National Service Scheme continues to play a vital role in exposing young Ghanaians to the realities of life and career enhancing opportunities, and business ideas at a time when they are yet to settle. National service personnel as future leaders of Ghana are* ***a treasured group*** *at any given time; hence, it is essential that their academic training is rounded with practical application. As such NSS always presents unique opportunities to test and perfect skills in areas such as planning, innovation, individual initiative, creativity, strategic thinking and community mobilization need for development.*
>
> - Ghana National Service Scheme Website (emphasis mine)

The Ghanaian state has a long history of social engineering programs that have sought to shape its citizens in accord with national development. These programs, such as teaching national culture and ethnic traditions through state school curricula (Coe 2005), have striven for shaping citizen-subjects who exhibit a sense of national pride and belonging[23]. The purpose of such programs has been to create a unified "national culture," which Kwame Nkrumah's policies of political centralization from national independence onwards also mirrored. Ghana National Service Scheme (GNSS) is one example of state-led efforts of shaping citizen-subjects among the graduate youth. The scheme facilitates access to "the world of work," and above all, proclaims to instil the young graduate with an ethic of "service to the nation." The Scheme pays monthly allowance during the year-long service in a public or private institution. Many participants are posted to teach school in rural areas. This rural work experience is framed as an exceptional medium of moral training as young people contribute their labour for national development.

As one source for the program design, GNSS established close links to the United

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[23] Ghanaian Christians, for example, have been continuously at odds with the promotion of "traditions" in the public realm, which dates back to the antagonisms between colonial administrators and Christian missionaries (Coe 2005). Many private and state schools still teach the syllabus, while "Africanness" has become an attractive label of identity in the "Afro-cosmopolitan" public sphere from mid-1990s onwards (ex. De Witte & Meyer 2012; Shipley 2009a).

States’ Peace Corps, which has sent several hundred young Americans to work in Ghana since the 1960s. Allegedly, Kwame Nkrumah had admired the Peace Corps program during his studies in the United States in the 1930s (Frontani & Taylor 2009: 88). The GNSS program was eventually created with direct operational assistance from Peace Corps. Initially, all high school graduates were required to commit to a year-long service period, while university graduates served for two years. Reflecting the increasing number of secondary school and bachelor's degree graduates in the present, only graduates from accredited public and private tertiary institutions are allowed to participate. For example, Gertrude was not eligible because her diploma was from a small, private, non-accredited institute. James was eligible thanks to his degree from University of Ghana.

My colleagues’ and friends’ experiences of their period of national service, which we discussed in life history interviews, were characterized by a mixture of expectation and high ambivalence. No one dismissed the idea of national service altogether. Upon graduation they found themselves in a highly saturated graduate job market and hoped that national service could offer a route to employment. Most remembered this period as mainly characterized by boredom. The job did not correspond with their career aspirations, they did not have enough work to do, and they waited for their allowances for months. Such experiences have provoked critique of the GNSS scheme since its inception (Frontani & Taylor 2009: 95); nonetheless, the possibility of work experience remains as an important motivator. However, perhaps due to increasing number of graduates, national service personnel can be employed without an apparent need for more labour. For instance, in 2010 I visited a small specialized library affiliated to the University of Ghana where I met three young women and two young men who were working in the library as national service personnel. They complained that they did not have much work to do. Some of them were by their laptops writing job applications, some browsing online. This was their first internship, which the Ghanaian state continues to provide as a specialised form of support for its graduate youth, while harnessing their qualifications for national development remains as the key rationale. National service postings to rural areas could typically emerge as a source of conflict;

young people often call into question the necessity of rural experience. For instance, graduates could use their connections to obtain a national service post in a private sector company, which has been an approved form of national service since the past years. James, for instance, had gone through a number of hurdles to avoid a posting outside Accra. He reminisced about the despair he felt when he was given a placement as an IT specialist at a public hospital in a small town in the Central Region. He was Ga, born and bred in Accra, and did not want to leave the city:

> “My dad said I should go. I said I won't go. Central Region[24], I don't know who is going to feed me there. And national service, you start the program like three month before your allowances start coming. Where am I able to sleep? Nobody cares! I said I won't go. So I wanted to change, they said it's not allowed. But nothing is impossible. So I went to the National Service Secretariat trying to give them excuses why I can't go to Central region. I contacted a school around my area, Labadi Presbyterian Secondary School. I wanted to teach them IT, so they gave me a letter that I can take it to the service secretariat, that this school needs my service. I think I went there several times, they didn't mind me, then later on they said there was some issue with some postings so they have to do a second posting. So I was hoping the second posting is better. Second posting I was rather posted to the North! Have you been there before? Try going there! So, I was put to the Northern Region, also to a public hospital. I said no, but my mother too says that I should go. And she's saying that over there, since people don't like going there, there are possibilities. I said no, I won't go. I don't wanna go…So far away, yeah. So I managed to go to the secretariat, again, and I asked to see the director. When I went in, I was showing him a letter that I have, a school where I want to teach. He said, what course did I do at school. I said, computer science. He said, ok, go to West-Arc[25]. It’s a new private company, foreign company, in Accra. So he gave me the posting. That day was Wednesday, and I am Wednesday born. I remember, I was sitting there and telling some guys, that today is my lucky day.”

Eventually, after several visits to the Registrar to no avail, James avoided placement in rural Ghana and remained in Accra. James's story encapsulates many discordances around the GNSS project, both between him and his family, and within the NSS Registrar. In the era of private capital, the employees of the NSS Registrar mediate job placements to private sector companies, potentially to their friends in such companies, who obtain free, state-subsidized labour as a result. Meanwhile, schools in rural Ghana wait for qualified teachers. Yet what seems like patriotic disobedience and assertion of individual self-interest calls for further reflection. Firstly, many of the postings in rural Ghana were teaching posts. While teaching was a prestigious profession in the colonial and immediate post-colonial eras, both the prestige and salary of teaching as a profession has gradually decreased in Ghana in the past 30 years (Peil 1968: 78; Whitehead 2007: 33, 49). Accra is a place where new types of economic organizations – such as NGOs, the media, and private sector companies – have emerged over the past 30 years, which has in turn encouraged new career aspirations. For James, national service placement in West-Arc was a jackpot – a chance to work in a foreign, formal sector company, which he juxtaposed with his father's occupation as a lower-ranking clerical assistant in a small branch of the Ghana Post Office. James' parents appeared to regard public sector placement (including rural postings) as ripe with possibilities, while James frowned upon these options. Indeed, the mere fact that the GNSS has opened up the scheme for private sector companies is significant, even as these desirable postings remain rare and may be allocated according to luck and connections.

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[24] A region next to Accra.

[25] All names are pseudonyms.

Further reasons for James's patriotic disobedience boiled down to his family circumstances. When he eventually started his national service in West-Arc, James considered himself to be the "first one to arrive and the last one to leave." As the oldest son of the family, he felt responsible for getting a well-paid job in part to "ease the burden" of supporting his two younger siblings' education from his parents. Also, his father had lost his job in the Ghana Post Office, which brought further familial financial pressure. After the service period ended, James continued working for West-Arc for six months without a salary while living in the family house where his parents were struggling to make ends meet. Eventually, he got a salaried position and became the main bread-winner of his family. He later obtained a better-paid, temporary contract in a multinational telecom thanks to his manager's recommendation. He lost this contract in 2012 due to downsizing and had been unemployed ever since. Fortunately, as he told me in 2014, his father had obtained a new job – low-paid but a job nevertheless – which enabled him to pay the school fees of his younger siblings.

Interestingly, in these narratives James did not frame filial piety as the ethical justification for patriotic disobedience – rather, the story about his family was seamlessly woven into his life history narrative. In this sense, James did not frame staying close to his family as a self-reflective ethical choice, but he rather expressed the more mundane desire to be close to the family and contribute to their well-being as constitutive of his moral belonging. James's narratives can be well compared with the kind of explicit statements on ethical self-reflection, and the 'good' that feature in the rich, growing corpus of anthropology of ethics. For instance, Saba Mahmood's (2011 [2005]) interlocutors, who participate in the emergence of the 'piety movement' in Cairo, make explicit statements on what it means to be a 'good Muslim'. Zigon's (2011) Muscovite interlocutors of the drug rehab of an Orthodox church grapple with conflicting demands and narratives of ethical subjectivity that may emanate from a variety of sources, from the church to prevailing public discourses about the nation state. Similarly to Zigon's interlocutors, James also found himself in the midst of competing narratives of what it means to be a 'good citizen', while his own narratives were less about what it means to be ‘good’ than what it simply means to belong to a family. To emphasise this point, James kept on repeating the question, “who was going to feed me?”, when describing his reluctance to leave Accra and move away from his family for a year. Feeding, in this case, can be understood as an index of moral belonging. James did not trust the capacity of the state to “feed” him, given the stereotypes of delayed allowances over GNSS postings, far away from his family. In this case, a rural posting was both an undesirable career move and a jump into the unknown where the sustenance of one's life-force was uncertain.

This raises the question of desire, and its role in the anthropology of ethics. Feeding and eating can be considered as bodily idioms of nurture that featured in James' narrative of refusing a rural posting as a young graduate. While Bayart (1993: 270, cit. in Hasty 2005b: 275) has identified eating as a prominent idiom to describe the kleptocratic logic of post-colonial African state elites as agents who “eat” the nation's wealth, James appeared to ask whether the state is capable of “feeding” him once he follows the orders of patriotic citizenship, and leaves his family. In this sense, following High (2014), the state could be imagined as an object of desire that entails the capacity to provide nurture, but whether the state delivers this nurture is suspect from the onset. What it means to be a 'good citizen' was therefore intimately connected with the pressing question of what kind of nurture could be expected from the agents of state power such as GNSS to flow to its citizens. While the Ghanaian state, through GNSS, continues to frame graduate youth as a “treasured group” whose qualifications can benefit the entire nation, which displays continuity with long-standing state logics of the collective significance of qualifications (Skinner 2009: 482-483), young professionals such as James viewed these logics from the perspective of both career moves and the capacity of the state to nurture as compared with the family. I next turn to another example that illustrates how ideals of citizenship and professionalism could link with local idioms of desire and nurture in a professional training event.

Nation’s New Professionals, part II: West Africa Business Expo 2013

While the National Service Scheme promises to assist graduates to navigate the shift from the world of “organized learning to the world of work,” state agents also played a role in a number of spectacles within Accra’s public culture of professionalism. Key events within this public culture were fee-paying certificate programs and one-day conferences that trained the participants on “professional skills.” The crux of many of these programs was to promote entrepreneurship, but a kind of entrepreneurship that was markedly different from, say, that of street vendors. The focus of these programs was on formalising a notion of entrepreneurship that contributed tax money to state coffers. The programs were typically advertised in mainstream media, such as the state-owned newspaper *Daily Graphic* that was Isaac's main source of information about certificate courses in Accra. The programs sought to attract the attention of professionals, informal sector small business owners, and Ghanaian high school and university graduates seeking to start-up their own businesses.

In September 2013 I attended one such program in Accra International Conference

Centre called “West Africa Business Expo.” The program was organised by Ghanaian state-agencies in cooperation with foreign multinational sponsors (including Google Ghana) and local media partners. The purpose of the conference was to provide a space for learning professional skills for growing a private business, including gaining access to start-up capital, making a budget, and accounting practices. In the beginning of the conference, I befriended Vaida, an informal sector cement seller and single mother in her mid-forties who was looking forward to growing her kiosk-stand business. Vaida told me that when she saw the advert on GTV (the state broadcaster), she immediately called the number. She was told that she was among the first ones to register. When she arrived on site, she recounted how the organisers gave her an immediate fee price reduction: she paid a 50-cedi conference fee instead of 70 cedis. “And plus they gave me food,” she added, referring to a packet of rice, salad and chicken that is commonly provided in such training conferences. We wandered around the exhibition stands in the conference centre, where Ghanaian insurance companies, banks and private universities were advertising their products. The majority of the attendees were indeed young men and women dressed in suits, high heels and neatly ironed shirts. Vaida was a rather uncommon participant, although, I could hardly assume that the impeccably dressed young men and women were themselves formally employed professionals given the amount of graduate unemployment and attention to style in Accra.

Together with Vaida, we attended a session on business growth strategies that addressed common infrastructural issues that crippled building a viable private sector, such as the difficulty of acquiring start-up capital beyond the micro-finance sector that catered to small enterprises, such as market women. The first speaker was an Indian consultant contracted by the government who first acknowledged the “capital gap,” the “missing middle” in the Ghanaian financial markets. This missing middle referred to the ability of the middle-classes to obtain start-up capital loans, which fell between 10 000 and 200 000 Ghana cedis. The consultant was quick to convince the audience of the abundance of capital sources available beyond the banking system in different types of “governmental funds,” such as “export development fund” introduced by the current NDC government. One participant was quick to point out that this fund was "just a name, not operational." The Indian consultant remained persistent: "Look, the myth is that there is no money in the system. There is. There are 50 funds in Ghana alone that have 15 billion dollars. It is up to SMEs[26] to prove yourselves and access these funds." One young man in the room raised up: "So the problem is us, our businesses?" The Indian consultant repeated that it was "up to SMEs to look out for funds." Vaida listened attentively, and took careful notes.

The second speaker was a Dutch female consultant who talked about online strategies for acquiring visibility for one's business, which presented the Internet as the infrastructure that could grant visibility for a business located anywhere in the world (see ex. Graham & Mann 2013). She also talked about the importance of choosing clear company names that could attract global attention and Google hits, which aroused laughter in the audience – Ghanaian small and medium-size businesses typically have names such as "God Will Provide Accounting Services" and "All Shall Pass Ventures." She also addressed the pressing problem of acquiring capital, and warned the audience that they should never accept a loan with interest more than 6 %. Her warnings appeared out of context, given that bank loans in Ghana typically came with at least a 20-30 % interest rate, or even higher. This was a rather clear infrastructural deterrent to start a company without existing assets or family capital.

After two government-contracted international consultants, the third and final speaker mounted the podium accompanied by deep silence in the conference room. He was a male representative from Ghana Revenue Authority, a tax collector. He started by claiming that the institution seeks to be "close to our customers. The Ghana tax system is not as hard as you want to believe. I don't want to blame you, maybe we are not educating you enough." In between the lines, the representative was referring to the well-known fact that many Ghanaian-owned companies avoid paying taxes by refusing to register their companies. In other words, even if the companies appeared rather formal, they rather choose not to "formalise" but remain in the shadows of the economy. His speech gradually became more persuasive in tone: "Believe in us, just like Jesus said, believe in God." He quoted Mark 12:17: "Give God what belongs to God and to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. The government sector, we are trying (…). There are reforms on-going all the time." This use of religious idioms led him to talk about the virtue of honesty: "We are all liars, we are all lying around. Please be truthful. The government needs the money. Be transparent to us, we are also trying. Start-ups, they don't even come to us. It's as if they're hiding. But we don't give up."

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[26] Small- and medium-size enterprise

At this point, somebody from the audience commented that when people find out that the tax money is mishandled, there is little incentive to pay tax out of their already small profits. "People feel hurt when they find out," the male commentator stated. The representative from the Revenue Authority lifted his hands up and concluded: "You attack me on this in vain. I have nothing to do on that. I say, go to the government, they utilize it." Interestingly, although in his previous sentences of the "government sector" he had conflated the state and the government to stand for virtually the same thing, in his response to the audience he attempted to create distance to the ruling government. He essentially evoked a sense of the ethics of non-partisanship that has become a prevalent ethical discourse to characterize ideal civil service conduct in Ghana (Lentz 2014), as elsewhere in Africa (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 2014).

The tax collector's plea – "we are trying, there are reforms going on all-time" – referred to attempts of public sector reforms that the Ghanaian state has been periodically implementing from 1980s onwards (Antwi & Farhad 2010). Public sector reforms – and publicity there of – is one way of convincing global and local publics that the state is attempting to improve its functions. The NDC government had adopted the slogan, "Building Better Ghana" since the 2008 victorious elections (Whitfield 2009), which included an ambitious plan of implementing reforms to all state agencies. Following the 2012 elections, the newly elected president John Dramani Mahama took personal charge of overseeing the implementation of reforms of particular ambition in magnitude and volume. These public sector reforms could be considered as a state attempt to convince the Ghanaian public that they aim to improve their "professional standards." In the case of the speech of the tax-collector, this conviction was followed by the demand of the audience to do the same by formalising their enterprises and becoming tax payers. Indeed, an important message of the West Africa Business Expo as a state-led, public, fee-paying event was to convince the participants to "formalise," while disseminating knowledge of professional business practices through the mediums of foreign consultants and the state's Revenue Authority. The representative of Ghana Revenue Authority further framed paying taxes as a Christian duty via references to scripture. This speaks to the public role of Christianity in Ghanaian political and popular culture, in which scripture verses can be routinely offered to illustrate an issue of political economic importance, such as, paying taxes as the ethic of a good Christian citizen. The tax-collector framed the refusal to pay taxes as a citizen vice, which could also stand for lack of ethical substance as a Christian. The Biblical rhetoric also demarcated a line between the informal and formal sector, by implying that by entering the latter, one also aligned oneself with the domain of spiritual virtue. Whenever the topic of paying taxes came up in daily discussions with my colleagues, they often stated that the tax deducted from their salaries did not give them any return of service. The more specific point about taxes, however, is the way in which both the representative of the Revenue Authority and its critics were voicing distinctive type of expectations. Taxes emerged as the medium through which people encountered the state as a rather tangible, intimate entity to which they channelled money. However, this money was expected to result in some sort of tangible "return."

Let me illustrate this return by recounting what happened to Vaida after the conference. I met up with her a week after the event to accompany her to Accra's Registry Central to register her company. We picked the bus together from popular junction in Accra's Northern outskirts. On our way, Vaida said that the organizers of the West Africa Business Expo had told her that registering her company – formalising it and registering it for taxation – will "make my business grow." She imagined business growth in a very tangible, physical sense: in terms of buying more cement, getting a bigger container, and getting more customers. With these desires at the top of her mind, we arrived to the lobby of the Registrar. Vaida immediately got an enthusiastic-looking young male employee to help her to fill the forms, about which she seemed pleased.

The name that she had chosen for the company was "As If," as the business expo organizers had advised her to use the first initials of her children. The name, however, was already taken and in the database. For a moment, Vaida appeared puzzled and did not know what to do. A young man sitting and waiting for his turn suggested that she could use her father's name. She accepted the proposition, and the name was verified, and we finalised the registration with an employee who entered the details to the data system.

Vaida wanted to celebrate this act of formalising her company by a plate of *wakye*[27] that we shared in a food joint next to the Registrar, watching as the employees made their way in and out of the impressive building. The conference organizers had effectively persuaded Vaida to become a tax-payer, which meant a change of status from an informal sector entrepreneur to a formal sector business owner who had knowledge of proper accounting and branding practices. However, as Vaida talked about her expectations of future business growth, for her, paying taxes appeared less to be an ethical Christian civic duty than an act that was meaningful for other reasons. Vaida quite literally thought that registering the company, namely allowing her business and its profits to be monitored by state agencies, positively contributed to business growth. Whenever I met Vaida the subsequent times, she would ask me if I thought that the organizers of the conference would call her to give further advice. She conceived of a relation of reciprocity between paying taxes and business growth, and expected that taxes could be converted into concrete help from the part of the state. The state, in this case, was embodied by the conference organizers, the employees of Central Registrar, as well as the representative of the Revenue Authority. And perhaps also by the foreign anthropologist met in Business Expo. I could not give answers to Vaida's questions, and eventually, she stopped asking. She had become a tax-payer, which nevertheless did not live up to her expectations of what the state was supposed to deliver in return.

Concluding remarks

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[27] A dish of rice, beans and spicy sauce, shito, typically accompanied by a piece of chicken.

History teaches that citizens tend to rebel when they are fed up with being take for a ride. We saw it on June 4, 1979 and on December 31, 1981. History also teaches that a caring and responsible middle class can avoid these events, or reduce their possibility of occurrence.
-Zaya Yeebo[28] (2017)

In this chapter, I have sought to establish a historical foundation to understand how debates over new skills that can grant persons new statuses have been a matter of complex local debates in Ghana, as elsewhere. These debates have shifted from processes of valuing the skills required to work with colonial administration, such as literacy, to framing professional qualifications as the means of broader social development beyond the individual that has become constituted as the legitimate basis of middle-class status. Further, I have discussed the particular features of Accra's contemporary public culture of professionalism which, when situated in this broader historical context, reveals how the qualifications of citizens have been a matter of continuing historic and present national interest. Next to contemporary debates on state interest in promoting its human capital, ways in which Ghanaians have valued (professional) qualifications evidence a distinctive historical trajectory marked by specific interlocking phenomena – such as, colonial recruitment practices, transatlantic and domestic slave trade, casting of education as enlightenment, and shifting valuations of skills in Accra's urban economy. The reach of these valuations can obviously extend further and include encounters between urban and rural residents, Ghanaian power authorities, foreign merchants, colonial administrators, slave traders, missionaries, and other possible "foreign professions." In the following chapters, I discuss the value of professionalism from the perspective of a variety of actors within Accra's media and service business sector as the latest incarnation of long-term historical processes of valuing particular type of persons, skills and qualities above others.

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[28] Yeebo, Zaya. "Will Ghana's Rising Middle Class Ever Learn The Lessons Of History?" *Modern Ghana*, 5th of October 2017. Accessed 20th of January 2018, URL: [https://www.modernghana.com/news/807578/will-ghanas-rising-middle-class-ever-learn-the-lessons-of-h.html]

Further, the examples of GNSS and West Africa Business Expo illustrate the desires at play when people engage with Accra's contemporary public culture of professionalism. For example, Vaida understood the qualifications accrued through the state-administered West Africa Business Expo as a means to concrete business growth. This contrasted with the explicit ethical discourse of the tax-collector, who rather constructed paying taxes as a Christian citizen virtue. As one perspective of interpretation, for Vaida, registering her business appeared as a route to participate in the nation's wealth, while also expecting help, and sense of protection and nurture, from specific agents of the state that she had personally interacted with. Vaida made a specific point about the food that she was offered, and she expected similar flows of nurture to carry on beyond the program. Making sense of these flows could productively link the analysis with the historical ethnographic corpus of chieftaincy in Ghana and West Africa (ex. Kallinen 2008; Warnier 2007), that speaks to the ambivalent relationships of care, control and access to cosmic power and life-force that has characterised the relationship between traditional power authorities and its subjects. Vaida's experiences of formalising her enterprise – and the desires that accompanied the newly established relationship to the state through the medium of taxes – raises questions on the kind of value that formalising economic action can yield. In the case of Vaida, this value was integrally connected with the idea of nurture, which I shall also explore in the subsequent chapters.

To sum up, in this chapter professionalism as an object of desire has linked with the desire for contact with the state (High 2014: 14), desire for national development, and desire for being close to one's family. While Accra's public culture of professionalism undoubtedly attests as the ultimate performance of neoliberal, therapeutic ethos of the self, and incorporates global flows of ideas about ultimate achievement (Moore & Long 2013), I have suggested that this public culture displays continuity with long-standing public debates on the power of professional skills and qualifications to overcome past statuses, become ‘rightful’ middle-class, and rise up in the complex local hierarchies of the postcolony. Throughout this trajectory, state agents from the colonial era onwards have come up with distinctive ideologies of the moral duty of nation's professionals, and their role in the political and economic progress of Ghana. All the while Ghanaians from the likes of Vaida to Isaac, Gertrude and James have become publics to diverse spectacles of professionalism that promise these skills and qualities can transcend past political failures and ambiguous class statuses, which their daily experiences contradict. To further illustrate how these ambiguities are confronted in practice, I will next shift the lens to the realm of the family, where the value of professional qualifications and professional status was negotiated in integral relationship to the meaning of family as a productive unit.

House at Zongo: interlude

A dusty, pothole-speckled road dotted by passing flocks of goats, small mosques, and open home compounds leads towards a detached house behind cement walls. This is Zongo. A buzzing Accra neighbourhood next to a wealthy residential area, on the opposite side of which is an open sewer next to a washing bay where workers from Zongo wash the 4V4s of the residents on the other side. Muslim prayers wake up the neighbourhood every morning at 4.30am, followed by women's rhythmic *shweez shweez shweez* as they start sweeping the compounds. Mosques throughout the neighbourhood cater to the many Hausa families there. Some Christians also live there in houses behind cement walls. Such as Grandpa and Grandma. They are on good terms with their Muslim neighbours. Every Christmas Day, Grandpa invites the children of the street to have a packet of rice and chicken from his house. Grandma buys their produce, such as *hausa koko* for breakfast and herbal medicine, and pays for a lady next door to help wash the laundry. Mohammed, the son of a Muslim family opposite them in the street, would enter the compound every Sunday morning to help Grandpa wash the car before they take off to Sunday church.

Grandpa and Grandma finished building their house over the course of forty years after leaving their villages in the Volta region in the 1960s. They were both in search for a better life. Grandpa was expected to do so; after all, he was the only son out of eight children, the rest sisters, and he was looked up to by the entire village. Grandpa managed to enter the Ghanaian military as it was recruiting able, strong men to defend the newly independent nation state. Grandma was the youngest daughter of a village chief and the only child of her mother, the chief’s last wife. She left for Accra determined to see life beyond the village, encouraged by her step-brothers who were already in the capital. She started learning English as a house maid to Indian families who were in the country to start up private businesses. “They didn't like blacks,” Grandma recalled, and she soon started working in a food stand close to the military barracks. Grandpa – a handsome soldier with an eye for beauty – took immediate interest in the young woman whose sweet Ewe dialect reminded him of home. They married, moved to the military barracks, and had seven children.

The children were taught the value of “hard work” from early on. Grandpa and Grandma desired to move out of the barracks one day and have a house of their own, a real family house in the city where they could start as strangers. Grandpa secured a plot of land in the early 1990s in the neighbourhood where they now live, which was back then a far-off area. The children carried heavy stones to the building site to build the house. They also took care of a small family farm of the type that the military ruler Jerry Rawlings was instructing urban families to keep for the sake of self-sufficiency. They helped Grandma to sell food in her stand, and at times sold other items around the barracks. They were also busy with the house chores of cooking, cleaning, carrying water and washing laundry. “School was play, home was work,” Edem, their son, once reminisced.

The fruits of their labour were harvested when the family moved in to their new house at the turn of the millennium, after over ten years of building it stone by stone – whenever they had money to buy another cement bag (Grandpa did not trust banks). Lots of work remained to be done indoors, such as painting, tiling and furnishing the bare rooms, but the house was fully inhabitable with an ingenious water system Grandpa had improvised to harvest water any time the public pipe flowed. The house had an open entrance hall, a living room, cooking space with a gas stove, two bathrooms and five bedrooms. Grandpa and Grandma each had their own room. Grandma set up a Catholic altar in hers. The whole family had joined a Catholic church in the beginning of 1990s, a church where many soldiers fellowshipped, when Grandpa and Grandma had also officially confirmed their marriage. The photograph of their marriage ceremony, the couple standing side by side with the priest, was mounted to the wall of the living room.

Their children grew into adults. In mid-2000, Amanda and Margaret left Ghana for the UK and US. Four children remained in Ghana. Some of them were chosen to shine.

Chapter 2

Office Children, Other Children: desire and disobedience in an Accra family

“You say you go to the office, but you have not even completed the building on your father's land!” Grandma burst out as we were sorting *moringa* leaves for the green soup she would later prepare.

It was late 2013. Grandma was talking about her youngest son, Edem, who worked as a producer at a Ghanaian TV station since close to six years. The family had put many resources into preparing him for a professional career. They sent Edem and his late older brother to a state boarding school outside Accra for secondary education, which was more expensive than day high schools. After completing a West Africa School Certificate Examination (WASCE), Edem lived at home for close to two years helping his parents. He described it as “sitting in the house,” a popular phrase for unemployment. During this waiting period, typical among Ghanaian high school graduates, the family contemplated how to pull together enough resources to send him to university. Edem, meanwhile, tried to decide which “forms” he should “buy.” This meant his choice of degree program, which required him to purchase paper forms, fill them in manually, and bring them to the admissions office. Since he was good at drawing, Edem applied to study for a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Ghana, Legon. He had also wanted to send an application to a program of industrial design in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, but Grandpa had refused to spend the money on two sets of forms.

Edem was eventually accepted to Legon, and in the next four years he specialised in theatre and television production. After university, he worked for almost two years without a salary in private media businesses in Accra. Eventually he secured a temporary contract at a new private TV station, TV Central.

Grandma spent six years observing her son going to the office every day and staying out from early morning until late evening, yet she remained puzzled by the mismatch between the amount of work his son was doing and the lack of tangible evidence that the work was paying off. She was not alone with her thoughts and frustrations. Many other parents I knew in Accra were equally confused by the inability of their children to live up to the expectations that came with their position as the professionals of the family. These children claimed that their salaries were not enough to rent their own houses, let alone contribute to long-term family investments. Yet they were "always working," as Grandma bluntly observed. Always working, however, did not result in a desired outcome, such as completing a building on the family land. To use a business metaphor, their investment in their children's education and subsequent support during years of unpaid internships was not bringing the expected rewards.

In this chapter, I discuss the kind of desires and moral expectations that children's professional status evokes in families that occupy a particular position within Accra's social stratification: these families may own a house – an important marker of being middle class – but do not necessarily have any other white-collar professionals in their family trees. They are therefore engaged in a particular project of modernity. Some family members may have attained higher education, professional qualifications and office jobs, all of which have been historically salient objects of desire and status differentiation since the colonial times (Foster 1965). As discussed in the previous chapter, individual's 'qualifications' might travel beyond the body of one person to a wider collective, such as the family. I draw from a seven year engagement with Edem's family, which I connect with young professionals' descriptions of their families in 50 life history interviews – as well as numerous informal conversations – to discuss professionalism as a collective status achievement. It is a kind of investment in children that is expected to contribute to the well-being and growth of the entire family, a proposition which links to familiar themes in West African kinship studies that recognise the family as an entity of growth and productivity (Goody 1976). This chapter approaches these themes through the lens of achieving professional status "as a family," which recognizes that the value of professional qualifications belongs to a broader collective (Skinner 2009: 482). Yet, some siblings may have to struggle more than others to reach that status. Others consider their role to support these status projects as a contribution to the family, which consolidated their position in the family hierarchy.

While the previous chapter discussed professionalism as a service to nation-building and constitutive of moral citizenship, this chapter shows how the desire for professional status – and its realised value – takes other type of registers and modalities of future anticipation in the intimate sphere of the family. This sphere, as I hope to show, is another stage of producing moral belonging that is underpinned by the daily flow of material care – including feeding, money, and prayer – which shapes moral expectations towards children with professional status. Yet, similar to the examples of Vaida and James in the previous chapter – who contested and subverted the moral discourses of state agents – the “office children” of this chapter also affectively negotiate the discordances between their particular desires for the future and their family’s expectations for what their professional status is supposed to deliver. These discordances at times manifest in what I call filial disobedience that co-exists with acute awareness of one’s indebtedness and continued dependence on the family as a source of shelter and nurture. As Cross (2014: 136) asserts in discussing the personal projects and desires of young male employees India's manufacturing industry, anthropologists of economic action must attend to the multiplicity of social relations that shape personal projects within new structures of access to social mobility. In this chapter, I attend to the frictions experienced within family lives, which provide an important angle to understanding the kind of value that professional work is expected to produce from the perspective of the young professionals' family.

I next turn to the trajectory of Grandma and her husband Grandpa, as I unpack the genealogy that underpinned their expectations of children's professional status.

Residents out of strangers: journeys to ‘middle class’

The parents of Accra's young professionals that I worked with since 2010 largely came from families with agricultural backgrounds that had migrated to Accra from villages. At least one of the parents – often the father – had secured waged employment in the capital in the expanding public sector, taking jobs in fields such as health care, teaching and the military (compare Spronk 2012: 65). Mothers had typically worked in the rapidly expanding informal sector as caterers, traders and seamstresses. To understand Edem's parents notions of work and value, it is important to consider their life trajectories. This trajectory can be conceptualised as a process of transforming from ethnic strangers into residents of the capital, which was gradually materialised in the project of erecting, building and eventually completing a family house (Pellow 2003). The concept of a “stranger” in Accra emerges out of the complex history of rights to land ownership in a city where land is customarily owned by Ga-chiefs and Ga families[29] (Pellow 2003: 68). Grandpa's land ownership, as an example, was facilitated by the military, which secured a number of plots in the Zongo for retiring service-men and civil servants towards late 1980s. In the mid-1990s, migrants from Northern Ghana started building their open compounds and mosques in the neighbourhood. Christian families, including that of Grandpa and Grandma, typically built cement walls around their houses[30] , while Zongo itself amalgamated into a multi-ethnic, multi-religious community with its particular forms of co-existence and co-operation.

This process of transforming from strangers to Accra residents was also characterised by residents negotiating the proximity and distance to their “hometowns,” which the children born in Accra encountered in diverse ways. In contrast to Spronk's (2012) Nairobi-based young professional interlocutors who typically did not master their parents’ languages, most of Accra's young professionals mastered whatever was the main language spoken at home, often their parents’ native tongue. Siblings most often communicated in Twi, the language of the demographically dominant Ashanti and lingua franca of Accra. Although Grandma and Grandpa frequently visited their home villages for funerals, weddings and other events, they hardly ever took their children along these trips. Nonetheless, they recognized their “hometown” as the town of their father[31], a place they may have visited once or twice in their lives. The siblings had many interpretations of this state of affairs. On one hand, going to the village could be dangerous, since they could not know ”who was against them” (for comparison, see Spronk 2012: 5). Kinship and blood could act as mediums of witchcraft, which could intensify in urban settings of upward mobility (Meyer 1998b: 336). Nonetheless, Grandma and Grandpa did host frequent visitors from their villages. This urban-rural moral economy was characterized by frequency of exchange and mutual care, which incorporated extended family members. The home village was altogether a distant, yet ever-present entity that at times entered the house in the form of cousins, uncles, aunties, fresh honey and kola nuts, even as Grandma and Grandpa's children grew up firmly rooted in Accra.

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[29] Accra's present-day middle classes find it risky to purchase land as private citizens, given that some dishonest chiefs sell the same land multiple times. The situation has opened an entirely new service business market for individual land brokers and estate agents.

[30] This reflects Accra's urban formation whereby Christians and Muslims live side by side, while there are significant differences in outside architecture (Pellow 2003).

Grandpa and Grandma in many ways succeeded in converting their status as ethnic strangers into that of residents, an essential background to enriching an understanding of the multiple type of motivations that animate projects of becoming middle class in Ghana, accessing professional status as one example. Work mediated their ability to create family property, which they had been planning since starting their family in the military barracks. The house-building project had also involved channelling the labour power of their children, which served as tangible evidence of not only middle class status, but, crucially, their status as full residents of Accra.

Similar to most of the characters in this thesis, the label “middle class,” let alone “professional” were hardly ever consciously used as markers of identity. In the case of Grandma and Grandpa, they rather used the term “Christian.” More specifically, they were Catholics who “understood the sacrifice of Jesus.” Identifying and distinguishing themselves as Christians was perhaps even more accentuated in a neighbourhood in which they found themselves surrounded by three mosques that started morning prayers at 4.30am, and where their closest neighbours were Muslims. Although Grandpa would at times discreetly say that “they have their own God,” they maintained good relationships with their Muslim neighbours. There was, however, one strict boundary: I never saw a Muslim neighbour enter the house. They were received outside in the compound. However, identifying as Christians was overall relatively new in the family. Elyenam said they did not go to church in the barracks. She was the first who had started to go to church regularly and the rest of the family followed around the 1990s. Since then, the family started going to church every week, which became the new institutional structure shaping their livelihoods after Grandpa retired from the military. He found employment in the storage of the Ghana Catholic Church, where he cycled every morning with a lunch box in his cycle bag. The small state pension and the money he gained from church covered the electricity and water bills. The children were acutely aware that this was not a desirable state of affairs. “I hate to see my father cycling every morning to work. At least, we children, we should be able to provide some comfort for our parents,” Elyenam said, echoed by Edem. For her part, Grandma had always worked in the informal sector and in her mid-60s started a meat pie business. She prepared hundreds of meat pies for church every Sunday and sometimes got orders from individuals. The Catholic Church, in other words, provided the institutional structure for their labour after retirement. Their hard work continued, which their children hoped to change.

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[31] Grandpa and Grandma were both Ewes, who follow a patrilineal line of descent.

On a global scale, the emergence of middle classes is often characterized as “boundary work” (Lentz 2015: 24), involving the drawing of hierarchical distinctions between other groups via consumption practices. For Grandpa and Grandma this entailed particular formats that intersected and shaped their house-building project. In other words, rather than seeing hard work for a house as only a middle class project of class distinction, I suggest it is fruitful to identify a wider array of relationships and forces that animate these projects. Since their arrival in Accra, Grandpa and Grandma had been negotiating their status in relation to the indigenous local Gas, their Muslim neighbours, and their hometown relatives who made occasional visits to the city. They also experienced a transition from the state as the primary institutional structure to the church following Grandpa's retirement. This process was (and is) ongoing, never fully completed.

A suitable metaphor for this state of affairs was the “uncompleted building,” the stone structure next to the main house. It stood for this perpetual flux and hope of something yet to come. The couple’s eyes were on their youngest son, Edem, whose professional status was esteemed as the most likely source to eventually help to complete this building as extra space for the whole family. Currently the stone structure was a storage unit where Grandma occasionally cooked with a coal pot, especially when the electricity was cut off and it was hot indoors without fans.

In the next section, I turn to how reproducing and fostering “professional children” was a particular genre of less tangible value creation that extended beyond the nuclear family.

Houseful of Professionals: producing professionals, creating family value

Most colleagues I worked with or knew in Accra's media business world were – like Edem – the only professionals of their families. These professional children in non-professional families were, above all, a result of familial investment. In some cases their status resulted from the benevolence of uncles, 'godfathers' and 'godmothers' who contributed towards university fees and/or supported these children during their unpaid internships. Each ‘Grandpa’, ‘Grandma’ and ‘uncle’ had to make choices as to which biological children to support beyond secondary education. The kind of careers these parents envisioned for their children were often in the public sector, while professions such as working in private media hardly entered their horizon. Next, I will give a brief sense of different educational and professional trajectories of siblings within a single family, in order to illustrate the particularities of Edem's professional trajectory.

Grandpa and Grandma financially supported all of their children through secondary school and their final WASCE examinations, while choices were made between boarding schools and day schools. Margaret and Amanda (respectively, the first and third born) graduated from a secondary day school close to the military barracks and started working in the hospitality service industry soon thereafter. Both Amanda and Margaret were planning to migrate from Ghana to the UK and US. They eventually did so in mid-2000. Margaret followed her husband to the UK. Similar to Grandpa, he too worked for the military. Amanda left on her own to work in elder care in the US. This introduced a transnational dimension to the family, to which I will return later in this chapter.

Amanda's journey to the US was greatly facilitated by Elyenam, the family’s second born, who decided early on that she would work to earn money rather than exhaust family funds towards her own education. Elyenam left school after the basic level. She learned sewing and showed talent as a clothing designer. After years of working for different “madams” as an apprentice, she was able to rent a container in a prime spot close to the airport. As tourists and office workers nearby started patronising her business, she was able to hire tailors and become a madam herself. Elyenam subsequently moved to a rented flat and started supporting the school fees of her three younger siblings, easing the financial burden on Grandma and Grandpa. When Amanda's American visa was approved, Elyenam paid Amanda's flight ticket to the country. “We sat right there, under the mango tree. Amanda thought I could not have the money. But I had! We counted every single bank note, in dollars, and took it to the airport,” Elyenam explained as she devoured the memory one afternoon. Elyenam thereafter became the chief breadwinner of the family for some time, who paid the secondary school and university fees of her younger siblings. This is a common state of affairs in Ghana where women have comfortably taken up such roles, which can be traced back to pre-colonial forms of household arrangement that positioned women and men as equal contributors to family income (Akyeampong 2000). Curiously, Elyenam did not emphasise her role and material contribution to her siblings’ careers; rather, she appeared pleased with her ability to transform her labour into the growth of the entire family, which included the educational and professional advancement of her younger siblings. Whenever she had extra money, she helped to upgrade the interior of the house. She bought curtains, covered old couches with a new fabric, and tiled the home’s rooms, one by one.

The family’s late son, Jonathan, finished high school partly supported by Elyenam, then entered a polytechnic to train in engineering. Jonathan was positioned both to become a professional and also to inherit the house as Grandma and Grandpa's oldest son. After his death two younger siblings remained to work toward the aspiration of professionalism. Mary, the youngest biological daughter, struggled to continue her education after secondary school. She failed an important Mathematics exam in the final WASCE examinations. Grandpa refused to pay for her to retake the exam. Instead of A-levels, which would have opened immediate access to university, Mary finished high school with O-levels sponsored by Elyenam. Similar to many other female young professionals I met, Mary was also told to become a nurse. “Grandpa was just following what his friends were doing, sending their daughters to nursing school,” Mary remembered. Mary, however, was interested in PR, marketing and sales, the kind of professions she had seen on TV. Indeed, the dream professions of many of my colleagues – including Gertrude – were in late-capitalist private sector industries associated with offices, company cars, TV personalities and other public figures that had become visible in the post-1990s public sphere. After finishing high school, she started working as a sales assistant in a supermarket. Later on, she sold air-conditioners in a specialized store. Mary also started her own informal, non-registered signboard and printing business. She eventually registered the company, and printed hundreds of business cards. She listed Edem – who by that time had started to work in the media – as a sales representative who was supposed to market their services amid his other errands. At the time Edem secured his employment contract at TV Central, Mary was having a lull in her business. Edem suggested that she apply to the company. She worked for one year in the marketing department, but the work was stressful and did not pay well. After all these years working in many different occupations, Mary managed to save enough money to realise a long-nurtured goal: a Bachelor's Degree in

Marketing and Business Administration, which she eventually started as an evening student at GIMPA, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration.

Mary considered university qualifications as the legible route towards upward mobility, while the trajectory was far from linear and was punctuated by occasional waged employment, informal sector entrepreneurship, under-employment and academic studies. Memories of similar type of non-linear professional trajectories, and sacrifices done by parents, siblings and the extended family, characterized the life histories of other young professionals I met. Their professional trajectories were often accompanied by some siblings sacrificing educational desires seeing one's parents' hardship. Another close friend of mine, Mandu, who we meet in the next chapter, had reasoned this way after finishing secondary school. His father left the family when Mandu was little, which left his single mother to struggle to finance the education of three kids. As the eldest child with two younger sisters, Mandu said he could not expect his mother to pay for his university fees despite his good grades. The family was also much smaller than Edem's – the extended family, let alone siblings, could not be expected to contribute to the same extent. Instead, Mandu started working in the informal IT sector, became a self-learnt, skilful hacker, and later on, did a few certificate courses that were cheaper and faster than university degrees while still being able to work. Later on, Mandu managed to obtain a job in TV Central, also thanks to the connections of his mother who used to work in a lower ranking administrative position at the state-owned GTV. The value of university education, in Mandu's eyes, was not worth the money – working was more pressing, while he esteemed that his work was also supposed to contribute to the family income.

As another aspect of the family as a site of mutual support towards professional status, which included co-operation between siblings, supporting children to attain a professional status was also considered as a duty towards the extended family. This was particularly pronounced in autumn 2013, when Grandpa and Grandma had a full house. Besides Edem, me, Elyenam and her 6-year old daughter, and Mary's baby daughter who Grandma took care of during the days, Grandma and Grandpa also housed two male cousins and occasional relatives from their home villages in the Volta region. The first cousin was Timothy, Grandma's nephew, who had been living in the house since 2009. Back in 2010 when we had met the first time, Timothy had been a final year student doing a Bachelor's degree in Environmental studies at the University of Ghana. He was a son of Grandma's elder brother, who was a coco-farmer with limited resources, but who adamantly supported his son's educational desires. After his first year of living on campus, Timothy moved to live in their house that was cheaper, and which was also located of convenient distance from the university. He lived there throughout his studies, sleeping on the floor of the living room, as well as throughout the one-year mandatory national service. However, unlike James, his national service did not result in formal sector job, and Timothy found himself unemployed in 2013 alongside numerous other Ghanaian young graduates. He was convinced that his former boss would offer him a job in the Oil and Gas industry, and kept on waiting for his call. Most often, he stayed indoors reading in Edem's room with his simple Nokia mobile phone by his side everywhere he went. Instead of returning to his village to help his father in the fields, he continued living with Grandma and Grandpa, helping in house chores. He kept alive his faith that one day, he would have a professional job and he could afford living on his own.

The cousin from Grandpa’s side, Benjamin, moved in the house in summer 2013. After completing an undergraduate degree in English, Benjamin worked as a primary school teacher for six years, a job that did not pay well. Frustrated of his stagnant salary, Benjamin decided to start pursuing his long-standing dream profession: law. He started reading for law school examinations, and managed to secure an unpaid internship in a private law-firm in central Accra, where he left early in the morning, at 5.30am, in order to catch the first trotro, beat the traffic, and be the first one in the office to arrive. Similarly to the internship experiences of many others, this was the time to “prove one's value,” which required displays of dedication. Benjamin could not have accepted the opportunity of unpaid internship and live in Accra without the support of the extended family that provided food and shelter. He returned back home late in the evening, took his supper prepared by Grandma, and withdrew to Elyenam’s room to read the entrance exam books. Elyenam had given him her own room while she and her 6-year old daughter Ama slept in the living room with Timothy. “He *will* be a lawyer. I had to give my room to him. With that exposure, he can't sleep in the living room,” Elyenam said, as she and Ama laid down on the mattresses under the roof fan, Timothy reading his old university books in the corner.

All of us would congregate around the entrance hall every morning around 5.30am to iron our shirts and dresses after taking a cold bucket shower. Often Grandma would demand to prepare us breakfast and advice not to waste money on food outside. She would wake up the same time as us, the “young professionals,” and make sure we left the family house properly washed, clothed and fed. In addition to lodging (potential) future professionals, there were also other young people living in the house who occupied a different status. Ever since obtaining their own house, Grandpa and Grandma had started taking young girls as house-helps, a form of domestic work that has been an integral aspect of middle-class family formation from lower middle-income brackets onwards (Coe 2016). These young girls typically came from Grandma and Grandpa's villages in the Volta region and helped Grandma in house chores, especially cooking and sweeping the dust from the shared areas. They were not blood-related, unlike Annie who was a distant cousin, and who Grandma and Grandpa had fostered as a daughter. They supported these girls through basic school and vocational training. By the time they left the family, they possessed vocational skills to start working in occupations ranging from sewing to hairdressing and catering. By the time I arrived to the house in 2010, the house-help in question was Eunice, a 16-year old girl who was doing the final year of her basic school. She was a bright student; after persuasion from the part of her teachers, Grandma and Grandpa decided to support her through high school, assisted by money Margaret agreed to send from the UK. After all, Eunice had been initially taken to help Margaret to take care of her new-born twins when she lived in the house with three children before moving to the UK. Elyenam, however, was highly hesitant of the idea, and wondered whether a house-help would really appreciate the help they were giving: “Will she bury my father? Will she remember my parents when they are old?” she asked one evening. Eventually, Elyenam agreed on the arrangement, and took Eunice around “with my own car, my own fuel,” in search of a good day high school in the area.

While living in a family that supported the professional, albeit non-linear trajectories of children, siblings, cousins, as well as the trajectory of Eunice, a bright student who was not blood-related, the objective of this support appeared curious. Why were people invested in each others' professional trajectories to this extent? Why did Elyenam let go of her own room in order for her cousin to have more comfortable living arrangement as he was preparing for law school examinations? Why was she hesitant about supporting Eunice? I suggest that this reproduction of professionals connects with much longer, historically shifting patterns of the family as a site of value creation, and property ownership, in West Africa (Goody 1976). This value creation was integrally mediated through blood-related family members, whose duty was to contribute to the growth of the lineage and ensure the organization of life cycle rituals; that Eunice was not blood-related excluded her, in Elyenam’s interpretation, from such a creation of value. These patterns were also linked with systems of inheritance. Edem's family were Ewes, who followed a patrilineal custom of inheritance: “It's Edem who will inherit the house. He's Grandma's son, after all,” as Elyenam bluntly clarified one day. Given the order of inheritance, that Edem was “chosen” as the child for university education seemed to make sense. Mary, for one, did not complain about the fact that Grandpa had not supported her university education. She said that due to the failed maths exam, Grandpa had refused further support. Academic success seemed overall highly valued in these families, and parents carefully followed their children's grades. Grandpa, for instance, had kept all the school certificates of his children in a special locker, including Eunice's, and proclaimed he would only accept the most excellent grades. While Mary verbally constructed her failed maths exam as the cause for a restriction of access, the order of inheritance, and awareness of who inherits the house, was also voiced as an explanation to which child was ‘rightfully’ chosen for education.

'What are you even earning?': discordant consumption

When Edem was in high school, my shop was doing well. I used to buy his school uniforms, his books, paid his school fees. When he went to university, we all paid his fees. He even had his own room, a nice room. He used to come to my shop with all his friends, to show his sister had a big container. I used to sew him his best clothes. Expensive, the ones made of linen. He just comes and points at what he wants, and I give it to him… Mary didn't get the same. She got someone else to pay the fees… I didn't go to high school. I told myself, let me do something for the family… The Kufuor government took the land where I had my container to build a new Ministry. I had invested everything in that land… My siblings, they don't help me. I asked Edem to at least do me a Facebook page, because I don't know the Internet. They work in an office, they know… These days, Edem doesn't even pick up when I try to call. He thinks I am only calling to ask for money.
- Elyenam, recollections 2010-2014

Since the birth of her daughter Ama, Elyenam had moved back to the family house from her rented apartment. She had lost her dress-making business. From the status of a bread-winner who contributed to the education and professional trajectory of her siblings, she was back to living in the family house, in a neighbourhood that she did not esteem high. She was expecting her siblings to help her financially, after all, she was a single mother struggling to pay Ama's school fees. Yet, there was uncertainty on the material flows that she was able to attract from beyond the family. Edem said he did not trust Elyenam's financial worries, with the memory of her successful business at the back of his mind. Elyenam increasingly turned to her friends, and made errands to offices where some of her former customers worked in an attempt to solicit extra income. She also invented a number of income-generating activities from helping to sell cars her friends sent from Europe to designing curtains and trading Chinese imported men's shirts. She was unhappy that her siblings, especially the ones with a professional status, were not helping her to move forward. In many ways, the professional qualifications of these siblings, which she had helped them to accrue, were not contributing to her own efforts.

These expectations, if possible, even intensified in 2013-2014 when the family was struggling financially. Grandpa's work in the storage was getting increasingly heavy taken his health issues. Their two older daughters, Margaret and Amanda, were struggling in the UK and US, and remittances were not flowing. Lots of secrecy abound over Edem's earnings too. Nobody seemed to know his salary. However, the most worrying to Grandma and Grandpa was his withdrawal from the family church. First he had started worshipping in a Catholic church close to the office, but then, he discreetly admitted that he stopped, already around 2009, because he did not want to pay the tithe. Avoiding regular tithes appeared common amongst his friends and colleagues in the media. He was suspicious that someone might disclose the amount of tithe he pays, which is 10% of one's earnings, and this would reveal his salary to the whole world. Grandma, for one, was increasingly worried of Edem's absence from collective fellowship – she said she prayed every morning and evening for her son, for him to get "closer to God." Elyenam, for one, worshipped in both Catholic, and Charismatic Pentecostal churches. One evening, she said she intended to take the pictures of Edem, Mary, and her sisters in the UK, to a famous newly emerged Nigerian Charismatic Pentecostal pastor, T.B Joshua, whose church in Accra was gaining popularity. She was contemplating that something had happened in the family generations before that "held them back," which a powerful pastor could help to deliver: "I don't like the way things are going in the house. And Edem is not bringing money to the house. No one is asking him money. But we don't know why he is killing himself for some work that does not pay."

This was the main source of confusion: Edem worked every day, and was out of the house every day. Yet, the family saw him "killing himself for nothing." He would come home late, tired, and complain that his family did not understand "the nature of my job," a typical complaint among most of Accra's professionals. Indeed, professionals from these "modest middle class" (Sassen 2013) families could experience profound discordance between these two communities of belonging; families were not able to understand the particular kind of stress, and struggle, that characterised their office lives, which I illuminate in the following chapter. When Edem tried to tell his mother about the “office politics” he was experiencing, which distressed him, he said his mother could not understand the source of his worry. Yet, the family also accepted Edem's job as a valid reason not to participate in family meetings during weekends, while understanding withdrawal from the family church was more difficult. The family was supposed to worship together, and Edem's absence was acutely felt, and asked after by the other church members.

Further, in addition to worry over Edem's religious life, he showed another sign of disobedience. Instead of helping to complete the building on his father's land, Edem purchased an old, second-hand jeep together with his British Ghanaian colleague who subsequently left Ghana back to Britain, and gifted his half to Edem. He had been dreaming of a car for a long time, which was a source of independence, as well as a clear status achievement in the professional world as elsewhere in Ghana (Meyer & Verrips 2001). Young men would spend hours in car mechanic workshops observing and supervising the work of the mechanics to make sure that they did their work well. Somewhat similarly to the uncompleted house in the family compound, the car became Edem's own personal building project. For two years, he would be “pimping” the car, get it sprayed, change the tyres, cover the seats with a new fabric, and save money for a new engine. Finally, in 2011, the car was ready to take on road. Every morning, he would wake up early to wipe the car off dust before driving it to the office. Grandpa and Grandma would watch him washing the car from under the mango tree: “Why did you have to get such a big car. The engine eats so much fuel,” as Grandpa would say. However, for Edem, the car was the ultimate manifestation of the fruits of his labour, much like the house had been to his parents.

In terms of the boundary work and conspicuous consumption well documented in Africanist ethnography (Lentz 2015: 21-22, see also Newell 2012), houses and cars could both be important objects of desire, which in the case of this family, became discordant. The shiny jeep standing in the family compound next to the completed house, almost accentuated the deplorable state of the uncompleted building. While the jeep could be considered as a fulfilment of professionalism's promises from Edem's perspective, it is important to keep in mind that he had initially co-purchased the car together with his British Ghanaian colleague, Jeremy, who had been an important friend known to the family a few years back. Their idea had been to use the jeep to do their own documentaries, which did not materialise as Jeremy decided to move back to Britain. In other words, the jeep had been initially purchased as something more than conspicuous consumption – it was rather a tool of production. Yet, uncertainty of whether the car was a tool of production, or rather "eating" too much fuel, and Edem's "real" earnings remained.

"Go Get Exposure!" Professionalism's broken promises

This far, I have described how Edem's achievement of professional status did not reap the kind of rewards that his family had initially envisioned. Rather, his professional status created divisions and discordances, which I have argued being integrally shaped by the family's on-going process of converting from strangers into Accra residents, which was materialised through the house-building project. The house project was also a project of becoming middle class and doing the kind of boundary work that anthropologists have recognized as integral of middle class formations in a global scale. Similarly, producing professionals can be considered as a similar status project. Nurturing the two nephews who desired to become professionals, from both Grandma's and Grandpa's side, was one aspect of this value creation that incorporated the extended family. I have also shown how Edem, as a professional employee, was exempted from family meetings that often involved monetary contributions - "busy working" was a valid reason. Such divisions and tensions that emerged index the multiplicity of value that professional status could stand for in a single family. I next turn to the issue of foreign travel, which further amplified these discordances.

Since 2010, Grandma had been talking about "sending" Edem abroad. Grandma and Elyenam both esteemed that Edem's professional status was not productive in the sense they had envisioned. After six years working in the office, Grandma and Grandpa had at least expected him to have finished the uncompleted building. Yet, Edem remained secretive about his salary, had stopped tithing in their church, and did not spend money on the family in the way they had envisioned. Elyenam was also expecting help from Edem to promote her dress-making business, but he had systematically started ignoring her phone calls. Grandma said that whenever she or the sisters talked to Edem about travelling abroad, he did not seem interested. “We are telling you, go do your masters to the UK and work. What are you even earning here?” as Grandma would often ask. Indeed, Edem often would tell his parents, politely, that he did not “take delight in travelling.” Similarly Edem's sister, Mary, who was two years older in her early thirties, shared in Edem's reluctance to travel: “In Ghana here, if you are a little smart you can make your money,” she told me back in 2012 when she had just given birth to her first child. Through her elder sisters, she had also heard a number of stories about how hard life was abroad for Ghanaians – Mary shrugged at the idea of taking up work as a cleaner just in order to make money.

However, in the wider neighbourhood of Zongo, foreign travel was a popular strategy and was present everywhere. One Saturday afternoon after the World Cup 2014 had finished, I was chatting with Mohammed in the porch of the family house. He said that he had dreamt about travelling for a long time. He had finished senior secondary school, but with poor final WASSCE results because he had to work long hours alongside to finance his fees. His results, together with lack of funds, had blocked him accessing tertiary-education. To my surprise, he pulled his passport from his pocket and showed a VISA stamp that he had got from the Brazilian Embassy. Mohammed had joined the Ghana Football Association a couple of years back with the hope that he could be sent to Brazil as a fan supporter. His plan had been to stay in Brazil illegally, obtain a job, and gradually start building his own house in Ghana through remittances. “I've been in the house for five years. My brother is taking care of me, but him too, he has three children. How long?” he said. Mohammed had many models of success through migration in the immediate neighbourhood. Since 2010, I had been joining Mohammed for walks around Zongo, when he introduced me to his friends who had their own kiosk businesses – some of them had been legal and illegal migrants abroad, and bought their containers with the money they had managed to save. As he confessed in the porch, Mohammed's plan to go to Brazil did not materialise this time around; Ghana Football Association told him he was “not ready,” like many VISA officials told Ghanaians in foreign embassies. He said that maybe life was better this way. His imam in the mosque across the street had also told him that being an illegal migrant was not right. While Edem, at times proudly, refused to leave the shores of Ghana, Mohammed existed in the kind of 'zone' where foreign travel was the only possible option of upward mobility.

Persuading Edem to leave Ghana can be taken as further evidence of professionalism's broken promises, when viewed through the lens of non-professional family members. While the child's professional status can be undoubtedly a source of pride in itself, this professional status was not rendered meaningful without a tangible contribution to the welfare of the family. Edem was seen as a person who was “always working,” namely contributing his life-force elsewhere, yet this work did not produce what was logically expected: money. The family was above all a system of regulating diverse material flows, from feeding to monetary transactions that extend beyond the nuclear family to the extended family. While money has been widely recognized as a culturally embedded medium of exchange (Parry & Bloch 1989; Zelizer 1997), in Ghana money has been integrally related with mediating the boundary between life and death (De Witte 2003; McCaskie 1983). “Sike Ye Mogya,” money is blood, as a Ghanaian highlife singer Pat Thomas states, which Hasty (2005b: 276) condenses as “constant humanizing flow essential to sustaining the physical, emotional, and social vitality of Ghanaian life.” I suggest that the value of Edem's professional status was interpreted precisely from this standpoint: his contribution to the family as a system of regulating various material flows, which mediated life force for the broader family unit.

In this context, foreign travel became the ultimate medium through which the family could “add value” to their youngest son, and through the son, to the whole family. The value had already been added in the form of professional qualifications, while the outcome of this status was not what was desired. Grandma and Elyenam proposing foreign travel as the next step was rather logical taken that theirs was already a transnational family unit (Coe 2013). The two eldest daughters were in the UK and US and sending regular remittances to the household. These children abroad had been important contributors to the family, and the exchange of nurture crossed national borders – in 2010, shortly after I left the family the first time, Grandma obtained a five-year VISA to the US and flew across the Atlantic to take care of Amanda's first born son, so that Amanda herself could continue working in elderly care and sending money back to Ghana. She stayed there for six months, came back to Ghana for another six months, and flew back to the United States again in 2012. As a trader, she was contemplating further income-generating opportunities and wondered if she could qualify to do some work in the States. This 65-year old lady was thinking of further business activities! I asked Grandma if she ever planned resting, just to receive a burst of laughter. ″We need money,″ as she would say.

Their proposition of sending Edem abroad was nevertheless met with reluctance, which was another source of confusion – why would a young man refuse the opportunity to travel? In the next chapter, I open up some reasons for this refusal, after first considering the broader implications that a glimpse of family life in this chapter reveals about the value of work and professional status in Accra.

Concluding remarks

Look, money makes marriages work; money makes families united.
Money gives happiness; money gives love; money gives everything.
Why then do they call money an animal? Money is not an animal.
Every day I continue to say that money is blood[32].

- Pat Thomas (2003), *Sika Ye Mogya*

This chapter has discussed professional status as a matter of collective family achievement, which in the case of the one family under focus, involved the participation of different family members in different capacities. I have shown that one way of unpacking the diverse type of value that work in late-capitalist conditions of production generates requires placing the professional as part of the productive unit of a family. This approach helps to bring further nuance to anthropological debates on African middle classes, and identifies complex local hierarchies that these categories can incorporate in a given ethnographic context.

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[32] Lyrics of the song of a Ghanaian high-life artist Pat Thomas translated and cited in Hasty (2005: 276).

The uncomfortable exchanges that indexed family expectations on children's professional status shows how presence in the world of professionals is incorporated as part of broader dynamics of West African family as a site of value creation. This affective incorporation involved many frictions, through which both the experience, and value of the *actual* achievement of professional status is realised (Moore & Long 2013: 11). Value, in other words, always emerges out of action that gains its force in relation to longer historical trajectories and notions of 'totality' (Graeber 2001: 49-50), which in this chapter has pertained to family as a sphere of value creation, nurture, reproduction and transmission of life-force through constant flow of material resources.

I have also discussed how professionalism as a middle-class status project links with the family's trajectory of establishing their presence in Accra. While the example of Grandma and Grandpa is a fairly successful case of upward mobility, the other side of the coin are the numerous houses in Accra that remain unfinished. Or, dreams of a house that have never materialised. Let me briefly turn back to Gertrude's family, who we met in the prologue of this thesis. When I told her I lived in a family house, her first question was: “Have they done the inside?” Upon hearing that the house was completed with some tiles and paint missing, she shrugged her shoulders, “Ok, so they are fine.” In Gertrude's understanding, the family of Grandpa and Grandpa, with their fully tiled house, was higher up in the complex vernacular hierarchies of Accra's social stratification. The family had a fully inhabitable house, whereas her own house fell to the lower end of the spectrum, which indexed her consciousness of what “middle class,” or what Gertrude called “being fine,” is supposed to stand for. This hierarchy got even more complex the more time I spent in Accra, and the more markers people included to evaluate a family's or a person's social standing.

Yet, the actual experience of the achievement of professional status, in this family, did not quite meet the expectations. Edem's access to professional status was enabled by the family choices of channelling financial resources and material flows, which he received over several years of education and unpaid internships. Negotiating the value of professional status therefore extended way beyond the individual professional. By embedding the family in the broader neighbourhood of Zongo, I have also unearthed the diversity of experiences and subject-positions that can exist within a single 'zone' such as an urban slum. Rather, zones of "living" and "death" (Povinelli 2011) may exist inside one neighbourhood, and even inside one single family that seems to be "doing fine." This is one tangible product of Ghana's post-1990s political economic trajectory: neighbourhoods where some houses are completed, others uncompleted, some furnished, others unfurnished, some behind cement walls, some with open compounds. Where curses may be cast, and chicken and rice shared. Where some are adamant at leaving, some are adamant at staying.

In this family, work in the office stood for a moral responsibility to contribute to the well-being of the family, which was premised upon material exchange between blood-related family members. This material exchange, in many ways, can be considered as the premise of both the family as a moral community, and what enabled regeneration of life for the entire lineage. Nurturing professionals was one part of this broader process of value creation, in which the completed house provided food, shelter, and nurture. The professionals were members whose qualifications, from a long-term historical perspective, were not only their own property. Their qualifications were the object of desire of an entire family. The ability to contribute monetarily, however, was closely linked with formal sector work. For instance, my own status in this family was largely that of a "student." Rather counter-intuitively to myself, I was not expected to financially contribute. This can only be explained by the fact that Grandpa and Grandma did not yet consider a student a productive individual, unlike Edem, who was working in an office. "Your time will come," she would say, whenever I left some money on her table. To belong to a family was therefore integrally tied to material exchange, which encompassed money, prayer, collective fellowship, feeding, and shelter. This is also the reason why Elyenam found particularly hard to accept the family support towards the education of Eunice – she was not blood related. Elyenam desired to maintain this hierarchy, while she had been the breadwinner whose contributions had essentially pushed her siblings upwards in the urban hierarchy. However, in the family hierarchy, her role as the breadwinner had been her source of pride, which she still sought to maintain by beautifying the house whenever she gained surplus.

Undoubtedly negotiations of family status and distinction play a role in understanding the effort that went into building a house, and sending children to university, or abroad. My objective has been to simply illuminate another layer to these status distinctions, namely the everyday logic of material flows, and the acute experience of the absence of these flows, that also indexed moral disorder. This logic of material flows, which I have proposed to call an economy of flow and blockage, was the base from which Grandpa, Grandma, and the siblings, evaluated the value of Edem and Mary's professional status. Put bluntly, the fact that professional status and work were valued, or not valued, cannot be adequately explained by treating the rise of neoliberal ethics of self-fashioning as the primary explanatory framework, and structure of governance that shapes particular desires and strategies of upward mobility. Nor can this desire be sufficiently captured by recourse to the rise of knowledge economy as a global form that renders knowledge and expertise as valued skills in the labour market (Castells 2010). From the perspective of struggling Ghanaian middle class families, professional skills and knowledge were valued because they held a promise of family growth that emerged from historically constituted ideologies of value and productivity (cf Graeber 2001). This was even more accentuated by the fact that the parents I met in Accra appeared relatively disinterested of the *content* of their children’s work. For instance, I would switch on the TV on Saturday mornings, and tell Grandma to come and see the final credits of TV Central’s morning show that displayed the full name of his son in the national public sphere. She would smile, a little, then ask, “And what is he earning?” The media work, therefore, could only be rendered meaningful by virtue of tangible contribution to the constant material flows that kept the family together. In this family, the office was a distant place somewhere in central Accra, while Edem's colleagues, who occasionally visited, communicated to the family that there were also other communities of belonging in their son's life.

Accra's current social stratification can be therefore understood as a result of diverse interlocking factors that come to shape life trajectories, and its material manifestations. Above all, urban life, including professional life, is a matter of moving in between a variety of zones that involves daily interaction with “non-professional” family members and neighbours. In the next chapter, I focus on the intense forms of co-operation and friendship that emerged among young professional colleagues in Accra. This friendship between colleagues, and the particular ethical demands that became explicitly voiced within struggles and hurdles that colleagues went through, can only be understood taken the backdrop of their family lives that this chapter has discussed. While Edem was recognized as not contributing enough to the material flows in the family, the next chapter shifts the lens to the realm of friendship, which reveals that he was engaged in another, intense form of exchange that was integrally tied to his presence in Accra's new worlds of professionals.

Postscripts

September 2014: Eunice comes to meet me in a café in Central Accra. She has been accepted to the University of Ghana, one of the most prestigious institution of higher education in the country. I hand her an envelope that contains the money her biological family is missing from their savings to pay the first year's tuition fee. “This is from the whole family,” I say, and she takes the envelope, and quickly puts it in her bag as if fearing somebody might steal it. Edem had carefully instructed me to tell her that the whole family stood behind the money. “Otherwise she might be ungrateful,” he added. However, I could not tell Elyenam, as Grandma had advised. I ask her to take a good care of the money, as she disappears to the buzz of Accra's Neoplan bus station to take a long journey back to his brother's farmlands in the outskirts of the city.

April 2016: I meet Eunice in the campus of University of Ghana, where she is a second-year undergraduate student of psychology and information management. “It's so interesting, I am really enjoying it, but it is very very difficult,” she says and tells how hard she has to work to catch up her peers who come from some of the most prestigious high schools of Ghana. She is currently illegally lodging in the dormitory room of one of her friends, because she could not find affordable accommodation close to the campus. I am bringing her a second-hand laptop so that she can write her essays in peace and avoid fighting for desktops in crowded computer rooms. With the grand, beautiful white buildings of University of Ghana campus in the background, she disappears to the Balm Library to study for the exam.

I also meet Elyenam. She comes to pick me up from a roadside in a car that a friend has sent from Germany for her to sell, still displaying red registration plates that signal the car is about to be sold to its real owner and pending full registration. We drive together to pick up Ama from school. To my surprise, she has cut her long natural dreadlocks and wears a down-cut that she covers with a black wig. “You know with dreadlocks, people think you are doing so well. They would never think you are going through any difficulties. So I thought, let me just be, let me just be free.” Back in 2013, Elyenam said she wore dreadlocks so that people would not see her struggles – “They think you have lots of money.” Now, she implied dreadlocks could also prevent people from believing she needed help.

In the compound of a Catholic mission school, Ama runs towards us looking desperate. “I didn't do well in Maths,” she cries out and buries her face to her armpit scared to show the exam paper to her mum. Elyenam firmly starts up the car, looking irritated, and shouts out, speaking in English: “Ama, I've told you Maths is very important!” I am trying to console Ama and say one can do well in life without being the best at maths. “I doubt,” Elyenam says as we leave the school compound.

New Year with Mimi: interlude

31st of December 2013.

“Let's go to your house! That's what we always do in Australia. We buy drinks from the supermarket and have a house party! You don’t always have to waste money drinking in a bar.”

Mimi was persuading Edem and his colleague Kodjo. It is New Year’s Eve 2013 and we are contemplating a place to while away time before Mimi takes us to a party hosted by an African American lady with “lots of interesting friends.” Edem and Kodjo are looking at him under his eyebrows. “Maybe we just go to sit at the Container,” Edem says, referring to a popular street drinking spot near-by in Osu's Oxford Street and clearly surprised by this sudden demand to invite Mimi to his house.

We have just moved out of Edem's family home to a small, rented one-room flat located in the compound of a Ga family in Labadi, close by the media office where both Kodjo and Edem work in Central Accra. We have one small room, which doubles as a bedroom and a living room, in addition to a small cooking corner and a tiny bathroom at the back. Every weekend, we transport food from Edem's family house (Grandma insists on us eating home-made food). She knows my cooking skills are not up to her level, while she is scared we might be poisoned if we eat outside too much. There is no running water, but there is an air conditioner which Edem insisted on buying “to keep mosquitoes away,” but we hardly use it due to cost. We do switch it on as we enter the room with our beers, Mimi having managed to persuade Edem that having a pre-party at our place would be cost-efficient.

We share a few drinks and gossips while Mimi praises the colours and fabrics in the room. We had to do some work to make the room inhabitable. One rainy morning we woke up to a flood in the kitchen – the roof was leaking, which we fixed with a background prop of a TV show seized from the studio of their media office. That, and stones that we carried from a building site near-by. A gigantic, open-air gutter stinks right behind the 12-square metre combined room, kitchenette and tiny bathroom. Our neighbours include our Ga-landlady whose auntie (living in another house) legally owns the land and the house, her Ewe husband who works in an Indian-owned food-processing factory, and their 12-year old daughter. Our landlady's daughter from an earlier union also lives in the compound working as a seamstress by the doorstep. In addition, there are a number of adopted daughters with children of their own, as well as other female relatives and somebody's Grandpa and auntie.

The compound is divided between their blood family on the other side of a narrow water gutter that cuts the compound in half, and tenants like us who live on the other side. The biggest flat is occupied by an Ewe family with two children and a jovial father who works as a security man and likes drinking on weekends. There are also three quiet Nigerian construction workers from Lagos who share one bedroom and two sisters in their mid-twenties, Mariam and Tina who work as shop-assistants a long public transport journey away. I only see them on Saturday mornings when the public water pipe flows and we all harvest water together from the shared tap in the compound. Our wall neighbours are Hannah, her daughter and a newly born baby-boy. They are in the house most days as Hannah goes about cooking, washing, or preparing to attend her Charismatic Pentecostal church where she is a “prayer warrior.” Finally, there is Ibrahim and his cousins who often visit from Northern Ghana. After years of working as a mobile phone credit seller, sometimes on the roads chasing cars, Ibrahim has managed to secure a customer assistant job in Ghana Water Company. Every morning he leaves the compound dressed in straight trousers and a white shirt, praising Allah for the job opportunity.

This is Accra's urban complexity in one microcosm. “It could merit an entire book, a TV show and a movie of its own,” I scribbled to my field notes one evening. That evening, I had been relieved because I and Edem had participated in a ritual that attempted to expose a thief in the compound. We all stood in a circle, while the landlady spiralled a Bible at the end of a string and waited for it to stop. The thief was revealed to be the landlady's adopted daughter, after all.

We hear our neighbours, especially the children's chatter and the music they play as they too celebrate New Year's. Similar to Grandpa, who distributed rice and chicken in Christmas, Edem brought each and every child a Christmas gift. These included paraphernalia such as key rings and notebooks he managed to seize from the office. But now we have closed the windows, put on the air conditioner, and in a much quieter and confined gathering, are following Mimi's unsolicited request. He is an up and coming Afrobeat artist who has been living in Australia for ten years or so. After all the absence, he started to miss home and arrived back in Ghana for his first long stay with the intention of becoming a successful artist. Upon arrival, like many other Ghanaian returnees, he quickly realized that he needed networks. In his case that included the local media. He met Edem through common friends – according to Mimi, they "bonded" fast because their mothers came from the same region and they spoke the same dialect. Edem, for his part, said that he simply liked Mimi's music as to why he started promoting his music videos on the TV shows he was producing. Mimi constantly complained that Edem was bad at responding to phone calls. Edem said that Mimi should never take his "services" for granted.

Mimi's friend and taxi-driver arrives. He is set to lead the way to the party in Adenta, part of Accra's northern outskirts through New Year's traffic. "You just follow us," Mimi tells us when we enter Edem's car.

As we set off, Edem and Kodjo start complaining about the route the taxi-driver takes: "He is deceiving Mimi. Why would he go all this way, he thinks we don't know." Suddenly, without any warning, Edem speeds and passes Mimi's taxi car, laughing with Kodjo. "You follow us!" They decide to take a different route. Mimi tries to call me; Edem tells not to respond. "What is he thinking, driving in front of us, ha! Me, you, drive *behind him*?" I decide to pick up Mimi's call: "Anna, what is going on, tell them to stop!" Mimi shouts out. The guys pull over to a bus stop. Mimi runs from the taxi and puts his elbows to Edem's side of the open window: "*Master*, what be your problem? My driver, he knows the way." Edem and Kodjo pretend they agree, but they will be devouring the memories of this pleasurable diversion for many days to come.

The party is in a big, luxurious house full of African Americans, and Ghanaian returnees, who eat and dance to electronic music. The African American lady hosting approaches us and asks if we speak English. Kodjo and Edem's eyes go wide; at that moment, they decide the party is "boring." They even refuse to eat. I fill my plate, off which they nibble some pieces of chicken. Kodjo does not make a move to strike up conversation with the other guests, who may also think he does not speak English. He puts on his earphones and focuses on his mobile phone, and tells Edem we should leave.

Edem is still assessing the surroundings and wondering if there are any people who we could "talk business" with. Soon he agrees that "there is nothing for us." As we raise ourselves to leave, Edem suddenly returns to the table, and seizes Mimi's almost full bottle of expensive Absolut vodka. We quietly leave the compound before Mimi notices we stole it. "You can't just steal someone's alcohol, and on New Year's Eve!" I scold Edem when we are back in the car. He says the theft is justified: "Mimi brought us to a boring party, he owes us. This is the price he pays."

Unable to protest, we drive again – fast – to the house of Kodjo's mother-in-law. We want to reach the house before midnight to wish Happy New Year to his wife, Fafali, and their two daughters, especially the baby girl whose birth we all witnessed two months prior. This house is several potholed miles away from the main concreted road. Fafali's mother is a tenant and shares a compound with many others; it is similar but bigger than our home in Labadi. It is quiet. Everybody seems fast asleep. We wait outside while Kodjo finds a way to go in and surprise Fafali, who emerges happy to see us. We go inside, quietly, and enter Fafali's room where their two daughters are sleeping on the bed.

Fafali was watching a live broadcast of the New Year's service of one of the big Ghanaian Charismatic Pentecostal churches. The year has just changed, we realise. It is 2014. "Our year of total recovery!" the Charismatic pastor on TV proclaims. We made it.

We leave the compound in the silence of the night and drive back towards the city centre. Several Charismatic Pentecostal churches we pass are having their “most profitable night of the year,” as Edem and Kodjo sarcastically remark. The duo start talking about travelling and the hurdles and humiliation of Ghanaians they hear happening in foreign embassies. “That's why I never want to do it,” Kodjo says with a conviction.

Next he adds: “You know that I don't make friends. I make brothers. I am fine being alone. I don't have to have friends.”

Edem comments: “As for me, I make friends for life.”

Kodjo responds with a story of a friendship that had ceased to exist. “I used to have this close friend, like a brother. When Fafali was pregnant, he didn't call to ask how the pregnancy was going. He didn't visit us.” He continues: “I want to have the kind of friends that even if I have to travel, I can ask the friend to go to see my wife and my children, to make sure that they are all right, and spend time with them.”

We end the evening by greeting Edem's family at the New Year’s service of their Catholic church, followed by sharing Mimi's vodka with a few office colleagues at a small drinking spot next to an empty football field.

Chapter 3

Kin Out of Colleagues: The vitality of work in friendship's dream-zones

The young professionals, whose lives this thesis has already touched upon, namely Edem, Mary, Kodjo, Mandu, Gertrude and James, shared one common vision for the future: to stay rooted in Accra. Sometimes, this involved explicitly devaluing the possibility and appeal of foreign travel. Some spread stories about the humiliation experienced by their friends and family when they were applying for visas abroad. Others went to the extent of regulating and hiding their absences from the city – when they left Accra to visit relatives in Lomé, the impression in the office was that the person was at home recovering from malaria. The regulation and secrecy around one's absence from the city appeared curious, given the wealth of analysis on foreign travel as a popular desire and migration as a strategy of upward mobility for masses of African youth in the era of labour surplus (Piot 2010: 77-95). While migration flows from Africa have diversified to a number of new destinations in the Middle East and Asia (Pelican & Tatah 2009), the centres of former colonial powers have remained as attractive choices (H. Cross 2013). Wealthier elites and middle classes obtain legal documents and take air routes to travel abroad for educational and professional opportunities; however, the youth in the lower income spectrum, such as Grandpa and Grandma's neighbour Mohammed in the previous chapter, leave the continent as illegal migrants in the interests of sheer survival. In that income bracket, migration is often the only hope of achieving upward mobility, given the inability of families to support the educational aspirations of their young people.

In the previous chapter, a particular lower-middle-class family, frustrated by the professional status of their son not delivering up to their expectations, was persuading their child to leave the shores of Ghana and 'add value' to himself through foreign travel. From their perspective, foreign travel entailed the potential of making up for the broken promises of professional status in Ghana. Two of their elder daughters were already abroad and, in a similar way, were telling their youngest brother to leave his office job, obtain visa documents and travel to their destinations, where they would help him to find a place for study. However, the two professional children, Edem and his sister Mary working in media and finance, were far less excited about this option. This chapter takes their reluctance to travel as the starting point, and shifts the lens from the realm of the family to the realms of workplace and friendship. I focus on a network of present and former colleagues, of which Edem was a part, who were working in Accra's private media scenes, and follow as they progress in their professional trajectories. My observations are based on long-term engagement with this predominantly male network of friends and colleagues, which stretches from 2010 to 2017, and I show how friendship between colleagues becomes a key realm for channelling material flows on to the family. At its core, my interest in this chapter is to explore the kinds of 'flow of sociality' that make friendship an important realm of social belonging and generate new forms of political imagination centred upon leading respectable professional lives without the necessity of foreign travel. Such value transformations are embedded firmly in the broader context of the workplace of these people and the ways in which their friendship emerged in the interstices of the private sector formal economy.

Building on Jamie Cross' (2014) notion of new sites of economic production as dream-zones that sit adjacent to capitalist profit-making and produce new types of personal projects and ambitions, this chapter zooms in on friendship between colleagues as another type of dream-zone. After describing the precarious work arrangements in Accra's media industry, I extend the metaphor of dream-zone from the office as a site of production and professionalism to the realm of friendship that extended far beyond its parameters. I shall argue that friendship is an even more crucial 'site' of value creation among Accra's media professionals than is material accumulation, given that, for each of them, their salary amounts to less than the income that a taxi-driver from the informal sector may earn in a month. This leads to particular forms of co-operative work, which, alongside the production of economic value, also entails aesthetic, political and ethical engagement as professional actors. In addition, this recognition forms the base for a critical engagement with Accra's public morality discourses about professionalism, which these colleagues encounter continually, given the low status of media workers in Accra's urban professional hierarchy.

This chapter shows how presence in the world of professionals is not merely another site of cultural continuity with nothing new on the horizon (Piot 2010: 172; see also Engelke 2004; Robbins 2007ab). On the contrary, I show how friendships established in new sites of capitalist production become the realm of sociality where young professionals experience the promises, and pitfalls, of professional status perhaps the most intensively and acutely. In these settings, their work must be conceptualised as more than a practice of economic production (cf. Bolt 2015: 26-27), but rather, as generation of multiplicity of value (cf Bear & al. 2015). Friendship, for one, becomes the key social force organising their work. This generates novel ethical demands that propose the idea that friendship could be an enduring social relation, and a realm of care, nurture and shared ambitions, next to the family. However, neither friendship, nor its 'permanence', can ever be taken for granted. Friends may act unexpectedly, even immorally, against one's desires while, also, they may become the most intimate persons who share more knowledge of each other than would be shared within a family.

Mis-en-scène: Gendered initiation to TV Central

Edem, Mandu, Kodjo, Frankie and Mandu's wife, Sita, had met through work in Accra's private media businesses. They were in their late 20s and early-to-mid-30s. Edem, Frankie and Kodjo worked as producers and editors in a private TV station, TV Central, where Edem and Frankie had been employed for close to six years. Kodjo had recently joined the crew with production experience from a family business. Mandu, an IT specialist, was their ex-colleague, who had left in 2012 for a rival company: the latest media station in town, TV Wonder. He was a skilful hacker, who accessed pirated movies and TV shows online; this made him a constant source of creative programme ideas for his producer friends. Sita had come to Ghana from Benin in 2009 to learn English and further her education in technical production. After a short stint at the state broadcaster GTV, which she left as a result of 'jealousies', she eventually found a job at TV Wonder. She befriended Mandu, who had left TV Central dissatisfied with his salary and the lack of any prospect for promotion. They became a couple, and Sita resigned, a few months before marrying Mandu in September 2013, as part of a collective decision made by a group of female colleagues led by her immediate boss, Barbara. Frustrated by 'office politics' and being 'taken for granted' as female employees, four women handed in their resignation letters on the same day and started up their own production company, Fine & Film Africa.

TV Central, Fine & Film Africa and TV Wonder were the three company 'sites' that were routinely intersected by the lives and friendship of the characters in this chapter. Their days revolved around these offices, from morning till night, as Grandma had observed; mornings started in one's own office, namely, the office that paid one's salary, to make 'one's presence known'. The day could soon continue in another office to brainstorm ideas and source information on any available jobs, mostly done informally for a variety of 'clients'. Then, one could rush back to one's own office to complete scripts and edits, take a lunch break in a local food joint with colleagues from various companies, and return to one's own office for meetings, typing and editing. The day could end in a drinking spot or a small cafeteria/grocery store that Sita and Barbara had set up, both as a business venture and to provide a place for the meetings of Fine & Film Africa. Evenings were indeed filled by a variety of 'meetings' on extra-income-generating opportunities, which happened mostly in the city's leisure spaces, such as drinking spots, car parks and night markets. Although their everyday lives, therefore, crossed a variety of offices, in this chapter, I use TV Central as the centre point that drew all our lives to its vicinity, thanks to personal networks, marriages, partnerships and, above all, friendship.

TV Central was part of the first wave of new TV and radio stations that had come into existence in the immediate aftermath of mid-1990s' liberalisation of Ghana's airwaves (De Witte 2003). During the 16 years of its existence, the station had changed ownership from a foreign-owned media conglomerate to a Ghanaian group of companies and become one of the most popular TV channels. Its airwaves were filled with locally scripted drama series, programme concepts imported from Asia and the global reality-TV scene, and telenovelas from Latin America. The company followed the global business model of private media, and its profits were dependent on sponsors, especially big telecoms, such as Vodafone, MTN and Tigo, which were buying airtime (Thalén 2011). Most importantly, TV Central was one of the biggest media companies that had come into existence as a result of privatising and selling state assets. The company still employed a considerable number of professionals, and engaged a number of young interns and national service personnel in each of the station's departments.

How did Edem, Frankie, Mandu and Kodjo acquire jobs at TV Central? No one was quite clear about how the recruitment process operated but it was evident that people had gone to great lengths to secure their presence in this world of professionals. For the majority of TV Central employees, their positions were a result of one or two years of unpaid labour; this was possible because of the (global) absence of labour laws that would regulate the position of interns. The sacrifice involved in unpaid labour was considered to be a veritable initiation rite: a mechanism that proved one's value and qualified them as worthy of a labour contract. Edem, for instance, had obtained his job as a result of shuttling between different media stations between 2007 and 2009, and working for free for two years. During those years, he had been supported by his sister Elyenam and a variety of informal business. These two years eventually resulted in a temporary contract that was made permanent only in late 2014. Frankie had a similar trajectory, which had started about a year earlier than Edem's did, in the same office. Mandu had benefited from his mother's connections; she used to work as an archivist in the premises when it was still the state-owned film company. Mandu said his bosses teased him about being a 'mother's boy' and he suspected that this was the reason that he had not achieved promotion and his salary was lower than that of entry-level assistants. Kodjo had entered the station in 2013 thanks to Frankie, whom he had met when he was studying for a first degree at the National Film Institute (NAFTI) and was in his mid-30s. Kodjo could jump over the period of internship because of his wide experience of media production in his family's smaller-scale media business. He said he came down to Accra because he wanted to gain experience working for a 'big company' in order to accrue his professional credentials and expand his networks.

The company had a formal regime of governance while, also, it was a social microcosm, that the characters in this chapter learnt to navigate from early on. Overall, a commercial company, such as TV Central, could be taken as a prime locus of "dark anthropology" as Sherry Ortner (2016) has called a theoretical paradigm that frames dynamics of power as the primary framework to explain social action. TV Central company hierarchies are an obvious place to start. I first met Edem, Frankie and Mandu in 2010, when they were still in their junior years. They lived in their family houses, did not have cars and took public transport at dawn to be among the first ones to reach the office. They roamed the city shooting stories, sat by desktop computers typing scripts and left the office late in the evening after commuter traffic jams had calmed down. They were also highly invested in hierarchical relationships with their immediate and supreme bosses, and these regulated their presence and movement in and out of the office. This period was characterised by making sure they completed all their given duties, which, at times, involved sleeping in the office in order to finish the duties of their bosses as well. Edem often reminisced about his junior years as being times when he "still had a boss": namely, a person in the office whose presence he respected. The most important one among these bosses was Rabiu, who came from a Hausa family in Accra and whose Muslim baby outdooring ceremony we all attended in his family house in 2010. Rabiu was a well-respected media professional, who had a master's degree from a British university and who played a key role in involving Edem in the production of one of the station's flagship programmes. 'Rabiu's boy', as his colleagues often laughed, was, nevertheless, a far more advantageous label than was Mandu's 'mother's boy'. Indeed, Edem shared a personal relationship with Rabiu, which was sustained even after Rabiu left the station for a more lucrative position in a foreign company in Accra; they continued to see each other and Rabiu would offer advice on any matters that emerged in the office.

Concurrent with their initiation into professional life, the guys also started participating in the life-cycle rituals of other employees and their bosses; this is a common feature of Ghanaian enterprises, NGOs, churches, state bureaucracies and other institutions. Funerals were the most important events, given that money collections were typically organised in the departments for the families of the colleagues involved. Colleagues usually gathered in the car park of the company early in the morning to leave together to visit the colleague's family home. "At least, our presence should be acknowledged," Frankie said once. "Otherwise, the family would think we are not showing appreciation." Life-cycle rituals were, indeed, the occasions when the world of work and the world of family came together. This entailed its own ritual proceedings; in funerals, colleagues shook the hands of the elders of the family by making a gesture of respect: placing their left hand on the elbow of the right hand that only lightly touched the hands of the elders. These were important occasions that, essentially, required the attendance of fellow colleagues. Also, the monetary contributions to funeral costs could be markedly 'formalised' in the sense that lists of the exact sums that colleagues had contributed were put together in departments and handed to the bereaved families.

Both the participation in rituals and the affectionate way in which junior employees related with their bosses amounted to intense social life in and around the office. Firstly, these hierarchical relationships were significant because they were essential for securing a contract and obtaining full professional status. From this standpoint, these relationships could be considered along with the male patron-client model familiar in urban West Africa (Newell 2012: 74). In the formal sector workplace, these models involved pledging allegiance to a professional superior and receiving 'protection' in exchange for performing labour and favours. However, more than protection or securing one's economic interests, the entry-level producer received something else: namely, advice, which introduced an intimate dimension to negotiating the meaning of patron-client relationships. For instance, Edem was among the first in his family to have an office job. He did not have prior models of what was involved in being a professional, let alone working in an office, when bosses such as Rabiu provided invaluable advice on how to navigate the world of the media office. Also, Rabiu himself came from a low-income background and appeared to understand what it meant to be the 'first professional' of a family. At times, they would meet late at night at a filling station to discuss issues, such as how to talk to people, whom to approach in certain situations and how to ask for a salary increase, among others. Such an exchange of advice connected with Accra's wider urban context, where having an office job was a rarity. Bosses observed their subordinates and, in the case of Rabiu, offered advice accordingly. It is unsurprising that such "vital relations" (Cannell & McKinnon 2013) could emerge in a private sector microcosm where young people were navigating their early social adulthood and spending the majority of their time together in an environment that was very different from their family homes.

Yet, it was equally clear that trajectories towards full professional status, including the prolonged initiation through unpaid internship, were highly gendered. In 2013, Edem, Frankie and Kodjo found themselves one step up in the hierarchy. They had been made permanent employees and were advising the work of production assistants, many of whom were young women, such as Dzigbordi. She had been the latest intern to secure a work contract at TV Central and worked directly under Edem and Kodjo. Dzigbordi was working, if it is possible, even harder than Edem and Frankie had been back in 2010. She would be the first one in the office in the morning and would leave late in the evening, and free Edem and Kodjo from their duties by taking responsibility for directing a late-evening show on Fridays. Her experiences revealed the gendered nature of hierarchical negotiations, which were inherent in the office as a realm of work and involved attempts to transcend gender expectations by putting on what she called the "guy's jacket":

> First when I came I was kind of 'ladylike, ladylike', timid, timid, a small thing. You know the media, they will start teasing you. Like, they see you with a guy and they say, "That's your boyfriend". Eih! Aa, I started crying. People were talking! Eih, that's the girlfriend, that's the boyfriend! And I wasn't actually dating the person; the person was just my friend. And one guy told me, "Hey, are you mad? Hey don't do that oo. If you come, be strong! You no be timid, otherwise people will rule you!" So it means, now, I have to put on a different jacket. You always see me in the office, and they will be like, "*ah!, this girl diyee, she dey behave like a guy oo!*" So that's it; if I go

> home, I am very quiet. But when I come to work, I talk a lot. When I see my guy, *"oh charley, whasup, what dey go on, charley you chop*[33] *make a go chop ee"*. I have that jacket on. So, I can move with everyone, yes, I can move with all the guys in my department, yeah, so I am putting that guy's jacket on. (…) I choose to put that jacket on. Cos I know it's part of the job, and it's going to help me. So why don't I actually do it, yes, but some people wouldn't do that, they will behave ladylike. Our work in production is really demanding; I would say it's for guys. So, you have to be tough, so that you will be able to, like, fill that field.

Dzigbordi was advised by her male colleagues to change her feminine approach in order to better 'fit into' the daily work flow of the office. The office was undoubtedly a space where gender, age, ethnicity, religion and social background could produce multi-layered hierarchies, which people negotiated through the mediums of hard work, style and demeanour. Dzigbordi's description of the 'guy's jacket' points at the construction of TV Central as an overtly masculine space that female employees were navigating, each in their own way. Her efforts to navigate this professional space resonate with similar observations regarding the masculine construction of post-1990s' entrepreneurial style in Ghana's post-1990s' public sphere (Shipley 2009a). Those women who played along with the masculine forms of self-representation were popularly called 'tomboys': the kinds of women who defied what Dzigbordi called 'ladylike' models of performing gender. Tomboys actively sought participation in male spheres of sociality in the professional space, for instance, by speaking pidgin, the 'broken' English. However, to what extent can such strategies be explained by concluding that these women were simply seeking to consolidate their positions in the office hierarchy? Why were these positions important? Dzigbordi, herself, often pointed at her family background and the necessity for her to perform; she had become the main breadwinner of her family after her father had died and was supporting her younger siblings' by paying their school fees out of her low salary. She could indeed conceive the 'guy's jacket' as a strategy for consolidating her position in the company hierarchy; however, this was for particular reasons that connected with her new position in the family hierarchy as the member who had a salaried office job.

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[33] 'Chop' in Ghanaian pidgin stands for eating.

Having said this, Dzigbordi was critical about the labour conditions and the amount of free labour she had to contribute in the course of the gendered initiation towards the status of a salaried employee. Her worst memory was the denial of two things: money when her father died and rice that the office distributed at Christmas:

> They didn’t give me anything when my dad died. I worked over one year without salary, without nothing. And can you imagine that even when it’s Christmas, they are sharing rice, they wouldn’t give you because they feel you are doing your attachment, so why should we. I felt so bad! Even like, oh God these people are so wicked! We are working so hard so at least, show some appreciation. They are not giving us transportation, we are using our own money; we are on our own for everything!

Dzigbordi’s memories of her colleagues’ denial of Christmas rice and monetary contributions to a life-cycle ritual are important details in advancing the key theme of this thesis: worlds of work as sites of moral, ethical and political engagement that shape values of work as *more than* economic production and Bourdieusian status distinction. The flow of money, in this mode of analysis, is not only the end-product of work but a concrete, material medium towards something less tangible: the lived and felt experience of belonging in conditions of late-capitalist production of value. The historically emerging popular desires to inhabit the professional world are rendered into a visceral experience through denial of what people have come to understand as key constituents of this belonging: participation in exchanges of care and nurture, which could be mediated through a variety of materials, such as cash and food. The logic of these material flows as constitutive of distinctly *moral* belonging could, therefore, be exported from the realm of the family to the realm of the workplace.

In the next section, I show that Dzigbordi’s strategies were, perhaps, also due to her understanding that friendship between men held the keys to the most lucrative ventures in the vibrant informal economies that surrounded the media office. While friendship between women could be as intense as it was between men and lead to emancipatory decisions, as in the case of Fine & Film Africa,[34] access to informal business ventures was tied to male circles of friendship and mutual help. While corporate internship attested a new type of prolonged initiation into social adulthood, of which tangible evidence was the labour contract, the next stage was to learn how to ‘use’ the company for one’s own ends. This was an attempt to transcend the material reality of salaries, which hit hardest after working for a few years and realising that the figure in one’s bank account was not delivering up to the wider social expectations of one’s professional status.

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[34] As a side note, many female young professionals evoked a spectre of the intense ‘jealousy’ between

Malleable office: Male circuits of exchange

The vitality and frequency of material exchange was integral aspect of friendship between colleagues, which was particularly evident in the case of Edem and Mandu. At first, Mandu had been a veritable IT loner but had gradually made friends with Frankie and Edem from the entertainment department. The friendship started from a moment when Mandu was going through a hard time and financial troubles:

> I was in a situation. A dark time. For me. That I don’t know whether they knew it. Though probably no one knew but myself, fighting with the little demons of mine. I met Edem. Or, actually, it was Daniel first; Daniel one time came to me that *“hey hey hey, you know what, you like sitting around too much, let’s go and have some drink”* (imitates Daniel’s low voice). I think Club House[35] was the first place that they were taking some drinks. So, I was just watching and, oh, it’s kind of enjoying, kind of soothing, you forget about all the nonsense in the office. And then you can really enjoy yourself, drum, dance, drink, make noise. (…) The next time they came by to my office, Daniel, Edem, Frankie, they came by, *“oh let’s go, oh charley, let’s go to the cafeteria, you know, this is happening, we are gonna do this”*, so we go and sit and we talk and talk. So now, people begun to meet people. But then, Edem begun to open up. Daniel the same but I didn’t like to get into Daniel’s head; because just the introduction is really nasty (…). So I know, okay, you are trouble. You get me. So, I mean, I started meeting Edem, we started talking. And then, one time, I didn’t have money. And I was having issues with the

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female colleagues in their life history interviews – namely, that, in professional settings, it was harder to make friends with women than it was with men, due to competition. This is a rather globally mediated moral discourse about the absence of ‘global sisterhood’ in a world where women try to climb up the ladder and break the glass ceiling within structural conditions of male dominance. Yet, in Accra, these jealousies perhaps also related to particular gendered models of professionalism, and the ambiguous position of a ‘tomboy’, who could be suspect in the eyes of other women.

[35] Usually a bar attached to a large-scale institution.

> management, getting problems. So, I needed fuel in my car. To go home. I didn't have any money. *(long pause)* And, you know, although it seems to be a situation in which I was desperate, I was already calculating in my head what to do. So, I said, okay, I don't expect any of these people to give me anything because I haven't done anything for them, hey, but, whoever will be selfless, then I owe that person a debt of gratitude. So, he said, *"oh let's go here."* And I told him, I have no fuel in my car, I even need money for fuel to get to the house. He said, *"oh don't worry, let's go, I'll sort you out."* I said, ah, it's not like, I can go, he said, *"let's go I sort you out and we go"*. And he bought the fuel. More than, like, what I was expecting (…). So, I was like, I know my state in the office, I don't have much lovers, I know how a lot of people really look forward to, if they get a chance to lynch me they will. And I was going through a situation. So, I was like, this is serious, I mean hey, don't you have something to do with your money, why would you use it on me, I mean your friends and everything. And we will go out, and he will buy drinks and he will say, *"charley, drink some"*. You know like, *"enjoy."* And other time, we go, he will buy the drinks, I don't have to buy any drink, and I am like, ah! Like, why? You know I began to suspect that he needs something. I decided to actually find out that he needs something, because I felt indebted to him for that good deed he did.

From that moment onwards, Mandu started helping Edem with programme ideas while they shared food, jokes and aspirations of becoming entrepreneurs one day. Drinking also featured prominently in Mandu's narrative of how the friendship started: "let's go and have a drink". Consumption of alcohol has, indeed, been recognised as a vital flow of sociality in Africanist ethnography (McAllister 2003; Newell 2012; Rekdal 1996); it mediates relations between persons, as well as between humans and the divine. Mandu framed drinking as the flow through which he entered a friendship network between colleagues. Further, the act of Edem buying a drink for him mediated a sense of becoming incorporated into a sphere of sociality: namely, transforming from a loner into a 'person'. Yet, drinking together did not mean that everybody could relate in the same way. Mandu esteemed Edem as a person with whom he could relate but it was not the same with Daniel, their close colleague who, subsequently, migrated to the Netherlands. Mandu felt Daniel was rowdy and "enjoying life too much". Edem and Mandu, on the other hand, became involved in each other's family lives in emotional and material ways. Edem frequently helped Mandu to fix his mother's small, old car. Mandu also passed Edem's phone number to his mother – if his mother could not reach Mandu, she would call Edem, who would calm her down and tell her he was safe.

These informal circuits of drinking and material help were integral to the friendship in the office, as has been the case in other sites of friendship in Africanist ethnography (Guichard, Grätz & Diallo 2014; Mains 2013; Newell 2012). Instead of seeking to 'purify' friendship of material interest (ex. Simoni & Throop 2014), a 'good colleague' was someone who attended to and contributed financially to life-cycle rituals, who visited when one was sick, and who recognised when one was 'hot' and needed money. Money, food, care and nurture constituted the core moral substance of this friendship. Further, a good colleague could even contribute financially to help a fellow colleague to maintain their status symbols, such as a functioning car. While Edem's family experienced a lack of material contributions, Edem was channelling financial help towards his colleagues, with whom, effectively, he spent the majority of his time.

The other side of this friendship was to be involved in the vibrant informal economy that surrounded the office. This came with its own excitement: *"let's go; you've been sitting in the office too much, this is happening"* as Daniel had said. Indeed, the more time I spent around TV Central, the more visible the malleable nature of the office became. This malleability was integrally tied to male circuits of friendship, which were underpinned by material exchange, while the office became more malleable the more one rose in the company hierarchy. When I returned to Ghana in 2013, it was clear that Edem, Frankie and their new colleague, Kodjo, related with the company in a way that was strikingly different from the one that I observed in 2010, when they obediently followed the orders of their superiors. As permanent employees, they had started using the company resources for their own benefit. Late one evening, I found myself helping them to take water from the company's water reservoirs as the public water pipes in our home compounds had not been flowing. One night, the guys went to defend Frankie's mother against witchcraft accusations from her neighbours and seized heavy, black loudspeakers from the studio. Another form of malleability was to use the media company as a platform on which to make informal profits by inviting to shows surprise 'guests', who paid 'service money' directly to their pockets. Generally, accepting service money was known as "brown envelope journalism" (Hasty 2005b) and media professionals could be, to different degrees, complicit in crime. As one of my colleagues put it: "God knows that I don't have, so he rather gives me a chance to take a bribe. It's like an armed robber prays before a successful deal," he added with some degree of playful irony. Taking 'service money' was, in other words, justified by the notoriously low salaries of media professionals and was public knowledge in Accra. While exact figures were rarely given, on average, an entry-level production assistant earned around 300-400 cedis per month (55-70 GBP) in 2013-2014, which was a period of rapid inflation and fiscal crisis. A producer with a permanent contract could earn around 600-800 cedis (120-149 GBP). As the previous chapter showed, such figures were hardly ever revealed to the family and remained a source of secrecy among colleagues as well.

Friendship between colleagues was the key force that enabled them to use the company as an extension of themselves and their personal resources in rather ingenious, and, at times, semi-legal ways. As various anthropologists considering corruption have argued, informal money transfers are integrally connected with complex networks of social demands and obligations (Hasty 2005b; Olivier de Sardan 1999), which also could index forms of resistance and critique of unfair redistribution of collective wealth (Bayart 1993, see also Hasty 2005b: 272). Daniel had introduced Edem to this informal economy initially. Most often, informal business meetings were attended by groups of colleagues; they did not go alone. It was 'safer' to have a witness in case of any danger or threat. While such informal, semi-legal ventures could raise one's monthly income, female employees were rarely incorporated in these circuits, perhaps because of the sexual connotations that material help in the office could engender. This state of affairs was also causing commitment to the workplace in quite a literal sense; over the seven years that I kept in touch with TV Central, most of the women who were working there in 2010 had left by 2016 while most of the men are still working there today.

Alongside experiencing the company as an everyday microcosm with informal income-generating opportunities that undoubtedly privileged male employees, the company was, however, not always or only a warm, fuzzy space of male solidarity. Dilemmas of egalitarianism were inherent in friendship and in the kinds of intimate knowledge that were shared. For instance, these colleagues never revealed their real ages to one another; they were guessing but real numbers were not given. Mandu was particularly uncertain about age matters. He was four years younger than Edem and Frankie, and he said that they would not take him ‘seriously’ if they knew his real age. When Kodjo joined in 2013, he was recognised as ‘more mature’ since he was already married while Edem and Frankie had more experience of how the company operated. There was an overall expectation of at least some sort of egalitarianism, such as a similar salary. This led to discomfort when Kodjo disclosed his salary to Edem. According to Edem, his salary was significantly higher than his own. He said he had to pretend that he was the ‘least affected’ by that information and gave the impression that he was earning about the same. Just as Mandu had said Edem and Frankie would not take him ‘seriously’ if they knew he was younger, Edem said that Kodjo would not take him seriously if he knew his salary figure. To be taken seriously was, therefore, enacted through the appearance of egalitarianism while people were aware that there were cracks in the ideal from the onset. These cracks could become highly disconcerting – one essentially became aware of hierarchies between relative peers, who, ideologically, constructed themselves as egalitarian colleagues. These instances also revealed that age, and salary figure, were the most intimate pieces of knowledge one could possibly share with a fellow colleague. This pointed at a significantly different type of construction of the meaning of intimacy in a West African workplace (cf. Geschiere 2013: 24), which is premised upon a distinctive set of ideas of what counts as intimate knowledge. At its core, the private sector workplace could be constructed, ideologically, as a realm of egalitarianism where colleagues could imagine walking the path of professional achievement along a shared temporality.

The context of a media company, with its own performances of egalitarianism vis-á-vis salary, gender, social class and age hierarchies, is among the ‘situational elements’ (Simoni &Throop 2014: 10-11) that set the stage for a particular kind of friendship to emerge. It emerged both in the formal settings of work and in the more hidden venues, such as, after formal closing hours, when fellow colleagues fetched water from the company's reservoir and used it as a platform to earn their own profits. Such experiences can be powerful in surfacing solidarity as the force of friendship that glues colleagues together. Yet, it required effort to maintain the ideal of egalitarianism through secrecy and regulation of the kind of information one disclosed. This is precisely the kind of context that enabled friendship to become a particularly dense sphere of sociality in which people could fashion alternative-type of personal projects as well as distinctive modes of ethical subjectivity (Simoni & Throop 2014). I next deepen the analysis by considering the kind of value that co-operative work in these settings could produce.

More than brown envelopes: Producing beauty and quality

"We are supposed to be professionals. How come we live our lives chasing other people's pockets?" Mandu sighed. We were sitting in a pork joint having our Friday treat of peppery, fatty meat with onion and Club beer. This was a typical Friday night back in late 2013 with Edem, Frankie, Kodjo, Mandu and Mandu's wife, Sita: evening production with Edem at the TV station, a programme which Mandu had helped to conceptualise, and, afterwards, hanging out with colleagues and planning new ways to make cash. The fiscal and energy crisis of 2013-2015 was starting to kick in; prices of food, fuel and public transport could rise every day while salaries remained the same. When Mandu and Sita started dating, he introduced her as someone who "likes business" and could help with making money. Mandu had envisioned that, together, they could venture into event management, advertising and other business activities. Sita was, however, constantly frustrated with the guys; they did not meet deadlines and were more often busy roaming around the city chasing after people. The week in question had not gone as expected. "You have to be serious!" Kodjo had told Edem midway through. They were supposed to finish a programme proposal and look for sponsors in order to produce a show of their own. Mandu's remark about "chasing other people's pockets", for one, pointed at Edem's chasing after a guest of a show who owed him 'service money'. In recent months, Mandu had grown increasingly impressed by Fine & Film Africa, started by Sita and Barbara; it was doing well in

Accra’s media business scenes and gaining recognition for the quality of its work and partnerships with foreign production companies. Mandu told his male comrades that they needed to “be more serious” with their own comparable attempts. While Fine & Film Africa was backed up by capital from Barbara, who had studied and worked in North America before returning to Accra and working in leading positions in a number of multinational companies, Kodjo, Edem and Mandu could not yet imagine starting up their own business and that being their only source of income. They first needed to “build our brand”, as they said: to increase their recognition.

Thus far, I have shown how friendship became an important sphere of material exchange and moral belonging, while friendship also pushed colleagues forward in the media industry that was publicly regarded as ‘unserious’, lowly paid and only a short-term stepping stone towards a more lucrative career (Hasty 2005a: 17). Mandu’s remark, “we are supposed to be professionals”, pointed at popular stereotypes about media professionals in Accra’s ‘public morality’ discourses. Although media as a profession had gradually gained more prestige from the 1990s onwards, thanks, in part, to new global Ghanaian media celebrities, the negative stereotypes about the character of media professionals prevailed.[36] Compared with being employed in the professions, such as law, medicine, banking, telecoms and NGOs, working in the media was commonly thought of as a lower-ranking career trajectory. However, the profession was higher in the urban hierarchy than were public sector professions, such as teaching, nursing or police, and, recently had come to incorporate dreams of global success. These dreams mobilised distinctive ethical demands of friendship (Throop and Simoni 2014), which materialised in attempts to push each other to be ‘professional’. While condemning corruption had become an integral aspect of Accra’s public morality landscape, in which ideal professionals were cast as being committed to neoliberal principles of transparency, formality and efficiency, among Edem, Mandu, Kodjo and

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[36] As Hasty shows (2005a), these negative stereotypes date back to the birth of the post-colonial nation, when private journalists were demonised by authoritarian rulers such as Kwame Nkrumah and, later, by military leaders such as Jerry Rawlings, who passed ‘libel laws’ that protected state agents from the media’s revelations while imposing censorship. In the post-1990s’ era of the liberal public sphere, these negative stereotypes carry on in the form of corruption discourses and, in the case of female media professionals, gossip about their sexual promiscuity and indecent dressing.

Sita, professionalism stood for commitment to strive towards ‘quality productions’. Mandu downloaded movies and new TV shows from a variety of TV channels, and they could spend hours and hours watching these shows, learning and taking notes on ‘nice shots’. This learning also had a mimetic element – they could concretely try to imagine how the shooting situation was orchestrated, such as where the cameraman had been standing next to the director. Their striving for quality productions can be taken as an effective statement on membership in the global universe of ‘excellence’ (Ferguson 2002). They verbally set their efforts against the grain of being employees of their office, which they viewed increasingly as a locus of ‘mediocrity’. They started making their own productions and informally negotiated access to company’s camera equipment. One purpose of these productions was to counter the very idea of Ghanaian media as a ‘mediocre’, ‘low-quality’ realm of work where the pay was less than that of a taxi-driver. This also meant surfacing alternative forms of ethical subjectivity that countered public perceptions of media professionals as lazy, corrupt and mediocre. Protégés, such as Dzigbordi, and a younger editor named Peter, were also drawn to these efforts – they would stay in the office late at night, long after formal closing hours, as the group was editing its own documentaries with the company software. “I like what they are doing. It’s something different and I am learning myself too,” as Peter said, while Edem and Kodjo praised and benefited from his skills. The production assistants were dutifully credited at the end of the documentaries, which were, eventually, uploaded to their own YouTube channels.

Producers were, indeed, taking advantage of new online infrastructures and the faster broadband speeds that were available in the city. They also had visible online presence, such as LinkedIn and Sound Cloud profiles. If they were lucky, for instance, if someone from the industry recommended them, they could be contracted by foreign production companies shooting in Ghana to work as production assistants. The cash they could earn in these projects could amount to a few months’ salary within a couple of weeks. The ultimate dream was to be noticed by the likes of BBC, CNN or Al Jazeera and win international awards. Some, such as a colleague of mine, Mahdi, with whom I worked in an Accra-based radio station for a few months, had won such awards by submitting entries to international competitions and was flown to Rwanda and to Norway for the awards ceremony.[37] Kodjo, for example, was writing scripts and submitting them to various competitions with the hope that he would, eventually, win funding to realise his dream productions. With the new opportunities provided by online infrastructures (Graham & Mann 2013), media had become a veritable global dream-zone for reaching towards personal dreams of career success. Yet, despite public recognition that the role of media professionals was integral to Ghana's democratic development (Hasty 2005a; see also Nyamnjoh 2005), in Accra, ordinary producers, journalists and entry-level production assistants continued to be considered as primarily motivated by 'brown envelopes'. Their efforts effectively countered these stereotypes and produced counter-discourses about what it meant to be a media professional in Accra's urban economy.

I suggest that the desire for, and concrete efforts to produce, 'quality' were, essentially, also efforts to produce beauty and vitality as other values of their work. This kind of register of 'professionalism' in the internet-enabled Ghanaian knowledge economy had less to do with satisfying corporate principles of honesty, transparency and efficiency, and more to do with fleshing out a space where an experience of quality and beauty could emerge. The majority of these efforts, instead of indexing the de facto neoliberal therapeutic ethos of the individual self, were shared. Production of personal documentaries drew colleagues together while they attempted to find space in their work schedules to participate in each other's productions. Such efforts can be well compared with observations of workers who seem to be not so alienated from the products of their labour (Bear fc. 2018) – rather, they forge affective relationships with these products, including factory items produced under exploitative regimes of capital accumulation. Accra's media professionals undoubtedly occupied more privileged positions than did Indian factory workers, while similarly, their work under the conditions of Accra's late-capitalist production of economic value for capital owners became also an opportunity to produce quality and beauty, which entailed other type of value beyond private accumulation of profit. Further, I would advance the argument of 'vitality of work' by suggesting that the effect of beauty and quality entailed potentially deeper logics of moral personhood. This effect was observable in the visceral excitement that Sita and Barbara felt when they saw the final edits of their production, and when Edem and Kodjo uploaded their co-productions to YouTube. These are the kinds of detail that are analytically important in understanding the multiplicity of desires at play in Accra's media scenes. I would suggest that producing quality linked with wider ethnographic observations regarding aesthetic quality in Ghana as an index of moral purity (Van Der Geest 1998). While these are undoubtedly global desires, the effect of beauty entailed a particular, morally regenerative force in a context where young professionals were seeking to qualify themselves as more than recipients of 'brown envelopes'.

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[37] Mahdi came from a markedly lower-class background. He was a son of illiterate parents; his father was a goat herder. He first received a government scholarship to a secondary school. After graduation, he returned to the village to herd goats and then 'sat in the house' for a couple of years until his mother managed to pull the extended family together to pay the first-year fee for studying towards a diploma at the Ghana Institute of Journalism. Alongside his university studies, he worked throughout weekends at a TV station, became involved in campus politics and, eventually, secured a national service position at the English-speaking radio station, which, impressed by his hard work ethic, employed Mahdi.

Next, I turn to the starting point of this chapter: namely, permanence as another constitutive of a new type of ethical subjectivity, which these professionals attempted to establish as part of their day-to-day work.

Producing permanence

Thus far, I have discussed friendship as a particular type of 'dream-zone' in which new kind of ethical subjectivities emerges. I started this chapter by discussing a rather counter-intuitive desire among the characters in this thesis: the desire to stay rooted in Accra. This desire was shared among a wider network of young professionals, who I met while working in the media and who appeared to fashion markedly 'avant-garde' social identities (Spronk 2014a) by distinguishing themselves as modern Afro-cosmopolitan, anti-colonial subjects (De Witte 2014; Shipley 2009a; Spronk 2014b): "Ade no go sweep the white man's floors. I love Ghana. This is my country; I would never want to move. I can't travel for more than one week; immediately, I would come back," as Edem's university mate, Samuel, once said. We were sitting in a street joint eating spicy, peppery kebab. Following my question about his reasons for not travelling, he elaborated: “Maybe because of all the business, I may lose sight what’s going on here. And can I eat my food there? I could bring my pepper [along] but I guess I can get tomatoes and onions in that place,” he said, followed by laughter among the guys and girls in the table. Edem continued: “Samuel has the same mind-set as me. I don’t take delight in travelling. Ghana is sweet.” Formally employed male professionals in Accra’s buzzing media industry could indeed envision a horizon of upwardly mobile career trajectories, unlike their peers and elder siblings in the informal sector, let alone the masses of unemployed youth in their home neighbourhoods. But what form did the desire for ‘permanence’ possibly take?

These young male professionals, unlike previous generations of professionals and their parents and family members, refused to accept education and work experience abroad as the ultimate way to ‘add value’ to their substance as professionals. “I can access all I need here in Ghana,” as Mandu said, referring to the online databases of global content, while his colleagues and friends also benefited from his hacking skills. He was equally keen on promoting the idea that a ‘good life’ (Robbins 2013) could unfold in Ghana; at times, Sita contested this notion. “She wants me to travel, to get exposure. But what if something happens on the journey, what would we do?” he said. Unpacking the reasons that such statements emerged as ways of fashioning alternative identities, which seem to go against the grain of foreign travel and mobility as historically salient strategies of upward mobility in West Africa, requires a focus on the distinctive meanings of ‘permanence’ that surfaced as a result. First of all, friendship could be imagined as a permanent social relation that was premised upon a shared temporality of professional achievement. This desire had already become apparent in the dilemmas of egalitarianism colleagues could experience in the office. However, friendship was also entrenched as more permanent than was a labour contract – material and immaterial exchange could cross company borders. For instance, Mandu’s resignation and new job at TV Wonder did not result in a severing of his friendship with Edem. Mandu continued to work for TV Central informally by developing programme concepts and ideas. Edem frequently visited Mandu in his new company and befriended the security guards; they whiled away time in Mandu's office, gossiping about their current and former bosses, sharing company secrets and plotting moves to make extra money. Mandu came to TV Central only in the evenings since he was not keen on meeting his former managers. Friendship, in other words, could sustain the crossing of company borders, and this illustrated Edem and Mandu's desire to maintain their connection despite changing jobs and no longer being colleagues.

This desire for permanence also materialised by fashioning an ideal of continued residence in Accra. For instance, Edem, Mandu and Kodjo could dismiss those colleagues who had left Ghana, such as Daniel. Frankie once laughed: "When he comes back, nobody will mind him. He may think everybody will go singing praises for him. It won't happen. He will be calling us; nobody will pick up." A certain pleasure accompanied the imagery of Daniel arriving in Accra and expecting his former colleagues to celebrate his return. Or, as Samuel declared when they discussed their former room-mate and close friend who had gone to the US: "I may not know what you're worth there but you may think your friends in Ghana don't earn when they may be earning more than you!" Also, they would state that they would not stay away from Accra for more than one or two weeks. Besides missing food from home, food obviously being a crucial medium of life-force, they also talked about 'being forgotten' and losing business opportunities. There was something curious about sharing these stories together, and laughing about the lack of pepper in Western food, that excited imagination and entrenched an idea of Accra as the centre of the universe. And, perhaps more crucially, defied racial regimes of value that proposed true professionalism emanated from qualifications obtained from white-controlled institutions located in the colonial metropoles.

Permanence therefore appeared to index the formation of particular political subjectivities as Afro-cosmopolitan professionals. This subjectivity was fashioned, among other means, by critically engaging with the presence of Western career professionals in the city. There was a particularly acute sense of Western creative professionals, such as film-makers, journalists, sports talent hunters, music producers, photographers, (anthropologists!), and other potential groups coming to exploit the 'content' that Ghana provided for the advancement of their careers. One afternoon, I passed by Sita's recently opened cafeteria where Fine & Film Africa was having a meeting. The group was engaged in heated discussion on the state of Ghanaian content production, which they juxtaposed with Western media producers from CNN, Al Jazeera and other TV stations, who appreciated the 'Ghanaian content' and took it away. Ella, who was Barbara's and Sita's colleague, said: "They come here and get the best stories. Why can't Ghanaians produce award-winning documentaries?" While these statements signalled acute awareness of a global hierarchy of media professionalism, they were also political in stating that Ghanaians should embrace Ghana as the locus of 'rich content': a register of instilling Nkrumah-style national pride as an integral aspect of one's professional subjectivity.

Other registers of permanence also prevailed. Perhaps the clearest occasion of permanence as the desired "quality" of friendship, while beauty could be taken as the desired quality of production, occurred one morning in 2014 when Edem and Kodjo announced they were going to look for a piece of land together. This land was intended as the site where they would start building their own houses. An editor at TV Central had a contact with a reliable land broker in the outskirts of Accra, where they headed together with a fellow female colleague who was also contemplating the purchase of a plot. Edem clarified their shared journey as follows: "It would have been very cruel if Kodjo would get to know that I've got a land, and he hasn't". Next, Edem added that even Kodjo's wife's mother, whom he had met on several occasions, had been telling him to persuade Kodjo to buy land where the family could start to build a house. Building one's own house is perhaps the clearest and most recognised sign of social adulthood in Ghana, as it can be elsewhere. These colleagues were envisioning starting the house-building project together and bringing the process of becoming social adults to an even more visibly permanent conclusion. The mere act of going to look for a piece of land together can be taken as evidence of the desire to enact friendship as an enduring social relation, which becomes materialised in neighbouring land ownership.

Permanence can, therefore, be understood as a distinctive type of ethical value that emerged in the midst of daily work and grounded the friendship to a place. Through speech, one may directly address the category of a friend as one of a 'brother', who is enmeshed in kin-structures, or may communicate stories of former colleagues who left the soils of Ghana and who ceased to be brothers. These stories also dismissed the value of foreign travel in enhancing professional qualifications. On the contrary, foreign travel was constructed as a 'blockage' to the successful conduct of social relations. Danny, who had left Accra, was not guaranteed the same type of friendship as were those colleagues who had continued living in the same city; and who "believed" in Ghana, so to speak. I, therefore, suggest that fashioning permanence as a quality of friendship was, crucially, about fellow colleagues pushing each other to believe that they could qualify as professionals *on Ghanaian soil*. Fashioning these identities was not present from the outset, such as in 2010 when I first came to know this group of colleagues. Rather, these forms of ethical subjectivity emerged after several years of sharing the path of professional trajectory, and material exchange in the private sector company; this was the social context in which to explore alternative ways of being media professionals in a public culture where their 'character' was under public scrutiny. Casting Afro-cosmopolitan subjectivity as commitment to an ethic of permanence nevertheless worked against a far more familiar regime of value in West Africa: namely, viewing movement of bodies, and presence in a foreign land, as the ultimate source of value and social prestige.

While foreign travel remained as the most widely accepted ideology of value in Accra, the young, predominantly male professionals represented in this chapter constructed permanence and continued residence as another source of value. Materialising this value was premised upon the kind of social action that could pertain as much to symbols, objects and resources as to what could be called the *qualities* and intentions of persons (Graeber 2001: 43). In other words, creation of value was not only about the creation of late-capitalist economic value. Rather, I have approached creation of value through the process of becoming a *professional person*, in which the value of both professionalism and (im)mobility could play intriguing, mutually constitutive roles.

Concluding remarks: Dream-zones of belonging

Once we did this new show. After our first episode, the board members liked it, and then they called to have a lunch with us at Mövenpick[38]*. That was my first time going there. And I was so excited: oh God, at least all my sacrifices have not been in vain; people like it. They've recognised that we are doing well and we are working so hard. Also, there are times that I will be left alone to produce, to direct, in the control room. I get happy that, at least, I am able to do something. I can produce something. I can.*

- Dzigbordi

This chapter has described the diverse meanings of work among a group of media professionals, and time-intensive efforts of fellow colleagues to produce beauty and permanence as alternative, ethically-loaded values of their work next to economic value. They are involved in each other's family lives, show commitment to long-term spheres of exchange via continued residence and business co-operation, and envision buying land together and building adjacent houses in the far outskirts of Accra. These efforts cast friendship as a site of intense moral experience that holds the potential for new types of 'selves' to emerge. The very presence of these people in the 'world of professionals' enables them to anticipate that life can unfold in Accra, and they can cultivate dreams of global success through knowledge of new technologies. However, the key here is to keep close sight of the uncertainties of converting professional status into respectable middle class livelihoods, which Accra's precarious media professionals had been navigating. Importantly, these ambiguities involved in the value of professional status also shape the ways in which the desire to stay put in Ghana come to be enacted and effectively incorporated as part of a broader future horizon.

Through the lens of work as mediation, I have considered production of beauty and permanence as part of, but also *more* than, an expression of young professional self-making and middle class status distinction. This is an attempt to combine what Spronk (2014) has aptly called a shift from "modes of production" to "modes of sophistication" in the analysis of African middle classes. Based on my long-term ethnographic engagement with a particular network of young professionals, and knowing them both in their workplaces and in their family homes, I can conclude these two ‘modes’, production and consumption, effectively converge in a number of ways. These two modes, or shadows of Marx and Weber, are two sides of the same coin; young people, even after having accessed the world of professionals, critically evaluate the value of professional status and moral expectations about ‘professionalism’. This evaluation links with precarious labour arrangements but also with deeper ideologies of the kinds of flows of sociality that constitute moral belonging: money, drinking, home visits when one is ill, and shared efforts to produce beauty, quality and a sense of permanence. These flows of sociality are the keys to understanding what kind of value work ultimately produces from the perspectives of the people involved. While friendship indeed became a powerful dream-zone within Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism, I have shown that it also became a dream-zone of belonging.

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[38] A famous five-star hotel in Central Accra.

At this point, let me briefly state that this friendship, eventually, ceased to exist. Despite the intense efforts, material exchange and shared cultivation of alternative ethical subjectivities, this friendship did not become a permanent social institution that could replace the family. These ‘after the fact accounts’ challenge our very understanding of what the anthropological mode of knowledge production can ‘explain’ (see Schielke 2015: 216-220). Towards the end of 2014, signs of breakdown were already in the air. Mandu and Edem had stopped talking to each other. They accused each other of selfishness and malign intent – Mandu felt that Edem had been benefiting from his ideas and not crediting him as the source of his programming concepts. Edem, for his part, accused Mandu of calling only “when he needed something”, such as somebody to buy fuel for his mother’s car. Upon marrying Sita, who was a daughter of an upper-middle-class family in Benin, Mandu, in Edem’s opinion, had become a ‘swagger’, who dressed in American baseball caps and Converse shoes, and was no longer interested in informal monetary ventures. Mandu, in other words, had become a bit like Mimi, whose New Year’s party led to this chapter being written; a person whose commitment to long-term spheres of exchange and permanence had become suspect. Edem was also disappointed about the fact that Mandu had not arranged a job for him at TV Wonder, which he thought was paying higher salaries than was TV Central. Mandu, on the other hand, said that he had “fed” Edem with so much that he had been “drained”. The flows that had sustained this friendship, which could consist of money, food, alcohol and creative ideas, had failed to produce a lasting social relationship. Their lives had started to separate and, according to Edem’s interpretation, Sita was the main person to blame.

Eventually, Mandu began working for a company outside the media scene. Edem started pursuing a master’s degree and planned to leave TV Central. Kodjo and Fafali told me he no longer visited them as he had done before. Frankie had fallen in love with a Ghanaian woman who lived in Italy and was planning to follow her to Europe. The friendship that this paper has heretofore described appeared to have ceased to exist. Permanence clearly could never be taken for granted and I found myself contemplating whether this had to do with the beginning of a move towards a different social status: that of being married and settling down with a family (Spronk 2012: 73-75). But, if even such intense forms of sociality could not transform colleagues into ‘brothers’ who could participate in each other’s families, as Kodjo had explicitly hoped for on New Year’s Eve 2013, then, what was the significance of the past participation in each other’s lives? What had been achieved, if anything?

What had been achieved was memory: a sharp, crystal-clear memory of once having inhabited a world of professionals where one could meet a future spouse and where non-blood-related persons could, even if temporarily, feel closer than their parents and siblings. It was where dreams of global success were cultivated in the complete darkness of one’s bedroom in a neighbourhood dimmed by an electrical blackout and where the only source of light was the phone touch screen showing the latest edits of a new production. But this access to the world of professionals had never been taken for granted. Access could be denied at any moment, as much as the phone could drain its battery and die. But friendship had sustained this access and made it into a tangible reality.

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In the second part of this thesis, I continue to explore the questions about what kind of value work generates under the structural conditions of Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism, and what kinds of social relationships are forged in new formal sector economic organizations. I next shift the lens to three distinctive Ghanaian-owned private sector companies, where I conducted fieldwork in 2013 and 2014, and discuss, in particular, the role of the Ghanaian state, and the new roles adopted by Christian agents, especially Charismatic Pentecostals, as agents of organising work in these new sites. The way I engage with these business companies is crucially underpinned by the questions that emerged out of the life and friendship shared, since 2010, with Accra's media professionals, whose ambitions, joys, dilemmas, dramas, fall-outs and jokes directed my thinking, and my life and research trajectory significantly. This thesis is dedicated to them and their families, as their voices guide my analysis in the upcoming chapters that zoom in on the business of building new economic infrastructures in Accra.

PART II

Authentically Ghana-made phones: interlude

January 2014. Joshua is sitting by the football pitch watching the morning practice of Asante Kotoko team. It is 7am in Ejisu, the hometown of the famous female warrior Yaa Asantewaa, who led the Ashanti rebellion against British colonial rule in the year 1900. Joshua wakes up early every morning because he is a very busy man: he works in the regional ministry as a civil servant; he runs a private consulting venture; he is doing an MBA degree online, and another online master's degree in Theology for his own interest; he organizes business forums and other public events; and he mentors young people in his former university. We have known each other since 2011 when I first interviewed him in the decaying, empty building of the Ghana Media Commission in Accra, where he used to be posted. Since that interview he has taught me many lessons about Ghana, especially what it means to work in the public sector as a young person given the shifting political landscapes and salary issues. I, meanwhile, have edited his private business proposals.

That morning I am visiting a close family I have known since 2010 in Ejisu, who have recently finished building their own house right next to the new training ground of Asante Kotoko. For time efficiency's sake, we decide to meet up during their morning practice as Joshua will be negotiating business with the team manager afterwards. That morning he tells a fascinating story of a company that I have followed for some time in the media, namely, BC Communications. This is a Ghanaian Telecommunications company whose young CEO, Benny, is celebrated for his entrepreneurial genius in manufacturing products in Africa. Joshua starts telling a tale of three close friends behind BC, namely Benny, Chris and Sammy. Benny and Chris knew each other since childhood in Northern Ghana. According to Joshua, they both come from humble backgrounds, whereas Chris had been the more fortunate one thanks to a “godfather” who sponsored his secondary and university education in Accra. Benny, for one, struggled financing his own secondary education in the North – he would come down to Accra to work as a truck-puller during school holidays in order to earn money to take him through each semester, a story repeated in local and international media celebrating his rags to riches success. Chris progressed in his career and helped Benny to get a job when he permanently relocated to Accra. When Chris was hired by a new multinational telecom company that had arrived in the country at the turn of the new millennium, he arranged for Benny to sell phone credit in one of their official stands. Next, he negotiated a promotion for him to work as the main distributor of the company's phone packages in another region. By this time they were doing business together for the multinational telecom, but branching out and accumulating their own networks in the industry. Together with a few other friends they started their own company, called "BENCH Limited", specialising in phone repairs and software solutions.

Around mid-2000, Benny and Chris started getting close to the then-opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC). They won the elections in 2008 led by John Atta Mills, who spearheaded a campaign of promoting Made in Ghana-goods and Made in Ghana-brands to reverse the imbalance in high industrial imports and raw material exports. Chris got an idea: let's start making our own phones and create our own brand, like Nokia and Apple! Authentically Ghana-made phones and laptops, manufactured on Ghanaian soil! They put together a project proposal and approached the government to source funding for an assembly plant.

Things worked out. The government gave the green light to their proposal. They created a stylish brand around the product that would appeal to both African consumers and foreign investors. They brought in their old friend, Sammy, to help with branding. The company, BC Communications, was born. A "fully Ghanaian," privately-owned mobile phone and telecommunications company.

Except that BC Communications was not quite private. The company became part of the global image management of the ruling NDC government, starting from the President himself. When John Dramani Mahama won a second term for the NDC and became president in 2012, BC Communications raised its profile to a different scale. As part of government-led strategies to brand Ghana as an attractive destination for foreign direct investment, they came up with a massive infrastructural project to build Ghana's own "Silicon Valley." The proposal was to construct an entirely new technology city outside Accra in undeveloped bushland that would attract software developers and global circuits of capital. As Benny stated when interviewed by a foreign media outlet: "We need a full-fledged city that can house professionals to be able to do research and development and create things within the natural resources that we have in Africa." Architects from Italy were contracted to design the first blueprints and the project was launched in a grand ceremony on the intended site, where President Mahama was pictured digging the earth to kick off the project. Ghana, now the Leading Star of African Knowledge Economy.

By 2015, the project was abandoned. "It was a scam," Edem and Mandu said. Joshua, even back in 2014, also thought the project was a dead-end, even as he knew that BC Communications and the NDC were hoping for global investors to embrace the project. New problems were also emerging. The NDC government had granted hundreds of thousands of cedis to BC to start a number of other auxiliary projects alongside the assembly plant, such as a guinea fowl farm and an IT training centre. Things got out of hand. The problem, according to Joshua, was Benny. Talking to me, Joshua muses that Benny's poor background had not compelled him to "handle money," so he started spending recklessly. He bought expensive cars, Bentleys and Audis. He also started making business decisions with the government without Chris' blessing. When he appointed a Chinese consultant to take up Chris' original position as the operations manager, Chris had had enough – he left, and decided to partner with Sammy to run their own business. Now the two were building a new venture from the premises of a company that Sammy had started with his wife several years back, diversifying from their core expertise of branding and media to other arenas.

…

"Would you like to work for Sammy?" Joshua suddenly asks, knowing I am looking for a Ghanaian-owned company for my research.

"You mean you know them?"

"Let me see what I can do."

A week later, he tells me to meet his friend Kwabena at Circle, a central vantage point and traffic hub in Accra, so he can take me to meet Sammy.

Edem, Kodjo, Frankie, Sita and Mandu, who are of Joshua's age and suspicious of anything to do with party politics, do not like the idea of me working in a company with such close links to the ruling party. Their worry makes sense. Edem, Frankie and Kodjo had often gossiped about their managers and co-workers at TV Central who had proclaimed their support for either NDC or NPP when the company was still owned by an Asian group. The Asian managers were in Ghana for profit, not politics, so they did not care. However, the employees had been targeted in 2012 when the TV station changed ownership to a Ghanaian group of companies known for its support of the NDC. The NPP supporters were either downsized, or removed from positions of influence, while NDC-branded employees were approached for support. Assumptions of party support could also be drawn from the employee's ethnic background, given the popular stereotypes about NDC voters as Ewe and Northerners, and NPP supporters as the demographically dominant Ashanti. Edem stated he did not want to play such games. He desired a different type of career. When I tell them I am to work in a company that appears to have something to do with BC Communications, they warn me of staying away from politics. “Be careful,” Edem says the morning I set off.

Chapter 4

Mafia Meets a Man of God: vital flows in a political enterprise

Introduction: private sector, patronage, 'professionalism'

Crony capitalism has dominated academic debates on post-colonial African private sector development (Taylor 2012: 5-9). A wide-spread assumption prevails that there is no genuine, formal private sector in Africa, due to a significant degree of state intervention with wider redistributive effects – such as hindering structural transformation of the economy, as governments lack long-term vision and hand out lucrative projects to their own shadow companies and friends, ″cronies,″ in a system of competitive clientelism (Whitfield 2011ab). The tale of BC Communications seems to tell the same story. Since independence, the Ghanaian state has been recognized for nurturing a class of political patrons and competitive clients who benefit from connections to agents of the state. These connections can take various forms, from grants, contracts, private-public-partnerships and tax exemptions to expediting the process of acquiring legal permits (Whitfield 2011a). In Ghana's political economic context domestic capitalist institutions are, due to various interlocking historical reasons (Whitfield 2011a: 12-14), far less numerous than the infrastructures created by political parties. As a result, domestic capitalists have historically played the role of competitive clients and ″foot soldiers″ who seek access to the nation's wealth in return for their party loyalty. Some even end up pursuing successful and often lucrative political careers parallel to their business careers.

Political patron-client networks were also part and parcel of Accra's private media business scene. Such networks could provide access to a particular type of world of professionals, in which one's professional career exists in close proximity to a political party. Yet, political careers have also emerged as objects of moral scrutiny in urban public culture, including in the press where debates over journalistic independence from political agenda-setting have intensified following the liberalisation of the public sphere (Hasty 2005a: 120-122). These debates extend to the wider realm of knowledge economy businesses, including media production. People gossiped about marriages, lovers and other forms of material and intimate exchange that tied seemingly "private" production companies to political patron-client networks. The young media professionals seen in the previous chapters frowned upon the idea of pairing their professional ambitions with a political career. Many other colleagues and friends of mine, from young to middle-aged Ghanaians working as private sector employees, to public sector civil servants and entrepreneurs in other industries, stated that political careers were prone to regime changes and hence were not sustainable. Further, political careers, despite the prospect of riches extracted from state coffers, could turn out dangerous. Rumours of professionals, both in media and other industries, who had been killed due to jealousies and "political games" routinely circulated in office corridors, market places, churches and other sites of urban everyday life. Charismatic Pentecostal pastors and public figures further amplified such imagery by persuading their audiences to build a career that was driven by their Christian duty to pursue excellence and ambition, instead of pairing one's inner ambition with that of political power holders.

…

In the second part of this thesis, I continue interrogating forms of social relations, co-operative work and value creation among Accra's professionals, and scale up the desire for professionalism from the realm of family and friendships to the level of running business institutions. I first zoom into a company I call Mepex, whose core expertise was advertising and media management. Mepex is an illustrative case study given that its leaders, Sammy and Chris, had been and were still active participants to political patron-client networks. Yet the company was also a stage for a diversity of other characters, career ambitions and desires that routinely collided and shaped both their entrepreneurial practice and their categories and values of work. This diversity of characters was perhaps particularly pronounced during my fieldwork with the company in 2014, marked as it was by Ghana's latest fiscal and energy crisis (Yunger 2016). Media businesses, alongside other businesses, were struggling as corporations and broadcast stations were not investing in new media products. Moreover, Sammy and Chris also found themselves in a less favourable position vis-à-vis the NDC government, due to personal disagreements with Benny, who was leading BC Communications. These factors combined led Sammy to employ a number of new faces, including me and a devout Charismatic Pentecostal marketing manager, Elikem, in the business. By considering a period when political patronage was, at least temporarily, less lucrative, this chapter sheds new light on political enterprises as workplaces shaped by a wide range of social relations that connect with but also extend beyond negotiating proximity to the Ghanaian state.

Throughout the second part of this thesis, I extend the notion of body social (Comaroff 1985) to analyse everyday flows of sociality in media workplaces, where diverse vernacular idioms of productivity and causality shaped both the conduct of social relations and ideologies of productivity. I suggest that such idioms are important ethnographic examples for theorising alternative cultural logics of corporate productivity in Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism, a suggestion that runs throughout the remaining chapters. In the case of Mepex, I shall consider the office as a site shaped by the company's kinship origins, history of political patronage and new strategies required to succeed in Ghana's post-1990s business-driven private media sector. As one intriguing aspect of these negotiations, similarly to the previous chapter, I highlight the work that goes into materialising the desire to be recognised as a professional business entity. This work involves considering oneself, and one's bosses and colleagues, as *more* than political patrons, while it also involves rather playful negotiation over each other’s' integrity, and virtue, as professionals. I will illustrate this negotiation by zooming in on how Sammy, the chief political patron, Elikem, a former journalist and Charismatic Pentecostal believer outside the political circles, and Aba, an ambitious, career-driven young media professional, negotiated their at times discordant career ambitions. This kind of cultural work can be fruitfully conceptualised as a practice of what Kondo (1990: 74) calls ”crafting selves” in the workplace. I show how the characters in this chapter were crafting these selves together, which involved producing mutual awareness of the kind of vital flows that enabled the company to operate.

NGO-disguise: the political economy of the office

Joshua's friend, Kwabena, who was a young man in his late twenties working for Sammy, met me on a hot afternoon in Central Accra. We took a shared taxi to Sammy's office for an interview. The ″office″ looked like a residential house, with a couple of cars in the yard and a terrace. There was no signboard advertising the company outside. The only artefact that could betray that business activity was taking place on these premises was a small advertisement for men's spray deodorants in the yard. As we entered the lobby through a heavy, brand new looking door, the place turned out to be a small office, after all. There were comfortable couches, a flat screen TV and a young female receptionist sitting in the reception booth. Above the reception booth, a certificate was displayed in a golden frame, stating that the office was a ″Chris Yakubu Foundation.″ At the back of the space five young employees, including another young woman, were sitting behind computer screens. Kwabena showed me the way to meet Sammy. In a luminous, spacious personal office two men were sitting by the leather couches and laughing as I entered. One of them was dressed casually in jeans and t-shirt, while the other one was wearing a smart white-collar shirt and black straight trousers. They welcomed me, and the smartly dressed gentleman, who I first assumed was Sammy, started by asking, in Twi, if I knew any Twi. I responded in Twi, and both of them exclaimed, 'Eih!' The casually dressed gentleman welcomed me to the company and asked me to sit down next to him.

The man in jeans and t-shirt turned out to be Sammy, the boss, while his smartly dressed partner was Oscar, who was his close friend and contact with the NDC. Chris was not around as he was mainly responsible for the import-export side of the business, and spent the majority of his time outside the office. At the time of my interview, there was a box of skin lightening creams manufactured in Ivory Coast lying in the corner, which Sammy and Oscar had been laughing about. "We are the media mafia of Ghana,″ Sammy stated by way of introduction. “If you know any foreign company who wants to enter the Ghanaian market, tell me, because we have all the contacts to the Ghana Standards Board, the media, we get the permits and advertising done very fast.” He grinned: “If they gave the advertising deal to any other company, I would get to know, and their life would be difficult.” Puzzled by all the business happening inside these walls, including an NGO, imports, and a media mafia, I managed to recompose myself as Sammy asked about my ”business in Ghana.” I told him about my research interest in young professionals and Ghanaian enterprises. He started talking about a new venture he was starting, namely, a real estate company. He was looking for foreign investors to develop the thousands of acres of land he had purchased in the far outskirts of Accra. My main job, however, as he announced I had already got the job, was to assist with the media side of his business, namely marketing and advertising that operated in the same premises. As I was about to leave for a two-week trip to Finland, Sammy got excited: “So your first task is to find me an investor in Finland!”

Indeed, Sammy had a dream of building Ghana's biggest real estate empire. Kwabena had been hired to design the buildings, the streets and shopping malls that would cater for the needs of the residents. He wanted to build what he called “affordable housing” that Ghanaian middle classes could access, contrary to the kind of luxury gated communities built by foreign capital speculators. Sammy marvelled that his concept was entirely different to other real estate companies: “Others, they build houses. I want to build a whole city. It will have a long street like Oxford Street[39] with shops lined up, coffee shops, everything.” As I expressed my gratitude for being able to work with them, he said ”You never know what this brings forth”, and added that I could be of great help finding foreign investment and valuable contacts. As we were about to finish, Sammy asked, looking at me under his eyebrows: “Do you drink? Because we drink a lot. In fact, most business takes place outside in the drinking spot. You know? Hardly any here in the office.” (I said I am used to drinking spots.). Next, he asked if I drive. He was disappointed to hear I did not. He said that if I go to meet a client in a *trotro*, “I won't entrust you with a deal worth more than 10 000 Ghana cedis.” Neither was he happy with my simple Nokia phone and told me never to show it to clients.

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[39] I assume Sammy was referring to the Oxford Street located in Accra, namely a long street characterized as the hub of transnational connectivity in Accra (see Quayson 2014).

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A job interview with Sammy and an NDC party official discussing the potential of attracting foreign direct investment from Finland speaks to the wider social infrastructure that had come to surround the Mepex office as a result of Sammy's professional trajectory. This infrastructure became gradually more visible during my first month as a “research analyst,” as stated on the stack of business cards I was eventually given. Sammy was born to an Ashanti family in a rural village in Eastern region far from the centres of economic and political elites. He learnt entrepreneurship through his mother's soap-making business, which brought primary income to the family. He hardly talked about his father, but rather praised his mother, as well as his maternal uncle,[40] who lived in the same village. Sammy had been supported through high school by the whole extended family, which led to a diploma in accounting. Subsequently he worked as an accountant for a private company for several years, which, in his words, made him determined to become an entrepreneur. This was early 2000, when Ghana had witnessed a peaceful transition of power from J.J. Rawlings' NDC to the opposition party NPP, the economy was growing, and private entrepreneurship increasingly became fashioned as a possibility in the liberalising public sphere (Shipley 2009a: 661).

Then, Sammy met Elizabeth. She was a media producer and a fearless documentarian. As young, aspiring producers, they started touring Ghana together and filming cultural festivals. They sold their documentaries to the state broadcaster, GTV, and to the new private media stations that were buying content from local media producers. They married, diversified their expertise to advertising and marketing, and started their own production company, True Colours Media. Mepex came into existence as a business outlet that hosted Sammy's business meetings, and where new adverts and products were conceptualised, while True Colours was located a ten-minute drive away and remained responsible for post-production.[41]

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[40] Indeed, Sammy traced his inheritance through his mother, following Ashanti matrilineal descent.

[41] As to how they acquired start-up capital to, for instance, secure land and build their two offices, I did not explicitly ask. I assume, however, that Elizabeth played a key role in the beginning of the business, given that she came from a wealthier background than Sammy.

The company, in other words, had its origins in the marriage and shared ambitions of Sammy and Elizabeth, which I shall return to later. During my first days there, it became clear that although they looked like small formal companies with a lobby, offices, desks, and a receptionist, both Mepex and True Colours Media were operating in the informal sector. Sammy explained that he did not want to mount a signboard because otherwise "the tax people would come." The certificates that claimed that the office was an NGO also started to make sense – if the tax collector came, the employees could claim that the office was a non-profit, in other words non-taxable. Salaries were also paid in envelopes. Sammy stated that he was not going to pay a single cedi of tax because the government "owed" him for all the previous projects he had not been paid for. He reinforced this conviction by saying he would rather pay tithe to his Latter Day Saints church than pay tax to the government.

While tax-exemptions could be seen as part of a patron-client model in Ghanaian political entrepreneurship (Whitfield 2011b: 24), Sammy specifically made a case for not paying tax due to personal reasons. The unpaid projects Sammy referred to were the marketing campaigns he had run for both BC Communications and President John Mahama during his election campaign in late-2011. He often enjoyed reminiscing about his most vibrant years with BC and the Mahama administration: "We managed to break that thing. We made the phones look nice. You see, there is this stigma around made-in-Ghana products. People think they don't last. But our brand was different." Indeed Sammy called BC "our brand" whose story was tied to friendship and co-operative work between three close friends, namely, himself, Chris and Benny. In these memories, Sammy suggested that the worth and dignity of this work (Hodson 2001), emerged out of the shared experience of having produced quality products on the Ghanaian soil, which worked against both global and local perceptions (cf. Mazzarella 2003b). These memories of co-operative work, whose product had been the beautiful brand, intensified Sammy's feeling that both he and Chris had been taken for granted, especially after Chris was replaced by the Chinese operations manager. Sammy stated that BC and the NDC owed them money. I was party to an effort to make BC pay by helping Sammy compose an email that demanded this payment. When drafting the letter, Sammy wanted to use the expression “legal proceedings” if their debts were not paid. In the email response, the representative of BC stated that they will pay the money on the condition that Mepex stops pursuing a legal case. Sammy told me to compose a polite, formal response in which he agreed to the settlement and appeared satisfied.[42]

Constant, playful process of creating distance and proximity with both BC and NDC was commonplace at Mepex. On one occasion, Sammy would mock the NDC, and say they were mismanaging the economy and ”becoming fat,” on another he would evoke an image of unity between his company and the entire party apparatus. For instance, when I asked if I could possibly interview someone from BC, Sammy burst to laughter and said: “This is BC, in fact, BC is right here, inside these walls.” When I asked about the colours of the building that first, to me, resembled the colours of the opposition party NPP, Sammy instantly objected, “Here, it's NDC!” In a sense, while the NDC was becoming ”fat” – a typical bodily metaphor to describe political parties misappropriating the nation's wealth by ”chopping/eating” this wealth while ordinary people's bodies shrunk and got malnourished (Hasty 2005b, see also Bayart 1993) – Mepex occupied an ambiguous position in relation to the main ”chopping” agent, namely, the ruling NDC government. Despite these hitches and debts, Sammy still held affectionate memories of the work performed for BC, while Oscar remained as an important party contact.

Sammy's playful creation of proximity and distance to the Ghanaian state through relations to party officials mirrors Yurchak's (2002) notion of “entrepreneurial governmentality” that shaped state-business relations in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union. This governmentality, that renders relations between private entrepreneurs and the state “thinkable and practicable” (Yurchak 2002: 279), was underpinned by a “hybrid” model of the state characteristic of the era of late-socialist transition. To be an entrepreneur at that time involved developing a skill for switching back and forth between ”officialising” and ”personalising” one's relations with diverse agents and institutions of the state. In many ways, Sammy was engaged in a similar type of negotiation. In the “officialised-public sphere” (Yurchak 2002: 310), Sammy was operating according to the professional conventions of corporate communication by sending neatly written emails to the financial representatives of BC, who he may not have personally known. In the “personalised-public sphere,” he retained close contact with Oscar, who kept on relaying to him the latest information from the NDC party office, as well as facilitating contact to agencies such as GTV and the Ghana Standards Board. This all gave Sammy a competitive advantage. Moreover, curiously, Sammy also appeared to conceive of BC, NDC and Mepex as virtually the same thing – it was his, and Chris' co-operative work that had created the brand of BC, as if there was no distance to begin with.

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[42] Interestingly, Sammy said he was not good at typing, and overall he did not consider email as the most important medium of doing business – rather, his main techniques were face-to-face meetings, phone calls, and WhatsApp. True Colours Media employed a number of young editors with whom Sammy worked at the time of post-production. He could have typed the email response himself, but given the importance of the email, I suspect that he simply wanted to ensure that the English was flawless and so as to give me work to do.

While switching between these two modes could signal entrepreneurial governmentality, premised upon self-discipline and knowledge, Sammy also embodied the distinctive style of a Ghanaian political entrepreneur. This style centred on the masculine speaking subject who, through inventive verbal play, could take an agentive stance and claim authority over an entire political party (cf Shipley 2009a: 633). Moreover, this verbal play was also marked by a degree of irony. To designate one's company as a ”media mafia” distinguished Mepex as a special type of company, and Sammy found that designation funny, signalling a certain kind of ”ironic acceptance of one's identity” (Gerschiere 2013: 24). Above all, the relationship between Mepex and the Ghanaian state was not only a matter of cultivating oneself as a certain kind of disciplined actor, but also playfully engaging with those public stereotypes that were being produced about political entrepreneurs in Ghanaian public culture.[43]

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[43] One can speculate over whether introducing Mepex to me as a media mafia was also related to an assumption of how white foreigners might take such designations. By immediately making it clear that I was getting involved with a “media mafia,” Sammy perhaps also, albeit playfully, tested the limits of a potential new recruit.

The shifting relations between Mepex, BC and the NDC government, as mediated by Sammy's entrepreneurial style of switching back and forth between proximity and distance, are essential context to understand what was occurring in the company at the time of my fieldwork. In the next sections, I will extend the analysis from the realm of relations with the state to other types of social relations in the Mepex office.

Partners and Protégés: routes to Mepex

“Have they welcomed you to the family?” Sammy asked me on my first day. Yes, they had. Mepex was a distinctive family that consisted of both regular and irregular employees. The place was running thanks to Ernest, the elderly janitor and security man who lived on the premises. He opened the gates in the morning, swept the compound, washed Sammy's cars, and made sure that water flowed in the pipes. Inside, the everyday flow of activity was punctuated according to the presence and absence of the three business partners, Sammy, Chris, and Elikem, who joined the company the same month as me in February 2014. Aba, Sammy's personal assistant and marketing executive, became my closest colleague. Emmanuel and Malana, two guys of me and Aba's age always sitting behind their desktops mainly worked with Chris. Later on I was also introduced to “Snake,” Sammy's jovial, flirty young nephew who lived with Sammy, and who flashed through the office whenever his help was needed to, say, drive me and Aba to a second-hand market to look for clothes for advert productions. He was the only worker who shared direct blood relation to Sammy, his mother's brother. A few young mobile sales executives also passed by and worked at the desktops for a day or two whenever Chris was around. Kwabena came in a couple of times after I joined – Sammy's real estate project was struggling to find investors, and so he had started looking for work elsewhere.

Besides these regular characters, the office was a veritable hub of sociality for family members, friends, and acquaintances. Besides Oscar, whose big, black 4V4 car was so loud we all heard it whenever it stopped by the yard, another regular visitor was Randall, Sammy's friend who worked for a private advertising company in central

Accra, and who usually arrived by trotro. In addition to his main, salaried job, he also worked with Sammy, which he one day told me he is not supposed to do: “Don't tell anyone you saw me here,” he added, with a hint of laughter. Randall designed advert concepts for Sammy's projects, shared in the profits, and often joined us for meetings and to watch football in the evenings. Sometimes Chris's wife, Melinda, dropped by, and so too did Elikem's wife and two young daughters during mid-term break. A lady, who according to Aba worked for BC, popped in occasionally to bring Sammy chicken salad from their favourite cafeteria in Osu, the hub of Western-style restaurants in Accra and site of the BC headquarters. The flow of many other smartly dressed men and women was commonplace. They usually arrived in their beautiful cars and immediately disappeared into Sammy's office.

These diverse characters had ended up in this office through a variety of contacts and for a variety of reasons. Randall, for instance, was making extra money to supplement his employee's salary, which would have been low for corporate media and advertising firms. He also shared a long friendship with Sammy. Apart from Sammy, who occasionally pronounced that he was to be a Minister of Trade or Communications one day, hardly anyone explicitly mentioned that they desired to pursue a political career. Elikem’s and Aba’s routes to Mepex involved a distinct trajectory. Elikem had a background in journalism and had come of age at the beginning of the 1990s, when the national airwaves were privatised after decades of military censorship. As the son of a single mother who had worked as a primary school teacher in a rural village, Elikem had developed a keen interest in social affairs, and decided to pursue a career in the media. After obtaining a diploma from Ghana Institute of Journalism, and supported by his maternal extended family, he worked in private newspapers for a few years. He started gravitating towards the corporate sector dissatisfied with his low salary and the considerable risks involved in being a private journalist in the 1990s, when the notorious libel law was still in place – a law that authorised the state to target journalists for any apparent reason – while his office had also been harassed, for instance, by leaving human faeces on the doorstep.[44] Elikem ultimately justified this career move through the need to financially support his single mother, who had paid for his education. His dream was to build a house for her, something she was not able to do herself. Thanks to friends already working in the corporate sector, Elikem ended up working as a marketing officer for several foreign-owned food-processing companies. In 2004 he met Sammy, who approached his company for marketing opportunities, and Elikem's company started giving him jobs, such as media buying.[45] "Acquaintance grew into friendship," as Elikem said. Ten years down the line, when Elikem found out that Sammy was about to abandon his marketing business in order to pursue his real estate plans, he proposed to Sammy that he could help him manage the media business and share in the profits. Sammy agreed, and Elikem was brought on board.

Besides earning money to one day build a house for his mother, an important reason for Elikem's move to Mepex was his desire to dedicate more time to his other passion, Charismatic Pentecostal ministry. He was a lay pastor in a small, growing Charismatic Pentecostal church close to his house on Accra's outskirts, where he lived with his wife and two daughters. He was going through training in Ministry and Theology, which during my time in the field once required him spending an entire week in an intense prayer camp when our marketing activities were in recess. Entrepreneurship with Sammy offered the kind of flexibility required in order to devote himself more fully to his ministry activities. However, he was equally clear that he did not want to depend on his church for income, contrary to the frequently voiced public accusations against pastors for extorting money from their followers (Shipley 2009b: 530). He intended to keep both corporate career and "ministry work" running in parallel: "Over the years I have told myself that if I go to ministry, I don't want to be depending on people you minister to. I want to be able to help people you minister to. So, I intend to keep working while I do the ministry work. But, I will do a lot more ministry than work." For Elikem, ministry was indeed distinct type of "work" from corporate work – corporate work earned him the money to live and enabled him to pursue ministry work in parallel, which did not necessarily have to produce monetary rewards. Above all, Elikem had no interest in pursuing a political career. He proclaimed himself an "issue-based voter" who had voted for a different political party in each and every election since the year 1996. This seemed to him an important point to emphasise – Elikem explicitly dissociated himself from Sammy's political affiliations, and envisioned a career that would gradually become more devoted to ministry than corporate work.

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[44] Human feaces in Ghana is the ultimate "dirt" (Van Der Geest 1998) the prolonged presence of which in the body, namely constipation, generates a blockage of vital flows of the body that can result in serious illness, even death. To leave human faeces on the doorstep of a private company is therefore essentially a death threat.

[45] Sammy had personal contacts with various media stations in Accra, so as to negotiate competitive rates.

Aba was Sammy's personal assistant, who was also part of the marketing team. She became my closest colleague with whom I would spend the majority of my time in the company. Together we would wait for Elikem and Sammy to come around, eat, leave the office to go to the market, and then talk about our future plans, such as Aba's educational aspirations. Aba's journey into the media industry had followed a rather similar trajectory to many other female young professional colleagues of mine. After her parents' divorce, Aba's father, an administrator in a state-owned company, had tried to persuade her to become a nurse or a dress-maker, which was her mother's profession. But Aba, the only girl among three boys, had other professions in mind. After secondary school she worked in her father's side-business, a drinking spot, and nurtured dreams of becoming an actress. She had a fun-loving personality and a natural talent for imitating voices, and was cast by a local small radio station to do an entertainment show. She also started working as a sales assistant in the new shops that emerged in her home city, Sekondi-Takoradi in the Central Region, thanks to the booming oil industry (see McCaskey 2008), and obtained a diploma certificate in marketing. Her life took an unexpected turn when she met Sammy through a common friend when he came to shoot a documentary in Sekondi-Takoradi. At the time of meeting Sammy, she was auditioning for movies and TV-shows. Sammy was instrumental in helping her to eventually secure her first media job:

> "When he came I had an audition coming up, so I told him about it, and he said oh he's in the media so he coached me. He thought I had something in

> me, I was good with the media so he told me that any time I come to Accra I should come to his office. So when I came to Accra, he had this show-thing going. He said that I should come to audition at this place as a TV presenter. So I came to audition, he wasn't there, some other people were auditioning. And I qualified, I won! It's TV, and I felt that I had my dream job! So I went back to Takoradi, I said I am quitting my job. I wanted to come to Accra, because I felt I had the job I wanted."

Sammy cast Aba as the presenter of a new TV show he was producing for a major telecom, MTN, broadcast on GTV. He took Aba under his wings and became her career mentor who she greatly respected. Sammy was also instrumental in enabling Aba to become financially independent. The production company rented her a place in addition to giving her a salary, by which time her father had had to accept her new job. They shared a strong bond: for instance, Aba was entrusted to handle cheques, go to the bank with Sammy, and accompany him on his errands to various business meetings, including the ones he had with BC before I joined. She was always on call – if Sammy was required to be at a certain place at a certain time, her presence was guaranteed. She also became Sammy's close confidant, who knew about his personal and business problems, both things Sammy also started to share with both me and Elikem the longer we stayed.

In many ways, it appeared that Sammy had become to Aba what Rabiu had become to Edem in the previous chapter: a trusted adult who was approximately ten years ahead in the professional trajectory, and who provided access, advice and mentorship. Yet, perhaps due to the sexual connotations that close cross-gender relations and intimacy could evoke in the Ghanaian media industry, as elsewhere (Zelizer 2011: 237-267), one day Aba specifically clarified: "You may think that because we joke a lot, that we are sleeping together. It's not like that. That's how Sammy relates with all his workers. He's free, he's fun to be with." Sammy would say the same – it appeared important for them to clarify that their relationship was platonic, a global register of professionalism in a workplace. At the same time, the relationship between the partners and protégés could also be intensely personal and involve very concrete care and protection. For instance, when Aba had a problem with her landlord, Sammy and Elikem both rushed to her place and directly confronted him. They were also both worried about the fact that Aba was single – Sammy tried to “fix her up” with a number of friends, most of whom Aba took no interest in, while Elikem would talk about choosing a good Christian marriage-partner. Aba would laugh at Sammy's attempts to “fix her,” while she also took his efforts seriously and did go to some of the proposed dates.

The relationship between Aba, Sammy and Elikem points at particular patterns in the construction of intimacy in the workplace (Zelizer 2011: 237-261), that in the case of Mepex was shaped by notions of the kind of advice and involvement that those higher up in the professional ladder could provide. The workplace, in other words, was not only a means of earning cash in a brown envelope but, for Aba, also a source of safety given that she did not have close kin in Accra. Similarly to the mentorship between Rabiu and Edem, the relationship between partners and protégés at Mepex extended beyond the content of professionalism to broader areas of everyday life, such as finding a marriage partner, that could emerge as objects of rather serious advice. This brings us to the issue of laughter, and what Geschiere calls the ”dark side of intimacy” in Africanist ethnography (2013: 24-25), namely, the less “warm and fuzzy” side of intimacy that challenges dominant modernist social theories of intimacy as the basis of trust (Giddens 1992, cit. in Geschiere 2013: 24, see also Carey 2017). I next turn to the patterns of joking and prevalence of laughter in the office, which I suggest emerged as a “vital flow” between diverse characters who had committed themselves to co-operative work.

The labour of laughter

”Modern capitalist life is love-saturated”
- Deirdre McCloskey (2006: 138, cited in Zelizer 2011: 245)

Whenever Sammy, Elikem, Oscar, Randall and Aba were around, the one dominant sound in the office was laughter. There was more laughter at Mepex than, for instance, at TV Central where I had also worked for a long time. Since my interview, the laughter that erupted as a result of frequent joking was the primary way in which Sammy related with both his peers and his workers. Except one. Interestingly, in the office, I never witnessed any form of joking between Sammy and his nephew Snake, though Sammy was his mother's brother in the classic Radcliffe-Brownian (1968) sense. On the contrary, Snake mostly kept quiet and sat in the corner behind a desktop whenever the “big men” were around; he became flirty and started joking with us the moment Sammy disappeared. This does not exclude the possibility that joking took place in their home. In the office, however, joking primarily occurred between non-blood related characters, including myself, and Elikem. I found myself drawn into a form of interaction where meetings about upcoming productions and adverts were rhythmed by frequent jokes thrown at one another, the kind of jokes that often directly addressed a particular personal attribute. For example, whiteness, and the kind of sexual habits that Sammy and Aba had heard whites were into.

The frequency of joking appeared curious, especially considering the form it took between Sammy and Elikem. The jokes often centred on Sammy's perceived lack of Christian virtue. Elikem would address this in a playful manner, yet with a rather consistent undertone. One morning we were all in Elikem's office planning an advertising campaign to pitch to foreign food-processing companies, when Sammy, as usual, changed the topic and announced that he wants to have at least five wives and ten children. Elikem, Sammy's relative peer and equal, protested, saying, “But that's not according to the Bible!” They were contesting it for a while, and Elikem meticulously brought up exact scripture and verse from the New Testament to justify why a Christian cannot have many wives. Sammy brought up a figure from the Old Testament, in which having many wives, according to his interpretation, had been permitted. Elikem immediately referred to another scripture in the New Testament, and they were bouncing the numbers of scripture verses back and forth. Then, Elikem sighed, as if giving up: “Sam, you said you have some position in your church.” Sammy said yes. We knew he went to the Latter Day Saints Church. Elikem pressed on: “What, are you some bishop or what?” Sammy declared: “I am an elder!” and we all burst into laughter, me and Aba amused by the idea of Sammy as a church figure. We next started discussing drinking and whether alcohol had been present in our families. Sammy said alcohol had been very much present in his family, especially through his father. He then looked at Elikem, grinning, and said that “as for Elikem's family, no drop of alcohol is accepted, and that is just fine.” Indeed, Elikem did not join us for evening-time gatherings that involved drinking, which Sammy asked me and Aba to join. At that moment, Elikem seemed to struggle with maintaining the balance between the seriousness of the Bible, the lightness of the overall situation, and the jokes that were cracked. His solution was to surrender to laughter while at the same time referring in detail to the exact numbers of chapters and verses in the Bible.

The flow of laughter was vital to this office, but I suggest it was vital for specific reasons. First of all, Sammy and Elikem appeared both aware that they were rather different types of professional actors, as well as Christian believers. Yet they had agreed on becoming partners in a company that was tied to Sammy's personality, charisma and extensive contacts, which included political patron-client networks. Such networks, for one, were close to the kind of powers the malevolent potential of which Elikem had experienced in his previous job as an independent journalist. I suggest that joking offered a way of addressing these discordances through verbal play, which Seligman & al. (2008) call the creation of “as if” worlds. These worlds, which they conceptualise as “subjunctive universes,” allow human beings to live and cross between different modes of being, and this is the basis of the human potential for empathy. Their idea opposes structural-functionalist ritual analysis, which they view as a quest towards unity, in which ritualised activity, such as joking between non-blood related business partners, is ultimately a means towards the creation of a 'corporate family'. In the structural-functionalist vein, joking is essentially a means of enhancing corporate efficiency under conditions of capitalist private accumulation. Indeed, many management scholars have adopted this approach to joking, which currently manifests in booming literature around the potentials of “comic organizations” for capital accumulation and job satisfaction (Butler & al. 2015). However, the kind of joking that occurred between Sammy and Elikem was rather a nod towards living *with difference* – in other words, this type of joking signalled that there were discordances between the ethical and moral values of the central partners of the business, which joking rather amplified. This type of joking appeared less a strategic means towards unity or efficiency, than it was a form of playful activity, the kind of play that rather amplified the differences between the participants.

Let me give another example about the kind of joking that could also turn sour. One afternoon we had a meeting about a commercial for an Indian water bottle company with Randall and a number of actors who were set to appear in the advert. Towards the end of the meeting, an actor's phone rang. The ringing tone was a Gospel song. Sammy exclaimed, “Ah you! If you attempt to go to heaven, angels will run away!” The actor looked at Sammy with a rather serious face, but didn't say anything. The joking structure nevertheless prevailed because Randall came in, as if to save the situation: ”Oh, if Nigerians can install air-conditioners to hell[46], then I can open a bar. And I know Sammy you will come to my bar!” And we laughed. This joke was funny some, but not for all. It incorporated Sammy and Randall but not the young actor, who appeared horrified by Sammy's words. Elikem, for one, was viscerally struggling, as he clearly found the idea of Sammy and Randall opening a bar in hell funny, while he also prevented himself from fully surrendering to laughter.

In many senses, laughter is a vital flow of Mepex as a social body in the sense that it created a certain ”shared sensorium,” that Jacques Rancière (2004, cit. in Boyer & Yurchak 2010: 212) has called a “sensible or perpetual shock” that shapes social relations, and in Rancière's analysis, generates political signification. The “political,” in this case, would refer to negotiating proximity to the Ghanaian state, which Sammy was constantly doing by sharing ironic remarks on the “media mafia.” But negotiating proximity to the realm of divine power was also present in these jokes – God, in other words, was also an agent of power, though people appeared to conceptualise the practical implications of this power in markedly different ways. As a result, this sensorium was not necessarily shared in the same way in Mepex, as people's laughter was not in unison – the power of the joke depended on people's particular subject position. Yet, although certain jokes could certainly cross the boundaries between sacred and profane, Elikem was verbally very skilled and good at joking too – he was at least as active in targeting Sammy with jokes as Sammy was targeting him. In a sense, although drinking could not flow between these business partners, jokes and laughter could. It was laughter that could enable a "subjunctive" mode to a shared sensorium, while the ethical value base remained plural – the idea was not to do away with difference, but live with the recognition that even people's relationship to God as the agent of power could differ.

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[46] A popular joke in Ghana at the time of my fieldwork was about a phone conversation between God and Satan. A group of Nigerians had ended up in hell due to their crimes, such as 419 scams. Satan was getting troubled. They were causing problems here and there, harassing other people, harassing Satan himself. One day he called God, asking him to take at least some of the Nigerians to heaven. God firmly said no. Satan called the second time, again God said no. Then, Satan called the third time, this time, crying and begging God to accept them: “God, they have installed air-conditioners, we are all dying!”

As Hasty (2005b: 291) describes in discussing the strategies employed by anti-corruption investigators in Ghana, laughter literally "opens up the person" and makes the person feel comfortable in a situation where his crimes are being investigated. Inciting laughter, in other words, is a prevalent ethos even in criminal investigations, the purpose of which, as Hasty argues, is not to evoke a sense of guilt but a sense of empathy – fraud is depicted as bringing misfortune to a "poor man," which the person under investigation is made to admit through creating a space where laughter plays a central role. In other words, contrary to the ethos of late capitalism as "love-saturated" (McCloskey 2006: 138, see also Illouz 1997) and as such generating intimacy and trust for corporate efficiency, echoing Hasty, I suggest that the purpose of inciting laughter relates to deeper cultural logics in social relations. Further, contrary to laughter as a tool of generating intimacy and trust, I would also suggest that it connected with less benevolent states of affairs: namely, Sammy's proximity to political power holders, which Elikem did not share, and the effect of which was uncertain. This ultimately led to a shared recognition of ethical incongruence that they nevertheless had to live with.

A further point concerns the amount of time that joking could take. Whenever we had meetings in Sammy's office, we discussed what would be conventionally understood as economically productive work, such as upcoming advertising projects, but joking was always weaved into these discussions. In some sense, joking was itself part of work, echoing Olivia Harris' (2007) observations on the diverse modes of activity that could count as work in Bolivian co-operative farming. In order to develop this point, let me next turn to other forms of co-operative work, namely, attempts to extend our networks beyond the NDC party apparatus, to potential clients in the broader urban economy.

Being formal: business in the city

That Accra's formal sector urban economy is the domain of diverse types of economic capital became evident during the months I spent at Mepex. Most of the entities who spent money on advertising were manufacturing corporations owned by Lebanese or Indians,[47] foreign owned food-processing companies, or the West African headquarters of big global brands, such as Toyota Ghana or major telecoms from Vodafone to MTN. However, it took a long time before Elikem, Aba and I started approaching clients. The first problem was the company car that kept breaking down and which did not have functioning air-conditioning, and this was vital in allowing us to appear ”neat” in front of prospective clients. Therefore, for the first weeks we spent a lot of time in a car mechanic workshop supervising the work of the mechanics and pressuring them to work on the car as the first priority. Next, we waited for the printing house to bring us our business cards. This also took a long time, and Elikem was not willing to visit any client unless all of us had our business cards ready. As the “research analyst,” Elikem instructed me to introduce myself as a researcher with several years of market analysis experience in Europe, which highly stretched the level of my qualifications. But this was our story, and it was supposed to give us leverage when negotiating deals with foreign-owned companies.

We started our rounds when the car and business cards were finally in shape. Each and every company that we visited was selected by identifying a personal contact that could receive us in the institution. One afternoon we visited a foreign automobile company where a former school mate of Elikem from his hometown in the Volta region, Emefa, was working in a management position. We entered a spacious air-conditioned office where Emefa warmly received us. Elikem introduced me and Aba, and immediately handed her our business cards. From the beginning, Emefa spoke in a familiar manner and fluently switched between English, Twi and Ewe, the vernacular that she shared with Elikem. We spent about ten minutes introducing each other and talking about potential marketing projects we could do, as she explained that they needed embroidered t-shirts for their workers before the Labour Day parade. After these ten minutes, Emefa switched to Ewe and started discussing with Elikem exclusively. She told him about a court case that she was involved in, which was stressing her out and causing problems in her family. Elikem was listening empathetically and exclaimed he could not understand the issue; whomever was taking her to court was being outrageous. Elikem gave Emefa advice on how to go about the issue, while me and Aba sat quietly and tried to follow the discussion that switched between English and Ewe, which neither one of us spoke fluently.

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[47] Lebanese and Indians in Ghana most often have Ghanaian citizenship as many have lived in the country for decades, in some cases since the 19th century when first Indian, Syrian and Lebanese business families made their way to Ghana (Quayson 2014). Yet, in popular parlance, they were hardly considered as ”Ghanaian,” and the label ”Lebanese/Indian” was retained.

The meeting turned out successful; we got the contract, and headed down to an embroidery workshop downtown owned by a longstanding acquaintance of Elikem's, who would get the work done in the most affordable manner, and hence leave Mepex with a decent cut. This contract was instrumentally facilitated by Emefa, who shared a familiar bond with Elikem and to whom she disclosed a confidential issue affecting her family. In a way, Elikem offering himself as the listener in the midst of an ostensibly formal business meeting also fitted his role as a pastor who commonly offered counselling for church members. This flow of family talk was a means of establishing that the meeting was not only about granting a contract – rather, the family talk created an illusion that Elikem was not only contacting Emefa because “he needs something.” This was a typical accusation in Accra's media and broader urban business scenes, whether formal or informal – the vice of contacting a person not because they “cared” about the person, but because they “needed something.” Phone calls to professionals or business acquaintances would indeed typically start with a few polite questions of “how are you doing,” ”how is the family,” and ”how are the children.”

Such examples of meeting up with clients demonstrate, first of all, that Mepex was a small company that was competing over contracts with the big, formal sector advertising houses that had come into existence in Ghana since the past 30 years. Sammy’s talent was well recognized in certain social spheres, but this recognition needed to be earned in other ways when approaching foreign-owned companies. For this purpose, the role of personal networks was key. Sammy and Elikem spent time thinking of any potential school mates, neighbours, church members or others who could help them to get through to management-level. Further, aesthetic elements were crucial in creating the image of a company that was “competent.” These aesthetic elements were not considered superficial but a prerequisite before a client could be approached. Business cards, dress, and an air-conditioned car were the mediators of this competence and ability to perform, just as much as showing care and emphasizing one’s acquaintances in the midst of business meetings.

Our experience of branching out to clients was also striking in that it entailed a certain control of any excessive flows of laughter. On one occasion Sammy invited us to his home and gave us detailed advice on how to approach a particular contact in an Indian manufacturing company. This was serious business. They wanted to do an “endorsement advert,” namely, the kind of advert in which a famous person declares that he or she believes in the product. Sammy instructed me: “You need to say that you have done endorsement adverts in Europe, and explain how.” I was puzzled – but I did not have that experience! Aba giggled: “You are too genuine!” Sammy confirmed: “I bi politics, that's why.” In this case, “politics” referred to the fact that we were approaching an Indian company that, as Sammy and Elikem said, “did not trust Ghanaians.” Also, it was a relatively big, well-known corporation, hence they thought that big advertising companies were already bidding for the deal. Therefore, my “work experience” in Europe was the leverage that would make the difference.

The meeting with the Indian manufacturing company eventually took place through Sammy's contact, a young woman who was their marketing executive. We did not succeed in securing a meeting with the Indian managers. The meeting was rather formal, and the lady said that we needed to put together a very good PowerPoint presentation, that presented three ideas for the endorsement advert. “Sammy has never disappointed me. I really hope you win the contract. But I can't guarantee. It's up to the panel to decide,” she said. We stayed in the office late putting the power point presentation together. My education and experience in Europe took an entire slide, which I contested, but Aba and Elikem said it was absolutely necessary. This was a big project that could bring significant revenue. Yet, Mepex was not a well-known advertising company in the broader urban economy – they did not have a signboard, nor a website, as Aba reminded me. Anything that could distinguish them as a company, such as my “work experience,” was harnessed for use.

Branching out to broader networks in the urban knowledge economy therefore provided a sense of the kind of standards of professionalism that were valued in the corporate sector underpinned by foreign capital. This experience also provided a sense of the kind of stereotypes that foreign capital owners held towards Ghanaians. In a popular vernacular hierarchy, one that many of my colleagues in other companies also repeated, Indians were framed as among the most suspicious of the professional competence of Ghanaians. Lebanese were considered as “slightly friendlier,” while Chinese companies were not even worth approaching – they only employed “their own.” European and American companies could be somewhat “forthcoming,” but were also the kind of companies that only did business with big, formal sector advertising and media firms, or brought in their own documentarists. Elikem and Sammy appeared to consider Mepex as off their radar. Incipient Ghanaian small manufacturing companies, for one, were highly regarded as potential new clients, but their number was not significantly high. We did consider contacting a new tomato paste food processing company owned by Ghanaians, as Sammy appeared enthusiastic of their advertising potential. But most of them were not yet big enough to have a separate budget for advertising. Therefore, the kind of companies Mepex could approach outside the realm of the state were of limited number. This did pose problems, which I turn to next.

Boss in an accident: sick body, sick business

Despite our best efforts in branching out to potential clients, the Mepex office turned quiet after a few months. Contracts were not coming in with the rate that we hoped. We did not hear back on our power point presentation sent to the Indian manufacturing company, and our only contact had gone on maternity leave. Elikem started spending more time in his church, while Sammy disappeared to Ghana's second biggest city, Kumasi, for a week at a time to attend to his fish farms. At some point, I and Aba found ourselves coming to the office every morning and waiting for phone calls from Sammy or Elikem, to no avail. I would be catching up with field notes from previous days, while Aba would be watching movies and TV series that Malana was downloading. Sometimes we would just leave the office and go to the local market to have lunch, or sit outside in the terrace discussing our plans for future. Aba was saving money for a Bachelor's degree program in Media and Communications in a new private university that was fast gaining reputation in Accra. “I need to do something, we can't just be sitting in the office,” Aba said. Indeed, while “sitting at home” in Accra popular parlance referred to unemployment, we found ourselves “sitting in the office,” namely, coming every morning to an office we called our workplace, but finding ourselves under-utilized. Moreover, the Mepex office did not have a generator; if there was a blackout, which were frequent in 2014, there was no Internet and it became hot and humid indoors. Perhaps due to the fact that the distinction between home and office largely collapsed as a result, a blackout was a sufficient reason to go home if none of the big men were around. Malana and Emmanuel seemed equally out of work – Chris was not coming to the office, while Emmanuel would still come every morning, even just to clean up and sit behind the computer till 5pm. In other words, the young people still expected that they needed to be present. Mepex was, after all, their only workplace, and nobody had another job in sight.

This quiet period was also marked by our increasing worry about Sammy's personal issues, which Sammy provided hints about here and there. One day, he came to the office late afternoon, and announced that he was sick. I thought he was feeling physically ill, and asked if he had taken some medicine and drunk enough water. Sammy clarified: “My workers know that if I say I am sick, they know I am broke.” He was indeed feeling rather down and looked weary. If a sick body and untimely 'bad death' could result from a “blocked” state of being in Akan lexicon (Crentsil 2007: 47-48), in Sammy's parlance, the main source of the blocked state of his body was dried flows of money. The land he had secured for building the real estate empire stood undeveloped, while media and advertising, the backbone of this company, was not producing much revenue either. The fish, for one, were only babies and would take time to develop into a profitable business. Little by little, more layers to Sammy's situation were unveiled. Aba disclosed that Sammy was going through marital problems. The marriage of Sammy and Elizabeth, whose shared ambitions had founded the company, was about to fall apart. Their trajectory had been tumultuous for some years, due to problems in trying to have a child. Some years back, Sammy decided to take another wife, Afua, with whom he had had three daughters. As far as I understood, Elizabeth and Sammy had finally had a son, but Elizabeth was dissatisfied with being the second wife. After all, Sammy was living with Afua, while Elizabeth was still the one responsible for a core element of Sammy’s media business, namely, post-production. She was insisting on having a divorce, which also would have meant property division and dissolving the two-track model that Mepex was part of. Sammy had been troubled by this state of affairs. Elikem, for one, was worried about his drinking, and wondered whether any extra-marital affairs were further distracting Sammy.

A dramatic event eventually brought addressing Sammy's issues to the top of the agenda. One Monday morning as I arrived in the office, Elikem and Aba were both already there with grave looks on their faces. “Sammy's been in a car accident,” Elikem announced. The accident had been serious and could have caused his death – a big 4V4 car had crashed straight to his side, and escaped from the scene. “I knew something like this was coming,” Elikem confessed, echoing worries he had voiced many times. That day turned out to be very busy. We did not rush immediately to the hospital, but instead went to three business meetings Elikem had set up for the same day. The first was at an embroidery business that was responsible for printing the shirts for Emefa's company, the second in another foreign manufacturing business where Elikem pitched Mepex services to a Ghanaian executive, and the third one at BC, where we waited for some ten minutes for Elikem to pick up a cheque for Sammy. Only after having received the cheque, which Aba carefully placed in her purse, did we make our way to the hospital. We saw Sammy sitting on the bed with a few scars on his face and legs. To our relief, he looked much better than we had thought. At that time, there were no family members around, and he was trying to be cheerful. He discretely took the cheque from Aba and placed it in his pocket. As we were about to leave, Sammy grinned, addressing us: “You thought that I was dead. Your boss is not dead.”

A few days later in the office, while Sammy was still at the hospital, we sat in Elikem's office and Aba recounted to me their visit to Sammy the previous day, which I had not been able to attend. “Oh Elikem prayed so nicely, I was very touched,” Aba said, looking at him. The purpose of this visit had indeed been to pray for Sammy, and deliver him from any evil spirits that may follow him. They had brought Randall, and to my surprise, also Elizabeth. Aba described how Elikem had led a “very nice, powerful” prayer, while all of them stood around the hospital bed stretching their hands towards Sammy, which was a typical Charismatic Pentecostal way of performing deliverance. The purpose of Charismatic Pentecostal deliverance is to “open the body” through collective effort (De Witte 2011c), and facilitate the flow of spiritual power to “cleanse” the body of harmful spiritual presence. Listening to Aba's description, it sounded like something similar took place around Sammy's sickbed, as business partners and colleagues stretched their hands as a way of mediating the benevolent flow of the Holy Spirit. It appeared that the bodies of fellow colleagues, in this instance, transformed into a technology of religious mediation (De Witte 2011c: 491), the purpose of which was to deliver the boss from malevolent spirits that could hold him back. Many other flows were also present in Aba's story. After the deliverance, Randall suggested that they all “share the grace,” which follows a particular order of well-known lines in Ghana. At this point in the story, Aba started laughing, holding her stomach, looking at Elikem, and I was puzzled. What was so funny about sharing the grace? Aba described that when Randall was leading the prayer, he was jumping over parts, not following the order. He had forgotten the lines! According to Aba, Sammy finally intervened and told Randall he was saying the prayer all wrong, and they had all burst to laughter. Aba said: “We were all laughing, but I think Elikem tried to hold himself because of his fear of God.” Through her laughter, Aba kept repeating that Elikem's prayer had been “touching,” to which she clearly accorded respect.

Sammy's accident served to bring his personal issues to the fore, and it led to me, Elikem and Aba's visiting Elizabeth's office more frequently. Elikem had also made sure to invite Elizabeth to participate in the prayer of deliverance around Sammy's sickbed, but had excluded Afua, who was still the wife with whom Sammy lived. Elikem, in this situation, adopted the role of a marriage counsellor and clearly preferred Elizabeth. Yet, instead of emphasizing Elizabeth's position in the business, Elikem rather emphasized her position as the first wife – original union should not be broken, let alone added to with a second wife. One day, we visited Elizabeth to discuss the reasons behind Sammy's accident. Sitting opposite Elizabeth's desk, Elikem announced: “I don't believe Sammy's accident was a real accident.” Aba supported him and said that the whole accident was strange, because Sammy is an “excellent driver” and knows Accra's roads like his own pockets. Next, Elikem suggested that he believes there are some “powerful witches” in Sammy's hometown that may be after him. “Ah, Elikem and Elikem's witches!” Aba interrupted at this point, clearly distancing herself from the idea that witchcraft could control Sammy. Elizabeth sighed and said that she was always praying that Sammy eventually get “closer to God.” Although Sammy had the position of an elder in his church, Elizabeth did not esteem that he had truly aligned himself with God’s will and purpose.

Sammy, in other words, had not adequately aligned himself with the power of God, and this made him increasingly vulnerable. The accident was the most powerful evidence that something had to change. Although I did not bear witness to any other prayer events, the accident revealed that tackling Sammy’s personal problems, materialised in his sick body, was vital since these problems bore direct causal effect on

Mepex as an institution. In other words, similarly to family and friendship in the previous chapters, a company's existence was premised upon the successful circulation of vital flows of sociality and attraction of cash, while "blockage" of these flows could lead to both moral breakdown, and business collapse. Elikem presumed that Elizabeth was part of a possible solution – after all, Sammy's media business had its origins in the union between the two partners, which went beyond questions of property ownership. Elizabeth also held the keys to align Sammy with God's will as per the New Testament, whereas his second wife, Afua, in Elikem's interpretation, would hold him back. In these discussions, the proximity to politicians was not evoked as the source of misfortune; rather, it was Sammy's marital problems and distance from God that appeared to hold more explanatory value in explaining the lack of profitable business.

Aba's reflections, and concluding remarks

This chapter has zoomed in on a brief period in the life cycle of a small political enterprise. By focusing on the kind of vital flows that structured the everyday co-operative work in the office, I have sought to expand the category of work to include a broader set of activities, from joking to dressing to prayer. Yet, contrary to the idea that these other activities merely signal a global ethos of modern capitalism as "love-saturated," I have shown that these other forms of work entail a deeper logic of being and becoming a person as a result of co-operative work within Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism. Further, my analytical stance has also been underpinned by the anthropological critique of theories of corruption by illuminating people's meaningful engagements with practices such as gift-giving (Hasty 2005b; Jordan-Smith 2007) and political patronage in Africa and beyond (Olivier de Sardan 1999; Yurchak 2002). Most recently, attention has also been paid to a far less explored aspect of these debates, namely the explicit desire of professionals and bureaucratic officials to "adhere to rules" (Tidey 2013) and demonstrate their competence and professional aspirations (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 2014; Hull 2017). An important objective of this theoretical inquiry is to highlight people's own efforts to produce counter-discourses of their presumed character in the global and local public sphere.

Let me briefly turn back to professionalism as a specific desired quality of both work and persons. Although this chapter has focused on describing the vital flows of sociality that underpinned Mepex as a workplace and generative site within Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism, I have discussed these flows in relation to a period when Mepex was approaching foreign-owned companies, which called for recognition as a "professional institution." Aba eventually clarified the tensions that surrounded this quality in relation to the distinctive entrepreneurial styles of Elikem and Sammy, which she reasoned were to blame for the fact that business was not running smoothly. Elikem's main problem was his slowness and "principles," as Aba said on another quiet afternoon. She explained that Elikem was not giving the customary "cut" to employees in the companies that they had approached, and who would influence their superiors. Aba mentioned the deal with Emefa as an example. When the embroidered t-shirts were due, ten shirts were missing from the final batch. They could not identify who had miscalculated the shirts. Elikem could have sorted the issue by paying a small amount of money to cover for the missing t-shirts. However, faithful to what Aba called "his principles," Elikem had refused to engage in bribery. "Even the woman told me, 'Aa, your boss seems very uptight, a very principled man'" as Aba recounted. She also said that Elikem was "too soft, he was just talking about what needs to be done." In other words, Elikem was not forthcoming enough, which, in contrast, Aba had recognized as Sammy's key trait as an entrepreneur. Or, one could say that due to his Christian ethics Elikem had become a veritable 'blockage' within the system of monetary circulation that underpinned social relations between diverse institutions in Accra's business scenes.

In Aba's analysis, Sammy was unbeatable in business meetings that relied on his charisma to convince the client: "Sammy knows how to sweet-talk. (...) I learned a lot when I observed how he was negotiating with BC. He would make everybody feel he cares about them so much, while he is just interested in getting their money! But he is very giving, he always makes sure he shares whatever comes out." This sharing was about the informal cuts that Elikem refused to provide. In Aba's analysis, Sammy essentially understood how human beings operated. Essentially, he understood that business was about both accumulation and circulation. Elikem, for one, would only talk about what he could absolutely promise. “He's just like, 'yes, well, let's get back to this on Monday, and see how it goes'. Elikem is toooo genuine! I mean, this is business. Fine, you can have your faith, but it's not that you are doing anything wrong.” In other words, it was Elikem's “Christian principles” that in Aba's interpretation emerged as a blockage to flows of profitable business in the broader urban context. Similarly to her giggling over my puzzled face when seeing my image on the PowerPoint, Aba considered Elikem's “genuineness” as a virtue that was counter-productive to business success.

However, Sammy had other shortcomings that were even more frustrating for Aba than Elikem's softness, slowness and “genuineness.” Aba accused Sammy of lack of planning and mismanagement of company funds. When they got money from an advertising deal, Sammy transferred this sum to invest in his fish farms. Another problem was access to the company bank account that was solely in the hands of Sammy. Aba was also frustrated by the model of friendship between the two managers that prevented Elikem from directly confronting Sammy. She explained that she herself had obtained the papers from the bank for Elikem to fill in so that he could get access to bank account, so that they could at least buy fuel when Sammy was away to go to visit clients. But those papers were still untouched in his locker. Aba was of course thinking about her own career. She wanted to work, be active, and go forward as a professional. She was not willing to “waste her time” in an organization that did not hold any career promise. She aspired to develop herself as a marketing executive and build up her professional network for future benefit.

…

In the following two chapters, I take Aba's remarks on the value of professionalism and Christian principles as the starting point, and shift the ethnographic lens to two markedly ‘formal sector’ private companies. In the next two chapters, the relationship between Christian virtue and professional virtue takes up distinctive registers as the professionals in question attempt to navigate, and counteract circulation as the dominant principle of value generation in Accra’s business scenes. At the same time, while doing so, I pay attention to how flow and blockage remain as key generative idioms in processes of adapting Christian ethical visions and ritual formats to mid-size and start-up company settings.

This is not a church. This is a business: interlude

March 2014.

“I don't think you can get much information, because of the way we work. We are very structured. Would you interview employees? What, participant observation? People are very busy, they don't have that time. And you'd end up wasting your time too.”

Janice’s decision as HR manager is definitive, delivered from the other side of her desk. I’ll have no internship at Strategic Africa. No research.

I’ve heard a lot about this company since 2010. The company specialises in strategic communications, branding, and event management. Its well-respected CEO, Ms Amuah, is also known to be a devout Christian.

“We have weekly corporate morning devotions as well as quarterly prayer and fasting sessions. We believe that when staff have sound Christian lives, it translates into a sound corporate life,” she said after receiving an honour in the “International Christian Business Excellence Ghana Awards” in 2011. Ms Amuah disputed that bribery and other illicit practices were necessary for business success in Ghana. Strategic Africa had “proved otherwise.” It had created an organizational culture where success came through the pursuit of excellence, and the staff could develop professionally as well as spiritually.

At the time of visiting Strategic Africa, I am still working at Mepex. The business is very slow. I am looking for a bigger Ghanaian media service company in which to conduct daily fieldwork while I continue helping Mepex with their productions. I mention the issue to Elikem one day in his office. Elikem looks astonished and asks, “Do you know the head of HR at Strategic Africa? She's my cousin. We grew up in the same house.” At that moment, Accra feels small, yet unknown to me. “It's a network of secret alliances,” as one of my friends says upon hearing the story.

Elikem is eager to help me enter this network of alliances. He immediately calls Janice's personal number. It is afternoon, so Janice must be at her desk. Elikem speaks softly in their dialect, Ewe. He states that I work with him, I am his ”daughter,” and I am not in Ghana to do anything illicit. He listens to Janice, and then asks, slightly frustrated: ”What is the problem with you people!? Do you think she is some kind of spy or what? Working for CIA? What are you people hiding?”

Janice stays firm. No internship. No research.

Several months later, after a series of emails with Ms Amuah's personal assistant, I am granted an interview with Ms Amuah. Numerous inspirational biblical verses on integrity and honesty are written on walls that follow guests from the main lobby upstairs to the office of the CEO. Ms Amuah comes to greet me and signals the meeting shall be in the conference room. A communications manager, Grace, is also present with a notebook, as well as a young female assistant who is taking notes throughout the 15 minutes that have been given as a time limit. I can make no recordings, only questions and hand-written notes.

I start the interview with a few polite remarks on how honoured I am to be granted this occasion, and compliment the beautiful Ghanaian art decorating the room. Before I have even posed the first question, Ms Amuah looks at me sharply:

”First of all, Strategic Africa is a business. If you go to Japanese companies, they have Japanese paintings on their walls, don't they? The British companies, they have British paintings, right? I don't understand why you find it so fascinating, or extraordinary.”

Flustered, I start asking hurried questions about corporate origins and other questions she has responded to a million times, then proceed to ask equally clumsy questions about her Christian life. The young intern keeps on taking notes. Ms Amuah repeats: ”Strategic Africa is a business. It is not a church. Christianity, it is not peculiar to just business, it's a life I live. I really don't understand why you find it so extraordinary.”

Next I ask whether they have Christian “rituals” as part of the company life, such as prayers and fasting. “Rituals?!” she repeats, sounding almost horrified. “I mean, prayers for instance,” I mumble, feeling I have totally lost her. “They are not routines or rituals. Christians are encouraged to fellowship whenever they come together. So how come, how would we separate them,” she says, looking at Grace. ”It doesn't offend anybody. I think there is such a big thing being made of Christianity,” she declares. She states again, for the third time: “Strategic Africa is a business. We use sound business principles, and all those principle are in the Bible, such as integrity and honesty, and we've been growing the business with those principles.”

As the interview finishes, she makes her final comment: “I invite you to experience my God yourself. Maybe then you can write a better report.”

On our way out, we pass an impressive metal sculpture in the upstairs lobby of a man playing an ornamented drum. ”Strategic Africa 20 years” is written on the drum. The company has been in existence since 1994, since the transition to democratic rule. “It's the talking drum,” Ms Amuah says, noticing my look. She mentions a friend of hers, a branding consultant who has recently launched a new branding philosophy, called ”Bradinkrah,” which combines corporate branding with Adinkrah symbols that represent Akan proverbs.

Ms Amuah sighs: “Branding is not new to Africa. [The Westerners], they always think branding is something, ummm, extraordinary to us. It's not. Every tribe has their own symbols and ways of greeting that make them understand that this person is from this clan. When I go to meet my clansmen, I know how to greet them in the right way. It's branding.”

We bid farewell, and I make my way out through the departments where employees are quickly typing by their desktops. It is quiet. The only sound is *tap tap tap tap.*

Later on, I recount the story of the interview to Elikem and Edem. Their diagnosis is that I had been “too transparent.” Elikem contemplates that maybe Strategic Africa does not accept foreigners because they are – also – a ”political company.” Various rumours circulate about Strategic Africa's connections to the ruling NDC party due to Ms Amuah's marriage to one of the party officials. They even predict that once NDC falls out of power, Strategic Africa's contracts go down.

Edem laughs at the whole situation, complimenting Ms Amuah. “She's a smart woman. Gone are the days when you people just come here and take information. Ghanaians have become smarter than that.” Edem also says that I should have tried to build a rapport with her over a longer period of time. I ask him how I could have built that rapport when *setting up* that short meeting took several months. “You should have been smarter.”

Ha! Strategic Africa had been the smartest.

I think about the notes the assistant was taking throughout the interview. Who, ultimately, had been observed?

Chapter 5

Queen Mother of Professionalism: flow of fellowship

Introduction: religion, capitalism, 'professionalism'

Ghana's Christianity, as this thesis has already shown, entails visible, audible and sensuous public presence that extends beyond churches as communities of belonging. Besides motivational speakers, books and broadcasts, church buildings, new educational institutions and gigantic billboards that dot the urban landscape, Christian mediums and materials were also ample in Accra's private sector workplaces. Morning devotions, end of the year Thanksgiving services, and increasingly, human resource trainings run by pastors provided rhythm for annual cycles. Office workers carried extra light Bibles in their bags, and listened to religious broadcasts in the middle of the workday. Meetings started and closed with a prayer. Similar to the shaping influence of Charismatic Pentecostalism in Ghana's "new public sphere" (Meyer 2004a), stories I heard about prayer, fasting and Charismatic Pentecostal managers in private sector company settings appeared as the latest step in the trajectory of Ghana's Christianity into a "public religion" that could be formatted into both popular entertainment, and organizational practices. Yet, this had not always been the case – J.J Rawlings, for instance, had effectively banned Christianity from public life, and rather promoted a secular public sphere while granting visibility to representatives of Ghanaian indigenous religions (De Witte 2005). "Publicly Christian" private sector companies appeared as part of a broader pool of ethnographic evidence that challenges master narratives of linear progression towards secular modernity (Calhoun & al. 2011; Cannell 2010; Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005; Meyer & Moors 2006), such as, that the emergence of modern capitalist institutions relegates religion to the private sphere.

Among Accra's formal sector business owners there was an emerging awareness of a veritable *movement* of companies that had started to "come out" as Christian, as the operations manager of major Ghanaian investment bank remarked in an interview:

> "There is an emerging trend where you find Christians who have created businesses. They are very polished about declaring that look, this is a

> Christian organization. I am even told that they almost had like a church at one bank. I mean they had instruments, like a full set, and they had their services in the company. Another bank, I know they had equipment to do all night prayer meetings. More Christians are becoming entrepreneurs and business owners. And maybe the Christians who are in leadership positions in various organizations are making a point to project their faith at the workplace. Even the way they project their company, there are scriptures on their buildings, there is that trend, people projecting what they believe."

The operations manager also explained that under Rawlings' military rule, professionals and entrepreneurs did not feel comfortable declaring their faith in public, at the workplace. Change started to happen from late 1990s onwards that also saw the influx of Ghanaian returnees from the diaspora, who started to build their companies in relation to a new type of public sphere that was more allowing of Christian styles of address. Yet, it was Ms Amuah who taught me that in the context of the Ghanaian private sector, phrasing the nexus of religion, capitalism and professionalism was as much a matter of global political economy, as it was about academic production of knowledge. Her reactions revealed that my clumsy questions were missing the point; she prompted me to consider carefully what it meant to think about Christianity as a “way of life,” instead of an objectified tool of management. For Ms Amuah, Christianity was a connection and mode of being that she perceived was shared amongst her and her employees. My questions, for one, framed religious ethics and practice as a “thing” that was possible to isolate as a variable for strategic purposes. A question about “Christian rituals,” for one, appeared to her as a question about alterity and 'African exoticism'. She was uninterested in a foreign researcher who wanted to study them, let alone theorise about her company challenging academic theories of linear progression towards secular modernity. Furthermore, the interview brought into sharp light questions of audience, sincerity, and the very category of 'professionalism'. To study religion through the lens of Ghanaian public institutions, such as privately-owned companies, was tied to a broader political economy and Transparency International Indexes that placed Sub-Saharan African companies, and African professionals, at rock bottom in professionalism; corruption, political patronage, and all sorts of transactional intimate exchange dominated these accounts and observations already. Accra's professionals, and especially corporate CEOs, were well aware of this global political economy that devalued the quality of (knowledge) work performed on the African soil.

…

The interview with Ms Amuah was an important lesson that shapes the objective of this chapter: to provide an ethnography of work and value situated in a private company that, in its “public Christianity,” was comparable to Ms Amuah's, and which in many ways looked and felt like the exact opposite of Mepex. Eventually, after many twists and turns, I gained access to City Services[48], which is one of Ghana's major human resource, recruitment and outsourcing companies. They were also involved in HR-related media production and publishing with the explicit aim of “making a difference in the Ghanaian world of work.” This difference, as I shall show, was integrally tied to a veritable public project of professionalism, and fashioning the company as exemplary of global excellence that was mediated through its owner and CEO, whom I shall call Mrs. Sackey. Besides a CEO, she was also a devout Methodist who framed her faith as the value-base of company policies, such as their explicit public stance against bribery and corruption. At the same time, City Services was also a family business similar to Mepex, where some of the key positions were held by family members of a Fante matrilineage. I suggest that Mrs. Sackey, for one, could well be called a veritable “queen mother of professionalism” whose authority to speak about professional standards was amplified by creating an aura of what Gott (2004) calls "royal regalia" with the help of a number of technologies. Similar technologies were also harnessed for the creation of an image of the company as ‘sincere’ (Keane 2002), which was widely mediated through its Christian narratives of the professional self. After considering questions of leadership and authority, I turn to particular forms of co-operative work that emerged in a company where business could stand for both "ministry", and a means of generating profit for a family as the ultimate unit of value generation. By the end of this chapter, I hope to have demonstrated why increasing the “professional standards” of both Ghana, and Ghanaians, was important.

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[48] All names in this chapter as well are pseudonyms.

A family business of ministry: orientation

Mrs. Sackey was widely heralded as a “Christian business leader” in public events and newspaper articles. I met her in an event organized by a group of young Charismatic Pentecostal start-up entrepreneurs, to whom I turn in the next chapter. She gave a speech titled “Living holy lives” in the Ghanaian marketplace: “City Services is a ministry. We lead people to find their purposes.” She also commented on the racialised political economy of professionalism through a striking image of Jesus: “Well, Jesus is white. Even we blacks, we don't recognize Jesus when he is black. Due to so many things, we have been told we cannot do anything.” Through the image of Jesus, she appeared to espouse an idea that professionalism was essentially a colonial quality of whiteness – the image of Jesus came to stand for the ultimate virtue, and the colour of this virtue was white. Yet, she made an argument that it was possible to be virtuous professionals by “living holy lives” in the marketplace that could turn this political economy upside down. I was intrigued – what did living holy lives have to do with being a professional? Mrs. Sackey asked me to come to the next internship orientation, and promised I could do a few month internship in the Head Office.

The office was located at the intersection of two jammed main roads, where a colossal billboard pronounced, “Find a job you are crazy about!” The advertisement displayed a young man in a white collared shirt absorbed in his computer screen, smiling widely and typing enthusiastically at the keyboard. The arrow on the billboard pointed towards City Services, located off the road in the midst of gated estate houses. The office was an impressive triangular building with the motto “Jesus Is Lord” written above the entrance. Upon stepping indoors, one's eyes are immediately drawn to a glass shelf in the lobby with numerous awards and certificates City Services had acquired over the course of its 20 years of existence. Like Ms Amuah, Mrs. Sackey had received the “Christian Business Excellence Award.” The majority of the awards, however, were given by Ghanaian and international organizations, such as the prestigious Ghana Club 100 Award that signalled the company was an elite brand with dynamic estimates of growth.

I joined a group of young graduates who had been posted as interns to different private sector companies, and we were led up the stairs to Mrs. Sackey's personal office. Instead of the official meeting room, we took our seats in her luminous office which displayed family photographs and various award certificates on the wall. We were welcomed by Fiifi Sackey, Mrs. Sackey's youngest son. He started the orientation with a PowerPoint slide that showcased a stylish, spectacular image of Mrs. Sackey, who was fully made-up, dressed in beautiful African print clothes, and looking directly into the camera. He started explaining the history of the company that centred on his mother's career biography. After graduating from University of Ghana, she did her national service in a small primary school in her home town, following the ideal Nkrumahist ethical vision of serving the nation. After a brief stint at Volta River Authority, a public sector electricity provider, in the 1980s, Mrs. Sackey landed an assistant job in a multinational SGS Ghana Limited that provided certification and human resource training in Ghana.[49] Through "dedication" and "hard work", she was eventually promoted to the head of HR, which expedited her dream of starting her own recruitment company. She had realized that there were no Ghanaian human resource and recruitment agencies; hers was to be the first of its kind.

Presenting her mother's career biography, Fiifi did not mention that she was a committed Christian, nor that the company values were Christian in any particular way. After Mrs. Sackey's spectacular image, he projected a slide of "City Services Values," of which "integrity" was the "first priority," namely "openness in everything we do." The second one was customer satisfaction, followed by teamwork, responsiveness and dependability. Rather, Fiifi emphasized his mother's commitment to hard work and exemplary leadership. Next, Beata, head of the Outsourcing department, took the stage. She appeared as an affable lady who was to talk about "professional grooming." Curiously, Fiifi had instructed us that when she starts talking about the importance of being polite, not rude, he would give a sign from the side and we would all start pretending to be bored and falling asleep. We agreed to the prank. Beata's talk was about professional behaviour, including personal hygiene, such as use of deodorant given the sweaty conditions of Accra where young people in particular travelled to their workplaces by trotro. She also defined appropriate topics to discuss in the office – politics, football, and what she called "social class" were forbidden. "In the work place, it's about getting the work done. No class, don't criticize others, there is no such thing as class." To my surprise, she also stated that religion was a forbidden topic. "Do you know why? Because people can get emotional, and it can affect their work." The young selected interns, who had already passed a strict test to obtain the internship, were taking careful notes. Then came the point about rudeness. Fiifi gave us a sign, and all of us pretended to fall asleep. "What is going on?! Oh Fiifi, you are doing this again! You are being rude to me!" Beata exclaimed, and we burst into laughter.

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[49] I assume that SGS has been operating in Ghana since the introduction of structural adjustment programs from early 1980s onwards, and provided oversight of various companies for a multiplicity of agencies.

The orientation focused on teaching professionalism through two angles, "values" and "grooming," that were both important aspects of being a professional. The values were not framed as Christian per se, but pertained to familiar global tropes of professionalism from integrity to teamwork. But the whole orientation had started with the spectacular image of Mrs. Sackey, who entered her office shortly after Beata's presentation. She commanded high respect. The laughter prompted by the joke dissipated, and even Fiifi and Beata fell silent. Mrs. Sackey took the stage, standing in her beautiful *kaba and slit*[50] Friday wear, and gave a speech about City Services as a company that "solves problems", and seeks to bridge the gap between the academia and industry. She talked about our responsibility to discover the "unique selling point" that would distinguish us from other interns. Further, she talked about entrepreneurship – the graduates could not assume that their academic qualifications, or even the internship, would lead to a job in an institution. Hence they had to be prepared to embrace entrepreneurship as a viable option. The orientation finished with Mrs. Sackey's remarks on making the best of our internship period, and to work hard.

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[50] Kaba and slit stands for a West African two-part dress tailor-made of African print fabric, with a figure-fitting shirt and skirt that extends to one's ankles.

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Contrary to what I expected based on Mrs. Sackey's public appearances, the internship orientation did not give any indication that the company was a "publicly Christian" company. Instead, the orientation gave the first lesson that the company was a family business where key roles were filled by matrilineal extended family members and children. Two of Mrs. Sackey's four children, namely her two sons, were already working for the company, while one of the daughters was preparing to start; the sons Fiifi and Gabriel were the heads of departments in the two branches of the company, Fiifi in the Head Office, Gabriel in the central Accra branch. Beata was Mrs. Sackey's niece and the head of Outsourcing department. While the prank orchestrated could appear as an indication of "love-saturated modern capitalism" (McCloskey 2006: 138), to recognise that this spectacle of affection occurred between matrilineal blood-relatives was also significant – most likely, Fiifi would have not dared to perform such a prank on his mother, while Beata was a safe target. Mrs. Sackey's husband was also an entrepreneur leading another service sector company, while he served on the Board of Directors and was a familiar face in the office – their family house was located near-by in a newly built gated community. The Board of Directors also consisted of a well-known Charismatic Pentecostal pastor, a couple of management consultants, as well as Mrs. Sackey's close high school friend, whom we called "Auntie Dorothea", the Director of Administration who called her simply as "Mrs. S."

Many key roles in City Services Limited, as well as Strategic Africa, were occupied by women. Interestingly, the fact that Mrs. Sackey and Ms Amuah were female CEOs hardly came out in their own narratives about their professional journeys. They did not fashion their CEO-status as an extraordinary female achievement, while in public speeches targeted at wider domestic and global audiences, they did acknowledge the challenges that went into juggling a challenging career and their role as mothers and wives. This could be for many reasons – besides the idea that their achievement as women was under-recognised, this could be due to more complex associations that existed vis-à-vis long-standing public roles women have occupied in Ghana, for instance, as queen mothers and priestesses. What Keane (2002: 65) calls “representational economy” is helpful to start conceptualising these associations, in which “economy” refers to “the way in which practices and ideologies put words, things, and actions into complex articulation with one another,” as a result of long-term historical trajectory.[51] For instance, the internship orientation did give indications of gendered ideologies of authorizing who can speak about professional standards. Mrs. Sackey's images took centre stage in the presentation, in which she wore expensive wax print fabrics. These images bear striking resemblance to Gott's (2009) historical ethnography of “women of wealth” among the Akan, namely, the kind of women who could claim social prestige in the absence of attachment to a royal lineage. Mrs. Sackey said that her father, who worked as a stores verifier in a public sector institution, belonged to a royal lineage. However, due to her being Fante, she traced her inheritance through her mother, a high school teacher, who was not of royal blood. Therefore, she did not consider herself as royal, or someone who could have been a queen mother in her home-town[52]. Yet, in these public events and outlets, she presented herself as feminine figure of authority who offers career guidance and mentorship, which characterised her discourse about the company. Offering guidance, and standing for moral authority, fits well with long-standing expectations of a queen mother (Stoeltje 2003), that have adapted to a variety of modern settings, such as running of development projects (Steegstra 2004, see also Comaroff & Comaroff 2009). At the core, Mrs. Sackey's authority to speak on professional standards was carefully crafted with the help of creating an aesthetic representation of her as a “woman of wealth” (Gott 2009), which seamlessly connected with her role as a moral authority of professionalism mediated through a variety of public appearances. Given the intricate ways in which material wealth has been converted to political power in Ghana (Nugent 1995: 4-9), a representational economy that pairs imagery of a woman of wealth with construction of public authority makes sense. Perhaps due to the fact that "women of wealth" could cross the thin line between decency and extravagance, Mrs. Sackey's public image emphasized her role as a responsible mother and wife.

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[51] Within Accra's representational economy, to fully explore why Accra's female CEOs were not explicitly celebrated as "extraordinary women" in the liberal democratic sense would require a historically grounded semiotic analysis, that takes into account the complex ways in which women's economically productive roles have been negotiated in the course of pre-colonial, Victorian colonial and post-colonial history.

[52] Yet, interestingly, in Ghana it seems that currently one can be made a queen mother due to extraordinary achievement – I once witnessed a ceremony in which a white missionary worker was made a queen mother thanks to her development work for the community.

Besides her role as what could be called a “queen mother of professionalism,” Mrs. Sackey also constantly talked about the significance of making sure that City Services outlived generations. Fiifi was being prepared to take up the position as the CEO after her. Such arrangements could potentially address particular inheritance arrangements in a matrilineal family unit, however, instead of inheritance, Mrs. Sackey rather talked about the necessity to “leave a legacy” – namely, that as a Christian, she wanted to ensure that what she had built did not die with her, but could live on. This was interesting given the popular discourse in Accra about Ghanaian companies that “died with the owner”. Private businesses were imagined as integrally connected to the charisma and personality of the owner, hence connections were also ruptured at the time of the owner stepping down. This was acutely clear in the case of Mepex, where we practically tried to make use of the brand that Sammy had built, which was proving difficult. In these public discourses, the existence of a private family business was considered as just one lifetime. Compared with popular discourses of grandsons destroying the company in Italian silk manufacturing business (Yanagisako 2002), in Ghana a company could die much faster than three lifetimes. Indeed, at City Services, efforts were already in place to ensure that “dying” with Mrs. Sackey was not their fate. Fiifi was leading the most publicly visible department of the company, namely Media and Publishing. He had also been instrumental in rebranding the company in 2011, which had earned City Services many marketing awards. Fiifi received those awards side-by-side with Mrs. Sackey, and he often accompanied her to public events and speech engagements. Her other children were also either already working, or preparing to work for the company, and family pictures dominated her personal office. While family business could indeed be conceptualised as a site of affective relationships that underpinned running a productive institution that glorified not just a family, but an entire lineage, they recognised that their non-blood related employees did not necessarily share this same relationship to the company. “We want to create an emotional attachment to the company,” Fiifi explicitly said during an interview. Next, I turn to explore the different ways in which such attachment could be created by a particular work on the self of the employees. Similarly to Kondo's (1990) ethnography of casting a 'company as a family' in a Japanese family business, in the case of City Services, creating emotional attachment could take a number of different forms, in which Christian media and materials came to play an intriguing productive role.

Christian business heroism and devotional discipline

On one lunch break during the early stages of my internship I sat down to eat with Mr. Lamptey, the general manager of City Outsourcing. I was not yet aware that he was practically next to Mrs. Sackey, and sat down with him as he was the only one eating by himself. First we were both eating, in silence, a bowl of banku and green soup, a meal that was partly subsidized by City Services to their employees. Mr. Lamptey started asking about my reasons for coming to do an internship with City Services, and I told about my interest in “Christianity in business”. Immediately Mr. Lamptey started lamenting Ghana's problems, the high unemployment rate and prevalence of corruption that was a challenge every single day. Politics was also a constant problem. He stated, “In Ghana, everything is politicised. Sometimes, as a company leader, you may say that you are fine with some idea of a politician, and the next minute, you are labelled. They come to you. That's why we are very careful, we don't want to get into politics since once you get in there, they will hurt you." I asked him to clarify. Did he mean that they might actually, physically, kill you? Mr. Lamptey looked at me matter-of-factly, stating, “Yes, of course."

Our discussion continued in the corridor as other employees kept coming in and out of the lunch room. Mr. Lamptey, delaying his return to his office, continued explaining that as Christians they constantly run into difficulties running the business. He was a Charismatic Pentecostal who attended an Assemblies of God church. As he explained, the ordinary way to succeed in Ghana's service business sector is to pay at least a 10% bribe for a contact in the client company who is responsible for transacting the business, such as contracting City Services to handle their payroll:

> “There are times when Joel [the head of Training Services] comes to me, and explains this is what is happening. I tell him, you know what you have to do. It's in our policies. We have to drop the deal. We say, keep your deal. Then they would come back again and say, 'oh sorry, we didn't mean it.' No, that's exactly what you meant.”

Mr. Lamptey concluded: “You know many of us, we are Christians, and we want to operate according to the religious …” He paused, looking for a word. “Principles.”

The policies that Mr. Lamptey referred to were personally set by Mrs. Sackey when she established the company in 1994. These policies centred on absolute refusal to provide or accept bribes, and were evident in stories shared and told about veritable anti-corruption 'heroism' of Mrs. Sackey. Every employee at City Services knew about these stories, which could also travel to the broader public space through their HR-related publications, such as HR Focus Magazine. One story went as follows: Mrs. Sackey had refused to pay bribes in the state-administered Tema port in order to clear the construction materials coming from China to start building the new Head Office. As a result, the building process was delayed, and she had to pay extra for the contractor. When the materials finally arrived, they stayed in the port for nearly a year before they were finally released, due to Mrs. Sackey's refusal to pay “any extra” to the state officials in the port, bribery being a familiar practice. Some of the less instrumental materials were still in the port after four years, such as rugs and decorations. “I still keep on praying they return them one day,” Mrs. Sackey once said, and pointed at her bare floor – she had refused to buy a rug, because she believed God would eventually release the missing items from the port. For Mr. Lamptey, this act was proof that Mrs. Sackey was committed to transparency and anti-bribery as a Christian who stood firm by her principles in a “challenging business environment.” Indeed, Ghana was frequently portrayed as a country where commitment to what Mr. Lamptey called “Christian” business principles, such as refusal to pay bribes, was difficult – the norm was to transact money informally to benefit a wider network of individuals, which Mrs. Sackey consciously confronted. The informal norm was an economy premised upon a logic of circulation that justified the existence of ‘big men’ and ‘big women’ as long as there was redistribution (Nugent 1995: 4).

In such stories Mrs. Sackey was portrayed as the guardian of both exemplary, ethical behaviour, as well as Christian spiritual sincerity as a business professional. Like Ms Amuah, she called Christianity a 'way of life' that she had grown into since childhood – in other words, how could she separate them? She was a Christian from church to home and the workplace. Christianity as a faith background was also widely shared among City Services employees. Christianity seemed the dominant (or even exclusive) religion, although they represented diverse denominations such as Methodist, Charismatic Pentecostal, Presbyterian, and Catholic. At the time of my internship, there were no Muslim workers in the company, but I was told that there had been some in the past. Mrs. Sackey's personal assistant, Yaa, clarified once, perhaps envisioning my thoughts, that they did not "recruit according to religion." However, every potential recruit was informed in advance about the "Christian company culture." She appeared to imply that prospective employees from other religious backgrounds may need to consider whether the Christian ethos of the company suited them. Mrs. Sackey would affirm the principle of transparency and merit in recruitment: they hired according to "talent", not religion.

Sharing Christianity as the faith background started to make sense as I began attending the mandatory morning devotions that took place at the start of every workday. Interestingly, Mrs. Sackey explained that morning devotion was also "mandatory" in her family; they started every morning with a prayer before they left the house. If they were in a hurry, they would do an "abridged version," but they never missed a devotion. At City Services, the devotion started promptly at 7.45am and finished by 7.55am just on time so that employees had enough time to take their position behind their desks before the doors of the Head Office opened to the public. Most often I found myself running from the trotro minibus stop in the main road in order to get to the devotion on time, as late-comers were immediately marked. Beata was also sometimes late – she sometimes picked me up from the roadside and together we rushed in just before the start. Some employees arrived earlier to sit in the meeting room and have their own “quiet time” before the day started. The format of the devotion was the same each morning: we started by singing a hymn or a Gospel song sitting on the chairs in the largest meeting room, followed by reading a devotional message from a booklet such as Daily Manna, or passage from scripture. Each employee took turns chairing the devotion – some simply read the devotional message, while some could spend a minute or two reflecting on the message. However, there was no time to waste: the devotion was total ten minutes, so that we could take our positions within the five minutes before doors opened. After the reading we gathered in a circle holding each other's hands, and shared the grace. There was some flexibility to the format though, as Yaa told me. She had once read a motivational text that was not directly based on the Bible, but which was well received by the staff. When it was my turn to chair the morning devotion, I asked if I could read Max Ehrmann's poem “Desiderata”. Yaa said that the poem was possible since it was not “anti-Christian,” but well aligned with a Christian message.

Mrs. Sackey herself was most often not present in the devotion – she usually arrived at the office way after the opening times from her house. Occasionally she did join the devotion though, and in those times, her presence was not recognised in any special manner. Yet, although she was not personally present most mornings, she had assigned Katherine, who worked the front desk, to keep detailed registry of attendance. Katherine explained to me that every morning she sent the list to Mrs. Sackey's office. If somebody was consistently late and missed the devotion, she had to report these employees who could be called to the CEO's office to provide an explanation. “Mrs. Sackey has said she wants all of us to pray together," Katherine stated. Yet, not everybody was present, such as Donald, a jovial young man who worked in the Projects-department in the interface between the company and the client base. He was often out of office, as his work required roaming around the city visiting different companies and outsourced workers. I asked him once if she had ever been reported to Mrs. Sackey. Donald hurried to explain that most often he goes to client meetings straight from home so for understandable reasons, he cannot be present. Yet, in the office, Donald, who was a Methodist like Mrs. Sackey, frequently mentioned his voluntary church activities, such as leading the choir. Somehow it seemed that his absence in the devotions was tolerated since it pertained to his role at the interface of the company and the client-base that required constant movement. In the past years, Mrs. Sackey had personally confronted those employees who were consistently absent, but this did not happen during my internship.

It could be argued that one rationale behind the policy of mandatory morning devotions was to bring the staff together in different intimate guises. Approached from the premise of cultural logics of late-capitalism as that of producing attachment through different techniques of intimacy (McCloskey 2006: 130-138; Giddens 1992, cit. in Geschiere 2013), devotional discipline could indeed look like a neoliberal discipline of producing dedicated, "attached" worker-subjectivities (Rudnyckyj 2010: 251). Attendance in morning devotions was formally policed. Both I and Beata undoubtedly felt this discipline in a very bodily manner – we would race along the potholed road that made the car jump up and down, which clearly was not good for her car, and most often, managed to arrive on time. Although (or perhaps especially because) she was a family member, Beata recognised that she needed to be present. There was no special leverage given to family members in this respect. One morning after another, these devotions were integral to what it meant to be a City Services employee. But what could possibly explain that it was the format of a Christian morning devotion that could generate "emotional attachment" in the first place?

To unpack why attending morning devotions was important in a family business, in which the majority of employees were non-kin, requires recognising that Christian ethics, and capitalist ethics, could form complex "assemblages" (Rudnyckyj 2010: 105) that present the ethnographer with the analytical task of unpacking why certain formats of creating economically productive subjectivities would matter more than others. But productivity for whom, and in which form? These questions constantly brought me back to Grandma's worry about Edem's refusal to attend their family church (Chapter 2), which she appeared to connect with the lack of monetary contributions that could have transformed the family land. She also contemplated how "close" Edem was to God, which Elikem and Elizabeth had also worried seeing the misfortunes that Sammy went through. While Islam in an Indonesian state-owned factory has been adapted into human resource management programs to respond to challenges of economic privatisation and global competition (Rudnyckyj 2010), I suggest that the significance of morning devotions in a Fante family business was primarily connected with a particular idea of collective fellowship as the prerequisite of a productive unit, whether it was a family, or a family business. While I cannot discuss to what extent these issues influenced recruitment decisions as I did not attend any job interview, the current employees of City Services shared a notion of collective fellowship as integral of their role as employees. Above all, unlike Rudnyckyj's (2010) factory worker interlocutors, the employees never explicitly reflected on morning devotions as something “extraordinary”, which echoed Ms Amuah's lesson. The “flow of fellowship”, so to speak, was not an object of expert or even popular knowledge, but a highly ordinary state of affairs. I turn next to consider what happened after the devotions, by zooming into the particular forms of co-operative work and ambiance that characterised different departments.

Exemplary professionalism: the workflow

After the morning devotion, employees usually returned quickly to their respective departments, located in separate office spaces, and started the workday. Having worked in Accra's media companies of which a majority might have been considered “unstructured” by the standards of City Services, jumping into the everyday workflow of City Services was a striking experience. The pressure was felt every day, inasmuch as one's movements were closely followed by one's closest colleagues. There was a clocking device in the lobby, and everybody was expected to work from precisely 7.45am, the time of the morning devotion, till 5pm. Exceptions to this rule were supposed to be clearly communicated by Martin, who was the main person responsible for in-house human resource management. The few times that I had to leave earlier than 5pm, I received sharp comments from my female colleagues in the recruitment department – they said Martin had not communicated that I was allowed to do so.

They pressed me on the reasons for my early leave, and in the end, I had to go upstairs to speak to Martin who sent an official email about my status as both an intern, and a researcher who occasionally might have to deviate from company schedules. There were indeed clear structures in place, and the new recruits were made aware that one was to respect these structures from the first day onwards.

What could be called performances of professionalism characterised many of the departments where I rotated during the first half of the internship. The speed of work and efficiency was subject to constant evaluation and recognition. For instance, in the Training and Development department, Effia, the training officer, was sending me bunches of documents to edit and openly complained when I chatted too long with Mr. Lamptey on the corridor during my first week. The Training department was responsible for designing and selling organizational HR programs that trained the workers in good professional practice. We partly shared the office space with the recruitment. Dansoa, a recruitment officer who had recently migrated back to Ghana from the UK, complained about my speed of editing CVs. She would come to check on my progress and be surprised at how slow I was. Occasionally she came to the department giggling and feeling excited, saying, "I got a new recruit again! I like to be efficient, *chop chop chop chop* and I'm done!" Then she would ask about my progress, and express her dissatisfaction. Effia was going on about "multitasking," and saying that she was managing many strings at the same time. "Oh yes, me also I multitask all the time," Dansoa responded. Overall, Effia and Dansoa seemed to share a close bond and publicly announced when they achieved results. Their young, recently recruited assistant, Emma, was quieter and constantly typing by her desk, or making phone calls. Once she did not manage to have her lunch because she had been occupied since morning. Effia firmly told her, "You are not managing your time well, nothing is more important than your lunch," and sent her outside so that she could at least get a donut from a mobile seller. No matter how busy one was, one could not "kill oneself" by forgetting to eat. Food was indeed vital, which was also evidenced by the subsidy that City Services added to reduce the cost of a daily full hot meal that they ordered from a catering service nearby. Nobody ate sandwiches – most workers would take the full meal in the lunch room in the middle of the workday.

As these examples illustrate, there was a performative element to professionalism at both peer-level, and in hierarchical interpersonal exchanges that relied on mutual recognition of each other's achievement. Cultivating the appearance and outlook of professionalism also characterised the marketing department, which was right next to Mrs. Sackey's office. This department was responsible for producing the main publications of the department, namely HR Focus Magazine, and Marketing and Media Magazine, which discussed latest trends in the field. The department consisted of mostly young people in between 24-30 years of age. Unlike other media offices, there was hardly any random, leisurely talk; the ambiance was strictly focused. As Dalia, a 25-year old recently graduated editorial assistant, told me, “Most clients walk past this office when they go to see Mrs. Sackey. There are glass walls, so we all have to look busy, very professional. You can't just take a nap on the desk.” At this department, besides helping in writing articles, editing documents and contacting clients, I attended a number of performance review meetings in which each member of the department was given performance assessments during the week. These meetings were shaped by an apparent age hierarchy. Dan and Freddie were quick to point out errors and ascertain that the young ones were “telling the truth” when they stated they had “accomplished all the tasks.” They kept on asking more questions, which occasionally revealed that the employee had fallen short. For example, Dan once caught Dalia not following up on missed phone calls by sending emails, contrary to what had been agreed. Dan concluded that she had not “told the truth” when she had earlier claimed that she got everything accomplished. The conclusion was that she had fallen short, and the lesson was to do better next time.

City Services, similarly to Strategic Africa, appeared as an exemplary model of formalised economic action. Indeed, it was formality and “structures” that emerged as the key objects of knowledge among the employees, while its connection to Christian subjectivity existed mostly in the discourses of Mrs. Sackey and Mr. Lamptey. There also existed a veritable pride of working for a company with clear structures, as

Donald once expressed, comparing City Services to his previous workplace where he constantly had to cover up for his boss. The project of professionalism as a way of instilling formality also appeared in the discourse of City Services as an "organizational doctor." They claimed to train organizations and fix common problems such as lack of proper structures, neglect of customers, informality, gossip, and other traits deemed "unprofessional." Besides the Training and Development department that designed and sold these trainings, a key part of this effort was a number of management training videos that Mrs. Sackey had produced over the course of 15 years. One day Joel gave me the laptop to watch through all of them. Many of these videos portrayed lazy workers, disengaged customer service, and chronic lateness, which was taken as evidence of lack of proper structures in Ghanaian organizations that would inevitably run into difficulties: "In the growing competitive environment, there is a need to put adequate structures in place to identify lapses in operational performance and service delivery," as Mrs. Sackey stated in one video that depicted a gossiping secretary. In these media products that were intended for the Ghanaian domestic audiences and especially public sector companies City Services framed itself as "the doctor" that could diagnose and solve common problems.

These performances of professionalism can be fruitfully considered in relation to a rather clearly recognised "cultural other" – namely, the "Ghanaian business environment." Mrs. Sackey was personally confronting this business environment through what seemed a desire to "adhere to rules" (Tidey 2013), a desire that emerged in her anti-corruption stance. This desire was communicated in media and training products and internship orientations. At the level of employees, everyday workflow also emerged as a platform of constantly qualifying oneself, and each other, as a professional. This was mediated through inter-personal verbal exchange, as well as performance review meetings that seemed to start from the premise that speaking truth could not be taken for granted. "Ghanaians, they hide the truth", as many employees in these departments said in a frustrated tone. Dalia would press the Ghanaian candidates being recruited for other companies, seeking to ascertain that what they stated in their CV was true. There seemed to exist an image of Ghana as a context where acting according to “sound business principles” was difficult, while they were agents of change. For City Services, this image of Ghana as the cultural other came to be constructed vis-à-vis their own image as a professional institution, and professional employees. Yet, there were frictions. I turn next to the department where I spent the longest stint, which revealed that this cultural other was not necessarily “out there”, but could sneak inside the company itself.

The 'Projects' department: testing spiritual sincerity

After a period of rotating between different departments according to where help was needed, I finally landed in the Projects-department where I stayed for the majority of the internship period. In practical terms, Projects-department referred to the Outsourcing department which also brought in most of the company’s profits. As Mr. Lamptey said, this was the “cash cow” of the company, which had been separated into a subsidiary, where Mr. Lamptey had been general manager since May 2014. The department was strongly characterized by the presence of Auntie Beata, who was the head directly under Mr. Lamptey. The projects department had five permanent workers total, and me and Joe, another intern, a university student in his early twenties. In addition to Auntie Beata there was Jake, an out-going young man who called Beata "Auntie B" and who frequently joked with her about a number of personal and political issues. Auntie Beata’s rules on the “forbidden flows” of sociality in the internship orientation, namely talk about politics, football, and also religion, were hardly observed in her own office. After every Black Stars match (Ghana's national team) in the Football World Cup in June 2014, the morning would start with a heated debate on their performance, spearheaded by Jake. In the corner there was Iris, an office assistant in her early forties who was responsible for filing. In addition to the three permanent workers, there were two officers, Donald and Mr. Attah, whose prime responsibility was to bring more business to Outsourcing and act as the interface between clients and the company. Donald was an openly flirty, recently married man in his early thirties who would smoothly shift between talking about his wife and about the Bible classes he was giving in his Methodist church. He was also part of his church's music ministry, and often played classical Methodist hymns on his computer. Very often we listened to religious music in the Outsourcing department, which was also Auntie Beata's preferred background ambiance.

Besides helping with filing and writing payslips for the outsourced workers, I began to join Donald for client meetings. These were the occasions where the presence of "professional others" could surface the most clearly. One afternoon, sitting in his air-conditioned car in a traffic jam, Donald started talking about his previous boss and why he had eventually left the company. He had become close with his previous manager, but he was engaged in illicit affairs, such as sleeping with female employees, which he could not continue watching. He stated that City Services had a "good company culture", which he appreciated. At that moment, he received a Whatsapp message. He smiled widely and handed me his phone, asking me to look at the message. It was a Christian motivational message that combined a biblical verse with a counsel for the day. Donald said: "That's from him, we communicate, he sends me these messages all the time." In other words, although Donald recognised the benefits of working in a more reputable institution that had "clear structures", he maintained contacts in the workplace that in many ways sounded like the cultural other to City Services. In the client visits, Donald appeared like a businessman comparable to Sammy: he would talk pidgin with the Ghanaian executive contacts and outsourced workers. Outside the confines of the office, it appeared that Donald rather conformed to the styles of masculine, generous, redistributive self-representation that was more beneficial in the broader business field.[53]

Compared to his previous boss, Donald was clearly not at this level of intimacy with Mr. Lamptey, who maintained a degree of distance from his subordinates. His management style strongly contrasted that of Beata: he was a keen disciplinary figure who would constantly press us and make sure we were on time. His management style was particularly visible during our performance review meetings. One afternoon Mr. Lamptey arrived to the meeting room looking serious. He announced that the payslips for outsourced workers in several companies had not been delivered, and their workers' salaries were being delayed. Mr. Lamptey said, "If we don't give them payslips, how do we prove that we're not cheating them?" He talked about how failure to deliver payslips ultimately delivers the message that as a company, City Services is not trustworthy since they are "hiding information." At this point, Mr. Lamptey straightened his back and said that he had asked Jake for a list of companies which had not received their payslips. Jake looked rather shy at this point, and looked at Donald. There were eight companies total, and as Mr. Lamptey stated, most of these companies were under Donald's responsibility. Donald protested and said that some entries in that list "are not true", as he had delivered those payslips a long time ago. Mr. Lamptey became agitated, and so did Donald. He raised his voice and said he had seen payslips laying in Donald's car that had not been delivered. "You should take responsibility!" Donald cried out, "Ah, boss, why are you always implying that I am not doing my job, that I am to be at fault?" Mr. Lamptey ended the review meeting by addressing each and every one of us: "We say we are Christians, we go to church, but a good Christian does his job without excuses. You are saying you are a Christian but you are not doing your job! Every child of God does the work with no excuse." Auntie Beata, Iris, Claudia and I had all been quiet throughout this exchange. Donald was looking rather pensive. Mr. Lamptey continued: "It is not only in the pulpit and in the church that one is Christian, and outside the church you can do whatever you want." The meeting finished. We all returned back to our spots, and continued work.

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[53] However, I did not witness any meetings with foreign clients or contacts, which were significant numbers in the City Services client base. As far as I understood, Mrs. Sackey was responsible for the most high profile client meetings, together with Mr. Lamptey.

This was one of the clearest occasions in which the assemblage between Christian ethics, and private sector employee ethics, was ethnographically visible. Mr. Lamptey directly connected professionalism with being a true Christian. Professional behaviour, in other words, did not only authenticate the employee as an effective capitalist subject, but also a devout believer. However, contrary to what could be assumed, the exchange between Mr. Lamptey and Donald did not result in severing of their relationship. The next day, when Mr. Lamptey came to the office looking for his missing pen drive and wearing a nice looking lightly coloured jacket, Donald exclaimed from his desk: “Oh my boss, you are looking very good today!” Mr. Lamptey did not say a word. Later on our way to another client meeting, Donald said: “As for Mr. Lamptey and me, we are fighting all the time.” Although the day before Mr. Lamptey had directly accused Donald of being irresponsible, and not a true Christian, this did not result in a relationship gone sour. However, professionalism and Christian subjectivity appeared to inhabit the same conceptual space in Mr. Lamptey's vision of corporate discipline. Above all, Mr. Lamptey tended to subscribe to a particular version of Ghanaian Christianity that he stated made a separation between “church” and “workplace” – people lacked commitment to Christian ethics outside their church lives, which emerged as an object of disciplinary action.

In our subsequent interviews, Mr. Lamptey was surprisingly open about what he defined as “a problem of supervision” in the organization. He started complaining, while being tape-recorded, that Auntie Beata was “not able to supervise.” However, he could not report her because she was related to Mrs. Sackey. Mr. Lamptey therefore recognised the limits of his corporate supervision, and disciplinary vision – Auntie Beata was invincible. In fact, during my internship, Auntie Beata was even given a promotion and a new title, on which other employees remarked affectionately: “Oh Auntie Beata, I hear you are a big boss now!” exclaimed Claudia, one of the officers, when she came back to the office after her summer holiday, and hugged her tight. Auntie Beata indeed seemed well liked among the employees, while Mr. Lamptey would follow from a distance these displays of affection. Above all, the Projects Department further showed that the “others” of professionalism came to be constructed at the same time as a particular ethical vision of professionalism was being instilled. Christian religious speech, for one, could evoke imageries that attempted to bridge the space between these various others. I turn next to a particular event that showcased how Christian public figures, and ritual formats such as prayer, came to occupy the same conceptual space with an organizational discourse of economic crisis as a state of blockage.

Visit from a UK pastor: leadership training

The problem of supervision dominated the narratives of the organizational performance of City Services. To address these issues, Mrs. Sackey organized an executive-level training in July 2014 led by a Ghanain female pastor and human resource consultant based in the UK, who was on a visit to Ghana and Kenya. She had already trained the staff of Barclay's Bank Ghana Headquarters, and had extended the visit to City Services. We all gathered in the biggest meeting room, and Mrs. Sackey started with critical remarks for the first half of the year 2014: "There is an economic crisis in the country, which all companies are feeling. Also, there is lots of lateness in the system, people are coming late to work." At this point, Effia, who was sitting next to me, whispered that she doesn't understand why so much time is spent on talking about staff being late. "I don't think that's a problem," she said, looking baffled. Mrs. Sackey also gave feedback on the management meeting: "No department has met their target this year. And we are second week of July." She acknowledged the general economic situation in Ghana and foreign exchange rates, which is also affecting their business. She says they have a lot of funds locked in debt – client are not paying for their services. However, it appeared that for her, the most significant issue in this situation was the problem of supervision. There were issues with "attitude, punctuality and time management." Mrs. Sackey stressed that taken the external changes, they also had to change the way they worked and conducted business. I somewhat shared Effia's confusion – supervision appeared already effective, while Mrs. Sackey and Mr. Lamptey agreed that it was a problem.

Mrs. Sackey introduced the pastor as her close friend. She gave a long list of her qualifications, which included running a successful consultancy enterprise, having a leadership role in a Charismatic Pentecostal church, and being named among the "10 Most Influential Black Christian Women in the UK." Her training was titled "Effective Kingdom Leadership", which she started by giving a reference to two scriptures upon which the training was founded. The first was Ps. 78: 70-71: "He chose his servant David, calling him from the sheep pens. He took David from tending the ewes and lambs and made him the shepherd of Jacob's descendants – God's own people, Israel." The second scripture was Matthew 20: 26-28: "But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant. Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Her theory of leadership was firmly grounded in the scripture, which she took as the baseline to encourage the executives to think of themselves as the "chosen people" whose leadership position was bestowed by God. They needed to use that position well, in order to glorify the position entrusted them by a divine entity. In other words, their position was a result of concentrated effort that undoubtedly included their own work, but also the agency of God.

The pastor kept the training highly practical, and addressed what she considered the main problem of leadership in Ghana: "You are too free with the people." Effectively, the pastor implied that flows of sociality and circulation were too much, and should be absent from the office. At this point, Dan raised his hand and voiced his concern: "They would say, oh charley you are *too known*," and asked how to supervise the best taken that people may take it wrongly. "Too known" effectively meant a person who was bossy and put himself above one's peers, which could result in jealousies, even outright danger. The pastor responded: "One thing about leadership, not everybody can like you. What they don't respect is double standard. *That* is hypocrisy. All the time leadership is under a test." Throughout the talk, Effia was carefully observing her immediate boss, Joel, who shared responsibility in the Training department. "Why is he taking notes, after all we are only two," she whispered. She asked a question about a situation of shared responsibility in order to clarify whether leadership was always top-down. The pastor said Effia had clearly understood the issue: "You made my point, leadership is not necessarily hierarchical. Leadership is influence, it is situational. Because it is situational, there will always be somebody on top. And remember we all influence with our expertise, so you must build a team of experts!"

The training finished with a Charismatic prayer. We started by singing a Gospel song:

“It's already better...It's already better...Hallelujah! It's already better...” We were all holding hands, and keeping our eyes closed. The prayer, led by the pastor, lasted for over ten minutes total, here in a heavily abridged version:

> You are the ultimate leader greatest leader Lord Jesus. There is no problem that stops you, no problem that fears you. So we come to you in that same understanding, you told Peter you can make him a fisher of men, and influencer, that's what we ask for City Services and its leadership team today. You know everybody's weaknesses, you know where we are failing, you know what our troubles are, our personal habits, you know who we ought to be, those things that so easily snare us and drag us down instead of up. (…) Let them have a sense of mission, you have not brought them to City Services just by coincidence, they are here to make a difference, they are valued, that you hand-picked them to advance this organization! That its greatness because of the work that they do. Thank you for the spread of unity, thank you for team spirit, thank you for consecration as team members, thank you for commitment as team members (…). We bless this organization, father wherever is haemorrhage we put stop to it, we seize it in the name of Jesus that nobody will be made redundant because of a lack of business or a loss of business. We say father we shut the doors to loss [*people say, Amen!]* and open the doors to a multiplication of business [*people shout out more loudly, AMEN!*]. We call the team from the north south east and west, father we take them beyond the boundaries of this nation, father, we say that we bring experts in from other country, so why can't experts be taken from here, to serve other countries, so we should open the doors of this nation! (…) Let them say to themselves, our cups are filled with enough rewards from Ghana, now we must serve these nations that need us, let them appeal to government that need them! Let them look and say their best is yet to come. CHANGE THEIR PERSPECTIVE OH GOD, REPOSITION THEM IN THINKING AND IN HEART, IN AMBITION AND PASSION AND DESIRE! [*increasing volume*] (…). And as father we have spoken it, the voice of the people is the voice of God, we all agree and we say: "AMEN! Hallelujah!" [*Employees recite in unison. The prayer is concluded. People start leaving*]

The training was the ultimate lesson about what I earlier called “flow of fellowship.” This flow was vital, in the sense that it mirrored similar flows of spirituality inside Mrs. Sackey's family that could be transported to the realm of family business. The collective prayer that finished the leadership training presented a macro-economic crisis as a state of blockage (Weston 2013), that was to be opened by the concentrated effort of both the mind and the body of the employees in the act of prayer. Aside its other rich metaphors, the prayer depicted business problems as a matter of “haemorrhage,” which can stand for both profuse bleeding, and rapid or sudden loss of blood. This was the part of the prayer to which the employees, including Mrs. Sackey, reacted the most vocally. Maintaining the flow of fellowship amongst employees, through the collective act of prayer, involved the power to qualify work as an experience of vitality that nevertheless was subject to constant negotiation. Dan clearly did not want to be considered as “too known,” while the pastor and Mrs. Sackey positioned scripture as the locus of wisdom that justified practices of supervision. Supervision, in their interpretation, was the key to the flow of money. And money, aka Pat Thomas, could as well be blood.

Concluding remarks

Ghana's privately-owned business sector has come to incorporate elements that may seem vaguely familiar to the Western observer. This familiarity may boil down to the Weberian legacy that would position virtues of professionalism, such as hard work and speaking truth in the public space, as the objects of knowledge and self-cultivation. Yet, this chapter has attempted to show that there were deeper logics of social relations, gendered authority, family business and middle class citizenship at play in understanding the representational economy between Christian media and materials, and a veritable desire for professionalism and formality that characterised the company's everyday workflow. Company founders can imagine their businesses “as ministry” that expands beyond benefiting a single family and transforms an entire nation by “leaving a legacy.” These two projects, however, did not always go hand in hand, as the reality of hierarchy between blood- and non-blood employees, demonstrated by Auntie Beata's invincible position and Mr. Lamptey's dissatisfaction, remained.

This chapter has also discussed City Services as a site of constructing “professional others” located in the broader Ghanaian urban economy. I suggest that these professional others, such as state officials in Tema Port, came to stand for religious others as well. Although not explicitly verbalized, for Mrs. Sackey and Mr. Lamptey, as well as some of the workers such as Donald, the Ghanaian business environment was full of actors who did not share their values as Christians. They could explicitly refuse bribery also undoubtedly due to their economic means. The employees engaged with the assemblage of Christian ethics, and corporate ethics, through different registers. While Donald would still maintain his connections to his former boss, employees recognised practices such as morning devotions and collective fasting as normal in their full participation as professional subjects. On the other hand, the effect of evoking Christian imageries, for instance when Mr. Lamptey implied Donald was not a true Christian subject, is harder to assess. Yet, the mere fact that assessment of one's character as a professional and Christian could be semiotically related speaks to the malleability of religious mediums as cultural resources that have come to make sense in knowledge economy businesses such as City Services.

A further note remains about the popular uncertainty about the actual work of City Services. Many friends and colleagues expressed suspicion of a concept of recruitment through formal enterprise, instead of the more familiar practice of getting a job through personal connections. "They steal people's salaries," an unemployed, university-educated female friend of mine commented. She ruled out the idea of applying for a job through their databases on the grounds that she had heard they deduct a portion of the employee's salary without informing the employee. They have "a secret alliance" with the company who pays less to the new recruit, and channel this money to City Services company coffers, she said. "Of course, they would never tell you that," she added. In these popular imaginaries, City Services was hiding something – Similarly to Elikem's insistence on religious principles, the company itself could be a source of blockage, if understood as an institution that keeps money instead of distributes. They could be hiding their practices of exploiting workers who were promised one figure, and given another. These imageries further reinforced how any project of professionalism as the register of integrity and transparency was hard to achieve, and never concluded. These projects navigated an economy premised upon the logic of hidden, informal material flows in constant circulation, while Protestant modes of sincerity called for meticulous tracking of these flows in order to qualify as true Christian professionals.

These observations ultimately raise questions on the broader implications of Christianity as a public religion in Ghana. The desire for professionalism, and presence of Christian media as the corollary of these desires, could look different depending on the subject position. For corporate owners, these desires were integrally connected with the broader political economy of professionalism, while in the company, these desires were shaped by deeper logics of sociality, and the kind of flows that sustained productivity and life itself. In other words, unravelling how forces that may not *seem* to be 'neoliberal' shape capitalist sites of production, and produce different types of *capitalisms* (ex. Ho 2005) and cultural logics of economic action, requires long-term ethnographic engagement with spaces and people who are collaboratively, through trial and error, finding out what kind of action counts as more productive than another. Next, I extend this proposition by shifting the ethnographic lens to Charismatic Pentecostal start-up entrepreneurs, who prompted me to reconsider the kind of theories of value that apply to the analysis of new sites of economic production.

Letter of Sponsorship to Manager of Heaven: interlude

March 2014.

“Spiritpreneurship Summit” reads a signboard at a popular junction. “Ghana's Premier Gathering of Christian Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders.” Intrigued, I snap a picture through the window of a shared taxi on my way to the Mepex office. A young man's voice responds when I call the number displayed in the advert. I introduce myself as a research student on Ghanaian professionals and the “role of Christianity in business,” and ask if it were possible to meet the organizer of the summit. After a few days, the young man gets back to me. He says that “Papa,” namely Randy, the CEO, is ready to meet me. I am welcome to visit their company, Kharis Media Limited, in Tema, a buzzing business town right next to Accra best known for the country's largest harbour. Mrs. Sackey, who knows Randy well and is also a guest speaker in Spiritpreneurship Summit, described him as “a fire brand. He is younger, he has a lot of energy, and he wants to make a big big difference. Randy is looking at a bigger picture, but I am thinking that the change always starts with us, what you can control, so I am focusing on what I can do in my little corner.”

The small office is in the upper floor of a new building that is still being completed, at the furthest edge of a new residential area. A young lady welcomes visitors in the air-conditioned, brightly-coloured lobby. She asks me to sit down. The glossy front covers of their flagship product, *Kharis Magazine*, are displayed by the receptionist's counter. They also publish self-help and motivational books. The latest one, *Dream of a New Ghana: Reality or Myth?* by Piesie Okyere-Darko Nyamenna, is on the table. The book talks about the spirit of Ghana's founding fathers, the “Big Six,” three of which the author picks as exemplars of citizens who had “faith in Ghana.” Tetteh Quarshie smuggled cocoa seeds to Ghana from Fernando Po with the faith that “what was good for the foreign land could be good for his fatherland.” And Ghana became one of the largest cocoa exporters of the world. Kwame Nkrumah took loans and used them to build world-class infrastructures like the Accra-Tema Motorway, Tema Harbour, and Akosombo Hydroelectronic Dam. We are in Tema; the Dam is still the backbone of the nation's energy production. The book casts the 21st century economic migration from Ghana to the West as a form of enduring slavery:

> "Almost everyone – from the pastor to the state official – is in the queue for a visa to travel to the West. Didn't we shout to the rooftop that we wanted independence? Didn't we say we could manage our own affairs? Why then are we trooping out in such great numbers to the slave masters' domain?"

I put down the book as I am asked to enter the CEO's office. "Papa" turns out to be a young, affable gentleman dressed in black suit and sitting behind a dark wooden desk. "Well, Anna, welcome to Kharis Media. I am happy you have found out about us. My name is Randy." He explains that Spiritpreneurship is not just about the Summit. It is a "concept" that captures the unity of spirituality, business, and the impact that Christians can make in the Ghanaian marketplace. We discuss for a long time what Randy calls the "negative mind-set" that plagues Ghana. He wants to build a media empire that "projects positivity":

> "We live in an environment where it is difficult to see people pursuing dreams. The environment is hostile. There may be a reason. People are not liberated in terms of their spirit. There is a lot of fear not to pursue one's dreams. But once you have God, why you should be afraid of the Devil? In Ghana here, we would rather magnify the Devil than we magnify God."

He asks many questions about the nature of my research and what I am hoping to achieve. "We hardly understand the real impact of faith in business, and I can see that your research would be a great platform for us to also understand its impact factor." My mind backtracks to my emails and the university letter of introduction – did I mention "impact"? I ask if there were a possibility to help out in the organization of the Summit. Randy contemplates that there should be a way to involve me in Kharis Media and also link me with other companies that he identifies as part of the "movement."

Before I leave, Randy shows me something next to his desk. It is a crumbled hand-written letter framed neatly on the wall. "Letter of Application to sponsor Kharis Magazine," the subject line reads, addressed to the "Manager of Heaven." We had discussed the problem of acquiring start-up capital in Ghana. Banks charge high interest rates while investors, both Ghanaian and foreign, rarely trust young African entrepreneurs. This letter to the ”Manager of Heaven” is the first letter Randy had ”sent” to ask for funds to print, promote and circulate the first issue of *Kharis Magazine.* He explains:

> ”I thought that if God gave me the business idea, then he must be ready to fund it as well. So, before I go to any other company, why don't I go to the person who gave me the idea? And I think it makes sense, so for me, I just wrote a letter to God. I addressed it to the ‘Manager of Heaven’, because that's where he is. I think that our faith must be practical; God has eyes and ears. So in the letter, I told him about the vision, and I said, there's a request, in his words, that's the Bible, Matthew 7:7, or so, it says, "Ask and it shall be given on to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened." So based on this advertisement in the Bible, I am putting in my application. Because it says, ”ask,” so this is my letter, I am asking for funds for the dream he has given me. These are the benefits: His name is going to be published, people are going to be inspired, people are going to be redirected to him. So that's it. He gives me something, I give him back. So I put up a table, and a chair, and I presented the letter in an envelope. Of course, God is a spirit, so he can't hold it, but I presented it to him, so for me I have done my work.”

At that time, Randy was still an undergraduate student of Agricultural Sciences in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, planning his enterprise from his dormitory room. He put on a suit and a tie and ”pitched” the business idea to God after midnight, when most students were asleep. The following day, he sent a bunch of sponsorship letters to companies in Kumasi and Accra, who he asked to sponsor his business. As he had to God, he promised these companies wide circulation and publicity as a return of investment.

Chapter 6: God's Start-ups: a prayer theory of value[54]

Introduction: recap, and the letter

While Charismatic Pentecostalism was the dominant denomination among my colleagues and young professional friends, Accra's workplaces constantly appeared as sites of religious plurality. The social networks of Edem, Mandu, Kodjo and Sita incorporated Muslims and Christians from various denominations, who displayed varying degrees of "devotion." Some were regular church-goers, others went to church every now and then. Some paid regular tithe, others refused to pay tithe altogether, and criticised pastors for "chopping" the money in a similar way that politicians were chopping their taxes. Some prayed in the middle of the workday and listened to broadcast sermons online, others did not. Most of my media colleagues would proclaim themselves as Christians who had accepted Jesus as their personal saviour, but they contested the idea that church-going was the ultimate evidence of being "good Christians." They had also encountered Charismatic Pentecostal managers in their workplaces. Their management style could involve spontaneous ministry sessions from a Bible on the iPad, which some found pushy and intrusive, others genuinely motivational. Sammy and Elikem taught me to think about proximity to divine presence as a matter of playful negotiation. The collective prayer around Sammy's sickbed showed that prayer was recognised as a potential solution to Sammy's blocked state of being, while Aba was laughing at Elikem's witch-talk as the potential cause of this blockage. At City Services, an executive-level leadership training at a moment of economic crisis involved a 10-minute Charismatic Pentecostal-style prayer. In these plural workplaces, Christian elements, such as prayer, fasting, potential of witchcraft and Charismatic Pentecostal managers, existed vis-à-vis different kind of religious subjectivities, which resulted in varying interpretations.

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[54] In this chapter, I make an exception and use the real names of the entrepreneurs in question due to the fact that the names of their companies and products are analytically important.

In March 2014, I met Randy and his fellow "spiritpreneurs" who provided yet another interpretation of the nexus of professionalism, religion, and capitalism in Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism, which this chapter zooms into. Three years after sending the first “letter of sponsorship” to God, Randy was leading Kharis Media Group, a self-proclaimed Christian media and publishing company. Similarly to City Services in the previous chapter, every day at this small company started with a devotion and Bible study at 7.30am. Their devotion was longer, usually 20-30 minutes, compared with 10 minutes at City Services. The devotion was followed by at times long hours of start-up business. Besides Christian glossy magazines, Kharis Media published motivational books written by mostly young first-time authors, organized fee-paying Christian motivational events, and ran a printing, courier and food delivery business on the side. One such motivational event was the “Spiritpreneurship Summit,” which I became involved in as a “research consultant,” as well as the second MC, following Randy's suggestion. Randy introduced me to a wider network of young Charismatic Pentecostal start-up entrepreneurs in their late twenties and early thirties, who pronounced that their businesses were doing “God's work.” Yet, compared with Mrs. Sackey's concept of “business as ministry,” these young entrepreneurs appeared to uphold an explicitly activist stance towards the meaning of work as Christian professionals. Randy in particular constantly talked about a “revolution” that was to occur in the Ghanaian marketplace as a result of their work, which would result in, for instance, more companies building churches in their compounds, more committed Christians acquiring wealth and leadership positions, and the eradication of practices such as corruption that dragged the economy down. This revolution entailed global repercussions – spiritpreneurs would turn upside down a global political economy in which persons who they called atheists were in possession of greatest wealth, and make Ghana into a respectable nation in the hierarchy of successful national economies.

When I left Randy's office the first time, the crumbled letter to God appeared as the kind of “strange thing” that the Comaroffs (2009: 33) have argued emerge in complex interfaces of culture, religion, capital and commerce. They call these strange things “ethno-commodities,” such as investment banks owned by Tswana chiefs, which draw their appeal from culturally sensible sources of authority (such as the chief as a source of protection and nurture) that merge with neoliberal commodity formats of capital accumulation. Randy's letter appeared as the latest product of the global appeal of Charismatic Pentecostal 'health and wealth' prosperity gospel, which among Ghanaian Pentecostals involves a concept of belief as a practical matter that engages the scripture with everyday problems (Daswani 2015a: 19). While the appeal of prosperity gospel in Ghana has been linked with neoliberal sensibilities of entrepreneurial self-representation (Van Dijk 2012), Randy's letter seemed to involve more than what Comaroffs and various other analysts have called the forces of “the Age of Entrepreneurialism and Human Capital” (2009: 150). What kind of God was even able to receive a letter of sponsorship? What kind of private enterprises and products emerged as a result of conceiving an enterprise as doing “God's work”? How did these enterprises exist in relation to a wider moral horizon and urban economy? As this thesis has shown, this economy was a complex ecosystem of circulatory flows between persons, families, institutions and divine entities, which spiritpreneurs extended to the realm of the Christian God.

This chapter explores questions like these through the stories of three spiritpreneurs. I discuss their evangelical responsibility to effect a cultural change amongst those they considered “mainstream professionals,” a category to which they might have included the likes of Edem, Kodjo, Mandu, Sammy, and Aba. The kind of products they generated were integrally tied with this ambition: to make “deep Christian” professionals out of “fake Christian” ones, which in their understanding entailed the promise of transforming entire Ghana – deep Christian professionals equated with an idea of the kind of homeland where God's presence could be clearly traced. In order to get to the bottom of why such ambition would matter, I focus on the co-operative work that occurred in the realm of their start-up enterprises. The focus on work, instead of only the content and form of the media product, reveals an important layer for tackling what Comaroffs (2009: 24) propose as the key question to theorize emerging formations of culture, commerce and capital: “What counts as capital, what as labor?” I propose that the particular form of their co-operative work can be fruitfully conceptualised through a prism of what I call “prayer theory of value.” This is a local theory of the kind of circulatory logic that incorporates God as an agent of productive force. Through discussions on prayer and other type of Christian ritual practice, this chapter places prayer at the centre of anthropological theories of value (Graeber 2001), and reveals the multiplicity of forms that work could take in the realm of start-up enterprises established by born-again Christian believers.

The evident problem of prayer-as-work, however, is the fact that one cannot immediately see how its effects materially manifest, or will unfold in the future. In order to illustrate what prayer theory of value could mean in practice, I argue that spiritpreneurs were essentially involved in producing the kind of flows of sociality that generate conviction that one's life and enterprise are manifestations of God's will. Contrary to the style of public Christianity at City Services, for spiritpreneurs the felt intimacy with God becomes an important object of professional, 'expert' knowledge. Ultimately, the case of spiritpreneurs brings nuance to theorising the kind of forces that underpin the “strange things” that emerge in the era of economic privatisation.

The style of the spiritpreneur: conversion narratives

Let me first introduce the central characters of this chapter. Although I did not yet know that he also self-identified as a “spiritpreneur,” I first met Geoffrey in autumn 2013. I had come across his company online called “Christian Institute of Business Executives” (CIBE). CIBE organized workshops on accounting, budgeting, project management and other professional skills, with a motto to “raise professionals to serve God.” Geoffrey explained, “Jesus is not against business, but against the motivation to do bad, and wayward use of money.” I attended his events, and visited him various times in his small, recently opened church, from where he was practically running his enterprise as he did not have an office. Geoffrey occupied a double role as an entrepreneur and a lay minister being trained for a leadership position in his church. Both of these roles went well together – he said his pastor offered both business advice and spiritual advice, while together they were invested in growing their small church, which was gradually gaining more members. Indeed, during our meet-ups, his pastor frequently called just to check on him; he was kept abreast of Geoffrey's latest meetings, such as one with an anthropologist.

Later on, I met Randy, his wife Lois engaged in similar type of transformational enterprise, whom Geoffrey knew very well. “We are not in competition, we are all doing God's work,” he stated. Randy and Lois had met during their university studies when Randy started Kharis Media. While Lois had influenced Randy's religious life, she had gradually become greatly invested in her husband's work – she wrote columns for the magazines and served in the board of directors as a vice president. They went to one of Accra's major Charismatic Pentecostal churches, namely Perez Chapel, where they also paid their monthly tithe. However, some Sundays Randy could be found in other Charismatic Pentecostal churches, where he was invited to deliver guest sermons on spiritpreneurship. Like Geoffrey, he was a skilful public speaker who could deliver powerful sermons which mesmerised listeners through his engaged, cunningly intimate style of address characteristic of Charismatic Pentecostal pastors (De Witte 2011c). Nelson was Randy's marketing assistant, and similarly a staunch believer in the power of spiritpreneurship to transform the Ghanaian economy. He lived with his family in the far outskirts of Accra, where his mother and father were fishmongers. Nelson was preparing to start a micro-finance company, Nelson Capital, whose first clients were to be his mother's friends in the fish market. Through Randy, I also met Benjamin and Jerry, who were integral to the organization of Spiritpreneurship Summit, Benjamin as the website developer and publicist, Jerry as the main MC. Lastly, Randy introduced me to Belinda, who was leading a Christian modelling agency called Cross Walk Models. They worked at public events, such as Spiritpreneurship Summit, and were looking for sponsors to organise their first fashion show. Their slogan, “Walk for Christ, Walk for Life,” was intended to promote decent dressing and fashion sense in Ghana.

Entrepreneurs such as Randy and Belinda must be first contextualised in relation to the public role of Charismatic Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana, which suggests that

Christianity as the entrepreneurial style makes good commercial sense (De Witte 2011b). Cultural producers in particular have been factoring in the appeal of Charismatic Pentecostalism to popular audiences (Meyer 2015), which has transformed Charismatic Pentecostalism into a veritable “entertainment religion” that draws on the influence of American evangelical popular culture (De Witte 2012). This entertainment scene includes popular rap artists who sing Gospel, Pop Idols on Preaching and Gospel singing, as well as Christian pool parties and other entertainment events. Pastors could appear in the media as renaissance-style experts on virtually any topic, be it business, sex, career, or child-rearing. The names of the enterprises of Accra's spiritpreneurs, such as Kharis Magazine and Cross Walk Models, bore close resemblance to names of similar enterprises and cultural products among American evangelicals, such as Charisma Magazine. All in all, the influence of global Charismatic Pentecostal cultural flows certainly inspired the format and style of spiritpreneurs, who could find plenty of exemplars online.

Yet, the fact that they were claiming ownership, and authenticity, of terms such as spiritpreneurship is also important to take seriously. Whenever spiritpreneurs explained their rationale to become particular kind of entrepreneurs, they gave a long conversion narrative as an experience of 'rupture' from the kind of life they had lived before (Engelke 2004; Meyer 1998b; Robbins 2007a). In Randy's case, this conversion was immensely influenced by Lois, who he met when preparing to take a WASCE Maths exam. At that time, he was an up-and-coming rapper in his late teens with “zero interest” in Christianity, until he met Lois in his Maths teacher's house where they had their prep classes. They became friends, and Randy grew curious about Lois' capacity to intuitively understand other people, as if she had some “extra eyes,” a God-given capacity. God was literally speaking to Lois, which Randy thought would be useful when going to meet music producers to persuade them to give him a recording contract. Yet, he changed his perception as a result of a gamble that he decided to have with God. In this game, Randy asked for what he thought was impossible to obtain, and when God delivered, he decided to commit his life to serve God the best way he could. This experience led to the realization that he was merely “floating” in the entertainment world, going to sit with friends having drinks without any higher purpose. Later on, Randy and Lois started dating, and Randy became an active member of a Charismatic Pentecostal church on their university campus at KNUST. He abandoned his rapping circles to dedicate his time to Lois and the church community. Instead of pursuing a rap career, Randy put his mind into combining his born-again personhood with entrepreneurship, which eventually resulted in Kharis Magazine.

Belinda's experience echoed Randy's conversion narrative, showing the importance of coming to perceive that a qualitatively different type of professional career is the outcome of becoming born-again. She became "more deep into God" as she was pursuing a modelling career and competing in the Miss Ghana beauty pageant. Belinda grew increasingly uncomfortable exposing her body in the dressing room in front of men, let alone on the catwalk, which she reasoned was in conflict with her Christian faith. At that time, she started to take Bible study more seriously, and decided to leave the mainstream modelling world. However, contrary to Randy who fully abandoned rap circles and went into Christian media production, Belinda contemplated whether it was possible to combine her genuine interest in fashion, and her desire to lead "holy lives":

> Belinda: I knew that there are a lot of people who are facing what I am going through. They have the passion to model and they are also Christians, and compromising. So they are stuck with their passion inside them, or they are just pursuing it and forgetting about God. I remember I was talking to a friend about it, and I was like, for all you know, I will start a Christian modelling agency, for Christ. Then later on I sat down and I thought about what I said and I was like, this could actually happen, like a Christian modelling agency. I got really into it when I saw a scripture in the Bible, Exodus 28, which talks about the Christly garments. The Bible describes fashion designing from head to toe, so I thought, okay, the Bible talks about fashion designing so why can't there be modelling? If there is fashion design, who is supposed to wear that fashion design, who is supposed to advertise the fashion designers outfits? So there can be modelling in the Christian sector, so that everything will be based on the principles of Christ, who nurture our models to be decent, to just exhibit certain bodily characters. In the Bible we are the light of the world, so we have to stand up and be who we are in Christ. (…) So I thought of a name, and I was getting crazy name, I was thinking of funny names, like *Esther Modelling Agency*, so I decided to pray about it.

> AR: Did you have any other names?
>
> Belinda: I think *The Difference Modelling Agency*. I was just getting crazy names, so I started to pray. And then, the Holy Spirit told me to use *Cross Walk.* So that was when I decided to use Cross Walk. It was later that I came to realize that there was another agency, not in Ghana, but somewhere with the same name. So I was disappointed but later I realized, ok, it doesn't mean anything, the fact that they also have the same name. It doesn't mean that you copy them, it's your own thing, it's also a Christian based agency.

Belinda's narrative nails a number of important points about the complex sets of influences that could generate spiritpreneurship as an entrepreneurial style. First, becoming born-again, in the case of these young Christians, could involve changing one's professional career ambitions. Furthermore, born-again conversion also entailed interpreting the scripture as the manual of business and professional advice. Belinda could locate verses that could justify modelling as a feasible career trajectory, when appropriately adapted. Above all, this conversion happened on Ghanaian soil, while the Bible could be interpreted as the divine, global check-point of professional practice that may have led to similar company names in distant lands. The Bible was a globally applicable business manual that Belinda recognised had been undoubtedly consulted and spiritually contemplated by a number of others. In other words, having the same company name, in this interpretation, was not about "copying the West." It was rather evidence of participation in a global spiritual network in which Holy Spirit worked in mysterious ways.

A further, crucial influence rooted in Accra boils down to their particular churches. While Geoffrey received business and career advice from his pastor running a small but growing church, Belinda was a youth leader in one of Ghana's prime Charismatic Pentecostal churches, namely ICGC. The general overseer, Mensa Otabil, is one of the best known Charismatic Pentecostal public figures, who strongly supports entrepreneurship, and translates biblical message into practical business and life advice (De Witte 2003). Belinda said she had "tested" the idea in her church community, and gained wide approval. Although she was not close to Otabil, who was a highly sought after "celebrity pastor" (De Witte 2011b), she did have close contacts in the church, for instance with the youth pastor. Although I did not follow Belinda to ICGC, it became apparent from informal conversations, and at the events where various fellow church members contributed their labour, that her role in the church, like Geoffrey's, provided a special type of support for starting up the company. Although this support was not necessarily monetary, the church community could provide approval of career-related choices, which added these choices the quality-mark of virtue (Lambek 2008). To start up an enterprise was therefore not only a means of private accumulation, but also about a way of being a particular kind of Christian person. In other words, these choices became authenticated as virtuous thanks to one's membership in a church, which could intimately participate in their congregants' career-related pursuits, including fellow church members coming to provide their labour if needed.

I therefore suggest that unwrapping the multiplicity of influences that went into producing the style of a spiritpreneur requires attention to both global currents, and locally rooted religious communities of belonging. Next, I turn to how being born-again could also translate into a distinctive experience of Accra as a site of various "professional others," who were also widely constructed as religious others.

Battleground of professionals: urban religious others

Randy and Nelson saw corruption everywhere in Accra, a city full of agents devoid of true commitment to Christian faith. One afternoon we were driving towards their office, when Randy and Nelson pointed out a police man on the street who was leaning close to the driver in his car. They assumed that the policeman was asking for a bribe. Indeed, they were particularly convinced that neither public nor private sector careers had never been truly connected with Christian faith in Ghana, as evidenced by the continuing prevalence of corruption, namely, the reality of illicit material circulation that in their eyes prevailed in the city. This conviction led to a complex hierarchy of "professional others," comparable to City Services, but amongst spiritpreneurs these professional others incorporated a wider array of possible kinds beyond state-workers such as customs officials.

The first and biggest group was “fake Christians”; they shared the same religion, but possessed a qualitatively inferior commitment to Christian faith and its principles which made it possible for them to accept bribes without bad conscience. A person from any denomination could be a fake Christian, including Charismatic Pentecostals. Most likely, they might have called the likes of Edem, Kodjo and Mandu fake Christians, given the fact that some of their income came through undocumented sources. The category of fake Christian professionals speaks to the exceptionally thin line between local notions of true and fake Christianity in Ghana, which has become a matter of vibrant public debate and performance (Shipley 2009b), echoing Chidester's (2005) observations on a more global scale. Yet, as an extension of prevalent debates about “fake pastors” (Shipley 2009b; Daswani 2015b), Randy, Nelson, Belinda and Geoffrey saw lots of fake Christianity in the Ghanaian professional world. These fake Christians were essentially hypocrites who went to church and praised God, but who let go of their Christian commitment when it came to their work lives, and the intimate decisions they needed to make in more hidden venues. This critique extended to big companies as well: although various public and private companies in Ghana hosted devotional sessions, such as daily or weekly staff worship and prayer meetings, Randy, Belinda, Geoffrey and Nelson were not convinced that this yielded large scale impact. They said the “temple approach” had failed – churches were not enough to make people understand that they were supposed to “act Christian” in all aspects of life. The second group were what they termed “occult” professionals and private companies. “They are in the system, but it is obviously difficult to find evidence, because they wouldn't tell about it openly,” as Jerry, the main MC of Spiritpreneurship Summit and Randy's close friend told me as we were waiting for rehearsals to start. These professionals might consult native doctors for career success, or visit shrines in their hometowns to get extra boost for their careers. Although they could be found in the private sector as well, occult professionals were particularly prevalent in the Ghanaian public sector, as well as among politicians. This was one reason spiritpreneurs wanted to "stay away from politics" – there was too much potential occult presence that could eventually manifest in a vicious way. A closely connected third group that Randy and Nelson in particular talked about were political patrons in the private sector who got support from one of the major parties, which made their businesses thrive. Had they known Sammy and Chris, they probably would have given them as examples. They saw political patronage as un-Christian, being located close to the presence of the occult and ritual sacrifice that they perceived as common practice in state corridors of power.

Fourth, they recognized a global category of the secular or 'godless' professionals, such as Richard Branson and Wall Street investment bankers. One Sunday afternoon these bankers were at the centre of our discussion, as we were having lunch in Randy and Lois' home with a number of friends. They were discussing the sin of greed that had caused the global financial crisis. “The greatest wealth in the world is in the hands of atheists!” Randy and his friend Godwin exclaimed. Why was it so? The Christian God was supposed to be the God of abundance; therefore, Christians were also supposed to generate greater wealth than the atheists. Overall, they saw lots of evidence of the power of what they explicitly termed the “secular” in Ghana: rap artists such as Chris Rock attracted young people in masses, which “perverted” their minds. Belinda talked about youth fashions, such as miniskirts and baggy jeans that showed underwear, as signs of secular immorality. On this map of religious and ethical others, Randy and his peers furthermore held an ambivalent relationship to the presence of Islam in Ghana. Inasmuch as Muslims were religious others, they also considered “average Muslims” to be more disciplined and authentic believers than the majority of their fellow Ghanaian Christians. They saw lots of business success among Muslims,[55] which they attributed to their religious discipline, especially the disciplined form of prayer five times a day. The discipline of prayer, in their interpretation, was evidence of a deeper relationship with God, which translated into visible signs of business success.

In light of these religious and ethical others, these young born-again entrepreneurs framed themselves as "radical" and "unapologetically" Christian professionals who would counter these global and local flows of un-Christian professional conduct. They also fashioned themselves as markedly "formal sector" entrepreneurs who dressed in impeccable suits, kept careful account books of every expense incurred, and complained about the "informality" and "unserious attitude" they encountered in other Ghanaian institutions. They appeared to uphold a veritable desire for professionalism, a desire that emerged in dress, good English, and correcting each other anytime somebody fell short – such as when I failed to take good quality pictures of their media appearance on the morning show of one of Ghana's prime TV stations. Surprisingly, they hardly talked about Lebanese, Indian, European, or other foreign professionals in Ghana – their categories of professionals seemed to be primarily fleshed out as categories of religious others. At the core, for spiritpreneurs Accra was a site of religious and ethical plurality, which contrasted with their vision of the kind of professional lives they wanted to lead after born-again conversion. In their everyday experience, this was the kind of Accra where non-Christian forces, including the power of the secular, were omnipresent. While Africa has been largely absent in the theoretical corpus of the 'secular' due to the prevalent idea that there is virtually nothing secular in Africa (Engelke 2015), for spiritrepenurs the threat of secular appeared very real, and existed in a productive tension to other impediments to lived Christian faith in the professional world.

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[55] Filling stations seemed to have become a common business model among Muslims, an assessment relayed to me informally by entrepreneurs in Accra.

Noting the time and effort spiritpreneurs put into talking about these religious and ethical others in the midst of daily work, the vast public presence of Christianity, in their understanding, had not generated deep impact. Above all, Accra's business scenes demonstrated that God's presence could not be taken for granted – rather, one needed to flesh out pockets within one's professional realm in which God's presence could be concretely evoked, and viscerally felt, and try to mainstream those pockets into the wider society. I suggest that the very awareness of these ethical others amplified the evangelical commitment to cultivating an intimate relationship with God as integral to one's professional subjectivity, which in the next sections I explore in relation to entrepreneurial practice. The focus on co-operative work reveals that convincing one of God's intimate presence was also hard work, as shown by Tania Luhrmann's (2012) study of US evangelicals who strive to hear God's voice; God becomes intimate through practices such as pouring a cup of coffee for God who sits at the same table. These practices share a powerful, albeit less hierarchical imagery with Randy's business pitching session to God sitting across the table in his dormitory room. Like Luhrmann's evangelical respondents who were acutely aware of the presence of secular others, the spiritpreneurs' work and ambition of “making godly professionals” must be contextualised vis-à-vis the perceived threats in the broader urban landscape. Next, I will explore how spiritpreneurs sought to instil the idea of God's “eyes and ears” as an integral aspect of one's professional pursuits by focusing on how they attempted to influence others through their entrepreneurial example.

Randy and Lois: anointing professionals

Kharis Media was premised upon the vision of building a media empire that projects what they called “positive attitude” in the Ghanaian marketplace. Randy was adamant, like the kind of motivational books he published, that it was possible to be a successful entrepreneur in Ghana and create wealth on Ghanaian soil independent of access to state coffers and contracts, or begging for money from foreigners. This conviction appeared to mirror similar ideas of leading respectable professional lives in Accra among the young professionals encountered in chapter 3, who dismissed the idea of foreign travel and university education abroad as the only possible route towards qualifying as a true professional. Similarly, Randy was convinced that foreign powers were not the only source of wealth in Ghana – instead of asking for aid, Randy positioned business, strengthened by the power of faith of which “impact” he hoped my research would prove, as the ultimate tool of empowerment.

Spiritpreneurship Summit was intended to launch this broader movement and “raise Christian entrepreneurs” to act both virtuously, and productively, in business. As we were filming the promotion materials in the poolside of a hotel, Randy pitched the show as follows: “Spiritpreneurship Summit is a platform for redefinition of business and work attitude. So we can redefine the nation.” In other words, echoing Nkrumah-style narratives of moral citizenry, redefining Ghana as the business environment was one of the key objectives, and this called for a qualitatively different type of professional character. Like many other motivational events, the main content of the Summit were the speeches by selected "marketplace apostles" such as Mrs. Sackey, who gave practical advice on how to pair one's faith with business. But more than that, as Nelson said, "Delegates, they come to learn, so they need the spiritual edge." The highlight of the Summit was to be the Anointing Service. In Ghanaian Charismatic churches, anointing typically stands for applying olive oil to the believer's head in order to transmit divine blessings, such as healing and special powers from the Holy Spirit (De Witte 2003: 187). Yet, there was debate over how much time they should dedicate to anointing. As we went to check the conference room in Africa Regents Hotel a day before the event was to take place, Randy and Nelson stated they wanted to plan the program so that maximum amount of time would be dedicated to "divine impartation." Jerry complained that making everyone come to the front for anointing would take too much time. Randy objected, saying, "But what if people want that contact? At least I would want a personal contact, it is important!" Nelson was contemplating which side to take, then sighed, "Ah, democracy takes time," and advocated doing the anointing "fast fast." Towards the end of the meeting, they agreed to take the oil out, as they did not want the participants to "get messed." The meeting finished with a long prayer (including speaking in tongues) which committed the space, the organizers, the audience, the families, and everyone possible involved in the organization, into the hands of God.

As I arrived on site the next morning, Randy was running up and down, making sure everything was in place. Nelson seemed relatively relaxed, while Jerry was instructing me on the MC role. Cross Walk Models were dressed in black trousers and Spiritpreneurship t-shirts, ready to receive the guests. The event was eventually sold out, but the participants were mostly young men and women, which slightly disappointed Randy and Nelson. They had hoped for a mixture of youth and mature businessmen occupying leadership positions, which would have extended the influence of Spiritpreneurship "to the corridors of power." Above all, from the young participants’ perspective, Spiritpreneurship Summit like other motivational programs were networking events – people put their business cards in a fishbowl, while the young ones had the occasion to approach the few corporate leaders present, perhaps also to ask for jobs. Dr. Djangmah was one of these leaders. This real estate mogul, who spoke after Mrs. Sackey, was fast becoming one of Accra's best known “Christian businessmen.” He had developed his own theory of spiritpreneurship called “Christian business spiritulogy,” which he had printed on a background prop mounted to a visible spot in the conference room. During his speech, he gave a passionate account of the power of spiritpreneurship that centred on the idea of making a difference in Africa:

> "Time is not on our side in Africa, because of technology and infrastructure. But we will give you the secret. We teach you the principles of seed and harvest, and it also applies to food and health, how to use resources. Africa is one of the most difficult places to work, because of human capital. Human capital has innate cultural inertia that we teach you to break down. So you join the global workforce! Holistically, use your spirit, soul and body in your business. Business is God's automated machine the fight poverty on Earth, especially in Africa. We have no excuse in Africa. It is the time of spiritpreneurship. Unearth the radical secrets in the Bible. What our forefathers in the Bible did, we are also able to do. Abraham, Job, Isaac, they were all spiritpreneurs! Like, Job sold houses. Churches don't sell houses. (…) Now there is a model that you have to be a pastor to prosper. No! Adam was not a pastor! (…) Did you know that 67 percent of you is supernatural? And only one third is your body? Most of he time we depend on our body resources and neglect the power of spirit and our soul. The energy in you is more than 1000 times the nuke that was blasted in Hiroshima!"

Dr. Djangmah's speech was a spectacular performance indeed, similar to Mrs. Sackey's. Both told the room full of young aspirant people that they could realise their dream in Ghana, and qualify as professionals on Ghanaian soil despite evident challenges. Above all, they could do so with the help of God. After the speeches, it was time for the Anointing service. To my surprise, although the previous day they had agreed otherwise, the oil was back in the game. Cross Walk Models brought in small bottles of olive oil. One of the speakers, who was both a pastor and a manager in a bank, stated, "this is ordinary olive oil, but we are going to make it into a blessed olive oil through our prayers." The ushers lifted the oil bottles up and kept them above their forehead as everybody prayed to bless the bottles. Next, they went through the room giving drops to people. The speaker advised the audience to apply the oil to their head, neck, hands, and especially feet, which were very important, since they are "foundational." The audience followed the orders. The Summit ended with a fervent prayer that evolved into speaking in tongues. This was the visceral moment of opening the body to flows of spiritual power, which took place in a markedly professional platform.

The use of anointing oil in a motivational event intended for raising a group of qualitatively different present and future professionals can be taken as a technique of evoking the presence, and intimacy, of divine presence. This called for material mediators (Engelke 2007; Meyer 2011), while Randy, Nelson and Jerry debated how much time they could afford for this mediation. As their debate preceding the event shows, convincing the audience of the intimate presence of God was one of the summit's key rationales. Given their existing observations on the Ghanaian professional world as “lacking Christianity,” the use of oil as the highlight of Spiritpreneurship Summit was intended to provide a physically felt experience of God's intimacy in a gathering of young professional actors. The use of oil, in other words, mediated the flow of the spiritual force, which Kharis Media conceptualised as the medium for transforming the self of the professional, after hours of listening to speeches by veritable Christian exemplars of professionalism. At the core, Spiritpreneurship Summit was the fruit of their long-term co-operative work, whose value could lie both in the number of tickets sold, and crucially in the sense of influence that the event could entail in a long time frame.

Furthermore, given Randy's understanding of God as a business investor who has eyes and ears, the role of longer transformations of pre-colonial ideas of supreme being turns out to be of interest. In various ethnographic studies of the Akan concepts of God being transported to the Christian universe, God is a remote, Almighty supreme being who resides in the 'sky', as the 'manager of heaven' in Randy's application. Yet, he is also intimately present as a “Good Father-Mother God” (Kumi 1996), who cares about mundane affairs. In order to explore practically the different possible layers that constitute the category of God as an intimate being, I turn next to other innovative religious forms through which spiritpreneurs sought to mediate their vision of Christian professionalism. This vision was premised upon a conception of God as an intimate being whose eyes and ears could document every business transaction, and the view that by instilling this awareness, a different professional subjectivity could be shaped. Intimacy with God, however, was something they needed to persuade others about, which required a number of material forms.

Geoffrey's sales pitch: beware of God

While Spiritpreneurship Summit appeared as an innovative religious form, such public events reflect the long standing objective of evangelical practice: to reform, and to make people more serious about the power and presence of God in the most intimate, everyday moments of their lives (Luhrmann 2012). These summits and training events framed the born-again professional as a person who understands that God's presence was not restricted to church. Mainstreaming this insight involved material aspects of religious mediation, which were transported from the ritual context of church to avenues of start-up enterprises. Let me turn to Geoffrey's “D8-18 Access Card” as another example of a Christian material intended to expand networks and instil professional responsibility. This was effectively an ATM card that promoted CIBE and could be linked to accounts at various banks. The name of D8-18 Access Card came from Deuteronomy chapter 8, verse 18: “But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.” In this verse, God is portrayed as the origin of wealth, and also as the entity in charge of one's ability to succeed.

Geoffrey said he had developed the card as a medium to reach out for “Christian-minded” professionals to become part of CIBE's network. Therefore, the rationale behind the card was to expand CIBE's clientele, while it was marketed as a biblically grounded means of managing one's money. Yet, marketing this card was framed as a rather sensitive type of work, which involved keen understanding of God's “eyes and ears.” Towards the end of 2014, I followed a training session that Geoffrey gave to young sales representatives to be sent around Accra to promote the card. The training session, like other CIBE training events I had followed, started promptly on time. To the sales representatives, Geoffrey framed time-keeping as a biblical principle: God works with time, therefore, they should always aim at sticking to “God's time,” instead of “Ghanaian time,” which he understood as chronic lateness. The cards had just arrived fresh from the supplier, and Geoffrey laid them on the table for people to peruse at the beginning of the training. He started by saying that the sales representatives were free to approach whomever they thought could be converted, including Muslims, but they must “always quote the scripture” when they went out. Next, Geoffrey quoted Deuteronomy 8:18, the biblical origin of D8-18 Access Card, before explaining the different features about the ATM card, namely the technology and how it was helpful for managing one's money. Yet, throughout this speech, he kept on repeating: “We are not selling cards. We are just thinking of different ways of how to empower our members, how to help people to serve God better. This card *diyeee* is just a spice.” Towards the end of the meeting, he warned the young PR representatives of the danger of any misconduct: “It's not only my name, but God's name, that is damaged.”

In the training session, Geoffrey persuaded the young sales representatives to imagine God as an actor whose eyes and ears followed them as they went about marketing these cards. If they “misbehaved,” for example, by providing incorrect information about what the ATM card offered, their activities had repercussions beyond harming Geoffrey: they violated the very person and what Geoffrey called the “name” of God. A cynic would say that Geoffrey was a capitalist who employed the imagery of hell and heaven to make young representatives feel vulnerable. Yet why spend so much time talking about God? Overall, in the training event, Geoffrey spent far more time talking about the biblical origins of the card than explaining the technology and financial benefits of the card. Furthermore, at least six times, he repeated, “We are not selling cards, don't think you are selling cards.” It appeared to me, while sitting by the table listening to Geoffrey, that Geoffrey himself was also uncertain as to whether ATM cards were the most effective tool for “doing God's work.” His speech attempted to establish distance from the materiality of ATM cards as financial products, and proximity to the biblical origins of this material form. In other words, it is possible that his speech was also directed to other entities beyond the sales representatives, namely God's intimate presence, which aimed to authenticate the ATM card as a material form of divine mediation.

Geoffrey's training sessions illustrate that spiritpreneurs were operating with a particular kind of God; one intimately connected with their business pursuits, whose presence could be felt in the room. Above all, Geoffrey also attempted to persuade his young sales representatives to be the kind of professionals who recognise God's eyes and ears following them in their sales pursuits. Besides his own uncertainties about the ATM card, this was also the evangelical ambition of spiritpreneurs as professional actors. Recognising God as the type of agent who took interest in professional pursuits was the key message that required hammering home, while the ATM cards mediated a sense of business as rooted in timeless biblical truth. The example of Cross Walk Models extends this idea even further, namely to evaluating the “amount” of prayer that professionals performed, which emerged as an object of knowledge, discipline and shared recognition.

Cross Walk Models: prayerful models

Among Accra's born-again entrepreneurs, prayer was an integral part of office routine, meetings, rehearsals and before important meetings and events. Randy and Belinda said that they took “every opportunity to pray,” whether it was on public transport, at dawn in their bed before they started day's work, or at midnight, during “quiet hours” when Randy had pitched his start-up capital application to God. Prayer therefore appeared integral to both the public and more hidden venues of their life and enterprises. Yet, it was especially with Cross Walk Models, who were preparing themselves towards their first major public event, namely Fashion Friday that prayer emerged as a “skill” comparable to, say, cat-walking and accounting.

One of the outspoken missions of Cross Walk Models was to “Groom the youth and enlighten the world through the incorporation of Biblical Doctrine in fashion and modelling.” The above text accompanied the letter of sponsorship that Belinda sent to various companies ahead of “Fashion Friday” set for late August 2014. In these letters, Belinda pitched the company for potential sponsors as follows:

CROSSWALK MODELS is a new modelling agency with strict biblical morals and spirituality. Our existence is primarily based on Psalm 24:1 which says; "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein" and "Every good and perfect gift comes from the Lord…" with reference to James 1:17. These scriptures clearly state that since the earth and everything in it belongs to God, then every gift and talent must be used in service to Him. It includes many others including fashion (Exodus 28), and modelling (whose primary aim is to advertise). We believe in effecting the necessary change to this world through every medium including what we stand for and what we have been called to do.
Vision: *To establish a platform that promotes biblical truth in fashion and modelling.*
Mission: *Grooming the youth and enlightening the world through the incorporation of Biblical Doctrine in fashion and modelling.*
Philosophy: *Practical Christianity, Excellence, Truth*

The notion of “practical Christianity” especially appeared to draw directly on Mensa Otabil's teachings, which emphasised the relevance of the Bible for virtually any human endeavour, including business pursuits (De Witte 2003). Another church also played a significant role in the business. The rehearsals took place in the attic of a side building adjacent to a Baptist church near central Accra. Belinda had persuaded the church's head pastor to offer the attic as both a rehearsal space, and the site of the main event. In other words, the church was the main infrastructure that offered this incipient start-up a space of existence, as its main agents were still university students. The rehearsals always started with a Christian worship session, when all the models and others involved gathered in a circle and sung a few gospel songs together. After the worship, Belinda and her business partner Kafui sat down with the models to discuss recent lessons taken from the Bible. In these moments, especially valuable were those contributions that applied scripture to an everyday situation. This echoed Randy's and Otabil's idea that “God must be practical.”

After sharing scriptures the models typically proceeded to a collective personal prayer session that often evolved into speaking in tongues. These prayer sessions could take a long time. At times the models got tired and had to sit down, or started leaning against the wall. They kept on throwing glances at Belinda, or some of the rather “prayerful models,” as if seeing whether the prayer was about to finish. I also once found myself exchanging an exhausted look with a model as we had to stop and sit down on the floor, since the prayer session in the hot rehearsal room was getting physically exhausting. Later on, it turned out that some models were esteemed as “more prayerful” than others, and these differences were made public by both Belinda and Kafui, yet through a rather friendly tone. The amount of prayers one performed in one's private space was subject to occasional checks. In one rehearsal, Kafui asked one of the young models if she had prayed that morning. She shook her head shyly. “Why didn't you pray this morning?” Kafui demanded with a rather serious tone. She bowed her head and looked at her mobile phone. In the next sentence, Kafui asked another model how much she rehearsed the previous day. Interestingly, Kafui's interrogation accommodated the question of prayer time, and rehearsal time, in almost the same sentence. It seemed that prayer, for Kafui, was an important form of activity comparable to rehearsing cat-walking, the form of work that intuitively links with the surfacing of the model's “professional skill” being judged in the public realm. In Kafui's and Belinda's interpretation (comparable to City Services), the prayerful nature of the models was also an object of disciplinary action. The rehearsals also ended with prayer; the models got back to a circle, held each other's arms, and sung what Belinda called “the family song” that portrayed all of them as belonging to the same “body of Christ,” who were on a shared mission of promoting decency in the fashion world.

Similarly to prayer, fasting also became a shared effort amongst the models leading towards Fashion Friday. A week before the show, Belinda asked the models to start fasting. This fasting was not intended to result in weight loss, as an object of bodily discipline for the model. Rather it was a form of spiritual discipline: through bodily hunger, one would also feel the "hunger for Christ" that would eventually help them to deliver in the final show. One morning as they were about to finish the rehearsals at Tesano Baptist Church, Belinda reminded all the models that they needed to be fasting the week leading towards the final show: "Please, I want all of you to fast, and pray fervently, pray a lot, we should never forget prayer. You can do the 6 to 12 fast, but try as much as possible to do as many 6 to 3 and 6 to 6 as possible." One of the young models said that she could not fast as much because of a medicine she must take. Belinda responded that she could try to do as many 6 to 12 fasts as she can, while she understood her limitations. Fasting also came up on the final rehearsal day of Fashion Friday when fasting was on going and some of the models were doing full 12-hour fasts. When two of the models were on the runway, they made a lot of mistakes and Kafui got frustrated. He asked them: "Ah, are you two hungry? Do you want to break your fast and come back?" He kept on asking this, while the models were looking at each other and searching out the gaze of Belinda, who was on the phone on the side. Kafui continued asking, "I am not hearing anything, please, yes or no? Yes or no?!" Belinda then finished the phone call and encouraged them to continue fasting, as they were only a few hours away from reaching a full 12 hours. The models decided to continue their fast and went to the side to continue practising the moves.

In this evangelical modelling agency, it appeared as if rehearsing cat-walking, praying and fasting were all considered forms of work that mediated between the realm of the divine, and the realm of the enterprise. The intense ritual experiences, such as lengthy prayer sessions, were techniques of enabling the models to feel God's intimate presence in the rehearsal space, that is, the professional space. This could at times be exhausting. While there are many reasons to say that prayer and fasting were qualitatively different types of work compared with cat-walking, both forms of work were practiced together in the sense that they connected the self of the professional with the realm of the divine. Also, for most of the young women this was their first professional appearance as models, which could undoubtedly involve its own uncertainties. Above all, what struck me was the way in which prayer and fasting were closely connected with catwalk rehearsing, in the sense that both emerged as objects of systematic calculation – “how long did you pray/how long did you rehearse?” Praying and fasting could therefore be therefore fruitfully understood as socially acceptable forms of 'work' (Harris 2007). The very meaning of "work", in the case of Cross Walk Models and other spiritpreneurs, therefore involves asking what people come to understand as productive activity in the first place. As one of the models leaned towards the wall tired from the amount of time spent standing, praying and speaking in tongues, we can speculate that this was the visceral experience of prayer taking a considerable amount of physical energy. The experience of prayer was work in its most physically taxing sense.

The fashion show itself was conducted according to Belinda's vision of a Christianized fashion industry: boys and girls changed in separate rooms, the dresses did not expose too much skin, the music was Gospel, and the surprise guest was a Christian hip hop artist, Kingzkid, who was Belinda's good friend. The people assisting her in the show (such as Robert, who otherwise worked in a privately-owned TV station) came from her church. The ticket sales were recorded meticulously in account books. The Fashion event had a number of speeches on decent dressing, as well as an intense prayer session towards the end. But the most intriguing thing about this show was the way in which the models' bodies and clothes became the material mediators of God's intimate presence and interest in enterprises; these bodies were not exposed on the catwalk, nor backstage, thus guarding both the models' and the enterprise's commitment to Christian virtues. Inasmuch as intimacy with God is a more universal mode of evangelical subjectivity, the insight emerging from Belinda's Cross Walk Models, and the ethnography of spiritpreneurs more generally, concerns the way in which striving for felt intimacy with God becomes a shaping force of the ethnographically observable entrepreneurial practice, and the product of entrepreneurial labour. Material mediators of divine presence, and commitment to Christian virtue, perform a key role in this type of business modelling. The techniques of evoking intimacy included prayer, fasting, anointing with oil, decently dressed model bodies, and warnings about God's ears and eyes documenting professional decision-making.

Conclusion: prayer theory of value

Building on Marx's labour theory of value at the heart of the concept of commodity, the example of spiritpreneurs invites the possibility to modify this theory into a “prayer theory of value.” Anthropologists have recognised that the very category of labour is subject to ethnographic analysis; this also applies to Ghanaian born-again professionals' start-up enterprises. As the examples of Geoffrey, Randy, Nelson and Belinda suggest, the Comaroffs' (2009) theoretical model of “incorporation” can be rendered more ethnographically specific by documenting the ways in which the very category of work/labour, and the category of production, are locally conceptualised and practically enacted. The past examples have shown that a key aspect of producing a particular type of professional actors as an evangelical entrepreneurial ambition involved considering prayer and fasting to be in the category of work. The value that prayer and fasting could produce was harder to calculate compared to cat-walking, while shared recognition of its importance remained. However, again, this recognition was shared in different ways – the exhausted models learning towards the walk might have had discordant ideas about the necessity of prayer, or they may have been simply experiencing prayer as work in the most visceral sense.

Above all, their practices of considering God's intimate presence to be constitutive of entrepreneurial labour appeared to be somewhat different from Weber's account of Pietists casting their work as "God's calling," which was primarily motivated by anxiety of whether one would end up in hell or heaven. The wider corpus of African Christianities shows a marked absence of concern for a place in heaven (Meyer 2004b), and rather shows that born-again personhood provides protection against curses, demons and jealousies from the most intimate ones (Meyer 1998b). In Ghana, these anxieties also gain their force from the dualistic cosmology of the universe as a battleground between God and Satan (Meyer 1999), to which one's professional life is not immune. Spiritpreneurs indeed saw Accra as a battleground between various types of professionals, while they conceptualised their professional pursuits as a vehicle for effecting change, and generating more “God-fearing professionals.” These professionals also held the keys to creating a different type of Ghana, namely, a Ghana where Ghanaian capital has the chance to grow, where aid is no longer needed, and where no-one has to beg for the white man's blessings.

There is also a point worth making about the framework of “commodification of religion,” namely the “Divinity, Inc.” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009) which is but one manifestation among many other “incs” that have emerged in different national and supra-national contexts in the era of private capital (see ex. Andersson 2015). According to the Comaroffs (2009: 136-138), the main explanatory framework behind such manifestations lies in the rise of economic privatisation and neoliberal governance. The ethnography of young Accra-based born-again entrepreneurs operating within Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism suggests that we may need to be more careful before casting a particular cultural product, or entrepreneurial practice, as a phenomenon chiefly explained by 'neoliberalisation' of the economy. As analysts, we must treat economic privatisation along neoliberal lines, but also recognise variables such as local theories and logics of productive causality (which can be rooted, among other things, in religious practice) as equally important explanatory frameworks. The underpinnings of practices such as morning devotions at Mrs. Sackey's City Services, prayer sessions around Mepex-Sammy's sick bed, and prayer in Cross Walk Models, must be subjected to ethnographic analysis before concluding that these practices are 'neoliberal', let alone as another manifestation of the 'overflow of intimacy' in late-capitalism that can be documented around the globe.

To sum up, in Paul Gilroy's (2013) words, entwining Christianity with market-driven principles of production, development and self-transformation might be called “vernacular neoliberalism.” However, using the term neoliberalism misses the question as to whether entwining religion with capitalist forms of production is neoliberal in the same way that Western economists would define the content of the term. Their definition is premised upon increasing efficiency of the time dedicated to the kind of labour that is esteemed to result in direct accumulation of material wealth, and divinely disinterested mode of economic subjectivity. Furthermore, employing the term neoliberalism positions market economy as the primary explanatory framework. This assumes that religious revivalism is by default a response to "humanize" alienating market forces (Pedersen 2011: 30). More grounded theories on why faith would matter for enhancing institutional, or personal productivity, help to get beyond this framework, as well as to the everyday struggles of lived religion in sites of urban plurality.

Mandu's uncomfortable conversion: interlude

April 2016.

A slim man with a shaven head sits at a corner table drinking a small bottle of beer.

I have missed Mandu. He has lost much weight, and his usually over-grown afro-hairstyle is gone. I have returned to Accra for a couple of weeks, and am lodging in Kokomlemle close to Mandu's new office where he has been working for the past months. He no longer works in the media, but in another private company that has something to do with imports and exports. He shows me the latest phone craze in the capital: a heavy, bulky mobile phone that looks like it's from the 1990s. During the energy crisis of recent years, these phones have been in great demand. The battery can last for a week, so one can be sure not to miss important phone calls. And phone calls are money. And money is life. Or blood, as Pat Thomas sings.

Many things have changed since I left Accra in December 2014. Mandu and Sita have a baby daughter, who I am eager to meet. Mandu said he needed to meet up with me first, however, as soon as possible, on my first night back. The reason comes out immediately. Mandu and Sita are getting divorced, which Mandu confesses, heavy sadness in his voice. The paperwork is on the way.

I've barely digested that surprise when Mandu knocks me with another: "These days I am a Muslim."

A Muslim?

"I am a Muslim," he repeats.

I vividly remembered Mandu as a Charismatic Pentecostal who enjoyed deep discussions on scripture, God and the nature of the universe, yet his conversion may not be as unprecedented as my initial shock made it seem. Mandu had always been curious about different faiths, including Ashanti indigenous worship that his grandmother practised in the village where he grew up. He was curious about the idea of atheism as well. In 2014, we once made our way to the defunct-looking Ghana Theosophical Society, where Mandu was hoping to ”get contacts.” We knocked on the door. Nobody opened it.

Mandu discloses that his conversion was inspired, among other reasons, by a trip to Morocco with Sita, her sister and her husband (an Australian mining executive) in December 2014:

> “I got so frustrated of Christianity. It's all money money money. It was the trip to Morocco that opened my eyes. There you go, you give money to mosques, but they were actually helping the needy instead of going to travel in business class in suits and having 4x4 cars and everything. So I thought Christianity was not a good religion. (…) There is something deeply humbling about bowing in front of God five times a day, they are very disciplined. Believe me, if Ghana were to have the Muslim work ethic, the economy would be so much better! They emphasize truth, honesty, integrity, and they are so disciplined. Christians, they are way too laxed. And they are hypocrites! They are saying this and doing another thing.”

Mandu also describes how ”developed” and “clean” Morocco had been. Sita, herself a Muslim, had also obviously influenced and inspired Mandu. When I used to visit them in their home, Mandu was already doing Islamic prayers together with Sita every morning in addition to fellowshipping in a Charismatic Pentecostal church. He had taken up the habit of changing to a white Muslim gown immediately after returning from work, which made him feel calm.

For the time being, Mandu has been living in the otherwise empty rooms of the house they had rented together with Sita to raise their daughter. The house is expensive, so when the contract expires[56], Mandu needs to move back to his mother's house. He had not informed his mother, a devout Presbyterian, about his conversion, but he might have to very soon.

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[56] In Ghana rents are usually paid upfront for one to two years.

Mandu's conversion has been professionally problematic. His new company is ”very Christian.” He hides that he has become a Muslim. In the interview that got him the job, when the CEO asked at which church he attends fellowship he gave his old church, Christ Embassy. The company has obligatory Charismatic Pentecostal devotions every morning and evening when workers hold each other's hands and pray in tongues. I asked Mandu what he did during those obligatory morning and evening prayers: “I join them, and after that, I do my own prayers.” The employees, however, are suspecting something is amiss. He disappears from his desk regularly. When he comes back, he has washed his hands, face and hair; sometimes water still drips from his hair to his shirt collar. For this reason, he had shaved his head nearly bald. Although the CEO of the company is a “reverend or something,” Mandu says he is not doing ”the right thing.” The company is not “structured.”

I tell Mandu about my visit to my old home neighbourhood, Zongo, where one of our favourite regular drinking spots called “Mina's Inn” used to be.

“Guess what is at its place now?” I ask.

Mandu exclaims, “*Eih*, they have even taken over Mina's! A church! They know it's a church that can make the money!”

We laugh about it, perhaps both of us missing the many moments we spent there. At least I do – *wait a moment* – Mandu became a Muslim but still drinks beer?

Divorce. Conversion, from Charismatic Pentecostalism to Islam. Christianity as an obstacle to economic development. A return to heavy cell-phones of the 1990s.
Time feels dense in Accra.

Economies of flow and blockage: concluding remarks

Times are hard. Businesses are struggling. If you have/get a job, please do it religiously.
Deliver like your life depends on it. 'Cos being jobless is suicidal.
- Kwadwo, 32, radio producer, Accra

"There were no birds like this in London," Quey said softly."There was no color. Everything
was grey. The sky, the buildings, even the people looked grey." Fiifi shook his head.
"I don't know why Effia let James send you to that nonsense country."
Quey nodded absently and returned to the porridge in his bowl.
- "Homegoing" by Yaa Gyasi (2016: 53),
set around the year 1800

The rain was heavy on Independence Day in March 2014. The murky clouds started gathering around 10am, when parades and festivities with President John Dramani Mahama were commencing in Accra's Independence Square. The clouds erupted into pouring rain. The thunder was loud and the whole day remained gloomy. Such rain was highly unusual at that time of the year. "God sent Ghana a message," a colleague of mine said. The cedi was in free fall. There were no jobs. No electricity. Even fuel was in demand. "We need coup d'état!" a male colleagues of mine enthused.

Three months later a group of around 300 young men and women, some carrying Ghana flags and many filming and posting pictures online, were marching towards Flagstaff House, the President's Palace. It was Republic Day, the 1st of July, 2014. They were protesting against the ruling NDC government, which they blamed for the ongoing economic and energy crisis, decaying infrastructure, depreciation of the cedi, stagnant salaries, rapid inflation, and recurrent scandals exposed in Ghana's private media and blogosphere. As the last drop, which seemed like the trigger to organize the protest, were the scandals that surrounded the national football team Black Stars in Rio de Janeiro's Football World Cup 2014. First the government had sent unaccounted for representatives and "girlfriends" to Rio with the "tax-payer's money." Next the government had air-lifted 2 million cedis in cash as an "appearance fee" to the players, who allegedly had refused to play without a guarantee of salary. On top of the air-lift, Black Stars failed the high public expectations; they did not qualify from group-stage.

“Come home! Stop wasting my money!” a group of professionals with whom I watched their last game proclaimed.

…

This thesis has been a journey into a world of knowledge economy professionals in a West African capital. Their primary form of work has been thinking, typing, filming and selling in shiny offices; hot and humid car parks; drinking spots; and home compounds. In the tropical city of Accra, professional life and work unfolds in the midst of electric blackouts, traffic jams, family obligations, and office politics. This shows that professionalism is an ethnographically specific mode of existence – professionals’ lives follow distinctive trajectories shaped by national history, global political economy, and circulation of new ideas of what it means to be a moral person. Next to these insights, the chapters of this thesis have provided evidence that support novel insights on what in the introduction I called the metaphysics of late-capitalism “from the south” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012), which I have explored by considering the multiplicity of values that work within Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism can produce. “Metaphysics,” in this sense, rather than signalling a fixed ontology or symbolic regime of values, are located in actions through which economic and other types of value comes into being (Graeber 2001: 86-89).

I set out with an objective to understand why 'professionalism' has emerged as an object of desire, and how such desires convert into diverse types of value. On one hand, I have shown how the desire for professionalism relates to the production of counter-discourses of prevailing colonial, and globally circulating stereotypes about professionals in Ghana and the greater African continent as existing in a post-colonial state of lack, which in Accra is mediated through its vibrant “public culture of professionalism.” I have also argued that the desire to be recognised and qualified as a professional links with a number of other desires that constitute what it means to be a person. These desires produce distinctive alignments, discordances, divisions and modalities of ethical subjectivity as the by-product of formalising economic action and building formal sector economic institutions in Accra. The particular forms of work and professional lives coming into being as a result render the assumed cultural logics of late-capitalism and neoliberal economic restructuring more ethnographically specific. This analytic objective has left the emic category of work empirically open, and incorporated feeding, beauty, fellowship and prayer as practices that people themselves understand as productive action, which pushes existing anthropological concepts of the meaning of expertise.

The chapters of this thesis have been situated in distinctive microcosms which each form parts of a comparative framework of what I have called the economy of flow and blockage. Understanding the creation of value within this economy has involved understanding circulation as the key generative idiom, which explains why people evoke bodily and other physical metaphors as a way to conceptualise the productive potencies within Accra's knowledge economy capitalism. In some cases, these flows have involved the provision and exchange of substances, such as drinking and food. In other cases they involve beauty, joking, prayer, and money. I have highlighted how these exchanges and substances mediate the kinds of value that entice the anthropologist to consider the distinctive trajectories that late-capitalist cultural logics can take in each ethnographic context. Christopher Taylor (1992: 9) has called such substances, and mediations as "the raw materials from which a "science of the concrete" embodying [gift logic] is edified." While I have not explicitly engaged with classic anthropological debates between "gift logics" and "commodity logics," (Gregory 1997), let alone structuralist analysis, throughout this thesis I have highlighted that empirical answers are rarely a straightforward choice between Marx and Mauss. Ethnography of Accra's professionals shows that questions of production and modes of co-operative work remain important units of anthropological analysis. At the same time this work and its outcome may benefit from the kind of analytical openness that recognizes the multiplicity of action that can count as work, as well as the multiplicity of value that this work generates.

This brings me to the point of Ghanaian knowledge economy capitalism as a generative system which pushes forward feminist approaches to capitalism by pairing middle class social reproduction with the emergence of knowledge economy infrastructure. I have shown, through detailed historical analysis, that apparent enthusiasm about the new structures of access, currently facilitated by economic privatisation, cannot be adequately explained by recourse to neoliberalism as the primary analytical framework. Rather, I have paired neoliberalism as the important contextual element with intimate projects of qualifying as professional persons, middle class families and respectable nations, and looked out for other systemic logics that explain the content and form of the kind of new economic organizations emerging in the 21st century Accra. I have demonstrated that an important systemic logic in Accra boils down to the centrality of circulation encapsulated by the economy of flow and blockage, which shapes work rhythms, organizational practices such as prayer, and family investment in children's professional qualifications. Yet, I have also shown that economies of flow and blockage in professional worlds are not necessarily always "nice," "warm" or "fuzzy." The diverse characters in this thesis taught me that intimacy in professional worlds can be dangerous, which is why people rarely say they have "friends." There may be various sources of blockage, depending on the subject's position. Evil spirits can be objects of blockage. Men can be sources of blockage, as can Ghanaian politicians, Charismatic Pentecostal pastors, Chinese illegal miners, Indian family businesses, Western career professionals, and numerous others yet to be identified.

Ultimately, what kind of "formalisation" of a West African economy does this ethnography point toward? I would like to end with a few notes that theorise the efforts of Ghanaians building knowledge-based economic infrastructure. As Guyer (2004) has shown, West Africans have been engaged in a variety of efforts to formalise economic transactions at the interface of internal and global trading networks. These formalisations have entailed converting between multiple repositories of value, from cowrie shells to hard cash, in which indigenous regimes of value have productively intersected with those of external powers. In this thesis, the primary repositories of value have been persons – and more specifically, professional, office-going persons and companies, instead of commodities or currencies per se. I have followed how the professional person becomes a repository of value as a result of concentrated, collective effort. The various microcosms of this thesis show that, alongside vibrant informal economies, “efforts to formalise” are salient features of contemporary urban life in Accra, as perhaps elsewhere in postcolonial Africa, and can be extended from the level of commodity and currency transactions to the level of producing persons and institutions (Graeber 2001: 211).

The formalisation of Accra's media and service business sectors occurs in an integral relationship with the informal economy, which is not the anti-thesis of formal (Bolt 2012) but rather a productive resource to reflect on what constitutes formality in the first place. The everyday lives of Accra's professionals exist at the productive interfaces between the formal and the informal economy, located in families, workplaces, and daily errands in the city. These professionals are aware that they occupy a distinctive position within the urban economy. As “office workers,” their status comes with particular social expectations vis-á-vis informal sector siblings and parents. At the same time, the various characters in this thesis also point at popular desires to be recognised as formal. In other words, formality, professional work and “structures” can themselves emerge as objects of desire. To be and become “structured” can involve a variety of practices from accumulating certificates, à la Isaac, to suggesting that acting professionally is a Christian duty.

A further intriguing question emerges from the convergence between the Africanist literature on flow and blockage, and ways in which metaphors of blood have become salient ways to conceptualise economic and political crises in the global West (Weston 2013). This convergence opens up the analysis of economies of flow and blockage for a wider comparative framework – such economies may not only be evidence of “African/Ghanaian” questions in the midst of fluctuating macro-economic crises, but offer a comparative foil to conceptualise how people make sense of macro-economic conditions in diverse contexts. My key suggestion is that formalising economic action in Accra involves incorporating activities that in the global lexicon of professionalism are not necessarily considered as productive – such as feeding, spiritual advice and prayer – but which can be placed under the category of expertise. These are the significant ethnographic details that enable us to ask questions about what people themselves come to count as formal, which challenges to ask, who ultimately has the power to define what counts as productive action.

…

Let me briefly turn back to Black Stars. After their dreadful tournament, news circulated in the Ghanaian media that a US production company was planning to make a film about the scandal of an African government transporting 2 million dollars via airplane to stubborn players on the other side of the world. My friends in the media were outraged. Yet another bunch of Western cultural producers were making use of 'African content' and projecting their version of an 'image of Africa'! The planned film appeared as an intrusion into what Herzfeld terms cultural intimacy (2016[1997]), the privacy of the nation state where particular truths and public secrets about the state were being produced. These truths could be addressed in the domestic sphere, but were not to be ridiculed by foreigners.

The heterogeneous middle class characters of this thesis have critically engaged with broader political economies in which capital accumulation by a variety of stakeholders (from politicians to private companies) is present. Occupy Flagstaff House is a prime example of this type of critical engagement as staged by Ghanaians who, based on my own brief survey on site, were middle class entrepreneurs or waged employees in private sector institutions. During the 2014-2015 economic and energy crisis, my friends' and colleagues' critique of the ruling government centred around perceiving oneself as a "tax-payer" – namely, as the kind of citizen who contributes money out of each salary to the nation's coffers, and hence could expect at least a decent football team. However, the economy (and the football team) remained "blocked." Rain and floods came at the wrong time, which some interpreted as God's message to Ghana.

Interestingly, within the cultural intimacy of the Ghanaian nation-state, my professional friends and colleagues recognised that their tax contributions can stand for blood itself (De Witte 2003b: 555; Hasty 2005b: 275) in their practical status as the key medium of “flow” between the state and its citizens. Although this may be a stretch of interpretation, when they saw the Black Stars crumbling, it appeared as if they effectively saw their tax-money/personally-contributed life-force being wasted. Besides taxes as the medium through which the state encounters the formally employed citizens, the outrage around the NDC government and the Black Stars also pointed to a particular value of Ghanaian middle class citizenry: non-partisanship, or the making of purposeful distinction to party politics given the class and ethnic divisions that have characterised the formation of the Ghanaian political system. This was noticeably evident in the Occupy Flagstaff House protest. When I joined marching crowd at Sankara Interchange, a few blocks from the destination there was an ongoing altercation. A representative from the opposition, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), attempted to join the protest but was booed away by the young participants. Video of the clash was immediately posted online. The protest was organized by an interest group calling itself “The Concerned Ghanaians for Responsible Governance,” that fashioned itself as an independent, non-partisan organization. Their struggles to keep the demonstration at least nominally independent were nevertheless difficult, as the protesters were aware that any critique of the ruling government could be interpreted as support of the opposition party. Booing the NPP politician was their way of emphasizing the quality of the protest as “independent activism” (see for example Musallam 2016).

At its core, the value and meaning of professionalism is a deeply politicised endeavour of respectable nationhood. As the encounter with Ms Amuah earlier showed, this endeavour entails global class politics and a hierarchy of nation states where African states are routinely classified in the rock bottom of “good governance” in the public sector, to say nothing of what that implies about its other privately managed institutions. Agents determining the standards of competence in this hierarchy are global institutions such as Transparency International, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund that recommend practices like public sector reforms. At the same time, the desire to being recognized as a professionally competent subject lurks at the other side of these top-bottom narratives. From the perspective of Ghanaian middle-class publics, this desire links with awareness of global class politics, and their intimate hopes of inhabiting a nation state that can deliver on its citizens' expectations. This kind of nation, though not explicitly verbalized, is also the kind of terrain where it is possible to stay and to not leave. This kind of land roots people to its soil instead of triggering mass exodus. This thesis has shown how – in spite of the attendant challenges – being a professional enables the imagination of Ghana as a site of abundance, success, plenty and bounty. The story of the value of work in this world is also a story of what it means to be a human, professional and otherwise.

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