

The Miraculous Life:

Scenes from the Charismatic Encounter in Northern Ghana

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the recent influx of Pentecostal-charismatic churches into the Northern Region of Ghana, a rural, underdeveloped region whose predominantly Muslim population has increasingly become the target of evangelistic efforts undertaken by Christians from the south. Based on ethnographic and archival research, my study considers the locus of this incursion as a densely layered zone of anxieties and emergences, desires and contestations, in which the elaboration of novel horizons of sensibility and experience is refracted through the vicissitudes of the region's social, economic, religious, and political history. I argue that the churches' impassioned campaign to "take back the north for the Lord" – a campaign whose exemplary medium is the evangelistic crusade in which "signs and wonders" are mobilized as particularly potent technologies of conversion – demarcates a complex field of intervention animated by a plurality of forces irreducible to those of strictly religious provenance. An ethos of progress and success fostered by the country's development apparatus; the longstanding prejudices surrounding northerners and "the north" in the Ghanaian national imaginary; the specter of a Muslim threat that surfaces in a post-9/11 world and perpetuates amidst a global war on terror – these are among the contingencies that have come together to render this encounter possible. Yet, far from simply overlaying these historical-political logics with the veneer of Christian discourse, my work charts the dissemination of a faith whereby, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, converts are anointed with a power to conceive themselves and, by extension, the world as nothing less than a totally "new creation." I contend that such practices of salvation, so characteristic of Pentecostalism's proliferation across the continent as

a whole, are being recast in ways both subtle and sensational by their transposition into the allegedly pathological space of northern Ghana – as are, I suggest, the lives of the men and women who inhabit it.

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Prologue

Coming Up For Air

The boy can't be more than eight or nine years old – by far the youngest among the dozen or so men and women, some of them teenagers, others elderly and arthritic, making their way slowly, gingerly, down the steps into the baptismal pool. One by one. If they or the congregation that watches them, hands outstretched or reaching into the heavens in prayer and thanksgiving, are at all aware of the conviction according to which the scene playing itself out in the church this evening is quite literally one of death and resurrection, the atmosphere at the moment does little to indicate it. Or perhaps, judging by the looks on their faces, the tears, the gaiety, the songs of praise and worship interspersed with raucous applause one minute, threatening taunts leveled at the Enemy the next, this is exactly what a baptism, theologically understood, ought to look and sound like. One by one: the remarkable singularity – if only for a few brief moments – of *this* name, *this* decision, *this life* beginning afresh. Down they go into the water, guided by the gentle but resolute hand of the senior pastor, and up they come, never, presumably, the same again.

What makes the performance of this most recognizable of Christian rituals at this particular Christian church unique, or at least, one imagines, somewhat different from the baptisms that take place every week in your typical run-of-the-mill mainline Protestant gathering, is the pastor's practice, every once in a while, of holding his microphone in front of the mouth of the newly drenched man or woman standing in the pool with him, at which point, often tearfully, starting timidly at first but picking up steam as it continues, quick bursts of

tongues, *glossolalia*, are carried out over the loudspeakers into the receptive ears and hearts of roughly three thousand believers who, taking a cue from the suddenly serene instrumental music being played by the worship team, have paused their singing and supplicating long enough to allow this gift from the Holy Spirit to be welcomed into their midst.

Two things worry the boy – well, one thing worries him, the other petrifies him – as he waits his turn on the thinly carpeted stairs: first, that the water will be cold, and second, that if the pastor places the microphone before him, nothing will come. Minutes earlier, his father had assured him once again that the water would be warm, like a bath. He also promised that if the Lord decided to grant him the gift of tongues tonight, he would by all means be given the confidence to speak. Just ask Him to be there with you while you're waiting, his father said.

Now the boy is stepping cautiously into the water. He was warned that the lights would be shining directly into his eyes, but still, it catches him off guard. That, and the realization, somehow unnoticed to this point, that, unlike the others, the pastor is wearing not a baptismal robe but a fancy suit, soaked to the waist. At least the water is warm.

What happens next will forever remain a blur. Down, up... down, up... down, up... three times, arms crossed, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And then, all at once, sounds emanating from somewhere deep inside of him. Cheering from beyond the light; the pastor helping him out of the pool. His dad hugging him, congratulating him, telling him he did good.

*

Nineteen years later, pen and notebook in hand, many lives removed from that night in California, this same boy struggles to get his bearings amid the maelstrom of words, songs, shrieks, and bodies in which he finds himself. It's late on a Tuesday evening, close to midnight, at the largest charismatic church in northern Ghana. Tonight is the second in a weeklong series of renewal services with a visiting prophet from Cape Coast. The boy's friend, Justice, lies prostrate on the ground, having long ago left his side to receive prayer near the front of the auditorium. His hands are folded behind his neck; every minute or two his legs do a little kick in the air, not unlike a toddler throwing a temper tantrum. All around, the place resembles the immediate aftermath of an explosion: people writhing on the floor, shaking, crying, violent spasms, while the leaders in the church, both men and women, attend to the many wounded. One guy, a human tornado, spins maniacally through the aisles, knocking down chairs as he goes along; elsewhere, a beautifully dressed woman in her early twenties prays silently in her seat, hands raised, head bobbing up and down like a rabbi reciting passages from the Talmud. A Holy Ghost earthquake, as they call it in such churches.

The sermon that precipitated this fantastic spiritual outpouring centered on two key issues: the fulfillment of God's dreams for us, His people, and Satan's plans to prevent those dreams from becoming a reality. Or, to be exact, Satan's plans to prevent that reality, already consummated, from becoming perceivable, inhabitable, actualizable in our daily existence.

Inflecting the exposition of these familiar, even generic, themes in the prophet's sermon are an array of distinctly – what to call them? – local flavors. The prophet, we learn, resided in the area for several years, eventually returning to the south when the “incidents” of 2002 made

living here more treacherous than usual. But things have gotten worse since then, he says.

Now it's even harder for those who serve the one true God. Islam is growing stronger. And the people are getting poorer. The Devil thinks he is doing well. But we know better. Don't we?

The fluid interplay between the collectively shared and the profoundly personal, between the stuff of world-historical interpretation and the minutiae of cultural disgust, between the life that you could, should, be living and the forces that preclude you from doing so – between, above all, the miracle and its misrecognition – is mobilized in the sermon with stunning effect. When the invitation finally comes, for those who do not yet have it, to receive the gift of tongues, variously referred to over the course of the evening as a means of arming, inoculating, securing, “fortressing” oneself for the coming battle, the response is overwhelming.

All this, and then some, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

Today, more than a century after Max Weber famously prophesied that the ongoing expansion of capitalist modernity would be accompanied by a widespread “disenchantment” of the world, religion has reemerged as an urgent, even inescapable, preoccupation for scholars across the disciplines. At the same time, as myriad forms of faith continue to weave themselves into the fabric of contemporary life, a growing number of politicians and intellectuals have begun to reassess – and, in some cases, fervently champion – secularism as a critical safeguard against the dangers such revitalizations of religion might pose to the freedoms associated with liberal democratic citizenship. This dissertation takes up these concerns from the vantage point of rural West Africa, where two of the world’s fastest growing religious movements – Pentecostalism and Islam – are encountering one another in an underdeveloped hinterland whose history of vilification and abjection is increasingly being translated, for the Christians who have begun to settle in the area, into an impassioned project of moral and spiritual redemption.

The Miraculous Life is an ethnographic and historical account of the arrival in recent years of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity in northern Ghana, an impoverished, predominantly Muslim region long regarded as an exception to Ghana’s self-characterization as a peaceful, prosperous, and indeed Christian nation. The research for this study was conducted primarily in the Northern Region capital of Tamale in 2007-2008, but it also draws on experiences and observations gleaned from several visits to the area, typically of a duration of two or three months, before and after that extended period of fieldwork.

Although a growing number of scholars have considered the Pentecostal revival as it has materialized within the urban environs of Africa's cities and metropolitan centers, few have documented the repercussions of Pentecostalism's confrontation with Islam, and fewer still have followed the churches into their various sites of evangelization, "spiritual warfare," and conversion. The present work seeks to fill this gap by charting the social and political, ethical and existential forms that are being activated and foreclosed as charismatic believers encounter those pathologized "others" who epitomize the obverse image of their vision of a miracle-filled existence. Taking for granted the basic axiom that any attempt to limn the contemporary contours of African Pentecostalism must roam far beyond both "Africa" and "Pentecostalism," and indeed the "contemporary" as well, I turn to document not only the current charismatic movement's resonances with, and repudiations of, earlier instances of Christian mission, but also the much larger social, theological, and philosophical trajectory of the vocabularies and practices they deploy.

Of these, I focus especially on the churches' discourse surrounding miracles – "signs and wonders" – which, I soon discovered, stand at the very center of their efforts to redeem, materially and spiritually, what they see as the squandered potential of the northern savanna. I found that for those whose sensibilities have been forged in the "consuming fire" of the charismatic revival, it is not enough to merely believe in miracles; rather, through a whole ensemble of bodily disciplines and spiritual exercises (fasting, spiritual warfare, evangelism, intercessory prayer), one must actively *live* them. Such a preoccupation with the miraculous, however, did not arise from nothing; on the contrary, I suggest, it constitutes only the latest

chapter in a genealogy spanning more than two millennia – from ancient Israel to the Latin Church, from the cult of the saints in medieval Europe to the Royal Society in 17th century England, from thinkers such as Hobbes, Hume, and Spinoza to Rosenzweig, Schmitt, and Agamben – and encompassing categories as diverse as sovereignty, theodicy, and natural law. In the end, far from regarding them as extrinsic to these religious and intellectual currents, this project treats the passions, polemics, and disavowals of Ghanaian Pentecostalism as embedded tenuously within them.

*

Arrived at relatively late in the writing process, the title and subtitle of this study now seem to me to provide a remarkably accurate précis of the project as a whole. I thought it might prove productive, then, to introduce the dissertation itself by way of a brief, admittedly selective unpacking of each of the title's key terms or phrases. *The Miraculous Life: Scenes from the Charismatic Encounter in Northern Ghana.*

The Miraculous...

Countless times during the course of writing this dissertation, be it in conversation with the person sitting next to me on an airplane or in the casual foyer chatter that invariably follows a conference paper, I have been asked some version of the following question. “But did you ever actually see a miracle?” As in: with your own two eyes? The way the question tends to be posed – imagine a no-nonsense let’s-get-real attitude mixed with a vaguely conspiratorial tone – it may as well be prefaced with “Yeah, okay, but just between the two of us...” It was only recently that I realized that, in a certain sense, many of the pages that follow can be read as an extended effort to come to terms with the presuppositions implicit in such a question, and therefore as an attempt to compose a suitable response to it.

The question, I suppose, is not a surprising or inappropriate one, for it is often prompted by the special stress I have come to lay – for better or worse – on miracles in the narration of this project. Recent years have witnessed a striking influx of Pentecostal and charismatic churches into the predominantly Muslim Northern Region of Ghana, I usually begin, and at the very heart of this incursion, this encounter, is a distinctive discourse on the miraculous. And not just a “discourse” on the miraculous. Miracles – blessings, signs and wonders, gifts from God; the semantic range in everyday speech is decidedly expansive – have become a palpable and inescapable presence in African urban spaces, saturating the continent’s teeming cityscapes with promises and attestations to that which is presented both as spectacularly *more* than the sum total of quotidian existence and, at the same time, as completely, even *naturally* immanent

to it. Tourist blogs and travel guides are chock-full of accounts of Westerners arriving in Accra or Lagos and immediately being taken aback by the cacophonous ubiquity of “religion” in the streets around them, from billboards announcing an upcoming healing crusade or prayer meeting and food kiosks, storefronts, and tro-tros (minibuses) emblazoned with Christian slogans (“Led By the Spirit”; “Walking in His Light”; “Jehovah Jireh: My Provider”; “My God is a Miracle-Worker!”) to little roadside placards calling, say, for the cultivation of an “End-Time Attitude.” Such, today, are the ambient sights of Ghanaian city life, and it is no exaggeration to say that the production, preoccupation, and indeed proliferation of miracles is as much a part of the nation’s self representation and self-fashioning as the consummate African success story as the World Bank indices and UN reports by which the health of developing countries is typically ascertained. And then, of course, there are the sounds: “In the name of Jesus!” you are apt to hear on a taxi radio or from sidewalk loudspeakers or from a nearby church at any hour of the night or day. “Receive the gift that has been prepared for you!”¹

The sheer magnitude, the sublime spectacle, of both the orchestration – the elaborate staging and dissemination, the high-technicity and cutting-edge mediatization – and reception – half a million attendees at this crusade, a mere three hundred thousand at the next – that together make possible “Ghana’s Miracle Explosion,” as Bishop Charles Agyin-Asare of Word Miracle Church International famously dubbed it in the title of one of his many books (Agyin-

¹ In Nigeria it is much the same – to the extent that, in 2004, as Ruth Marshall (2010: 215) recounts, the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission went so far as to ban “unverifiable miracles” on state television, accusing televangelists of defrauding the public. A number of charismatic ministries went on to challenge the ban in court, but failed to overturn it.

Asare 2001), has been much commented upon in the literature on the emergence of the country's "Pentecostalite" public sphere (Meyer 2004a; see also Asamoah-Gyadu 2005, De Witte 2005, Gifford 2004). Less addressed – in fact, I am unaware of so much as an acknowledgement of it in these studies – is the question of the degree to which this multiplication of signs and wonders is bound to the transnational, metropolitan milieus with which it is most readily associated, and thus of what happens when this paradigmatically urban phenomenon moves from its putatively natural habitat in cities such as Accra and Kumasi, and the innumerable megachurches that populate them, into Ghana's rural, less developed, and to a large extent "unreached" (that is, from a charismatic perspective) hinterland. There are obvious reasons for the identification of Ghana's miracle culture, if one can call it that, with the urban and metropolitan, even cosmopolitan, environs of the country's south, not least of which is the overwhelming emphasis in Pentecostal sermons and testimonies – or at any rate in scholarly renderings of Pentecostal sermons and testimonies – on wealth and material flourishing.² That the miraculous, for all intents and purposes, equals money for charismatics, making it synonymous with the rise of the so-called prosperity gospel, is now so widely and uncritically averred among academic observers of Pentecostalism as to constitute an article of scholarly faith

² "On the whole," writes J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, a Ghanaian scholar of Pentecostalism, "I take a positive view of charismatic Christianity, including aspects of its emphasis on prosperity. [...] These churches have clearly contributed to the growth of non-Western Christianity with dynamic, expressive, and exuberant worship styles that appeal to upwardly mobile urban youth. *But precisely because of its emphasis on material wealth, charismatic Christianity in Africa has largely remained an urban phenomenon.* Its message has little to offer the many young people who peddle gum, candies, bananas, peanuts, and fried pastries to eke out a living" (2009:40, my emphasis). There is undoubtedly some truth to Asamoah-Gyadu's analysis, but I would suggest that what "largely remains an urban phenomenon" is the academic study of charismatic Christianity, with few scholars taking the time to investigate how these "many young people" actually live their lives on a daily basis, to say nothing of venturing beyond the confines of the capital city into areas where the churches are now making significant inroads.

(see, e.g., Coleman 2000, Darkwah 2001, Hackett 1995, Hunt 2000, Maxwell 1998, Meyer 2002). Thus, tellingly, in his much lauded *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* ("This book is simply the best thing out there," gushes Philip Jenkins in his endorsement), sociologist Paul Gifford quite literally subordinates his analysis of miracles to the rubric of economics, and a superficially conceived version of it at that. Placing the section "The Miraculous" within a chapter entitled "Economic Role," Gifford catalogues the ways in which, manifestly *pace* Weber, the charismatic message that "advancement comes not from skill or effort or application or excellence, but miraculously" serves to keep a mostly uneducated, unskilled urban population beholden to a projected future that will, on the whole, never materialize (Gifford 2004: 144-150).³

For Gifford, then, as for many would-be experts on the charismatic movement in Africa, such an obsessive preoccupation with miracles, and the gospel of prosperity that animates it, insinuates not so much a distinctive vision of the world as a systematic and all-consuming escape from it. And soon, presumably, the argument goes, the hungry masses will awaken from their still-unfulfilled fever dreams and the Emperor – the senior pastor – will be exposed in all of his naked glory. For what, at the end of the day, are miracle stories but "mental constructs," in the words of Africanists Stephen Ellis and Gerrie Ter Haar (2004: 44), empirical impossibilities which, like "pervasive rumors elsewhere" (think "witchcraft tales," they tell us) have little

³ Birgit Meyer offers a less moralizing version of Gifford's argument. "More research needs to be conducted to assess the way in which the Prosperity Gospel is at once PCCs' [Pentecostal-charismatic churches'] main attraction and, as the promise in the long run fails to materialize among most ordinary believers, its main weakness" (Meyer 2004b: 460).

“factual basis in the visible world” yet are nevertheless seized upon for the modicum of existential stability they promise amidst otherwise unstable circumstances? African believers may be forgiven for their credulity, we are told, since not only are they “exposed to [miracle stories] from their infancy,” and so, unsurprisingly, have trouble parsing “the mixture of fact and hypothesis that is always the work of the imagination,” but they also – wait for the predictable determinism – “live in environments that are volatile to the extreme” (ibid., 44-45). If this sounds like a warmed-over version of the rightly disparaged sociology of error invented by Victorian anthropologists (Asad 2011: 37-40), for whom the primordial belief in “magical” rites was condescendingly seen as an attempt by natives to come to terms with the capricious conditions in which they found themselves, it’s because it is. Later, in Chapter 2, I will consider the manner in which just such perspectives have been taken over by Ghanaian mainline or “orthodox” (Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, etc.) Christians in polemics against their charismatic counterparts in the north – and in turn, interestingly, by many charismatics against one another. Here, I merely want to register the fact that, despite their different takes on the Pentecostal revival, what unites these scholars is not only their conviction that, as Gifford puts it, “the miraculous practically defines this Christianity” (“We have avoided ascribing an ‘essence’ to charismatic Christianity,” he explains, “but if one had to be identified, it would almost certainly be a focus on the miraculous”) (2004: 144), but also their presumption that what “the miraculous” names – divinely apportioned wealth and (although less often discussed) health⁴ – is rather obvious and transparent, epiphenomenal of

⁴ There is now an emerging literature on health and healing among Pentecostal-charismatics; see especially the

the vicissitudes of capitalism and sadly symptomatic of the insecurities, indeterminacies, and inequalities that beset the African urban present.⁵

While I share the general impulse that if we wish to comprehend this thing called African Pentecostalism we will need to come to terms with the miracles that attend (if not “define”) it, my own approach, as will become evident throughout the dissertation, departs, or at least imagines itself departing, in significant ways from much of the prevailing literature on the movement. Simply put – and I will be elaborating on this further below – it is not that I have a different, more nuanced or insightful set of answers to the questions that get posed of Pentecostalism. It is that I am not at all confident that we have been asking the right questions to begin with. As such, my engagement – what I would like to think of as an anthropological engagement – with the dizzying plurality of forms, rationalities, desires, and declarations that constitute this brand of Christianity amounts less to an aspiration to lead, so to speak, than to be led (and pushed, and jolted, and confounded...) by it, which, in practice, has meant following words like *miracle* into the differential spaces where it resides: past the cities of the south, past our fixation on the present (“the current moment”), even, to borrow a phrase from

excellent collection of essays gathered in Gunther Brown 2011.

⁵ Thus Jean and John Comaroff argue that “these conditions, and similar ones in other places, have conduced to a form of millennial capitalism. By this we mean not just capitalism at the millennium, but capitalism invested with salvific force, with an intense faith in its capacity, if rightly harnessed, wholly to transform the universe, including the lot of the most marginalized, immiserated, and disempowered. At its most extreme, this faith is epitomized by forms of money magic, ranging from pyramid schemes to prosperity gospels, that pledge to deliver immense, immediate wealth by largely inscrutable means; in its more mundane manifestation, it accords the market itself an almost mystical capacity to produce and deliver ever more wealth” (2012: 159).

Matthew Engelke (2010: 196), “past Pentecostalism” itself.

Accordingly, the pages to come are populated with a somewhat motley array of figures, places, periods, and events, each responding in a specific way to the question of how, why, and with what consequences miracles have come to stand at the very heart of the churches’ struggle to redeem, materially and spiritually, what they see as the squandered potential of the northern hinterland. These include, among other things, the recounting of a sensational (if finally anticlimactic) showdown between a charismatic prophet and a notorious fetish priest; an exploration of the circumscribing and objectifying procedures – from a Hippocratic treatise of Greek antiquity to the theoretical formulations of early ethnology to the interreligious confrontations of late modernity – through which miracle has been distinguished from its variously vilified, demonized, or just pathologized human and conceptual others; a first-hand account of an avowedly “miraculous” demonstration of divine power that established, not Pentecostalism, but the Catholic mission to the Gold Coast’s outer reaches; a consideration of the social, spiritual, moral, and developmental significations of light and electricity; a close reading of *Signs and Wonders*, a bestselling book authored by one of Ghana’s foremost pastors; and, most significantly perhaps, assorted snapshots of the quiet intimacies, frustrated longings, and impassioned prejudices that emerge within the interstices, in the cracks, of the impressive force that is the movement of charismatic Christianity into this area of West Africa.

In sum, by taking the increasing primacy of signs and wonders as a crucial entrée into the transformations being wrought by the arrival of Pentecostalism in northern Ghana, this dissertation seeks to elucidate the elemental and at times quite violent role of miracles in the

constitution of a life, a future, a world – a world to which the allegedly unsaved inhabitants of the beleaguered region, like so many across the continent today, are being beckoned with startling effect

...Life

“A lot of people”, Dr. Felicia explained,

like to talk about miracles, they run around from place to place looking for signs and wonders. But they’re just baby believers. That’s what they are – if they’re believers at all. Let me ask you a question: Are they growing in the Word? Are they praying and fasting? Are they destroying the works of the Enemy? Are they being discipled by a man or woman of God? Turn on the radio, turn on the TV, you see plenty of miracles; go to Accra, Kumasi, you see miracles everywhere. You think God is impressed with all these miracles? The Devil is performing miracles all the time! Doesn’t it say that in the last days there will be people prophesying, doing wonders and all that, acting like the power of the Holy Spirit is with them? Doesn’t it say that? As for miracles, God is not impressed *at all*. What impresses God is a miraculous *life*. We need to be taught, I need to be growing on a daily basis. I need to be shaped and molded by His refining fire. You get the difference?

You would think that by the time I served as the recipient of this emphatic address, delivered in the car on the way to a mid-week worship service during a quick visit to northern Ghana in May 2011 – nearly three years, in other words, after completing the fieldwork upon which this dissertation is based, and two years into the writing of it – you would think that by that time I would indeed have “gotten the difference.”

It had, after all, been a primary motivation of my research (and the subsequent narration of it) to capture in detail and close proximity the manifold disciplines, exercises, pedagogies, and techniques put to use by charismatics in their efforts at being and becoming

otherwise: otherwise than “the world,” otherwise than their Christian-in-name-but-not-in-practice colleagues, friends, parents, siblings, and fellow citizens, otherwise than “those Muslims” and “these northerners,” and, ultimately and most significantly, otherwise than the selves they are now, or once were, and, in the absence of vigilant work and scrutiny, are at risk of again becoming. Inspired in part by the turn to and thematization of so-called “lived religion” – its attention to the body, to experience and the senses, to materiality, to the popular and prosaic, to biography – among sociologists and historians of American spirituality (Schmidt 2000, Wacker 2001, Bender 2010; Griffith 2001); in part by calls such as Courtney Bender’s to orient our inquiries less around objects, sites, and phenomena “that appear to be self-evidently ‘religious’ and [to] turn instead toward the processes that make certain things (activities, ideas, institutions) recognizably religious” (Bender 2012: 275); and in part by a still-nascent anthropology of ethics, both in religious contexts (Mahmood 2005, Hirschkind 2006, Robbins 2004a, Marshall 2009, Keane 2010, Laidlaw 2002) and in anthropological theorizing more generally (Lambek 2010, Fassin 2012, Zigon 2008, Das 2010, Faubion 2011), a great deal of my ethnographic work in northern Ghana was given over to documenting precisely those moments, “between Sundays” (Frederick 2003) as it were, in which the event and the everyday, the spectacular and the subjective, in its broadest possible sense, became mutually implicated in scenes of dissonance, doubt, anguish, victory, transformation. The aim, as I saw it, was to track the bidirectional entailments of the charismatic confrontation with “the north,” with Islam, as they inscribed themselves, not only on the surface of gaudy pageantry and loud pronouncements, but also, critically, on the ostensibly private terrain of habit and

introspection, “spiritual exercises,” in Pierre Hadot’s (1995) terminology, all those Greek and Latin words – *askesis* (training), *conatus* (striving), *phronesis* (practical reasoning) – that together bespeak the labor, the problem, of perpetual self-creation (see Hadot 2004, 2008; Foucault 1994, Nehamas 1998, Davidson 2004; among anthropologists who have fruitfully deployed these concepts, see Davis 2012, Povinelli 2011).

So it came as something of a surprise to discover in the wake of Dr. Felicia’s speech⁶ that although I had been keenly attuned to the formation and inner workings of what she and others referred to as the “miraculous life,” or “lifestyle,” or the miraculous “way of life” cultivated by Ghanaian charismatics, I had not, in fact, done justice (in my writing, in my thinking) to a fundamental distinction: the distinction, as Dr. Felicia put it, between those who are “growing on a daily basis,” who are being “shaped and molded by His refining fire,” and those, on the other hand, who are simply “running around from place to place looking for signs and wonders.” The latter, emphatically, are to be rebuked not for their thirst for wonders, nor, necessarily, for the primacy they grant to miracles in their calculus of faith; like other members of the Tamale branch of Lighthouse Chapel International, and definitely unlike many Catholic or orthodox critics of the Pentecostal revival, Dr. Felicia insists that those who “worship in Spirit and in Truth” will experience “miracle power” like “you can’t even imagine.” No, their deficiency, their fatal shortcoming in Dr. Felicia’s view lies rather in “chasing miracles” to the detriment of their more general spiritual development – which is to say, to put it in slightly

⁶ I recount in more extensive detail the conversation with Dr. Felicia, and the lessons I gleaned from it, near the conclusion of Chapter 4.

different terms, in reducing “the miraculous” to a noun, a discrete event or happening, as opposed to figuring it, *living* it, in its properly adjectival, descriptive register: the miraculous *life*. If anybody, even Satan, can perform miracles, she reasoned, then shouldn’t the task be to foster our spiritual senses so as to be able to distinguish God-inspired from merely human or demonic activity? Doesn’t the Bible invite us to put our gifts to work, to be transfigured into vessels of the Holy Spirit’s creative movement in the world? And, if so, shouldn’t that necessitate a transfiguration of our very being, a transfiguration that, in contrast to those who content themselves with spiritually “getting by,” with remaining (at best) a “baby believer,” will ensure not just eternal salvation in heaven, but the capacity to see, taste, touch, and hear, indeed, to *become* a living conduit of what God is doing here on earth?

That I failed until very recently to grasp the salience of this distinction – the product, according to some of my charismatic interlocutors, of a kind of spiritual blindness on my part – had a least two related repercussions. First, it prevented me from registering the differentiating maneuvers internal to the charismatic movement itself that serve to fix the criteria and parameters of what it means to be born again, and therefore what it looks like to inadequately, or even falsely or duplicitously, inhabit that new existence. Such internal delimitations are all too easily overlooked in homogenizing pronouncements on “the global Pentecostal revival.” This is not, of course, to suggest that we need a better conception or definition of what it means to be truly saved. It is to say that we need to pay closer attention to the locally and historically specific ways in which self-identified charismatics break not only with “the past” and its notoriously attendant socioreligious forms – everything from

Catholicism and Islam to kin obligations and the honoring of ancestors – but also break with one another, thereby establishing, however tenuously or controversially, a veritable multitude of “others” in opposition to whom the individual and collective project of salvation finds an array of proximate yet no less constitutive obverse images. This dialectic, which might be seen as a radical or intensified extension of a much longer tradition of reformation, and which no doubt accounts for the endless splintering and breaking away characteristic of charismatic churches, is clearly, if somewhat inadvertently, exhibited at a number of junctures throughout the present work.⁷

A second, more immediate repercussion has to do with a tension or ambivalence that imbues our conceptualization of the miraculous (life) itself. In Chapter 4, for instance, I borrow from Gilles Deleuze (1983, 1994) the notion of a defective or dogmatic “image of thought” to suggest that our ability to comprehend the avowed miracle with which the chapter opens – wherein a young pastor receives a “secret word” from the Holy Spirit to heal his choking daughter – is seriously impeded by the peculiar picture of the miraculous that has been handed down to us. Rupture and suspension, negation and nature and law and intervention: these, I contend, are among the keywords that make up our prevailing image, that undergird

⁷ “The pattern of recurrent reform movements,” writes Webb Keane, “can take the pattern of what Judith Irvine and Susan Gal have called fractal recursivity, ‘the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level.’ . . . The restlessness of Protestant Christianity, which today is producing new factions and denominations at an extraordinary pace, is driven by this sense of revival, restoration, and reform; however routinized the religion becomes, transformation remains a lurking possibility. This transformation is not necessarily a conversion, much less the radical conversion from non-Christianity (or even nonreligion) to Christianity. But when some evangelical conflate the two and portray even revivals within the church as conversion, they are perhaps picking up on a logic already immanent in the reforming character [of Protestant Christianity itself]” (2007: 50, emphasis added).

the entire edifice upon which, at least in the knowledge formations we occupy, miracle has been and continues to be constructed. At stake here, I propose, is not merely a more or less adequate mode of theorizing, but rather a thoroughgoing (and for that reason mostly unrecognized) vision of the world, an implicit understanding, a tacit story, about the way things hang together. “Sovereignty” is the name I assign this story, and I try to show how the testimonies conveyed by those I worked with sought to contest or falsify it, thereby fabricating, in effect, an altogether different rendering of reality.⁸ Starkly unlike the dominant discourse inherited from medieval scholasticism and, later, Enlightenment philosophers such as Hume, Locke, and Spinoza, the “miracle” encountered by Ghanaian charismatics, I discovered, is experienced less as a matter of exception than inception, not so much a break with the ordinary as a divine remaking of it. “The Spirit is constantly doing things in our midst,” I was often told. “We just need the eyes to see it.” Hence the chapter’s concern to elucidate the various means by which charismatics work on themselves on a daily basis, honing, through a range of body techniques (Mauss 1979) and devotional practices, the sensory faculties – what Bishop Dag Heward-Mills refers to as the “organs of perception” – that will permit the activities of God – as well as Satan – to be identifiable, and so accessible, in all the complexity and intensity of their unfolding.

A contrary, even opposite, impression emerges in Chapter 2, however, where it is sheer, unequivocal power that defines the outpouring of God’s anointing, and where, far from

⁸ For a more general attempt to parochialize so as to move beyond the primacy of “sovereignty” in social and political theory, see Goldstone forthcoming.

enjoining congregants to submit themselves to the arduous task of living and becoming otherwise, there is scarcely any incitement to discipleship or personal transformation (the “willed obedience” of which Asad [1993] so poignantly writes). A relation of antagonism, of enmity, features prominently in this economy of wonders, with sensational demonstrations – unmistakable to believer and unbeliever alike – mobilized not only to overawe one’s rivals, but also, arguably, to performatively instantiate, or produce, the miracle in the very gesture of its manifestation. (The locus classicus of this dynamic, alluded to frequently by charismatics, is the scene in which Aaron’s rod-turned-serpent devours those of Pharaoh’s magicians in Exodus 7:8-13.) Surely such a deployment of the miraculous – histrionic, episodic, public, eminently *forceful* – is as representative of a charismatic sensibility as that elaborated at other points in this work. How to reconcile these seemingly divergent images?

I am not the first to grapple with this question. In an article entitled “The Sovereignty of Miracles: Pentecostal Political Theology in Nigeria” (2010), which develops many of the arguments set forth in her monograph on the “Pentecostal revolution” in Nigeria (2009), Ruth Marshall oscillates between two poles, or possibilities – ideal types, really – that have come to frame the growing discussion of miracles, and political theology more generally, within the humanities and social sciences. Oddly enough, considering the relative obscurity of their contributions to the major intellectual currents of the twentieth century, it is the disagreement, the “secret conversation,” as political theorist Bonnie Honig (2007: 79) calls it, between the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig and the Catholic jurist Carl Schmitt (and, adjacently, Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin) over the meaning and potential uses of the miraculous

that has supplied the terminology by which this discussion has taken shape. It is difficult to summarize their positions without enumerating the constellation of categories that animate them, but suffice it to say that while Schmitt and Rosenzweig, unlike their peers in legal theory and philosophy, respectively, each lamented, in a way, the demise of miracles and “miracle belief” in secular modernity, they differed sharply in their understanding of what a miracle is (or rather once was) and, by extension, the nature of the world it transpires within and the political community it engenders. For Schmitt, whose “theologico-political” model of the state is self-consciously indebted to a genealogy running from Constantine and the “kings two bodies” (Kantorowicz 1981) to the absolutism of the Leviathan, a miracle is fundamentally an intervention into the laws governing the normal course of events, such that the speech act – the “decision” – that brings the miracle about (or decides on its authenticity) attests dramatically to a power, a vitality, that lies before and beyond the determination of any given order. Ultimately, it is both the unanticipated, singularly interruptive as well as the decidedly theatrical character of the miracle that renders it analogous to, and at certain times historically coincident with, the “state of exception” that so famously inaugurates and sustains his logic of political sovereignty.⁹

For Rosenzweig it is another matter. In light of its centrality to Marshall’s treatment of

⁹ It is important to note that, like Hobbes before him, what interests Schmitt is less the ontological or epistemological than the social and political status of miracles. Thus in his essay, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: The Making and Failure of a Political Symbol* (1996), Schmitt invokes the Hobbesian formula *Auctoritas, non Veritas* (translated as “nothing here is true; everything here is command”) to argue that “a miracle is what the sovereign state authority commands its subjects to be a miracle; but also – and here the irony is especially acute – the reverse: miracles cease when the state forbids them” (55). It was the cynical maintenance of state sovereignty at any cost that motivated the writings of this lapsed Catholic, not the sanctity, theological or otherwise, of the “miracle” as such.

Pentecostal praxis, and its clear inflection of my own work, it is worth quoting Bonnie Honig's gloss on the profound deviation of Rosenzweig from Schmitt on exactly this score. "Whereas for Schmitt," writes Honig,

the decisive feature of the miracle and the decision is their interruption of the everyday, their sovereign suspension of normal lawfulness, for Rosenzweig this interruptive quality is not essential to the miracle at all. Rosenzweig aligned himself with a tradition of Jewish thinking in which, it was argued, the perfection of God's order would be called into question rather than confirmed by the interruptive miracle. A world that requires the saving supplement of a miracle is a world that was not perfect to begin with, and how could that be true of a divinely created world? [...] Therefore, the miracle is not about the contravention of everyday patterns of existence or laws of nature. It is a sign of divine providence that allows or invites us to experience the everyday as miracle, the ordinary as calling for acknowledgment and receptivity and gratitude. It calls for us to experience the apparently contingent as steadfast, as fated, willed, foreseen or at least (in more secular terms) significant. It calls for what we might now term mindfulness (Honig 2007: 84-85; see also Santner 2005).

Or, as Rosenzweig himself puts it, "For us, today, miracle seems to need the backdrop of natural laws, for it is only against this backdrop that it stands out as it were as a miracle." What interests him, however, is the rehabilitation of an entirely different view: one in which "the miraculous character of the miracle rests not on its divergence as regards the course of nature, but on the fact that it was predicted" (Rosenzweig 2005: 104). To predicate miracles on prediction, to say, as Rosenzweig does, that "miracle and prophecy go together" (ibid., 105), indeed, to assert that in the absence of prophecy or prediction (which the Jewish thinker derisively associates with Islam) what we are dealing with is in fact a "magical miracle" and not a miracle per se (ibid., 127-128), to argue thusly is not only to circumvent Schmitt and the

venerable philosophical, theological, and political tradition that stands behind him,¹⁰ it is to shift the very question or possibility of miracles onto the terrain of a counter-lexicon.

And it is this lexicon – oriented not around suspension and interruption but around prophesy, providence, receptivity, subjectivity, and above all testimony – that Marshall takes up in her remarkable analysis of Nigerian Pentecostalism. Adroitly joining Rosenzweig with Foucault, Marshall focuses her attention on what might be termed the *subject* of the miraculous as it emerges in the process of “preparing” for the miracle and then in “witnessing” to its occurrence. The latter is particularly crucial. For to be a witness – the “central Pentecostal technique of the self,” according to Marshall (2010: 211) – is not merely to observe or experience something and then tell others about it; rather, it involves something like a double miracle: there is the miracle being attested to, without which, as Marshall notes, it wouldn’t exist at all, and then there is the subject, the “new creation,” which is itself constituted in the declarative act. For Pentecostals, on Marshall’s reading, the miracle is not prior to or outside of but rather belongs to and indeed makes the self. Miracles, if they are to amount to more than the merely strange or unexpected, are essentially underdetermined. They require a life, a living community of lives, in which they can be received. Wonders need signs. And signs need reception.

¹⁰ Though rarely noted by commentators, I would argue that, despite his ridicule of the “rationalism” of the Enlightenment, Schmitt’s understanding of nature – and therefore his metaphysics more generally – shares with those Enlightenment thinkers (most prominently Hume) the presumption that the world is ordered in accordance with a set of immutable “laws” the contravention of which must constitute a “miraculous” or “supernatural” event; he parted ways with them, it seems to me, only on the question of whether such events were possible and/or necessary.

Yet, for all her insistence on the irrelevance of the Schmittian paradigm, and despite her efforts at positioning the Pentecostal revival squarely within a (Rosenzweig-inspired) frame of community and witness instead of sovereignty and exception, there are points throughout Marshall's writings that seem to sabotage such neat distinctions. I say this not to signal a deficiency in Marshall's work – though, admittedly, I remain unclear as to how her emphasis on the “sovereignty of miracles” (the title of her article), or her invocation of the “messianic suspension of the law” (2010: 215) and a Pentecostal ethos of exception and exclusion (ibid., 201), is not, in the end, reinscribing the vocabulary she seeks to counter – but rather to query the feasibility, and desirability, of reaching for a definitive theory or conceptualization of the life-worlds that comprise this form of faith. For her part, Marshall acknowledges this difficulty, describing it as the “precariousness” (2009: 213) that beleaguers our attempt to capture this reality. As will become apparent, my own reflections in what follow are by no means immune to this aspiration; nor, as my occasionally ill-fated attempts to theorize the miraculous life – away from sovereignty, away from Schmitt, away from “the Western intellectual tradition,” away from theory itself – uncomfortably attest to, are they immune to the contradictions and cut corners that so often accompany it. As with any mode of life, miraculous or otherwise, description will probably serve us better than explanation.

Which brings us back to Dr. Felicia. It was tempting, upon revisiting these chapters, to purify them of their blind spots and conceptual inconsistencies, and indeed there is something about the experiences and sensibilities I encountered that, in retrospect, strike me as stubbornly, frustratingly, irreducible to schematic interpretation. Yet there's the problem, the

“precariousness” of conceptualization, and then there’s precariousness of a rather different sort. “As for miracles,” said Dr. Felicia, echoing countless sermons and teachings, “God is not impressed at all. What impresses God is a miraculous life.” And then: “But let me tell you, Brian, it’s easier said than done. For we have a powerful adversary. As it says in Scripture, ‘*The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.*’”

Scenes

In its most interesting or compelling moments, those that come nearest to realizing, not a goal delineated at the outset, but a potential, a form, conceived somewhere along the way, this dissertation comprises a big, jumbled, at times bizarre array of portraits. A crowd of voices. A gathering of scenes.

It occurred to me somewhat early on in the process of conducting fieldwork, as one encounter, one biography, one rumor or accusation, one strangeness or curiosity led to another, that whatever writing was to result from it would need, if not to mirror, then at least to be touched by the state of open-endedness and incompleteness in which the research perpetually found itself. (At this point, if I remember correctly, the project had gone, tellingly, from being about “the ways in which Pentecostalism’s ‘prosperity gospel’ is reconfiguring – and is itself being reconfigured by – northern Ghana’s ethical, social, and political terrain,” as I wrote in the grant proposal that secured funding for the research, to, more modestly if also nebulously, being about the “various forces that have impelled and been activated by the arrival of Pentecostalism in northern Ghana,” as I wrote in an email to my

advisor halfway through it.)

But as time went on, and as the thoroughly mystified activity of fieldwork transitioned into the no less mystified labor of “writingwork,” each dependent, as Michael Taussig puts it, on “impossible-to-define talents, intuitions, tricks, and fears,” “magical projections through words into people and events,” in short, on an uncanny willingness and ability to convert “*all that* into a three-hundred-page piece of academic writing” (2010: 26), my early impulse to reproduce in the dissertation the elusiveness and disorientation that came with fieldwork in general, and Pentecostalism in particular, gave way to something else, something slightly disquieting (and not in a good way). Above, I referred to this something else as a reaching for schematic interpretation, the stylistic disposition of which, at least as I write it, tends to take the shape of elaborate histories of ideas and dramatic interventions. Fortunately, though, these flirtations with the conclusive and comprehensive – which led, ironically, not to the proverbial “big picture” but to the sensation of tunnel vision – eventually became exhausted, and, immersing myself again in a mountain of notebooks and field recordings, I struggled to find a form of writing, a tone of voice, that might feel a little less imposing, more expansive and diffuse, with a little more room to breathe. Even, maybe, more adequate to the material. A method of piecing together scenes was at once the style and epistemology that seemed appropriate.¹¹

¹¹ Reading over the dissertation in its entirety, it is painful to realize that much of what I write in this section is out of sync, in many ways, with the pages that follow it. I suppose the “style and epistemology” of “piecing together scenes,” and the implications for that method that I gesture toward in this section, points as much, probably more, to what I hope the next iteration of this project might become, how it might be structured and

Such a method, with its adjacent and seemingly banal suspicion that how we write (or speak, or sing, or paint) about a given thing is ineluctably bound up with what we can know about it, finds some powerful precedents in a cluster of recent ethnographic texts (Beihl 2005; De Boeck and Plissart 2002; Desjarlais 2003; Garcia 2010; Jackson 2007; Lingis 2000; Ochoa 2010; Pandolfo 1997; Raffles 2002, 2010; Stewart 2007; Tsing 2005). What these share, it seems to me, are at least two attributes. On the one hand, they grapple rigorously with a question that, surprisingly, considering the anxious handwringing that resulted from the “Writing Culture” moment of the 1980s and early 90s, managed to go largely unasked: the question, that is, of whether there are more or less fitting ways, better or worse styles or tones of voice, by which to convey the divergent realities that confront us.¹² To be sure, this question would itself have appeared to many of those preoccupied with “the poetics and politics of ethnography” as hopelessly symptomatic of the problem, insofar as it presumes, not just the need to reassess our requisite habits of representation (the central plank of an anti-Orientalist anthropology), but, much more problematically, the actuality and fact of “divergent realities” as

recomposed, than to what the project is in its present state. In other words, what I say here can be read as a kind of blueprint or vision statement for a potential future life of *The Miraculous Life*.

¹² An obvious outlier in this regard was Talal Asad’s contribution to the original *Writing Culture* (1986) volume, which, quite unlike the other chapters, took issue not with the ethnographic assertion and concomitant inscription of cultural difference, but with how easy the “translation” of that difference was made to seem. He sought, moreover, to call into doubt the primacy of ethnography itself as the privileged medium of conveying it. “If Benjamin was right in proposing that translation may require not a mechanical reproduction of the original but a harmonization of its intentio,” wrote Asad, “it follows that there is no reason why this should be done only in the same mode. Indeed, it could be argued that ‘translating’ an alien form of life, another culture, is not always done best through the representational discourse of ethnography, that under certain conditions a dramatic performance, the execution of a dance, or the playing of a piece of music might be more apt. These would all be productions of the original and not mere interpretations: transformed instances of the original, not authoritative textual representations of it” (Asad 1986: 159).

such. In a globalized, cosmopolitan, postcolonial world, went the unspoken rationale, any intimation of real alterity – the kind, in other words, that might withstand the newly enshrined custom of showing that what appeared to be “x” (traditional, distinctive, etc.) was actually “y” (modern, hybrid, etc.) – was deliberately or unwittingly complicit in the perpetuation of those “exclusions, conventions, and discursive practices” that had long buttressed the fantasy and politics of a now-outmoded order (Clifford 1986: 24).¹³

The ethnographies/ers that interest me, however, the ones that inspire my efforts here, came of age in a rather different political-intellectual climate, and though they offer strikingly diverse, at times conflicting, perspectives on the character of that climate and the ways we might transfigure it, they share a strong conviction that the materialities and dreams, stories and socialities they wish to document possess an immanent consistency of sorts, requiring a composition that will be responsive, in tenor and format, to the idiosyncrasies of the subject. (Why should an ethnography, say, of goddess devotees in South India sound and feel much the same as an ethnography of financial traders or genocide survivors?) Moreover, I would suggest that common to these endeavors is what might be thought of as a “post-theoretical” relationship to the text – a counterintuitive proposal to say the least, since, if anything, these are among the most literate and even pathbreaking of anthropological engagements with theory as we know it.

¹³ For a recent resuscitation of such a critical anthropology, one that opposes (rhetorically if not explicitly) the ethnographic conceit – the “anachronistic” ethnographic conceit, as he puts it – that there may, for instance, be distinct cosmologies that could remain intact after the “reflexive agonizing about positionality” demanded of contemporary anthropology, see Starn 2011: 193. That such anthropologists will speak of “other” cultures exclusively in scare quotes, thereby reinforcing the common sense that the prospect of their existence is both dubious and passé, is among the more unfortunate legacies of a certain brand of postcolonial criticism.

What then do I mean by post-theoretical? I mean that the heavy citational lifting, by and large, is confined primarily to the margins; that instead of rolling out the conceptual scaffolding on every other page – or, alternatively, imposing an artificial divide between the “theoretical” and “ethnographic” segments of the work – the concepts, ideas, arguments orienting the project have become internalized in the writing, present as the unavoidable condition of possibility for every word (indeed for the shape of the text itself) while remaining subtle in their influence, tactful in their advance. The “post” implies a working not after or over theory but through it; its expressive tactic is one of “showing” rather than “saying” what it means to say.¹⁴ Above all, it seeks the immediacy of the singular, the layered density of the encounter, “not lacking knowledge but saturated with secondary naiveté” (Serres and Latour 1995: 23). Such, according to Todd Ramón Ochoa, is nothing more than “the spirit of empiricism that defines ethnography” (Ochoa 2010: 17).

Arranged as a compendium of disparate scenes, an “album of sketches” compiled over the

¹⁴ Sometimes, as with Angela Garcia’s (2010) ethnography of heroin addiction, the adoption of such a tactic is deemed a matter of moral as much as intellectual necessity, a way of “writing with care” experiences that reside on the outer limits of knowability. Here we are in the region of “epistemological problems that center on the question of how to think and write an account of experience that is fundamentally foreclosed to the ethnographer, even to language itself” (ibid., 11), which, among other things, compels Garcia to be reserved as regards explicit theorizing: “reserved because so much theory forecloses the possibility of letting things remain vulnerable and uncertain – states of being that I want to engage and evoke” (ibid., 35). In other cases, such as Todd Ramón Ochoa’s study of Palo, a Kongo-inspired “society of affliction” at the margins of Cuban popular religion, the stylistic configuration of the text derives from a concerted effort to bring the “aesthetics” of writing – which for him entails a “narrative style... that portends more than it clarifies” – into alignment with the “aesthetics” of the world in question. My own approach, while propelled neither by the psychosocial extremities such as Garcia confronted nor by the experimental, infinitely recombinant logic of Palo craft, nevertheless affirms that “explanation in writing,” as Ochoa puts it, “must value the object of interpretation and insist that thought be lost to the object, rather than the object lost to thought” (2010: 15-17) – a view, again, with profound consequences not only for what we say but for how we say it.

course of “long and involved journeyings,” if I can invoke that Wittgensteinian conceit,¹⁵ my hope is that something of this spirit of empiricism will be discernible in the approach I have adopted here. To write in “scenes,” as I understand it, is to affirm the basic finitude of observation, the inescapability of finding ourselves anywhere but in the midst of things, and thus the unavoidability of our beginning anywhere but in the middle. I look around and I perceive: events, imaginaries, longings and refusals, prejudices and denunciations that I assume *must* be related to one another, and yet I can’t say exactly how, or to what extent, or for what reason they are or would be. In practical terms, scenes allow me forays into a range of genres (ethnography, philosophy, history, biography, even fiction) without being bound to a single mode; likewise, they enable me to assemble a thousand stories, side by side, as opposed to subsuming a thousand stories within a sovereign, overarching one. As I deploy them, scenes have less to do with length (two paragraphs? fifteen pages?) than with their potential to refract “the whole” – even if, in the end, it is hard to get a grasp on what that whole might be. Needless to say, this makes the extrapolation of abstract trends, logics, patterns not impossible but difficult – certainly more difficult than the reductive move of trimming the edges off the world in the service of clarity, coherence, and comparability. The ethos, the empiricism,

¹⁵ I can relate to Wittgenstein’s sentiment upon finishing what would become the *Philosophical Investigations*. “After several unsuccessful attempts to weld my results together into a whole,” he writes in the book’s Preface, “I realized that I should never succeed. The best that I could write would never be more than philosophical remarks; my thoughts were soon crippled if I tried to force them on in any single direction against their natural inclination. And this was, of course, connected with the very nature of the investigation. For this compels us to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction. The philosophical remarks in this book are, as it were, a number of sketches of landscapes which were made in the course of these long and involved journeyings... Thus this book is really only an album” (Wittgenstein [1953] 2001: ix).

indeed the “essayism” (Musil 1995; see also Harrison 1992) to which this dissertation aspires – again, belatedly and not always successfully – is one that allows connections and root causes to be allusive and referential (as opposed to systematic and didactic), and that, far from eschewing facts and local knowledges, rather gathers them compulsively, turning and juxtaposing them to see what new images might emerge.¹⁶

In this sense, *The Miraculous Life* is a collection, but a collection committed – so far as writing, and at times photography, permits – to keeping its objects alive and in motion, and them, in turn, to keeping their curator on his toes. Unlike the collection of the nineteenth century, in which “the object was detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind” (Benjamin 1999: 205), this is an unruly assemblage that – when it’s doing what it should – pulls the text into a tangle of trajectories, relations, and disjunctures.¹⁷

¹⁶ The notion – or rather the ideal – of “essayism” has guided my understanding of this project since I first encountered the term in Robert Musil’s 1933 classic *The Man Without Qualities*, which I read during my time in the field. In one of the book’s many digressive chapters, its protagonist, Ulrich, “pays homage to the Utopian idea of Essayism,” an intellectual sensibility, and moral philosophy, that Ulrich associates “with the peculiar concept of the essay,” which “in the sequence of its paragraphs, explores a thing from many sides without encompassing it.” Though Musil uses the term specifically to describe the attitude of a particular character, it is clear that “essayism” is also a description of Musil’s own aesthetic intentions: “There was something in Ulrich’s nature,” he writes, “that in a haphazard, paralyzing, disarming way resisted all logical systematizing, the single-minded will, the specifically directed drives of ambition...” According to Ulrich, striking a Benjaminian note, “all moral events take place in a field of energy whose constellation charges them with meaning” – and essayism, as he sees it, in its occasionalism and partiality, is the practice best suited to approaching them. See Musil 1995: 267-277; and also Harrison 1992; Atwan 1995.

¹⁷ I borrow this phrasing from Kathleen Stewart, whose *Ordinary Affects* (2007) she describes as an “idiosyncratic map of connections between a series of singularities.” Like Stewart – who conceives of her text as a spreading out of “too many possible scenes with too many real links between them” (ibid., 128) – my aim here is to “write not as a trusted guide carefully laying out the links between theoretical categories and the real world, but as a point of impact, curiosity, and encounter” (ibid., 4-7).

And of course, as with any amateur collection, mine too is marked by incompleteness as much as wholeness.

The Charismatic Encounter

Two young people, a man and a woman, both in their mid-twenties, each a minor, relatively peripheral character in the drama that I am referring to as “the charismatic encounter” in northern Ghana. Peripheral and yet, in a way, strangely representative. The man, al-Hamdu – this is how he wrote it on a scrap of paper when he gave me his mobile phone number – is a born-again Christian from Kaduna State in central northern Nigeria. He’s now long gone, but when I first met him, in 2008, he and a close friend, Maliq, had just arrived in Tamale, missionaries from Nigeria whose aim was both to “warn” the believers in northern Ghana about the imminent Muslim threat and to evangelize the local Muslims by way of argument, demonstration, and refutation – decidedly not through friendship. There is much to be said about this remarkable duo, but here I will simply note that, unlike any other Christians, certainly charismatics, I met during my time in Ghana, these two believed – taking seriously the Apostle Paul’s call to “become all things to all people for the sake of their salvation” – that the best way to “win” Muslim souls was to look and sound like them, even to the point of taking “Muslim names” (initially I assumed they must be converts to Christianity, but I was wrong: they were born and raised in the church) and adopting what they took to be an Islamic style of comportment.

A mutual friend had introduced us. I never quite clicked with Maliq, the one on the

right, I don't think he trusted me, but al-Hamdu and I got along well and we spent many hours talking and going around town together. For three months, I accompanied al-Hamdu whenever he managed to convince a pastor to allow him to speak for a few minutes at a Sunday morning service, and, as one of their "strategic backers" – one of six – I also attended their weekly sessions of prayer and spiritual warfare, held in the dank storage room of an old building. His appearance alone was a major strike against him as far as the city's charismatics were concerned. It was not uncommon, after concluding his spiel about the coming jihad, the on-the-horizon imposition of Shari'a law, the secret Islamic conspiracy to take over all of Africa, for al-Hamdu to be literally laughed out of the church. The experience must have been a familiar one: his family in Nigeria wanted little to do with him, and his father, a deacon in the Methodist church, made it clear that al-Hamdu's Christianity was not his own. But, as I remember him asking me one morning as we left yet another service, how many missionaries do you know who have not suffered persecution? And so he persisted.

Augustina Osei-Bimpong was among those who laughed at al-Hamdu. It was the night that I arranged, on their repeated request, to have Maliq and al-Hamdu speak at Prophet Joshua's outdoor healing and deliverance service at Police Park, a huge concrete enclosure where political rallies and various other events were sometimes held. Despite, or, come to think of it, probably due to the near-total darkness, it was a popular spot for all-night gatherings of charismatics. Augustina, whose photo I never took because we never met each other in daylight, had been in the north for about a year at that time. She moved there to study business administration at Tamale Polytechnic; the tuition was much less prohibitive there than

in the south. She wasn't married but hoped to be soon. We usually chatted before and after the weekly meeting, if it didn't end too late. In the beginning, when I first started attending the meetings, Augustina was always one of the five or six young women who either stepped forward to receive deliverance after the brief sermon or were singled out by the prophet for especially vigorous prayer. In principle, this meant that each week, one after the other, Augustina was revealed to be in the clutches of a demonic presence, and, after strenuous prayer and combat, eventually freed from this harmful spirit. The real change came when, at the close of one meeting, Prophet Joshua commanded the group of twenty to twenty-five attendees to bring a key – not an old and rusty key, but a brand-new one bought specially for this purpose – to the next gathering. They were going to lock up their enemies.

It was never clear to me why Augustina should have enemies, but apparently they were myriad. Fellow students, teachers, neighbors, so-called friends – judging from her prayer requests, and the “words of discernment” invariably given by the prophet, you would think that everyone was out to get her. Maybe they were. At any rate, she no longer required deliverance after the night she locked up her enemies. Now she was the one doing the ministering, helping the prophet when others needed intensive spiritual care, anointing their heads and legs with olive oil and holding them down when, in the midst of their demonic manifestations, they tried to get away. She was never given this opportunity as an Anglican, she told the group one evening, this opportunity to be used of God. This kind of power. That's what attracted her to Prophet Joshua, and it's why – she said this to me, not to the group – it's why she was never satisfied in the normal churches. By “normal churches” she evidently meant

those such as Winner's Chapel and Dominion Life Power Mission, both charismatic, and both of which she had attended for a time, and both of which, like the Anglican church she grew up in, had left her wanting more. I got the sense that she hadn't left them on especially good terms. With Prophet Joshua, however, the prophet who called himself the "naked wire," the prophet who preached war, battle, destruction, the prophet who called down fire from heaven, who saw clearly the things the Enemy was up to in "this particular region," with him it was a different story. With him she could hold the key.

Two people, one laughing at the other. Peripheral and yet strangely emblematic of the charismatic encounter in northern Ghana. Al-Hamdu, for his part, failed to understand why his message of resistance and preparedness, with the exception of two or three people here and there, continually fell on deaf ears. As he saw it, the charismatics in the north were too timid in their confrontation with Islam, too hesitant to engage the Muslims directly and unequivocally, though they were certainly better than the Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians, and the rest when it came to recognizing that, again as Paul put it, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). Why couldn't these believers, these churches, see what was happening, spiritually and physically – the new mosques going up, the increasing prominence of certain Muslim politicians – all around them? Or, if they could see it, as they claimed they did, why weren't they doing anything about it? Is it because they're afraid?

Charismatics like Augustina took a different approach. For her, the fact that she, a

southerner, was now residing in the Northern Region was not at all an accident. God had brought her here for a purpose – and, contrary to what she originally believed, it was not simply to get an education. The Lord was using her, training her, under the direction of Prophet Joshua, to be a soldier in His army. Satan had plans for her life, just as he had plans for northern Ghana. But he couldn't touch her. Her life was bought with the blood of the Lamb, as was the soul of the nation – an essentially Christian nation, as far as she and other charismatics were concerned. What al-Hamdu doesn't realize is that Ghana is not Nigeria. These Nigerians, they like to stir up trouble, they like to fight. Ghana is a peaceful country. Ghanaians don't like blood, the way Nigerians do. And besides: Why would they dress like Muslims? Why take Muslim names? The point, Prophet Joshua told me after Maliq and al-Hamdu's fruitless attempt to enlist those present at the prayer gathering, is not for us to become like them, like this place, but for *them* to change, for them to see the *amazing things* the Spirit is doing in and through us. And then they will want to join us.

*

Who is this “us” that beckons an entire region?

First, some history. But which history? There are several to choose from. What holds them all together is a desire to shed light on a set of facts that have become impossible to ignore for anyone with any interest in contemporary Africa: that those who identify with Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity now constitute more than 20 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's total

population;¹⁸ that this particular brand of religiosity, with Islam, is the fastest growing on the continent; that the Pentecostal efflorescence has come to permeate nearly every aspect of African social life, from presidential campaigns and everyday commerce to Saturday morning television and bus journeys back to one's home village. The least scrupulous of such histories – surprisingly prevalent – are dubiously devoid of history, treating African Pentecostalism as a self-engendering, almost sui generis religious form. Accounts of this sort, which tend toward the impressionistic and anecdotal, seem to emanate from the shock of the sociologist or ethnographer upon discovering that the little corner of the world she or he has been studying for several years has suddenly been overrun by churches, those of the tongues-speaking, miracle-making (or, more likely, -faking), soul-saving variety, that all the chiefs and elders are getting saved (or being denounced by those who are), that, with apologies to Bob Dylan, “something is happening” but they don't know what it is – yet they need to appear as though they do. Here is a Pentecostalism that arrived essentially from nowhere, that sprang sensationally from the past twenty or so years of cultural fomentation, with little relation to the world at large, to say nothing of the Christian tradition.¹⁹ A slightly less facile version traces

¹⁸ The reference here is the extensive (though not uncontroversial) survey on African Pentecostalism conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Pentecostalism in Africa* (2006) www.pewforum.org/Christian/Evangelical-Protestant-Churches/Overview-Pentecostalism-in-Africa.aspx

¹⁹ Against such accounts, this dissertation treats the practices, doctrines, and disavowals of Pentecostalism as profoundly entangled with the “discursive tradition” (Asad 1986) of Christianity. To be sure, a great many of the phenomena associated with this brand of Christianity are unique to the cultural, historical, and political milieu in which they transpire, but the crucial, oft-overlooked point is that even what appear to be radical innovations are invariably framed by their practitioners as reclaiming the authentic – albeit long betrayed – core of Christian orthodoxy; as one devout friend emphatically told me, the charismatic churches are merely “reminding the world what Christianity is all about.” Neglecting this dimension has led scholars to a number of erroneous conclusions, such as the widely held view that Pentecostalism's emphasis on personal anointing and the spontaneity of the

everything to North America – the churches are reading Benny Hinn and Creflo Dollar, the logic goes, so that must be where this stuff is coming from – or, alternatively, on the other side of the coin, presents Pentecostalism as the natural organic outgrowth of a uniquely “African cosmology,” the sensational success of which is attributable to its clever appropriation of an ensemble of principles, beliefs, and predilections latent in “traditional African societies” (Meyer 2004b: 454-458, 460-463).²⁰

A more compelling history of the Pentecostal present – one that supplies the backdrop against which the following chapters unfold – takes seriously the undeniable novelty of African Pentecostalism while at the same time acknowledging the much longer itinerary of the idioms and practices it deploys (Kalu 2008; Meyer 2004b). Emerging from the extraordinary social and religious watershed that was the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles from 1906 to 1909, which itself had antecedents in the radical evangelical movements (above all the so-called Holiness strain of Methodism, source of such breakaway sects as Pillar of Fire, Shiloh, Fire-Baptized Holiness Association, and Missionary Bands of the World) that sprang up in the aftermath of the eighteenth-century, Anglo-American ferment known as the Great Awakening,

Spirit inevitably diminishes the authoritative role of scripture in the everyday lives of believers. I would contend that such assumptions uncritically reproduce the polemical denunciations leveled at the new churches by their various detractors and, in doing so, overlook the complex pedagogies and hermeneutical techniques by which even the most sensational of “spiritual gifts” are legitimated, however creatively, by reference to the canonical text (for a notable exception, see Engelke 2007).

²⁰ This latter perspective may be taken as a species of the pervasive “continuity thinking” that, according to Joel Robbins (2007), has prevented social scientists from apprehending Pentecostalism, African or otherwise, on its own culturally and doctrinally specific terms.

the Pentecostals, as they called themselves, soon coalesced, doctrinally and institutionally, into such major denominations as the Assemblies of God, the Church of God in Christ, and Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee).²¹ Notorious for their febrile displays of emotional frenzy – one leader proudly recalled the attendees at his tent meetings “screaming until you could hear them for three miles on a clear night, and until their blood vessels stood out like whip cords,” while a newspaper reporter likened the sounds at an Oakland prayer rally to the “female ward of an insane asylum” (Wacker 2001: 273, ff. 3) – the various streams of early Pentecostalism converged in a common insistence that the only true gospel was the “four-fold” or “foursquare” gospel of personal salvation, Holy Ghost baptism (whose “initial physical evidence” was the gift of speaking in tongues), divine healing, and the Lord’s impending return (Robbins 2004: 121; see also Dayton 1987: 19-23). And also the primacy of unceasing outward expansion. Indeed, if one were to add a fifth plank to the doctrinal underpinnings of this nascent movement, it would most certainly be its understanding of the irreducibly global orientation of the Holy Spirit’s activity in the world, and the responsibility of ordinary believers in becoming conduits of that activity, even to “the darkest corners of the earth.”²² All of which, of course, was

²¹ A vast literature has emerged on the early history of Pentecostalism. among those I have found especially helpful are Wacker 2001; Dayton 1987; Anderson 1979; Marsden 1980; Blumhofer 1993; Griffith 1997; Cox 1995; Synan 1997.

²² Grant Wacker (2001: 263) notes that “the rhetoric of global conquest” endemic to early Pentecostalism often “outstripped the reality” of its fruition. Nevertheless, he points out that within a year of the Azusa Street Mission’s founding in Los Angeles in 1906, native language Pentecostal newspapers were thriving in Norway, Germany, China, Japan, Palestine, and Brazil, and that by 1909 missions had been planted in at least fifty foreign countries. The chapter titles of one of the earliest insider historical narratives, published in 1926, is indicative of the movement’s global reach: “The Pentecostal Flame in Canada,” “The Pentecostal Outpouring in the British Isles,” “Revival in Russia and Other European Countries,” “Showers of Latter Rain in India,” “A Great Pentecostal Outpouring in Central Africa,” “The Rain Falls in South America,” and so on.

regarded as little more than a return to the Spirit-filled, eschatologically-minded, evangelizing impulse of the first-century church.

In the Gold Coast Colony, as in other West African territories (see Beidelman 1982; Daneel 1970; Englund 2003; Hastings 1995; Isichei 1995; Martin 2002; Maxwell 1997; Ojo 1988; Peel 2003; Sanneh 1991; Sundkler 2000), this impulse manifested itself during the interwar period, with the stirrings of Pentecostal fervor surfacing first – and with markedly mixed results – through the church planting endeavors of the Assemblies of God mission in 1931 and continuing with the arrival of the UK-based Apostolic Church (later to become the enormously successful Church of Pentecost) in 1937.²³ When Ghana achieved its independence twenty years later, the new wine of Pentecostalism, “fermented in America, bottled on the mission field, and uncorked with dazzling success in the Third World,” as one pundit has quipped (Wacker 2001: 268), was well on its way to being guzzled.

Significant as these developments proved to be, however, it would be a mistake to trace a direct line of causality between Azusa Street and the Euro-American denominations it gave rise to, on the one hand, and the multifarious elements that comprise Ghana’s contemporary Pentecostal-charismatic scene, on the other. To do so, as Ogbu Kalu has suggested, is not only to fall prey to a longstanding tendency among scholars of so-called global Christianity to construct a narrative that is obstinately unidirectional, where it was “the yeast from North

²³ Interestingly enough, unlike similar endeavors in the Gold Coast, the Assemblies of God missionaries entered the Colony not through its coastal port but across the northern frontier from French-speaking Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso). Enjoying little (if any) success in the northern hinterland, the missionaries proceeded quickly to the south.

America [that] leavened the whole inhabited world” (Kalu 2008: 17), but it is also to elide a set of parallel influences that bear on the current social-spiritual landscape in arguably profound ways: namely, the influence of those itinerant prophetesses and prophets, William Wade Harris, John Swatson, and Samson Oppong chief among them, who predated the arrival of foreign Pentecostal missionaries by several years and catalyzed an insurgency of New Testament-like proportions in their wake (Baeta 1962). Harris’s impact was particularly acute. A Liberian convert to Methodism, he received his divine call in 1910, while serving a jail sentence for taking part in a failed antigovernment uprising. The archangel Gabriel had visited him in his cell, Harris later reported, and identified him as a prophet who was to lead his people to repentance and prepare the way for Christ. With his simple, signature refrain – “Jesus has come and Satan has run away!” – Harris cut a fiery path through great swaths of West Africa, casting out demons, exposing witchcraft, sparking revivals through prophecies and miraculous healings, and preaching an uncompromising message of disdain for indigenous religious customs, often illustrated by pouring holy water on shrines that would then burst into flames. In 1914, upon returning from the Gold Coast, where he had been ministering in the coastal villages, Harris was arrested at Kraffy, Côte d’Ivoire,²⁴ extradited to Liberia, and remained imprisoned there until his death in 1929 (Kalu 2008: 34-37; Shank 1983). “One man preached the Gospel in the Colony for nine years and only converted 52,” wrote a British observer at the

²⁴ According to some accounts, Harris was arrested because the colonial authorities in Ivory Coast were told of his spiritual exploits in the neighboring British colony and were afraid of similar revivals breaking out in their own territory; others say it was due to his denunciations of French shipmasters for employing African laborers to offload goods on Sunday. The latter explanation seems convincing, especially if, as legend has it, Harris caused the ships to explode in flames after dousing them with holy water (Kalu 2008: 37).

time, comparing the evangelistic efforts of the African Anglican priest Philip Quaco to Harris's own. "But another man preached for just two years and 120,000 adult West Africans believed and were baptized into Christianity" (quoted in Amanor 2004: 17).

An overriding emphasis on personal revelation and individuated anointing; the pride of place accorded to the exceptional "man (or woman) of God"; the legitimacy accrued from having been ostracized by the religious powers that be, to the extent that a narrative of censure and marginalization becomes crucial to the self-portrayal of the figure or ministry in question; a certain distaste for institutional oversight and accountability; a close engagement with the local and the traditional, if only to disavow it; the primacy of signs and wonders; a distinct knack for self-promotion – it is easy to discern the traits that so phenomenally distinguished movements such as William Wade Harris's in the churches and para-church assemblages that proliferated a century later. In fact, following Kalu's revisionist account, I would suggest that if we want to know where people like Prophet Joshua, Augustina, al-Hamdu, and many other figures and phenomena that populate this dissertation came from, we would do well to look, not to the actors – the purveyors of denominational or "classical" Pentecostalism – who are usually given historical precedence, but to this ragtag, largely neglected ensemble of homegrown, Spirit-filled mavericks.²⁵ And here a potentially critical genealogical distinction may help to explain a current terminological one: the distinction drawn among Ghanaians of all stripes between the

²⁵ The legacy of figures like Harris, I would argue, is evinced not only in the small-time prophets and prayer camp leaders who subsist on the margins of Ghana's charismatic scene, but also, writ large, in the megachurch pastors and spiritual superstars who preside over it. After all, as they are wont to remind their congregations on a regular basis, nearly every one of these celebrity pastors started out quite humbly themselves, and today, we might say, the difference between them and the lowly prophets they often mock is a matter of degree – of magnitude, scope, and capability – rather than kind.

properly “Pentecostal” churches (that is, those whose origins are directly traceable to Western missionary successes in the country) and the newer, huger, more independent and dispersed “charismatic” congregations.²⁶

These latter, though present in Ghana since at least 1979 (the year Nicholas Duncan-Williams, the self-proclaimed father of the charismatic movement in Ghana, founded his Christian Action Faith Ministries International in Accra, after studying under the renowned Benson Idahosa in Nigeria for three years prior), had kept more or less to themselves during the protracted dictatorship and then presidency of Flight Lieutenant J.J. Rawlings, during whose tenure the state-controlled media effected a strict exclusion of any but the most “traditional” of religious expressions, with the programmatic aim of boosting “national pride” in what became reified as “the African heritage” (De Witte 2003). Increasingly the country’s political-economic, cultural, and religious tides began to turn, however, and the post-Cold War sea change that Piot (2010) has registered in the Togolese context in many respects holds true for Ghana as well. By the time I arrived there in 2002, a cluster of circumstances, now well-

²⁶ It is has become *de rigueur* in academic discussions of – What? Pentecostalism? Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity? Born-Agains (Marshall 2009)? Neo-Pentecostalism (O’Neill 2010)? – to bemoan the “terminological crisis” that invariably unsettles such discussions (see, e.g., Meyer 2004b; Robbins 2004; Kalu 2008). What does it mean when those who comprise the focus of an anthropology of Pentecostalism reject the name “Pentecostal” for themselves? The solutions to such dilemmas, often involving the formulation of ever new typologies and discriminations, make up the “taxonomic games,” as Birgit Meyer (2004b: 452) calls them, that have long preoccupied observers of African Christianity; an earlier instance being the confusion – again, not, presumably, for practitioners, but rather for scholars – between “African Independent Churches” and those of a “Pentecostal” persuasion. While affirming Meyer’s argument that we “should not take such classifications for granted, but instead understand them as part and parcel of a politics of representation” (ibid., 452), and notwithstanding the distinction Ghanaians make between the two, I nevertheless opt – mostly for reasons of readerly convenience – to use “Pentecostal” and “charismatic” interchangeably in this text.

documented (Meyer 2004a; Hasty 2005; Gifford 2004; De Witte 2007) – the privatization of markets and formerly state-owned infrastructure that attended IMF-imposed policies of structural adjustment, and the uneven influx of global commodities, images, and values that followed in its wake; the horizontalization of power that saw the simultaneous pullback of the state and the proliferation of NGOs, civil society groups, humanitarian agencies, and the like; the demonization of “custom” and “tradition” that went hand in hand with an emergent, future-oriented discourse surrounding development and democracy; and, last but definitely not least, the liberalization and commercialization of the country’s radio, film, television, and print outlets – had congealed over the course of the 1990s into a vibrant, variegated, eminently contemporary religious milieu, a spiritual ecology that would come to render, at least for the roughly six million souls who soon composed it (Meyer 2004a: 107, ff. 1), the old recognizable orders and theologies – political, economic, and otherwise – quaint at best.

So materialized the “us,” the amalgamated, shape-shifting, contentious, and, for many observers (including this one), vexingly heterogeneous “us,” that has so palpably configured the reality of Ghana today. The “us” that is forever an invitation, and always an open question.

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And always – to return to one of the guiding motifs of this dissertation – an encounter. This in multiple senses. First, there is the encounter with a place, with a particular locality, landscape, or geography. By this I mean to insinuate not only the manner in which charismatic believers construct “spiritual cartographies,” as Piot terms it, whereby vast segments of West Africa get newly mapped as “lost to the Devil,” while “longstanding connectivities between the

city and the village” are replaced with “relays among Pentecostal nodes in Lagos-Lomé-Accra-Abidjan” (Piot 2010: 61),²⁷ but also the ways in which the very grammar of charismatic faith is inflected, and profoundly affected, by its transposition (whether physical or imaginative) into a particular space. Indeed, we might even say that, as a living and perpetually in-the-making language game, we can speak of “charismatic faith” only in its encounter with a given space²⁸ – a point remarkably overlooked in the literature on Pentecostalism but which, in practical terms, is evidenced by the fact that such “standard” Pentecostal modalities as spiritual warfare, intercessory prayer, and witnessing take on an irrevocably different cast in northern Ghana than they do in Accra or Cape Coast (to say nothing of London or California). The pneumatological gloss here is Eugene Rogers’s observation that the Spirit descends, and, in descending, *takes place*, manifesting itself variably and transformatively “in particular bodies, at particular times, in particular locations, among particular people” (Rogers 2005: 184). My hope is that, as a result of exploring this form of faith in the singularity of its encounter with northern Ghana,

²⁷ While I find Piot’s notion of a “spiritual cartography” extremely useful, it is important to note that, in Ghana at least, such mapping does not necessarily proceed along rural-urban lines. Thus a crucial point of this study is that whereas for an earlier dispensation of the missionary project it was a rural, uncivilized “paganism” that exemplified all that was to be overcome, it is now a worldly, stubbornly pious Islam that signifies the supreme obstacle – and, in instances of conversion, the ultimate victory – for charismatic evangelists. Which helps to explain why Tamale, the semi-urban capital of the Northern Region and, from the churches’ perspective, site of a recalcitrant, re-entrenched Islamism, has progressively supplanted the village, with its unsaved yet comparatively docile inhabitants, as the “front lines,” as one pastor put it, in the battle for the future of the north and the souls of its population.

²⁸ This way of putting it is indebted in part to the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre’s well-known argument that, since language becomes language only “as it is used in and by a particular community living at a particular time and place with particular shared beliefs, institutions, and practices,” there can be no such thing “as English-as-such or Hebrew-as-such or Latin-as-such. There is only Latin-as-written-and-spoken-in-the-Rome-of-Cicero and Irish-as-written-and-spoken-in-sixteenth-century-Ulster” (MacIntyre 1988: 373).

place as it is inhabited, confronted, and narrativized might become a central site of making sense of Pentecostal-charismatic experience.

Which leads us to another sort of encounter operative in this text: those with the Holy Spirit. “When one unexpectedly encounters something strange, demanding, and transforming,” writes Talal Asad, “it does not seem to me important to ask whether it comes from inside or outside, whether it is immanent or transcendent. What matters is that through a familiar medium (a time, a place, an object) a totally unfamiliar sense opens up, a glimpse of ‘another world’ that *grasps one’s life*” (Asad 2006: 223, original emphasis). This project takes the possibility and repercussions of such life-grasping moments as a scene of anthropological investigation. What would it look like to undertake an ethnography of the Holy Spirit? I cannot pretend to have sufficiently displayed in the following pages what a possible answer to this question might entail, but it is one that has shadowed this dissertation from the start.

And then there is the “charismatic encounter,” not just with the place, not just with the northerners and Islam, not only with other denominations, but with itself, with other (putative) charismatics and with what it means to be charismatic – with what it means to be, and to become, this particular kind of Christian. Whether it’s al-Hamdu in Muslim drag, summoning his fellow believers to gird themselves for the jihad just over the horizon, or Augustina rejecting that summons for a different sort of battle, on a different kind of battlefield; or whether it’s Dr. Felicia distancing herself from these “baby believers,” from such “miracle chasers” in favor of an entire lifestyle of spiritual gifts, the issue is never settled, definitely or conclusively. That is why, analytically and methodologically, I have situated this study, not in a single church or

ministry, as is customarily the case, but in an ever-expanding multiplicity of sites – from prayer camps and prayer closets to megachurches (or their outposts) and barely existent ones – trying to keep open as much as possible the matter of what counts as charismatic, and how *this* comes to count for the project, the struggle that took me to northern Ghana to begin with: the struggle, as the missionary Kingspride Hammond put it to me in Atlanta when he announced that he would be moving to the region (see Chapter 2), and as I heard over and over during the course of my time there, to finally take back the north for the Lord.

Northern Ghana

When northern Ghana – the north, or rather “the north” – appears in this dissertation, it does so, by and large, through charismatic eyes. And because those eyes are at the same time, to a large extent, Ghanaian eyes, and also (with just a few exceptions) the eyes of southerners, it becomes important to step back and ask the question of how it is that, once again – albeit, to be sure, in novel and unexpected ways – this area and this people have been constituted as a target of intervention. What is it about the north that has so tenaciously procured its status as the primordial, pitiable, destitute, and even dangerous object of a long succession of humanizing missions? With recourse to what images and representations have these ventures been pursued?

The particular field of intervention that concerns me here, while commissioned and carried out in the distinctive idiom of Christianity, has been energized, I suggest, by a range of forces (geopolitical, historical, ideological) irreducible to those of strictly “religious”

provenance. They reveal themselves in gestures subtle and dramatic: in the snide remark of an Ashanti pastor, in the patronizing tone of an expatriate housewife, in the urgent bombast of an evangelistic call to arms. At a moment when Ghana is seeking to fashion itself as a counterpoint to what is typically regarded as the intractable predicament, even “fate” (Meredith 2006), of Africa – with rock singer-cum-humanitarian spokesman Bono going so far as to declare, on the eve of President Obama’s inaugural visit to the country, that Ghana is “setting about the business of rebranding a continent” (The New York Times, July 9, 2009, A25) – perhaps it should be unsurprising that the pathologization of the northern hinterland (not by outsiders, significantly, but by Ghanaians) would take the form of the worst clichés about Africa and the most hackneyed caricatures of Islam, the twin master tropes, respectively, of failure and menace in a post-9/11 world.

Still, the naked prejudice, and this in a nation that prides itself on its hospitable openness, often managed to catch me off guard. “It’s hard to believe there are people like that in our country” – this is how Akosua, a born-again Christian and a secretary at the U.S. Embassy in Accra, put it to her sister on the way home from church one evening. It was said in reference to a promotional video for a miracle crusade, the “Healing Jesus Crusade,” that was to be staged in Tamale later that year. The message conveyed by the high-resolution images cascading across the screen – malnourished children, crippled men and women, deformed arms and legs, orphans with flies buzzing around their heads, all set against the backdrop of newly constructed mosques and praying Muslims – was not lost on Akosua, nor, apparently, on the other 4,000 congregants at Dag Heward-Mills’s church that night. The north is poor, desperately poor.

And it's obvious where the blame lies for this condition. On the way home, in the car, Akosua shook her head in dismay.

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“The land of barbarians was what southerners called it. Most of them had never been north of Kumasi, so a full day's journey from Accra to Salaga was unthinkable, but this didn't prevent them from sharing fanciful tales about air so thick you could hardly breathe, or describing bare-breasted women with the kind of revulsion and fascination you would expect from an American provincial opening the pages of *National Geographic* for the first time, or mapping the north-south divide along the lines of brawn versus intelligence, or bemoaning a world without indoor toilets or electricity, or complaining of lazy and untrustworthy servants from the area. Listening to them you would have imagined that northerners had stumbled out of their caves just yesterday and had yet to lose their scraggy feral manner. My landlady swore you could smell the stench of the untamed at the edge of the forest. Her daughter openly mocked primitives who had never set eyes on the sea, as if this alone were enough to damn them for eternity. The crudeness and poverty of northerners would send me running back to Accra, they warned. It was an inhospitable country” (Hartman 2007: 178).

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Arriving from the coast, whether by airplane – for roughly the price of a roundtrip ticket from New York to San Francisco, a private Ghanaian airline now offers the political elites and foreign NGO workers who can afford it tri-weekly flights into the region's tiny airport – or, much more commonly, by car or bus, the first thing you notice is the landscape; a close

second is the weather. Gone is the muggy, tropical feel of the southern mountains and rain forests. Here the topography consists of low lying, mostly uninterrupted, savanna. Uncultivated areas of sparse bush are interspersed with drought-resistant trees (acacia, baobab, dawadawa, shea nut) and the occasional compound of thatched roof huts. Bordering Togo to the east and Côte d'Ivoire to the west, and hemmed in by the Black and White Voltas and their tributaries, the verdant grassland of the Northern Region – one of three administrative zones in the north, along with Upper East and Upper West – inevitably dries up in the rainless season and becomes susceptible to bush fires. The dry harmattan winds that occur during this period are harshest the further north one goes. Due to its proximity to the Sahel, the region has only a single rainy season, normally running from May to October. Otherwise it's hot. Very hot.²⁹

Numbering approximately 2.4 million people (as of the 2010 national census), the population of the Northern Region makes it the least densely inhabited in Ghana, with the overwhelming majority of people still living in traditional homesteads and engaged in subsistence agriculture. Most residents speak one or another dialects of the Mole-Dagbani and Gurma subfamilies of the Oti-Volta languages (Saaka 2001: 5), although Hausa, the lingua franca of northern Nigeria, has become increasingly prevalent, particularly in markets and trading centers, and the specific languages spoken tend to vary from district to district. As

²⁹ Here is what the director the Gold Coast Government's Anthropology Department wrote just as he was beginning the research for what would be his last great work, *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland* (1932): "I crossed the boundary on January 8th. After some score of years spent, in the forest zone, among the Akan-speaking peoples, the contrast presented by this Hinterland and its inhabitants is indeed extraordinary. The traveller appears to pass in a few hours into a country where climate, physical features, peoples, customs and problems present as striking divergences as those which would exist, say, between East and West Africa" (Rattray 1928: 179).

intimated by its linguistic diversity, the region is home to a number of ethnic groups, both “centralized” (Dagomba, Mamprusi, Gonja, Nanumba) and “stateless” or “segmented” (Konkomba, Grusi, Chokosi, Nchumburu, Vagala) ones, some of whose communities, thanks to the now infamous arbitrariness of colonial boundary-drawing (Bening 2001), straddle Ghana’s international borders. Among historians and anthropologists, Jack Goody (e.g., 1954, 1956) was the most prominent to argue that the original peoples of northern Ghana lacked chiefs in any conventional sense; on this view, it was in the fifteenth century, as offshoots of the large western Sahelian states of Mali, Songhai, and Hausa started infiltrating the region, and as previously nonexistent political structures and institutions such as chiefship were gradually superimposed on the segmented systems of the pacified autochthones (who were permitted to persist as sub or minority groups within the societies of the invading powers), that the strong centralized states associated with the area began to emerge (Horton 1971; Middleton and Tait 1958; Rattray 1931; for recent dissenting views, see Der 2001; Lentz 1993). Of these, the Dagomba have long dominated the region, not only numerically (today they make up about a third of the population) but also, crucially, in terms of land ownership and thus political-economic clout (Pellow 2011), which has led, over the years, to a great many inter- and intraethnic conflicts, acutely exacerbated – some would say precipitated – by colonial and then postcolonial political interference (Bogner 2000; MacGaffey 2006; Lund 2003).

Moreover, the longstanding hegemony of Dagbon has been vital to the preponderance of Islam in the Northern Region. Here, as elsewhere in the Sudan savanna, the process of so-called Islamization began with the settlements of Mande traders and clerics, who developed

close ties with the Ya-Na (the Dagomba king) and other local chieftaincies. Unlike places such as northern Nigeria, however, where Islamic rule was consolidated, first through the efforts of militant reform movements and the establishment of Islamic governments whenever possible (Hiskett 1984; Last 1987), and later through the putatively “pro-Muslim” (or, more accurately, *laissez-faire*) policies of British governor Sir Frederick Lugard, who for pragmatic reasons kept the area off limits to Christian missionary activity (Barnes 1995), there was no such tendency in the Voltaic region (Levtzion 1968, 1979; Weiss 2004). There, goes the conventional and not unproblematic wisdom, the rulers were perhaps nominally Muslim, but the old political and religious structures remained essentially unchanged (Goody 1953; Wilks 1961, 1965; Weiss 2005; Ferguson 1972). For many observers (Mumini 2002; Weiss 2001; Sanneh 1997), this “religious pluralism” early on – an anachronistic descriptor if there ever was one – can account for the comparative diversity and tolerance that persists in the Northern Region today: 14% Christian, 22% “traditional,” and 64% Muslim, according to the most recent figures from the government.³⁰

Tamale, the administrative capital and primary commercial node of the Northern Region, is where the bulk of the research for this project was carried out. Before I ever stepped foot in the sprawling metropolis, my Ghana travel book gave me an idea, if not of what to expect, then at least of the raw deal the city has tended to get in the world at large. “As the main route focus in northern Ghana, and the biggest urban conglomeration in the area, Tamale

³⁰ For the most recent census results, see <http://www.ghana.gov.gh/census/phc2010.pdf>

is hot, flat, and quite incredibly dusty: first impressions upon arriving in the harsh light of day are less than flattering, unless perhaps you're a homesick construction worker. [...] Prone to occasional paroxysms of violent bloodshed, travelers are advised to exercise caution after dark. The most noteworthy facet of the city is the Grand Mosque, and its rather astonishing infestation of bicycles; beyond that, there is not much of interest here" (Briggs 1999: 351). Not so for the estimated two hundred international NGOs, humanitarian agencies, and non-profit groups with field offices in Tamale (the "NGO capital of West Africa," as city leaders proudly refer to it), nor, evidently, for the roughly 400,000 residents, with many thousands more in the surrounding villages, whom the organizations and their army of (largely Euro-American, but increasingly Middle Eastern and North African) employees and volunteers are ostensibly there to serve. Nor does there seem to be "not much of interest" for the enormous wave of entrepreneurs, small businesses, traders, merchants, and moneyed elites that have flocked here in recent years, bringing with them a train of newly constructed banks and savings and loan companies (over 20 at last count), hotels, internet cafes, forex bureaus, and market kiosks peddling everything from pirated DVDs and toothbrushes to designer jeans and cell phones, and invariably owned by enterprising migrants from as far afield as Mali and Niger. Like other cities in the "developing world," Tamale is a study in juxtapositions: Land Cruisers next to goat herders; open gutters alongside gated homes; mud huts next to air-conditioned restaurants; fancy perfume shops beside butcher stalls with fly-covered guinea fowls and the severed heads of cows; and on and on. It is also, and perhaps most pertinently for my purposes, a remarkably kaleidoscopic cultural and religious terrain, accommodating not only

“traditional” practitioners and the municipality’s majority Muslim population – itself a strikingly heterogeneous community, divided among Sunni, Ahmadiyya, Tijaniyyah (a Sufi brotherhood widespread in West Africa), and Shi’a traditions – but the various Christian denominations operating in the area as well, who for several decades have catered primarily to transplants from the surrounding regions.³¹ Indeed, despite the outbreak of ferocious violence in and around the city, most notably the Dagomba-Konkomba war of 1994-95, which claimed an estimated 15,000 lives (Bogner 2000: 174; Talton 2003), or the riots that followed the killing of the Dagomba royal family in 2002, a fragile coexistence has been achieved – on the surface, at any rate – among the city’s numerous ethnic and religious groups, generated in part by a government-mandated “moral and religious education” curriculum in schools along with interreligious dialogues between Christian (mainly Catholic and Anglican) and Muslim (mainly Ahmadiyya) representatives. With the increasing influx of charismatics from the south, however, many of whom are openly contemptuous of civic – or what they call “Catholic” – virtues such as mutual respect and tolerance (while nonetheless accusing their Muslim neighbors of lacking precisely these attributes), there is little doubt that all the crusading will eventually take its toll: if not violently, conspicuously, “like in Nigeria,” then perhaps in less obvious though equally invidious ways. It is widely assumed that nothing stands to jeopardize the religious calm – again, however tenuous or superficial – that currently prevails in northern

³¹ Significantly, many of the leaders in these churches are themselves northerners, though few are from the Northern Region, hailing instead from Upper East and Upper West, the areas that were most receptive to Catholic, Anglican, and Presbyterian missionaries. Thus, much of the discourse about northerners that I explore in this dissertation is attenuated and discreet among the “orthodox” Christians, unlike among the charismatics, most of whom are recent arrivals from the south.

Ghana as much as the rhetoric and behavior of the charismatics. And really, they would be unlikely to disagree; in fact, it is exactly such “calm” that they delight in demolishing.

*

There is a word that I encountered at several junctures throughout my research. It would come up in conversation, for instance, when I was interviewing an elderly Konkomba about the years he spent in Kumasi as a porter and nightwatchman; or when my friend Adib, a Muslim born and raised in Tamale, told me of his experiences at the University of Cape Coast, where he earned a degree in French; or when yet another friend, one of the few native northerners at the Tamale branch of Winner’s Chapel, complained about the insults his fellow church members regularly directed – privately, amongst themselves, but in his presence – at their Dagomba co-workers. The word is *odonko*, or *donkor* (plural *nnonkofoo*), an Akan epithet, likely of Mande derivation (McCaskie 1995: 376, ff. 60), that “applied strictly,” as the colonial ethnographer R.S. Rattray (1929: 35) put it in his tome on Asante law and custom, “to any man or woman, other than an Asante, who had been purchased with the express purpose of making him or her a slave.” In practice, though, as Rattray observes, the term *odonko* referred not to slaves in general, but to the “people of the northern savannahs specifically, all of whom the Asante viewed as potential slaves” (ibid., 36).

And not just “potential slaves.” In 1841, the Methodist missionary T.B. Freeman recorded the opinion of Asantehene Kwaku Dua, the monarch of that powerful inland kingdom, to the effect that “the tribes in the interior are of no use *for any thing but slaves*; they are stupid, and little better than beasts” (quoted in Allman and Parker 2005: 31, emphasis

mine). Fritz Kramer notes the distinction made in Asante law between the category *ohoho*, that is, a stranger who cannot be enslaved but who also cannot take part in the legal system, and *odonko*, “that other sort of stranger who speaks an incomprehensible language and whose face is disfigured by scars, and who may be enslaved and forced to perform unclean chores” – in short, Kramer explains, borrowing a typology from Georg Simmel, the kind of stranger that is “denied precisely those characteristics which are felt to be intrinsically and purely human” (Kramer 1993: 6).³² Thus occupying a position “outside of jural corporateness and indeed on the fringe of perceptions of humanity (Allman and Parker 2005: 31), the “Dunco,” according to Ludewig Roemer, a trader at Fort Christiansborg, was “a great deal wilder than other slaves. The further up in the land the slaves come from, the more stupid they are. One can hardly call them human” (Roemer 2000: 182). It would seem, then, that before there was the *Muselmann*, the Holocaust figure described by Primo Levi (“Non-men who march to labor in silence,” he wrote, “one hesitates to call them alive” [1995: 90; see also Agamben 2002]), and before there was the nigger, for that matter, there was the *odonko*, that pathetic, servile creature from the interior, bound to a state worthy of Sophocles: “deserted – friendless – from my home afar – A corpse among the living” (1905: 361). The Asante, whose “liberal and cosmopolitan values” have been regarded by one eminent philosopher (who also happens to be an Asante) as

³² Kramer points out that facial scarification, which was customary only in the north, constituted for the Asante “the personification of *odonko*, the personification of the barbarian’s deplorable customs which legitimized enslavement. This was all the more so because, after several generations of social absorption via adoption and marriage with free Asante, and cultural assimilation through gradual domestication, the slaves’ descendants were not scarified as a matter of principle. At the end of this process, the status of the slave was on par with that of the lower strata... they wore special garments which identified them as slaves, and at all events they remained jural minors, like perpetual children” (1993: 5).

“anticipating” those in the modern West (Appiah 1998: 109), are to be credited with the invention of this abject persona: a somewhat different “laboratory of the future” (Hoffman 2011: 252) than we are accustomed to finding in West Africa.

I call attention to the history and, as my northern interlocutors will attest to, persistence of this figure in contemporary usage because I believe it offers an alternative etiology of the ensemble of prejudices and projects – extractive and salvific alike – to which the north has been subjected for the past couple hundred years. Much, doubtless, can be laid at the feet of British colonial policy, but the full extent of the animus and condescension, and the deprivation that both generates and proceeds from it (a chicken and egg dilemma: does the antipathy stem from their material destitution, or does their material destitution stem from the antipathy?), cannot be adequately accounted for by looking to colonialism alone; there was an earlier legacy, a prior intermingling of vilification and dispossession, which furnished the storyline for a drama that continues to be enacted by charismatics today. Does the relative inattention to this precedent among the country’s politicians and intellectuals have anything to do with the more pervasive silence – or, in any case, highly selective memory (Holsey 2008; Hartman 2007) – that has long attended the subject of slavery in Ghana? “Before the occupation of the north by the British in 1897,” writes Yakabu Saaka, the late historian who hailed from the Bole-Bamboi area in the Northern Region, “the whole of the area, for nearly two centuries, was effectively under Asante tutelage. Although this control did not imply the actual presence of resident Asante rulers, the patronage they enjoyed in the north was vigorous enough for them to earn from northerners the accolade ‘Black Imperialists’” (Saaka 2001: 140).

It was, he goes on to say, the exploitation by the Asante in the form of slavery – stoked by European demand and sanctioned by an official discourse that rendered northerners the bestial and/or childlike denizens of a nature beyond culture – that proved particularly devastating. Compelled to provide a tribute of several thousand slaves annually to the Asante court (Wilks 1961: 14), the northern centralized states started organizing raids into the so-called acephalous tribes further north, thereby visiting upon their weaker “siblings” (ibid., 15) a version of the expropriative destruction that had similarly befallen them. By the time the slave trade was abolished in the Gold Coast in 1874, a potent picture of the north had been circulating widely, and all roads pointed south.³³

That picture would undergo a slight modification in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as the gods, shrines, and spirits of those who were dead or had been shipped away were discovered to have a ritual efficacy that could be harnessed for a variety of purposes – most notably as a means of detecting, curing, and combating witchcraft (Allman and Parker 2005; Debrunner 1959; McLeod 1975; McCaskie 1981). The southward migration of these northern deities, which has engaged the ethnographic and historical imagination of Africanists virtually from the outset of anthropological work in Ghana (Rattray 1932; Fortes 1936; Ward 1956; Goody 1975; Werbner 1989; Parker 2004; Friedson 2009), not only brought with it an

³³ “On these roads,” writes Saidiya Hartman, “men, women, and children stolen from their homes became commodities destined for the market... The people walking along the road didn’t suspect this; they thought it was a path like any other, until the road revealed its true nature and they discovered that it was the kind of road that didn’t lead you anywhere – this was the end of you. It was a road of torment and devastation, a road of insatiable and cruel appetites, a road where you lost everything, and remade yourself from the wreckage... To the north of Salaga was the Sahel and to the south was the forest.” (Hartman 2007: 181).

emergent repertoire of ritual practices – leading one government researcher to contend that “the nature and attributes of any deity are not inherent in it but change with changing worshippers, sometimes out of all recognition” (Field 1940: 145) – but also engendered a reevaluation of the meaning of the north itself. No longer merely the domicile of a slavish, savage, and stupid people, now the savanna was figured as a space of formidable spiritual potency, a zone of mysterious, unmediated access to a range of arcane powers. Rehearsing the double valence (lawless or untainted?) accorded the “state of nature” in early modern theory, not to mention the shifting character of the primitive in nascent anthropology, it was precisely the northerners’ lack of assimilation into the world of human culture (which in the south had grown entangled with the colonial and Christian orders), their primal intimacy with a kind of Bataillan landscape of unadulterated vigor and experience, that made them appealing, in a way, to their patrons in the south.³⁴ This unexpected – or maybe perfectly predictable – “romance of the north” (Rosenthal 1998: 100), as one anthropologist has termed it, even included the incorporation of *amefefewo*, or northern “bought-and-sold people,” into the pantheon of Ewe spirits: a form of rectifying the theft and accumulation of slave trading by offering southern bodies as vessels for the *odonko* dead.

³⁴ Drawing on the work of Allman and Parker (2005), Bayo Holsey notes that southern interest in northern shrines was linked explicitly to the latter’s resistance to assimilation into the world of Christianity and colonialism. Indeed, just as the antiwitchcraft movements were emerging in the south, and as government interference with native customs was becoming more widespread, northerners who had settled in the area were reporting that witchcraft was unknown in their communities of origin, due to the power of their deities who protected them against it. “Since they were the shrines of far off vigorous tribes not yet under the mental stress and conflicts arising from the culture contact in the South, they attracted the attention of the southerners who came there to get help from their troubles” (Debrunner 1959: 107, quoted in Holsey 2008: 85). It was in this way that “Nana Tongo,” the Akanized name given a shrine originally from the Tong Hills in northern Ghana, came to prominence in the south (Allman and Parker 2005: 106-142).

Meanwhile, up in the savanna itself, which had been brought almost as an afterthought under colonial jurisdiction and christened the “Northern Territories” in 1902, the British were busy instituting a policy of deliberate nondevelopment: what the region lacked in gold and cocoa, surmised the governor in Accra, it would make up for in spades in bodies and physical labor, the idea being that if the north was kept free of development of any sort its male population would be forced to seek work in the southern mines and farms (Kimble 1963: 533-536; Brukum 1997). And if lack of investment in education, agriculture, and other industries was not enough to convince them to leave their towns and villages, then imposed taxation – payable exclusively in British currency – would surely do the trick (Hawkins 2002: 71). This reduction of the inhabitants of the Northern Territories to a reserve army of labor, with the concomitant isolation of the Protectorate socially and politically (Saaka 2001: 142-143), worked out fabulously for the British, just as it had for the Asante before them; for the northerners, naturally, the arrangement was a bit less advantageous.³⁵ Not for the last time would the “success story” of the south be told at the expense of the privation of the north. To their credit, some of the leading early nationalists, including Kwame Nkrumah, took it upon themselves to remedy this imbalance, at least so far as the unity of the incipient nation was

³⁵ At independence, one Fanti official observed that the “condition of life [in the north] is so degraded by disease, illiteracy, malnutrition, and squalor as to deny its victims basic human necessities” (quoted in Songspore et al., 2001: 225). Already facing a high death rate from infectious diseases and poor living conditions, an influenza epidemic in 1918-1919 reportedly killed over 25,000 migrants from the north (Kimble 1963: 41-42). And then, adding insult to injury, northerners were unable to enter (albeit marginally) into Asante society as they had during the slave trade. As Schildkrout notes, “whereas the *odonko* had been incorporated into the Asante family and eventually lost his alien identity, the migrant laborer of the twentieth century remained a stranger, whether he moved from farm to farm or lived in one of the many stranger communities, or *zongos*, which mushroomed all over the area” (Schildkrout 1979: 194).

concerned (Saaka 2001: 142-150; Rathbone 2000). Even so, the regional inequities, in political, material, and economic terms, would endure long after independence, as would the well-worn images of the hinterland, recalibrated to the peculiarities of the moment: whether seen as nothing more than “hewers of wood and carriers of water” (Allman 1991), or, in the words of a group of Asante teenagers, whose attitudes were logged a full two decades into the postcolonial era (and a century after the slave trade) by an ethnographer studying the “ideology of regionalism” in Ghana, as “people who love human sacrifice,” who “use snakes and hens to prepare their meals,” who “come to Asante to help us weed our farms and to sweep the streets,” who “do not love education for their children,” who “will do something extremely evil to you if you do not keep protection” (Schildkrout 1979: 202-204), it seems that the romance of the north was indeed short-lived. Little surprise that those whose shrines and deities were eagerly sought after in an earlier epoch would by a subsequent, now Christian generation be regarded as merely primitive, an impediment to national prosperity and an exception to the Ghanaian rule. To wit, the post-independence, government-initiated campaign to “eradicate” nudity among the “northern tribes,” whose fashions, or lack thereof, had in this Pan-Africanist moment become something of an embarrassment (Allman 2004).

To this cursory survey of the concatenation of contingencies and circumstances that have come together to render possible the charismatic encounter in northern Ghana – the deep-seated prejudices surrounding northerners and “the north” in the Ghanaian national imaginary; an abiding pattern of discriminatory policy and calculated peripheralization, accompanied by effective strategies of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003); an ethos of progress and

success fostered by the country's development apparatus (Bornstein 2005) – must be added one further element, namely, the metamorphosis of the area into the so-called “Muslim stronghold” it is today. Until recently, the reigning sentiment among Christians of all stripes was that, although “officially” preponderant, Islam in the Northern Region in actuality constituted a thin, barely perceptible, mostly inconsequential outer layer underneath which subsisted the *real* religious leanings of the people there. Nor were such appraisals anything new. Going back to the reports of George Ekem Ferguson (see Chapter 2), who argued that previous accounts had mistaken the “adoption of Hausa and Mahomedan [sic] garbs” for “genuine piety” (Arhin 1974: 109), the dominant nomenclature, employed by imperialists and anthropologists alike, was one that differentiated between “true” and “pseudo” Muslims, the latter encompassing those precious few who “could read and write Arabic and in their daily life approximated the European image of Islam” (Weiss 2004: 14). Hence the assessment of the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories that most residents in Tamale District, lacking any “crusading enthusiasm” to “proselytise among the local Heathens,” opportunistically “ape Mohammedanism as it gives them status,” or the findings of the 1916 Annual Report that

Mohammedanism would appear to make little, if any, progress in this Dependency, and is, in the case of many who profess its tenets, of a debased form, and more than tainted with the prevailing Paganism.³⁶

Fetish worship, idolatry, paganism, superstition: these are the terms with which the north was long associated, as the citizenry and authorities of the Gold Coast (and later Ghana)

³⁶ Quoted in Weiss 2004: 13, 15.

arrogated to themselves the competence of skilled diagnosticians, “de facto theologians” (Mahmood 2006: 327) who, like their peers throughout the Christian world, felt free to adjudicate the fidelity, to say nothing of the morality, of the region’s religiosity. Two events in the early years of the next millennium – the attacks of September 11 and the ensuing war on terror, on the one hand, and the implementation of Shari’a law in Nigeria on the other³⁷ – seem to have changed all that.³⁸ I won’t bother hauling out the torrent of pronouncements that aver the emergence of a newfound Islamism in northern Ghana, and the multiple ways this resurgence is supposedly inextricable from the endless maladies that afflict the region; there will be plenty of statements to that effect in the pages that follow. Suffice it to say, as I bring this abridged chronicle of the various makings and remakings of “the north” to a close, that the Ghanaian public sphere has by no means been insulated from the global discourse surrounding Muslims – and that nothing sounds more valiant, more courageous, more *urgent* to the churches in the south, nothing looks more compelling in fundraising letters and crusade videos, than the prospect of confronting this specter head-on.

³⁷ References to these two episodes were ubiquitous during my time in Ghana, and if the chat rooms and message boards of Ghanaian websites are any indication, they continue to exercise the nation’s imagination today. Of course, there is a great deal of internal debates among the various churches as to whether the country’s Muslims are at present, or could ever become, the sort of danger they are in Nigeria and other places. (And even here, for those who try to account for the lack of radicalism in the north, the negativity creeps in: that the area’s Muslims are “weak,” that they are “lazy” and “disorganized.”) What everyone seems to agree on is that “the north” is indeed “Muslim”; they disagree, at times, only about the implications of that fact for Ghana’s future.

³⁸ One telling case in point: Scanning newspaper articles and editorials written during the calamitous Dogomba-Konkomba war in the mid-1990s, I found that the figure of the pagan, the primitive, the savage – and the “nature” to which “they” belong – was remarkably recurrent; whereas in 2002, during the violence that ensued after the death of the Dagomba king, it was Islam that became explanatory, and “those Muslims” that became the problem.

PART I

Chapter 1

States of Supernature

On the cusp of the twenty-first century, nothing was taken to more vividly mark the emergence of a “new Christendom,” and hence to more drastically signal the repudiation of the various formations of Protestant and Catholic orthodoxy that had supposedly ossified over the preceding centuries, than the primacy and deployment of the supernatural, the miraculous, of signs and wonders among the proliferating Pentecostal-charismatic churches across the global South (see, e.g., Jenkins 2002, 2006; Gifford 2004).¹ “In this thought-world,” writes Philip Jenkins, one of the foremost popularizers of this view, “prophecy is an everyday reality, while faith-healing, exorcism, and dream-visions are all basic components of religious practice” (Jenkins 2002: 8). Though he avoids using the word, and notwithstanding the sense of novelty with which he otherwise portrays these churches, Jenkins finally resorts to an image of *survival* in appraising the significance of this peculiar “thought-world.” “For better or worse,” he claims, “the dominant churches of the future could have much in common with those of medieval or early modern European times” (ibid., 8). His was by no means the first study to depict such phenomena in this way; coming at it from the opposite direction, for example, Keith Thomas

¹ And yet, despite the views of such scholars, I have been puzzled by the almost complete absence, so far as I can tell, of any sustained analysis of miracles per se in the expansive ethnographic/anthropological corpus on global Pentecostalism (a notable exception is Marshall 2009, 2010). Those elements comprising Pentecostalism, it will be pointed out, are famously multifarious, localizable, and prone to modification, but surely this lack of more than fleeting attention to a crucial, maybe defining, set of practices and ideas is due less to the uniqueness of Ghana’s charismatic culture than to the peculiar analytical, not to say disciplinary, presuppositions of those for whom Pentecostalism has become an especially pressing site of anthropological inquiry; why this is the case remains to be examined elsewhere. Thus “miracle” and its analogous terms are scarcely treated, for example, in Robbins 2003; Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Coleman 2000; Miller 2007.

opened his classic survey of religion and magic in sixteenth and seventeenth century England with the acknowledgement that a number of his insights had in fact been culled from the investigations of ethnographers into comparable behaviors in contemporary African societies (1971: ix).² With regard to Jenkins' account and the conceptualizations inspired by it, the assumption seems to be that African charismatic believers can be distinguished from their liberal, enlightened counterparts (both within and beyond the postcolonial world) not only along theological or doctrinal lines but according to their valorization and, indeed, embodiment of disparate epochs as well: one a bygone past, ruled by witches and demons and innumerable manifestations of divine agency; the other a disenchanting and progressive – albeit no less “Christian” – present that is presumed to have supplanted it.³

I discovered during the course of my field research that a similar perception of the fault lines running throughout Africa's religious landscape is shared by many clergy and laypeople in the older “mission” or “orthodox” churches – Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventist; in Ghana, tellingly, even Assemblies of God and Baptist churches are considered orthodox – although their coordinates and allegiances did not always map so neatly

² Elsewhere Thomas would make the same observation in reference to the historical study of witchcraft: “I have become convinced that many of the insights of the social anthropologist can be profitably applied to the study of history, and that this is nowhere more so than in the case of the study of witchcraft – a topic which most historians regard as peripheral, not to say bizarre, but which has always been central to the British anthropological tradition. The parallels between African and European witchcraft have often been noticed, but they have not, so far as I know, yet received any systematic examination” (Thomas 2004: 47). For a similar sentiment see Lloyd 1979: 2-49, which, in one chapter, repeatedly tacks back and forth between Evans-Pritchard's interpretations of Azande witchcraft and his own analysis of magic in classical Greece (to the detriment of the latter in my opinion).

³ Such temporalizations of difference, to borrow a term from Wendy Brown (2006: 184), are equally apparent in other denominational contexts, such as the polemical characterizations of Anglican African clergy as primitive “traditionalists” by some of their North American brethren. For a lucid examination of the contours of this debate, see Hassett 2007.

onto the clear-cut divisions postulated in the literature. To my surprise, I found that miracles, or what are usually referred to as signs and wonders, stood at the very center of the upheavals that have attended the influx of charismatic churches into the north. Widely seen as a preeminent means to convert Muslims at outdoor crusades, to entice those already saved to leave their home churches, and more generally as a way to bolster the reputations (not to mention the bank accounts) of the men and women of God to whom they are accredited, reports involving miracle claims and their workers have attracted a great deal of publicity in Ghana's media outlets and perpetually command the attention of Christians and non-Christians alike. Moreover and less surprisingly, the sheer intensity with which signs and wonders have saturated Ghana's, and, in recent years, northern Ghana's popular imaginary – the allure of spiritual supremacy evidently too much even for presidential candidates to resist⁴ – has elicited a vocal if variegated backlash from among the largely peripheral, relatively conservative quarters of social and religious discourse. Thus, in one of his frequent polemics against the charismatic insurgence, Father Christopher Bazaanah, Vicar General of the Catholic Archdiocese of Tamale, expressed what has become a familiar sentiment when he likened miracle pastors to business-savvy magicians. For priests like Father Bazaanah, along with a

⁴In February 2008 it was revealed that Professor Atta Mills, the opposition party's (NDC) presidential candidate, "made a quick dash to Nigeria to seek spiritual help to overcome his enemies." According to the *Daily Guide*, a relatively well-regarded newspaper, the candidate "was caught on a live television broadcast at the Miracle Service of Synagogue Church of All-Nations presided over by the controversial 'Man of God' Prophet Temitope Balogun (T.B.) Joshua." Depending on who one spoke to, his visit to the Nigerian church was seen either as an attempt to gain spiritual protection or, as some of my friends who favored the ruling party put it, to acquire weapons to defeat his rivals. Recently, pro-NDC newspapers had been reporting on the flagbearer's spiritual problems, with the party's Propaganda Secretary for the Central Region, Allotey Jacob, accusing the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) of unleashing supernatural attacks on Mills. See "Mills Storms Lagos Church," *Daily Guide* (February 26, 2008), A2

number of the Muslim leaders I spent time with, miracles have come to epitomize the strategic deceptions and, in some cases, the satanic forces that have propelled these pastors and prophets out of obscurity – and once exposed, these skeptics believe, are most likely to send them back.

Characterizations such as these tend to prevail among non-charismatic observers of Ghana's religious scene, but they offer us, I think, little appreciation of what miracles *do*, of how, why, and with what consequences signs and wonders have come to suffuse the sensibilities and self-stylings of so many today.⁵ By caricaturing as a way of neutralizing this efflorescence, such reactions serve to foreclose a more nuanced comprehension of the creative, disruptive, and, lest one succumb to a sentimentalizing impulse, at times eminently destructive efficacies of the miraculous in northern Ghana, evinced as much in what Veena Das refers to as the eventfulness of the everyday as in the spectacular performances of supernatural strength that usually garner attention (Das 2007: 218).⁶ It is this controversial, contradictory, always unpredictable, inherently excessive terrain that the present chapter aims to explore. For my feeling is that a better comprehension of what miracles enact in their multiple registers can afford something of an *entrée* into the constellation of teachings and phenomena associated with

⁵ Michael Goodich voices a similar frustration when he notes that, until recently, the skeptical attitude typical of the historical profession has led to miracles seldom being taken seriously, with historians preferring to “relegate the miracle tale to the historical dustbin filled with the myths, folklore, and superstition of the Middle Ages” (or, as Jenkins suggests, a contemporary Africa that is seen to resemble it). Though critiques of post-Enlightenment prejudice are by now almost axiomatic, particularly among anthropologists of religion, there nevertheless remains, according to Goodich, evidence that some scholars persist in perceiving miracles “as either the unfortunate artifacts of a preliterate tribal past, as the peculiar beliefs of an ill-educated underclass, or as the tools of a repressive class-based culture” (Goodich 2007: 32).

⁶ Read through and alongside the writings of Stanley Cavell, Das's work allows me to grasp what is unquestionably among the signature senses of wonder in northern Ghana, namely, the sense that what “wonder” names is not a cut in the ordinary but rather that which is inseparable and, in a way, constitutive of it.

the new churches and, furthermore, will enable us to capture some of the routes of subjectivation by which, as Achille Mbembe writes in his discussion of this brand of Christianity, “the self arises from the interaction between the world of the empirical and what cannot be reduced to it” (Mbembe 2002: 270). Here miracles indicate nothing so much as an unmitigated potency, a singular, often context-specific capacity (“Walk into *your* miracle...”) to animate what is dead or dying, to make manifest what was previously hidden, to fill with content what was fully empty – and to annihilate whatever, and in some instances whomever, is purported to stand between one’s miracle and its realization. In this economy of the miraculous, “nothing is, in principle, unattainable, unrealizable. The possible is limitless” (Mbembe 2001: 189). Indeed, what listening to countless testimonies eventually made me realize was that, beyond the health and wealth that routinely comprise the focal points of these testimonies, miracles also and perhaps more fundamentally denote the inauguration of new ambits of possibility, of new pasts and futures, of novel spaces of experience and horizons of expectation, and of an emergent subject who will henceforth inhabit them.⁷ It is in this light that the jubilant refrain of the new churches – “*For if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old has gone, the new has come!*” – can, I think, best be appreciated.⁸

 Tempting as it may be (or, judging from current scholarship, tempting as it *has* been) to depict such subjectivating processes in exploitative or authoritarian terms, as issuing from scenes in which the desires of “the people” (a poor and largely illiterate people) are projected

⁷ On “spaces of experience” and “horizons of expectation,” see Koselleck 1990, esp. Ch. 14.

⁸ II Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

onto figures of awe and anticipation, top-down sovereigns with the prerogative to kill and make live, intervene and decide, I contend that such images insufficiently capture the extent to which, through the indwelling of the Spirit, believers find themselves invested, or *anointed*,⁹ with a power not only to bring about “those transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object” (Foucault 1990: 29), but also to produce something in excess of whatever happens to be – to conceive, in short, a world that departs from its present status.¹⁰ To neglect this dimension, which might be thought of as a kind of radical democratization of spiritual competency, is likewise, it seems to me, to neglect the precise character of the faith that underpins it, where “faith” (in the original sense of *fides* or *fideres*) names less a cerebral procedure of assenting to the truth of a particular proposition (or, in the case of miracles, of avowing the likelihood that such and such an occurrence could or actually did take place) than it

⁹ As theorists of the modern democratic state have long indicated, this dispersion of power in the political field effectively signaled the reversal of a longstanding conception of sovereignty, one in which it was assumed that when God “leapt” into the king at his anointment and consecration, grace conferred upon him the divine *potestas* that, by nature, belongs to God alone. Through the maxim *deus per naturam, deus per gratium*, which, according to Ernst Kantorowicz, foreshadowed the mystic fiction of the king’s two bodies, the king could thus resemble both God and man while also remaining above the latter and below the former. “In the process,” writes Adam Sitze, “the concept of grace – which could just as easily be interpreted, on the model of the Eucharist, to confer upon every vessel of the Spirit the sovereign capacity to judge all while being judged by none – was instead reduced to a prerogative of exclusively royal and priestly institutions” (Sitze 2005: 254, emphasis mine). I will return to the problematic of the relation between anointing and sovereign power below.

¹⁰ I borrow this way of putting it from Barber 2008: 16. Without trying to assimilate Ghanaian Pentecostalism to a Deleuzian ontology, I nevertheless find, particularly in Barber’s conceptualization of what he calls “metaphilosophy,” an array of generative resonances between them. Immanence, Barber writes, “provides the potency for creation, for producing the future, but it is metaphilosophy which enables immanence to conceive, and thus to surpass, presently-determined conditions. Metaphilosophy makes suffering’s experience of senseless into a horizon for the production of novel sense.... The horizon of creation is the crack within the given. Immanence, at this level, is irreducible to the given as well as to the beyond. It emerges in the interstices. Like a film’s flicker, which quickly, almost imperceptibly flashes in between frames, immanence emerges in the cracks of the present. To conceive immanence is to conceive this cracked, flickering horizon” (ibid., 334). I want to propose that the force of Ghana’s proliferating religiosity subsists in something like this capacity to conceive, so as to *pry open*, the cracks in a given reality.

does an ongoing participation in a mode of positive relationality – a relationality, moreover, that works through and is dependent upon a range of intensities, affections, passions, and capabilities. Against a predominant rendering of faith that, like “belief,” makes it an epistemological category defining objects of choice, there is another, older understanding of the word that renders it in terms not of informed volition (or even as a “leap” from it) but rather in terms of fidelity, obedience, and conviction – that is, attributes that presuppose emotional dispositions embedded in social and political relationships as well as distinctive sensibilities (Asad 2012; see also Keane 2008). Furthermore, to the extent that miracles contain within them a constitutively semiotic quality, the architecture of the senses upon which miracles rely cannot simply be opposed to “rationality,” for what is at stake is precisely the supersession of a worldly or carnal knowledge in favor of a properly Christian manner of knowing.

Put in slightly different terms, I discovered that, far from being a matter of brute facticity or empirical proof, *available* for just anyone to see, the apprehendability of miracles is instead contingent upon a whole repertoire of spiritual exercises and sensory calisthenics by which what may, to the skeptical outsider, appear to be mere luck or happenstance, or even a freak occurrence, becomes for the community of believers a *sign-event* emplotted in a complex structure of prefiguration and fulfillment. This is a point to which I will return later, as it helps to distinguish a paradigmatically modernist understanding of miracles – whereby, in the theorizations of everyone from Spinoza and Hume to Schmitt and Badiou, they are defined above all by a state of *exceptionality* or *contravention* – from the ways they are conceived by many Ghanaian charismatics and, in fact, have been conceived at various junctures throughout the

Christian tradition: namely, as invitations to recognize and then to cultivate oneself as the bearer of spiritual gifts, the activation of which allows for otherwise unfathomable thresholds of potentiality to appear within the crevices of the ordinary.

And yet, at risk of stating the obvious, the lineaments of this form of life, what my friends often refer to as their own “miraculous lifestyle,” can neither be catalogued in advance nor be disentangled from the social and political macrocontexts – the “representational economies,” as Webb Keane (2007: 19-20) would have it – that mediate the terms for such spiritual capabilities and, in doing so, themselves become targets of scrutiny, attack, and modulation. This is the case not merely because the notion of a private miracle seems somewhat implausible, especially among those with whom I worked. Rather, it is because the very naming of a “miracle” as such, the languages in which this naming might be intelligible and to whom, the means by which one could discriminate true miracles from their fraudulent counterparts, signs from special effects (De Vries 2001), and the conditions for bringing miracles to bear on one’s own life and that of others – that is to say, the conditions both for testifying to and becoming an instrument of the miraculous – can be envisaged only from within a culturally and historically specific set of enunciative acts. The task, then, is to pursue those contingencies that have rendered miracles thinkable and realizable in this particular time and place and in these particular ways – to be mindful, as Ian Hacking (2002) might put it, of our indebtedness to the shaping influence of a historical ontology.¹¹ Admittedly, this insinuates a

¹¹“Historical ontology,” Hacking, adopting a phrase used in passing by Foucault, writes in the title essay of his most recent book, “is about the ways in which the possibilities for choice, and for being, arise in history. It is not to be practiced in grand abstractions, but in terms of the explicit formations in which we can constitute ourselves,

difficult course of analysis, one that probably militates against the urge to quick formulations (such as, perhaps, even those I have already hinted at above). It calls for humility in the face of circumstances that signal their irreducibility to any but the most open-ended and provisional of accounts, and so also a working up from the unfamiliar and often unsettling idioms of activity and imagination with which we find ourselves confronted.

Accordingly, I make no claims in this chapter to have discerned, much less to have encompassed or exhausted, all of the myriad significations of signs and wonders in Northern Ghana. Instead, my hope is that by reflecting on some of the multiplicity of attitudes, doctrines, debates, stereotypes, rumors, polemics, disciplines, disavowals, and inheritances that have accompanied and enabled the flourishing of miracles in this region, we might obtain a clearer sense of the practical and conceptual resources upon which, for better or worse, its population now increasingly draws in articulating their existences. Surprises abound, for as we venture into this layered and contested field, this *problem-space*, in David Scott's evocative terminology, we are accosted by an array of categories that bear, whether tangentially or directly, on the idea of "miracle" in both its historical and contemporary guises.¹² Magic and

formations whose trajectories can be plotted as clearly as those of trauma or child development, or, at one remove, that can be traced more obscurely by larger organizing concepts such as objectivity or even facts themselves. Historical ontology is not so much about the formation of character as about *the space of possibilities for character formation that surround a person, and create the potentials for "individual experience"* (Hacking 2002: 23, emphasis mine).

¹² For Scott, a problem-space points to "a context of argument and, therefore, one of *intervention*.... [It is] an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs." What defines this discursive context, he explains, "are not only the particular problems that get posed as problems as such, but the particular questions that seem worth asking and the kinds of

sorcery, destruction and spiritual warfare, nature and supernature, sovereignty and creation, the body and its senses, witness and testimony, the event and the everyday – these are but a few of the pathways one encounters. So it is in their direction I now turn, beginning at a moment when it was not the charismatics but a group of comparatively unassuming Catholic missionaries whose success was seen to hinge on a conjunction of wonderment and conversion.

Prelude to a Deluge

*Drought teaches magic and prayer.*¹³

It was a miracle that first brought Christianity to northern Ghana – or rather, it was a miracle that first demonstrated to the inhabitants of that region, via the White Fathers of the Society of Missionaries of Africa, the unprecedented power of the Christian God. The natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast had long been accustomed to droughts of varying magnitudes, but when, at the beginning of June 1932, the middle of what was supposed to be the wet season, not a drop of rain had yet appeared, their worry soon turned to desperation. As Chief Commissioner Duncan-Johnstone noted in his diary of that summer, 1932 had been a year of critical food shortages; in Jirapa, site of the mission compound, there had been less

answers that seem worth having.” In this dissertation, I have found Scott’s notion of a problem-space to be helpful in coming to terms with the arrival of the new churches in northern Ghana, for what it provides is a way to see the churches as intervening not merely in the “solutions” to a set of pre-given and undisputed predicaments (the problem, say, of material privation), but as transforming the quality of the predicaments themselves and, therefore, the possibilities that might emerge from them.

¹³ Aby Warburg, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*, Michael P. Steinberg, trans. (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 3

rainfall than in any of the previous twenty-three years of recorded history.¹⁴ The White Fathers' evangelization efforts in the Northern Territories had in fact commenced in 1906, in the small town of Navrongo in what is now Ghana's Upper East Region, but, due largely to opposition to the mission on the part of the chiefs, along with an undercurrent of British suspicion directed toward these "French" missionaries – the concern being that the latter's presence in the area would both jeopardize a fragile political order and create the impression that the British had "sold" portions of the protectorate to the French – they were able to win relatively few converts.

Perhaps this was to be expected, for the establishment of the mission in Navrongo had itself been contrary to the wishes of the White Fathers, who, having learned Mooré in Ouagadougou, had originally intended to work among the linguistically related Dagaaba in the northwest part of the Territories. Yet their persistent attempts over the next several years to extend the mission's radius of activity to that area met with stubborn resistance. Unlike the overwhelmingly "animist" population of Navrongo and its environs, the northwest was widely perceived to fall under the religious authority of the Wala Muslims (Wilks 1989) – important allies to the Chief Commissioner in those days – and administrators worried that competition for converts might render the pacification of the region's tribes a more difficult task (Lentz 2006: 154-155). It was not until 1929, at the threshold of the implementation of indirect rule, and after more than two decades of trying to convince the governor in Accra to intervene on their behalf, that permission was finally granted to open a mission station at Jirapa. Father

¹⁴ Chief Commissioner Northern Territories, "Diary," 4 August 1932, RHL, MSS Afr. S. 593.

Remigius McCoy, a young Canadian with four years' experience serving the Navrongo mission, was appointed superior of the nascent community.

By the time the people of the northwest found themselves suffering through their worst drought in recent memory, the White Fathers were making discernable – albeit, in their view, unsustainable and even superficial – inroads among the Dagaabas.¹⁵ One of Father McCoy's earliest decisions upon moving to Jirapa was to seek the assistance of a British doctor, posted to a nearby town, in setting up a medical dispensary. During his time in Navrongo the priest had experienced firsthand the difficulties of using education as a means of evangelism, and, now surrounded by “the cruel yet preventable ravages of disease,” realized that even the most rudimentary of clinics would be likely to bear fruit. And indeed it did: according to the mission's records, over 16,000 patients sought treatment at the station – and received it, along with prayer and basic religious instruction – between 1930 and 1932. Despite this impressive figure, however, the mission could after three years claim only 68 baptized Christians and 432 catechumens among its followers.¹⁶ The White Fathers attributed the Dagaabas' reticence to

¹⁵ My use of the appellation “Dagaaba” in this section is not intended to stake a position in the fascinating and often fierce debates, both among scholars and indigenous representatives, over the proper name to be employed when referring to this people of northwest Ghana. Rather, I use the term Dagaaba – as opposed to LoDagaa, Dagarti, Dagara, or Dagaba – simply because the primary voice in this section, Father Remigius F. McCoy, has chosen to do so. For a helpful overview of the history and contentiousness of these designations, particularly as read through the efforts of anthropologists such as Jack Goody and R.S. Rattray, see Hawkins 2002: 41-51.

¹⁶ Figures cited in Hawkins 2002: 155. Elsewhere, Hawkins makes the interesting observation that of those baptisms carried out between 1929 and 1939, nearly 20 percent were performed *in periculo mortis*. “With the exception of peaks in baptisms in the years 1936-37 and 1937-38,” Hawkins writes, “the majority of baptisms were performed on the very ill. Whether they were catechumens, relatives of Christians, or spontaneous converts we do not know. We can presume, however, that those who were dying received medical attention before their deathbed confessions – a presumption which explains why, indeed, the very ill turned to the priests in such large numbers from a relatively early date – and we see that within a few years, a significant proportion of dispensary patients were being baptized on their death beds.” When some of these patients died shortly thereafter, their deaths tended to be blamed on the baptism and/or the one who had performed it; conversely,

what they perceived to be a panoply of entrenched fears: of their neighbors, of the deities, and, most significantly in the eyes of the missionaries, of the chiefs, whose authority and legitimacy was now being underwritten by the ubiquitous threat of colonial intervention. According to one Catholic historian, what was needed to overcome such hesitations among the natives was an extravagant display of "du mystère de la grâce de Dieu" (Hebert 1976: 246), a sign, as Origen had put it many centuries earlier, that would "persuade those who heard new doctrines and new teachings to leave their traditional religion and to accept the Christians' message at the risk of their lives" (1980: I.4.6). So it was that on June 5, 1932, the rains poured down from heaven and watered the soil that would soon yield the greatest harvest of souls the Society of Missionaries of Africa had yet been party to.

Listen to Father McCoy's remarkable recounting of the episode.¹⁷ We have just been told of the countless sacrifices offered to appease the ancestors, of a palpable despondency as farmers awoke each morning to increasingly parched fields, of the pitiable repetition by which, day after day, the *tendaana* attempted unsuccessfully to find gifts that would be suitable to their unresponsive masters, of the blame eventually leveled at the native catechumens for their refusal to take part in the rituals, and finally of how, "little by little, complaints against the catechumens died down as the people realized that only one alternative remained to them."

their survival was regularly attributed to the sacred rites. Hawkins argues, however, that it "was not the issue of last rites which caused controversy between Christians and pagans, but the question of the appropriate internment of the dead" (Hawkins 1997: 76).

¹⁷ Remigius F. McCoy, M.Afr., *Great Things Happen: A Personal Memoir of the First Christian Missionary Among the Dagaabas and Sissalas of Northwest Ghana* (Montreal: The Society of Missionaries of Africa, 1988)

Perhaps, after all, the God of the Christians held the key to the heavens. It was worth a try, at any rate. Anything was worth a try if it worked. Though not all agreed, many felt that the threat of famine in the coming year was too real to let religious principles stand in the way of a possible solution. In the villages, the elders gathered to form delegations to go to the mission at Jirapa. They would see if the missionaries could be more persuasive with their God than their own specialists had been with the spirits. ...

It was about eight o'clock on the morning of 5 June 1932 when Hector came looking for me to tell me that a large group of elders from Daffiama was asking for me. They had come bearing gifts, he told me, and looking uncomfortable about it. I went out to receive them where they stood, in front of the mission house. ... Not a cloud could be seen from one horizon to the other.

When he reached the group, Father McCoy tells us, he saw some thirty men standing about uneasily, clutching gifts of chickens, eggs, and whatever meager produce they had been able to scrape together. "It was clear from the looks on their faces that, though they had come to seek a favour, they weren't at all sure they were going to receive it." After a brief exchange of customary greetings, their spokesman laid the gifts before Father McCoy and got straight to the point. "What we want is rain," the man said unceremoniously. The priest was annoyed. "Do you think I deal in rain?" He turned out the pockets of his cassock as he spoke. "You see? I have no rain to give you. The rain is God's and His alone to give. Take back your gifts. God doesn't want your chickens."

The delegation let out a gasp of shock and withdrew a small distance to deliberate. Finally, a second, older spokesman came forward and apologized for the first man's impropriety; he explained that the gifts were meant as a token of friendship and pleaded with the priest not to reject them. "You know our village," he said. "You know that we are poor

people there. Our gifts reflect that. They are not worthy of you, we know. But we have no better ones to offer. Please, Father, accept them and ask God to send us rain so that our people may not go hungry and die.” Humbled by the elder’s good manners, Father McCoy offered his hand and gladly accepted the gifts and the friendship that went with them. “As for the question of rain,” he proclaimed,

Of course God can give it to you, and He will. But first He wants something from you. He wants you to promise Him three things. First, you must promise to stop making sacrifices to spirits. Second, you must allow your people freedom to come to pray at the mission whenever they want to do so. And third, you must not force your daughters to marry anyone against their will.

A loud murmur greeted his words. The Dagaabas, he explains, “were not accustomed to giving anything to God directly. That God should even know they existed, let alone condescend to require something of them directly, was enough of an innovation to cause shock.” After much animated discussion, the spokesman returned with the delegation’s response. “The second thing God asks, we all agree to that,” he announced. “We will not stand in the way of anyone from our village who wishes to pray with the Christians. And we can even agree to the third thing if God really insists on it, though we think He would not insist quite so much if He knew our daughters as we do. But as for the first thing He asks...” He looked down and shook his head slowly. “What will happen to us if we desert the spirits? We are afraid.”

The priest knew they were getting somewhere. “Two out of three on the first try wasn’t bad at all,” but even still, he recalled many years later, he was “going for all or nothing.”

My friend, what will happen to you if you reject the will of God who is far mightier than any spirit? To offer sacrifice to mere spirits is an insult to Him. Is not God the Master of all, even of the spirits?

In McCoy's telling, the old man hastily accepts this line of reasoning but with the proviso that while, yes, God is indeed all-powerful, it is the spirits who deal with humanity; God, the elder concludes, is "too big to be concerned with us."

It is easy to summon this exchange as it unfolds, we have seen it many times before; it brings together in one frame a set of actors and images both recognizable and, to a certain extent, necessary for the missionary archive and a critical modernity alike. (Anthropologists, especially, owe much to the image, for their disciplinary identities and methodological principles were in part constituted in opposition to it [see, e.g., Priest 2001; Harding 1991].) Thus Father McCoy's response to his interlocutor – that the latter was "wrong in his conception of an aloof God," that it was "on this point that the witch doctors and fetishists had led the people astray," that his was "a God who knows your needs even before you ask Him for help," and that, in short, "the spirits can have no power against those whom God loves and who love and serve only Him in return" – is in some ways as predictable today as it proved persuasive for its intended audience.

McCoy's narrative continues. We continue to look on as the elder, visibly moved by the missionary's words, once more steps away to confer with his colleagues, the missionary left standing alone, unsure, he tells us, if the delegation would be able to conquer their doubts or if, instead, they would "continue to believe in the spirits and to live in slavery to them." In his

memoir, McCoy protracts and inflects these scenes with a number of hesitations and silences, with facial affects (“a glimmer of fear flickered in more than one pair of eyes”) and tones of voice, no doubt conscious of the memorializing force his account would have, no doubt aware, writing in 1988, of the scrutiny to which this story had been and would continue to be subjected, and thus of the need to imbue this genesis narrative, this founding mythos, with a level of detail that would effectively secure its historicity – if not for a handful of skeptical academics, than at least for the indigenous Catholics for whom this evental sequence still serves as a critical point of reference. “Very well,” the spokesman finally announced, “we will not offer sacrifices to spirits anymore – if God will give us rain. We have all agreed to it. What more must we do?”

You must pray, they’re told, and Father McCoy leads the group of twenty-five or thirty Dagaabas into the chapel. “Perhaps it would be best if you prayed in our name,” the elder tells McCoy. “You are a man of God and know His ways.” Slowly, then, and “concentrating with all [his] being,” the priest began to address aloud “the All-Powerful, Eternal, Majestic God, Creator of the universe, Tamer of spirits, and Protector of His children.” “I called upon Him,” McCoy writes,

to hear the prayers of these particular children of His who had come from Daffiama to honor Him and to beg His forgiveness for having doubted His power and mistakenly placed their trust in mere spirits who were powerless to help them. They now knew that they were wrong and promised never to offer sacrifices to spirits again.

McCoy turns to the congregation behind him, registering their consent. Then, resuming his prayer, he moves on to the two remaining provisions.

We promise today that all in our village who wish to know you better and to pray with the Christians will be prevented no longer from doing so. ... We give our solemn word this day to refrain from ever offending You in this way again.

Another pause “to check with the silent petitioners whose voice I had become.” Again they agree.

Now we want to imitate Your absolute regard for free will by honouring it at work in those around us. Because of this, we promise to stop trying to impose our wills on our children in the question of marriage. From now on, we the people of Daffiama solemnly promise that the girls of our compounds will be free to choose their own husbands.

Having received their pledge to this last and most contentious stipulation, Father McCoy had the men of Daffiama repeat the Our Father and, with a final sign of the cross which he briefly tried to explain to them, the delegation exited the chapel and began the fifteen-mile trek home. But the story is not yet over. “When the swiftest walkers reached Daffiama four hours later,” Father McCoy reports, his tone markedly understated,

they were met by a soaking rain. Their immediate reaction was one of jubilation and an urge to retrace their steps to Jirapa to give thanks. But the rain was falling so heavily, they finally decided to wait until the next morning. Had they carried through with their original impulse, they would have been surprised to see that as soon as they left the boundaries of the village, all was as dry as before. *The rain that day, and for several days after that, fell only on Daffiama.*

Within weeks, historians tell us, the small village of Jirapa was transformed into a regional center, attracting pilgrims from as far away as the adjoining French colony of Huate Volta. By

December of that year, the White Fathers were able to record over 20,000 conversions in the north – the result, as District Commissioner John Guinness wryly put it at the time, of a “fortunate and apparently miraculous answer to a prayer for rain” (quoted in Lentz 2006: 158).

Charismatic Magic

Seventy-six years later, on a sweltering afternoon at the tail end of the dry season, I conducted my third and final interview with Father Christopher Bazaanah, Vicar General of the Catholic Archdiocese of Tamale. Over lukewarm beers in his living room/office, with hundreds of books, pamphlets, encyclicals, Bibles, magazines, and academic journals stacked floor to ceiling around us, Father Bazaanah – a pleasant, learned man in his early forties, born, incidentally, only a few miles from the original mission station in Jirapa and later educated in Rome and Brussels – made clear his antipathies toward the charismatic churches which, having dominated Ghana’s metropolitan public culture since the early nineties, were now making their presence felt in the towns and villages of the north. The narcissism and arrogance, exploitation and abuse, the proclivity for “syncretism” endemic to at least a good number of these churches was most conspicuously exhibited, he contended, in the miracle claims through which the churches invariably drew their followers. Not unlike those scholars for whom Pentecostalism marks the persistence of an “archaic spirituality,” a “primal piety” particularly suited to Africa’s putatively local ontologies (Cox 1995: 82; Martin 1990: 122), Father Bazaanah wasted no time in positing a string of correspondences between *magic* and what it is the faith healers imagine

themselves to be doing – and, in linking these two seemingly divergent figures, articulating his own normative theology in contrast to both of them.

“Prayer,” he explained to me, “is communication with the divine,”

a dialogue that sometimes involves bringing one’s concerns before God. But you cannot *manipulate* God – and that is why we end every prayer with “Amen,” which means “Your will be done.” The amen implies an openness to God’s plan for our lives. God is free to respond as He chooses. It means the Christian cannot manipulate God, cannot twist God, cannot bribe God, cannot corrupt Him. Because we approach God as creatures before the Creator, our stance is one of submission to whatever the Master has for us. And because we believe that God is all-knowing and all-seeing and all-powerful, we believe in confidence and trust that He will do for us that which is good. So that is where we live. It’s not magic, that is the contrast. Magic’s working principle is ‘my will be done,’ and as you, an anthropologist, know better than myself, many writers have shown us that magic is nothing more than *a shortcut to eternal bliss*.

“A shortcut to eternal bliss?” Before he could answer, the tune of Bob Marley’s “One Love” suddenly filled the room, the ringtone of the priest’s mobile phone interrupting our conversation. “Yes,” he responded after quickly ending the call. “An attempt on man’s part to control the powers around us through the use of rituals, rites, and so on, in order to produce automatic results. And this, you know, is what the miracles in these churches basically amount to.” Later, as he escorted me to the front gate, he seemed concerned to reiterate his position: that miracles are possible, to be sure, but are *Christian* only to the extent that they testify to fallen humanity’s dependence on, and submission to, the omnipotent will of God; magic is the transference of this capacity, aimed principally at the production of immediate outcomes, onto the prophet, the “man of God,” the pastor, or oneself. “If I can heal you on the spot, give you money on the spot, if I’m doing these amazing acts, then I become God to the people, and I can

get you to do whatever I like.” He smiled and shook my hand goodbye. “We tend not to emphasize such things.”

Yet surely Father McCoy’s account can be taken to have emphasized “such things,” and I wish now that I had pressed Father Bazaanah on this heritage – a heritage, moreover, that he and his fellow priests proudly and regularly avow in their writings and public speeches. I could have pointed, for instance, to the observations of a number of historians, made with reference to an array of church and colonial documents, that in the several months following the rain event there was a large degree of undecidability as to the locus of this exceptional power, with many converts attributing the wonders they had witnessed to the spiritual prowess of the missionaries themselves. Thus one historian’s view that “in the conversion process, the attention was focused on the missionaries who demonstrated greater powers than the fetish priests and divinities; it was rarely on God, who was never thought of as the cause of drought or hardship” (Naamah 1991: 1999; see also Hawkins 1997: 57-58; Der 1983: 160-161). The legends concerning the White Fathers that soon circulated amongst the villagers – legends from whose vantage point the downpour in Daffiama could be construed as merely one episode in a much longer, albeit less publicized pattern of supernatural exploits – only underscore this ambivalence: the priests, so these stories alleged, had originally descended from the sky, arrived speaking fluent Dagare, could cure any illness, and frequently resurrected the dead (Paternot 1953: 133).

Perhaps, then, the boundary separating miracle from magic, the *my will be done* from *Thy will be done*, was a bit less impermeable than Father Bazaanah asserts it should be? Add to

this Father McCoy's status of at once speaking *as* and *on behalf of* God – such as during his negotiations with the elders, where he appears less an intermediary than the vocalization and personification of God's promise and command – and the matter of “becoming God to the people” turns out to be a complicated one. (Equally problematic, though in a different way, is McCoy's practice of speaking both *as* and *on behalf of* his interlocutors – his “becoming the people to God,” so to speak.¹⁸) Hence nowhere are we made privy to the means by which the stipulations of God's agreement with the Dagaabas are revealed to McCoy, stipulations that went far beyond the demands of a mere “religious” reorientation to include the production of new modes of sociality (gender equity, freedom of conscience) as well.¹⁹ It could justifiably be suggested, on this view, that the question of dominion – over nature, over everyday life – and of in whose hands it ultimately resides was never so unambiguously settled as the heirs to that originary, extraordinary moment might have preferred.

Be that as it may, my purpose in drawing attention to this cluster of circumstances is not to posit resemblances, with concomitant intimations of hypocrisy, between those acts which laid the foundation of the Catholic mission in northern Ghana and those which its representatives now persistently condemn, nor is it to impugn the outcomes or motivations

¹⁸ Decidedly *unlike* the charismatic churches of which Father Bazaanah is so suspicious, absent in Father McCoy's account is the possibility of an individuated, dispersed anointing: the men of Daffiama assume the role of engaged spectators – “engaged,” that is, only to the extent of their participation in the contract – and, even here, their elder stands as the mouthpiece for his fellow faceless, nameless, disembodied “villagers.” The faith of the latter seems to have followed from an agreement in which, for better or worse, they themselves had no singular voice, and thus no singular, but only a corporate, assent.

¹⁹ Though I do not do so here, it would be worthwhile to consider Father McCoy's early incitement to toleration as a foreshadowing of those virtues (tolerance and religious freedom chief among them) which are now taken to exemplify Ghana's status as an avowedly secular state.

surrounding the rain event by alleging, for instance, that it was the priests and not God to whom a wonder-working capacity was actually ascribed.²⁰ After all, as Father Bazaanah reminded me in that same interview, the misattribution of agency in the face of miraculous deeds is something the prophets and apostles, the saints, even Jesus had persistently to contend with. Nor, for that matter, is it my intention to make the banal yet no less important point that certain attitudes and preoccupations, namely those having to do with marvels and the miraculous, are not as a matter of fact exclusive to those Christians (i.e., African charismatics) and that period (i.e., the present) with which they are most often associated. There is, of course, something to be said for calling the precision of such stereotypes into question, but interrogations of this sort too often run the risk of overlooking the very real *uses* to which such generalized impressions are put by disparate actors on the ground, and so also of neglecting the practical and semantic – or, as Asad following Wittgenstein prefers, the grammatical – alterations concepts invariably undergo as they move across time and space (Asad 2003: 25). In sum, endeavors aiming to unmask the “true” quality of a given phenomenon can prove to be not only counterproductive but anachronistic as well.

No, the series of images and differentiations being put to use by Father Bazaanah and other critics of charismatic praxis – a diverse group, needless to say, with whom Bazaanah and his fellow Catholics may share little else in common – cannot so easily be dismissed, cannot so

²⁰ To level such an accusation against the White Fathers would, as I discuss below, follow from a long anthropological tradition, itself in many ways a liberal Protestant tradition, of attempting to expose the supposedly magical traces that inhere in Catholic dogma and liturgical practice – and this, of course, despite the irony that it was a Catholic priest’s argument against the “magical” traces inherent to certain *Protestant* practices that first led me explore these matters.

confidently be trivialized or discarded, whatever critical purchase such projects of laying bare historical similitude or conceptual superficialities might proffer. It is therefore incumbent on any attempt to grasp the vicissitudes of the globalizing charismatic movement as it makes its way into previously unclaimed territories, or, in this case, as it makes its way into what is still imagined to be the spiritually bankrupt (or worse) life-worlds of northern Ghana, that we grapple a bit further with Father Bazaanah's effort to counteract its impact by recourse to the charge of magic – a charge which, especially inasmuch as it works to delimit through dissimilarity the preserve of proper religiosity, carries with it no small measure of social and theological baggage. Thus in his introductory remarks to the inaugural volume of *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, the journal's editor rightly observes that the drawing of such distinctions is both an operation and effect of power, and that “a major area of comparative focus must be to explore what roles these differentiations play in various societies, who controls [them], and to what ends this created difference is employed” (Bailey 2006: 9-10). For to be categorized in this manner, he goes on to remind us, “is generally an accusation rather than a self-appellation,” a point made more forcefully in Simon During's assertion, itself bordering on the mundane, that “had magic no enemies it would not be magic at all: its esoteric status has been consolidated by centuries of persecution” (During 2002: 3). To which I would only add that, in tandem with attempting to unravel the disparate trajectories from whose lexicons this “enemy” surfaces, it is vital that we similarly examine those particular doxa whose superiority it helps to ensure and whose position on the better side of the binary it effectively strengthens.

Here I can do little more than gesture toward these problematics, and somewhat obliquely at that; my concern is less with surveying how magic is and has in the past been “made” (though recent scholarship has compellingly addressed that question), still less with making or defining magic myself (an undertaking on which, as Mary Douglas once famously complained, “too much erudition has been expended already”²¹ – and that was in 1966), than it is with how, from classical Greece to present-day Tamale, situating a practice on the side of “magic” and its corollaries has been able to illuminate and even conjure up the very categories to which it was being opposed. From what sources and from which directions does Father Bazaanah’s indictment acquire its specific force – or, as might well be the case, its lack thereof? And, especially pertinent to my purposes here, what can it tell us about the status and frontiers of what is recognized to be the genuinely miraculous?

Itineraries of a Polemic

Who, in that case, is the idolater? It is always the other, or more particularly, the people. It is never the leaders, whose ambitions induce them to take themselves for gods, rather than to worship them, or even to derive from that divine worship exemplary benefits for the representation of their own power. Idolaters are neither emperors nor patriarchs. But the faithful, the believers, the credulous, the superstitious, these are the idolaters, a feverish mass, inspired and subjugated at the same time, who do not have ears for the too-subtle doctrines of the incarnation and consubstantiality. The idolaters are all those who bend the knee, who prostrate themselves, who worship, who touch and sway to the point of ecstasy. They have seen the icons cry, they have seen them bleed, have seen them kill. They have seen their own hemorrhages and leprosy disappear at the single touch of a divine object. Their blind eyes have once again become piercing, their tongues loosened. They have been revived from the dead. They carry with them effigies, amulets,

²¹ See Douglas 1966: 58-59. Sixteen years later, Edmund Leach’s outlook was considerably more pessimistic: “As for magic...I can only say that, after a lifetime’s career in as a professional anthropologist, I have almost reached the conclusion that the word has no meaning whatever” (Leach 1982: 133).

phylacteries, and talismans. They are called fetishists, and they do indeed often resemble them. They travel the world searching out and preserving relics. They spend time with icons and contemplate them, eyes brimming with tears; they notice the incorruptibility of holy cadavers. They are all there in their thousands, those who believe in the pleasure and suffering with which the bodies that incarnate them are imbued; they take action, invoke, make, and sacrifice. They deploy a new force in which, for them, no activity is improbable. Everything is possible for those who believe. The popular imagination rediscovers the archaic divinities that have always caused it to maintain with the visible matter of the world operative relations of a violent effectiveness. Demons and wonders! Nature appears to defy itself – or rather, to defy everything that is predicated on it (José-Mondzain 2005: 179).

That Father Bazaanah would invoke the authority of anthropological expertise as a way of buttressing his indictment is not surprising; after all, the figure of magic had galvanized the discipline's energies from the very beginning and led to some of its earliest theoretical advances (although, to my discredit, I have thus far been unable to locate within this body of literature any reference to magic as a "shortcut to eternal bliss"). Yet what would in the writings of Tylor, Durkheim, Malinowski, Lévy-Bruhl and a host of others become schemata for distinguishing magic from religion, and, ultimately, both categories from science, had as their antecedents the variously veiled and overt polemics, born of a distinctively Protestant sensibility and directed against whatever vestiges of superstition were deemed to have survived into contemporary life, of several earlier generations of churchmen and intellectuals. So before, say, Frazer could in *The Golden Bough* (1890) write more or less axiomatically of the "radical conflict of principle between magic and religion" and of the "relentless hostility with which in history the priest has often pursued the magician" – an antagonism attributable, he proclaimed, to the latter's "arrogant" but "nevertheless misguided" attempt to command and coerce spiritual forces "instead of conciliating or propitiating them as religion would do" –

there was already in Europe's religious and philosophical and indeed political history a venerable and diverse tradition of first objectifying and then contrasting a particular conception of magic with the shifting lineaments of a *true* – which is to say a reformed and therefore rational – Christianity (Frazer 1927: 48-51).²²

By this I do not mean to imply that it was only with the onset of the Reformation that magic became an object of scorn and derision; it had, in multifarious ways, been pathologized long before then. So it is that when Augustine launched his trenchant assault on “the arts of magic” in *City of God*, he endeavored to show that, contrary to prevailing views, it was not the recent ascent of Christianity that had led to magic's vilification; even the pagans, he argued, had looked upon such practices with repugnance. “Why,” he queried, “should I not cite public opinion itself as a witness against those magic arts in which certain most wretched and ungodly men love to glory? For if they are the works of divine beings worthy of worship, why are such arts so gravely punished by the severity of the law? Was it the Christians, perhaps, who enacted the laws by which magic arts are punished?”²³ Answering this last question with an emphatic “no,” he goes on to cite the judgments of pre-Christian authorities such as Virgil and Cicero in support of his claim. Although the terrain was more variegated than he implies, Augustine was right to assert that magic's disreputable status had preceded Christianity: from its beginnings in

²² Compare Frazer's diagnosis to Durkheim's, who accounts for the “marked repugnance of religion for magic and the hostility for religion in return” by calling attention to magic's “professional pleasure in profaning holy things” and, on a more fundamental level, to the essentially private as opposed to visible and collective nature of magical rites (Durkheim 2001: 42-45).

²³ Augustine of Hippo, “Of the Ungodliness of the Art of Magic, Which Depends on the Assistance of Malign Spirits,” in *The City of God against the Pagans*, R.W. Dyson, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 339

the Greco-Roman world, the term “magic” seems to have carried with it a definite geographic as well as valuative sense, an exoticism tinged, at best, with ambivalent moral, intellectual, and spiritual insinuations. Thus historians trace the substantive *magos*, from which magician is derived, to a specific moment in Greek history just after the Persian Wars in the early Classical period, a time when the term was being used by thinkers such as Herodotus to link Greek practitioners of “the religion of the special case” (or “a heterogeneous collection of rituals for empowering individuals or groups in particular contexts for specific ends”) to the Persian or Median priestly caste made familiar by those wars and by the earlier Persian occupation of Ionian coastal cities (Gordon 1999: 163-164).

To find one’s behaviors or ideas likened to those associated with the *magoi* was, with rare exceptions, to find one’s reputation, and possibly one’s life, in a decidedly precarious state (as with the seer in Sophocles’ *Oedipus*, who is contemptuously derided as being a “scheme-making *magos*”). Writes Geoffrey Lloyd in his study of the origins of Greek science: “It is clear that for Herodotus the *magos* were a distinct tribe (the doubtful accuracy of his reports does not affect their value as evidence of what was believed about the *magos* in Greece). But already in the fifth century *magos* and its derivatives came to be used pejoratively for deception, imposture and fraudulent claims for special knowledge... [They] were never clearly defined in terms of particular practices, but were commonly used of such activities or claims to special knowledge as any particular author or speaker suspected of trickery or fraudulence” (Lloyd 1979: 13, ff.

20).²⁴ This early association of *magēs* with charlatans who, whether from avarice or sheer ignorance, fancifully attribute divine causes to naturally ordered phenomena was most systematically presented in a Hippocratic treatise on epilepsy – arguably the school’s most famous text and the first in extant literature to explicitly classify a body of beliefs as “magical” – dating from the fifth or early part of the fourth century B.C.

Entitled *On the Sacred Disease*, the text sets as its principle aim both to establish that epilepsy is “no more sacred than any other disease” and to expose as frauds those who claim a capacity to cure the disease with incantations and by other ritual means. Recourse to such solutions, the author contends, is made by “the sort of people we now call *magēs*, purifiers, vagabonds and charlatans” – those “impious rogues,” in other words, both within and beyond the borders of Greek society, who “claim to know how to draw down the moon, cause an eclipse of the sun, make storms and fine weather, rain and drought, to make the sea too rough for sailing or the land infertile... whether by rites or by some other knowledge or practice.” The author proposes in its place an explanation of disease tied to a theory of the uniformity of nature and the regularity of causes, where the “so-called ‘sacred’ disease,” readers are told, “is due to the same causes as all other diseases, to the things we see come and go [i.e., to and from the body], the cold and the sun too, the changing and inconsistent winds... Each disease has its own nature and power and there is nothing in any disease which is unintelligible or which is unsusceptible to treatment. The majority of maladies may be cured by the same things as

²⁴ For clarity I have replaced the original μάγος with “magēs,” following Lloyd’s own conflation of the terms throughout his text.

caused them. A man with the knowledge of how to produce by means of a regimen dryness and moisture, cold and heat in the human body... would not need to resort to magic and all that kind of charlatanism” (quoted in Lloyd 1979: 16-21).

Almost from the moment of its induction into cultured discourse, then, the sinister or simply duplicitous connotations of *mageia* were extended beyond the domain of foreign cultic rites to include a number of illicit, covert, or private practices undertaken by the Greeks themselves (Bailey 2006: 7). In the process, an orientalist disdain for what Heraclitus would refer to as “people of the night, magi, male bacchantes, maenads, initiates into the mysteries” came to betray a deeper, more profound apprehension having to do with the alien sources from which certain key Greek doctrines – such as the Platonic notion of the immortality of the soul, purportedly adapted from Chaldean formulae – were believed to have originated. Of course, the most prominent representatives within this intellectual milieu tended to deem magic dangerous or illusory, a temptation for abuse and inimical to refined intellection, but this appraisal was, if not tempered, then at least complicated by developments within the natural sciences that were indebted to the magic arts and, in some cases, avowedly inspired by it (Gordon 1999: 164).²⁵ Subsequent attempts at the recuperation of magic on the part of European elites – from the “high” or “learned” magics of the late Renaissance (in the form of

²⁵ It is now widely acknowledged that an alternative strand of classical philosophy not only recognized this indebtedness to *mageia* but explicitly valorized it. From Pliny’s botanical ontology and Seneca’s defense of divination in his *Natural Questions* to, more significantly perhaps, the belief among Neoplatonists that some philosophers could possess magical powers as individuals, it seems that several of the writers and schools prominent in the development of Greek cosmology and science combined an interest in the magical arts with their studies in the “inquiry of nature.” See Tambiah 1990; Lloyd 1979; During 2002: 4-7; Graf 1997.

Hermetic divination, Neoplatonism, alchemy, astrology, and so forth) and diverse strains of Romanticism on through Surrealism and the other aesthetic avant-gardes – would draw liberally from this classical heritage, exploiting those currents, subterranean or otherwise, in whose ambiguous, at times laudatory attitudes toward magic could be discerned an impetus for their own artistic and intellectual programs.²⁶

Such equivocations were distinctly absent from the discourse on magic that made its way into the writings and sermons of the early Church – even if, as for the latter’s non-Christian counterparts, what denoted “magic” to begin with was to remain a recurrent and, to some extent, intractable point of disputation. Yet whereas the Hippocratic author quoted above posits “magic and all that kind of charlatanism” against the aims and methods as well as – crucially – the *character* of the medical sciences, amounting to a critique of magic as both irrational and *immoral*, the ensemble of practices that enter the Christian, or, better, Jewish-Christian tradition as “magical” will be opposed not merely to “the natural light of reason” and its superior diagnostics,²⁷ but, put simply, to the power of the living God – whether

²⁶ Giambattista della Porta’s influential *Magiae naturalis* (1589) is a striking model of such rehabilitative efforts. “There are,” he proposes, “two sorts of Magick: the one is infamous and unhappie, because it hath to do with foul spirits, and consists of Inchantments and wicked Curiosity,” while the “other Magick... is natural; which all excellent wise men do admit and embrace, and worship with great applause... that Magick is nothing else but the survey of the whole course of Nature.”

²⁷ It should be noted, however, that this depiction is profoundly challenged by Peter Brown’s *The Making of Late Antiquity* (1978). “Men believed in both ‘miracles’ and ‘magic,’” Brown observes. “This was not because their credulity was boundless. It was rather so that they should feel free to exercise a choice as to which wielder of supernatural power they would acclaim as a holy man and which they would dismiss as a sorcerer” (19). He goes on: “For the distinction between rational philosophy and irrational magic, though present, was never central to the debate. What was hotly debated was the difference between legitimate and illegitimate forms of supernatural power” (60).

unmediated or exhibited through earthly proxies – and the suitable conduct of the human subject in relation to it. It is in this manner that magic becomes a problem for Christians, exactly to the extent that it now becomes incumbent upon them to distinguish the miracles of Christ and his church from comparable (though, it will of course be insisted, qualitatively dissimilar) feats brought about by what Augustine, in his most succinct definition of magic, refers to as “the use of demonic arts, or [work] by the demons themselves.”²⁸

Without going so far as to suggest that miracles somehow *require* the counter-image of “magic” in order to secure their inimitability – an assertion with far-reaching, probably heretical implications – it is nevertheless the case that the attacks on magic so frequent throughout the Christian tradition consistently serve to disclose, and typically are intended to disclose, a specific conception of the nature and utility of miracles. The scriptural referents for this contrast effect are abundant and well-known: beginning conspicuously in Exodus 7 with Moses’ and Aaron’s confrontation with the sorcerers of Pharaoh’s court and continuing through the Acts of the Apostles, where we are told of the conversion of Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-25) and later of Paul’s orchestration in Ephesus of a burning of magical texts (Acts 19:19), the appearance of magic and magicians in the canonical narrative functions to bring into vivid relief both the folly of sinful hubris and the *truth* – the grace, vitality, boundlessness – of the miracle which outstrips it (or, in the case of Aaron’s rod, literally devours it).

Efforts at hardening the partition between magic and miracle would exercise a great deal of Jewish and Christian theological reflection. One way of conceiving this distinction,

²⁸ *The City of God against the Pagans*, R.W. Dyson, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1055

vigorously articulated by Franz Rosenzweig in his 1921 masterpiece *The Star of Redemption*, has been to regard a miracle as a sign-event constituted above all by its embeddedness in a preexisting structure of prophecy and fulfillment. Conversely, and starkly unlike such palpable confirmations of divine action, the “magical miracle” attacks God’s providence and (note here the concurrence with Father Bazaanah) “seeks by audacity, guile, or coercion to extort from it what is unforeseen and unforeseeable by it, what is *willed by its own will*.”²⁹ Hence the necessity, Rosenzweig contends, “to go beyond the pagan miracle, to curb its spell that carries out the command of man’s own power, *through the sign that proves God’s providence*” (Rosenzweig 2005: 105, emphasis mine). As with all classificatory projects, the borders separating miracle from magic have always been drawn in history, amidst widely variant conditions and in response to specific questions, exigencies, and adversaries both real and imagined. This was as true of the abstract and notoriously intricate formulations with which Rosenzweig sought to develop his “new thinking” (Rosenzweig 2000) in post-war Germany – it is not, to my mind, inadvertent that the Jewish philosopher’s favored example of a magical miracle is the Qur’an, whose

²⁹ To be sure, various strands of Christian, Jewish, and Islamic mysticism have consistently tested and refined, and at times dramatically expanded, the practical and doctrinal limits of appropriate religious experience. Thus, in his enumeration of the Spanish Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia’s theory of language, for example, Gershom Scholem, a close associate of Rosenzweig, is careful to distinguish between permitted magic (characterized by the “unveiling of the secret symbolism of all language”) and its forbidden counterpart (in which “the poetic force immanent in language is used for material and selfish ends”). “Abulafia is completely aware of the immediate power emanating from words, most of all words purified to the utmost, which seem meaningless but are actually charged with meaning, as well as their metamorphoses, their ‘revolutions.’ ... Magic does exist for him as that which is non-communicable and which nevertheless radiates from words – this internal and profound dimension of magic remains exempt from the prohibition of sorcery and magic. It is this sort of legitimate magic the prophets engaged in... But whoever permits himself, without that status of a prophet, to intervene, by so to speak technical means, in the Creation, or claims to be capable of such intervention, succumbs to the temptation of mantic sciences, that is, of magic in the usual sense. That discipline, ‘demonic science,’ though not without some basis in reality, is a falsification of true mysticism, because it crudely imitates the external aspect of the deeper truth...” (Scholem, “The Name of God,” quoted in Mosès 2009: 178).

creator Rosenzweig likens to an “oriental despot”³⁰ – as it was of the legal and theological writings of the Middle Ages and, before that, the patristic literature of the fourth and fifth century church.

There we encounter an upsurge in authorizing processes aimed principally at circumscribing and then extirpating from the Roman church any residues of its pagan past – including an assortment of practices that till then had been considered of negligible religious import but now, in homilies and legal statutes alike, are judged “magical” and thus nefarious³¹ – at exactly the same time as a widespread preoccupation with miracles and wonders, manifest especially in the proliferation of shrines and relics, is harnessed by the Christian empire to consolidate its worldly *auctoritas*. That this post-Constantinian campaign to root out paganism arises contemporaneously with the cult of the saints along with a more general foregrounding of the miraculous in the life of the church indicates not, as scholars influenced by Edward

³⁰ Writes Rosenzweig: “Mohammed came upon the idea of revelation and took it over as such a find is wont to be taken over, that is, without generating it out of its presuppositions. The Koran is a ‘Talmud’ not based on a ‘Bible,’ a ‘New’ Testament not based on an ‘Old’ Testament. Islam has only revelation, not prophecy. In it, therefore, the miracle of revelation is not a ‘sign,’ it is not the revelation of divine providence, active in creation, as a ‘plan of salvation.’ Rather the Koran is a miracle in itself, and thus a magical miracle.” *Star of Redemption*, 127-128. That few studies on Rosenzweig’s work critically assess such claims is disheartening. Perhaps the recent publication in Germany of *Franz Rosenzweig: Ausgewählte Schriften zum Islam*, Gesine Palmer and Yossef Schwartz, eds. (Berlin: Philo Verlag, 2003), which contains Rosenzweig’s most sustained invective against Islam, will force readers to confront this uncomfortable dimension of his thought. For critical remarks along these lines, see the interview with Gil Anidjar in Shaikh 2007: 244-246.

³¹ In addition to canons forbidding Jews from blessing the crops of Christians and women from spending the night in cemeteries, and those which outlawed the worship of angels, the acceptance of festal gifts from Jews or heretics, and the use of charms or amulets of any sort, Greer writes of a telling incident recounted in Augustine’s *Confessions*: “In 385 Monica joined her son in Milan. Augustine tells us that she had been accustomed ‘to take meal-cakes and bread and wine to the shrines of the saints on their memorial days,’ but found herself prohibited from doing this in Milan. Ambrose had forbidden the custom ‘both for fear that to some they might be occasions for drunkenness and because they bore so close a resemblance to the superstitious rites which the pagans held in honour of their dead’” (Greer 1989: 121).

Gibbon's dubious "two-tiered" model long suggested, a contest between orthodoxy on the one side and a popular, recalcitrant paganism on the other.³² Instead it signals the struggle of an emergent church-state to eliminate from its domain any practice thought to be spiritually or politically subversive – and magic, as Augustine's earlier cited polemics attest to, is before long looked upon as both – as well as, crucially, an attempt by this burgeoning order to mobilize for itself, *through signs that prove God's providence*, unmistakable evidence that, in Rowan Greer's words, "the power of heaven and of the age to come had, in a sense, been domesticated and made available here and now" (Greer 1989: 5).³³ Gradually the theology of the period came to accommodate this perspective, with writers as esteemed as John Chrysostom, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Eusebius, and even Augustine soon emphasizing the indispensability of miracles for the legitimation of the Christian commonwealth; more unexpected, perhaps, are their solutions to the prevalence of alleged superstition and the allure of the preternatural among their congregations, which, increasingly, are met not with the unbending austerity with which the Fathers are often associated, but with vernacular modes of alternative remedy – the

³² In such works as *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the assumptions of which would dominate analyses of late antiquity for the next two centuries, the eighteenth century historian and parliamentarian Edward Gibbon posited a clear-cut opposition between the official piety of the early church and the popular, resolutely pagan belief systems that ultimately corrupted it. It was the great merit of Peter Brown's seminal work in the 1970s to have finally unsettled such views.

³³ Hence Greer's assessment of what he takes to be the strong link between miracles and the community life of Christians after Constantine: "[O]nce the church gained predominance in the Empire, most Christians thought that a new Christian commonwealth was in the making. Their enterprise was the sacralization of the Roman order. Heaven had come down to earth, and Christ was transforming the kingdom of this world into his own realm. The miracles associated with the cult of the saints and with the holy people in the Christian Empire were part of this sacralization. The power of heaven and of the age to come was, in a sense, domesticated and made available here and now. ... In short, then, the sacralization of the Empire was accompanied by the burgeoning of the miraculous" (Greer 1989: 5).

use of the Gospel book to ward off disease, the sign of the cross to repel enemies – now cast, however reluctantly, as authoritatively, recognizably Christian.³⁴ Decrees such as Pope Gregory the Great's (c. 600), which ordered that the temples of the converted peoples of Northern Europe were not to be destroyed but instead aspersed with holy water and filled with relics and altars, have led many scholars to the conclusion that, from the Church's perspective, if pagan politics could be Christianized, then so, too, could pagan magic. Nevertheless, to read these recommendations as signs of acquiescence on the part of church leadership is to miss the basic point: that what mattered for the Fathers (along with, as we shall see, successive generations of ecclesiastical authority) were less the surface affinities between certain pagan and Christian practices, although these certainly generated anxiety, than the *sources* (licit or illicit) from which spiritual interventions were believed to have originated and the single, unified authority by and through whom all such discriminations would be determined.

This concern to distinguish a range of exceptional yet nonetheless magical and/or diabolical phenomena from those which might justifiably be reckoned miraculous, and to do so without at all foreclosing the continuation of God's creative action through the latter in the present age, is one which persisted, even intensified, well into the Middle Ages. Indeed, the labyrinthine logic and the dizzying, at times inscrutable multiplication of distinctions and

³⁴ Even so stalwart an enemy of paganism as Augustine would recommend, though not unambivalently, the placing of the Gospel at one's head as a substitute cure for headaches. "For so far has human weakness proceeded, and so lamentable is the estate of those who have recourse to amulets, that we rejoice when we see a man who is upon his bed, and tossed about with fevers and pains, placing his hope on nothing else than that the gospel lies at his head; not because it is done for this purpose, but because the gospel is preferred to amulets. If, then, it is placed at the head to allay the pain of the head, is it not placed at the heart to heal it from sin?" Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 7.12, cited in Greer 1989: 47.

subdistinctions so characteristic of medieval scholasticism is unquestionably on display as these issues are taken up, with novel technical terms coming incessantly to augment an expanding theological and philosophical vocabulary. Thus it was the thirteenth century that saw the inauguration of the very term “supernatural” (*supernaturalis*) as a category of theological analysis, thereby dislodging, as Henri de Lubac has shown, what had until that time been a contrast between the “natural” and the “moral” – or created *nature* versus created *spirit* – and installing in its place a new distinction between “nature” and “supernature” (see Milbank 2005: 17-18).³⁵ Of course, de Lubac recognized that the seemingly comparable phrase “above nature” (*supra naturam*) had been employed in theological discussion from the fourth century onwards, but there was, he insisted, something momentous about this particular coinage. “Even if the mere word ‘supernatural’ does not enable writers and thinkers to say something they could not say before,” observes medievalist Robert Bartlett, “its appearance surely indicates that they wanted to say it more often and more conveniently” (2008: 12-13).

Why the emergence of this term at this specific moment? We can point to at least two interrelated precipitants: the irruption of Aristotelianism into the intellectual centers of Latin Christendom between 1150 and 1250 and the contemporaneous establishment of the

35 It is important to register the fact that not all Christian traditions have thought it necessary to develop and employ such a vocabulary; thus, for instance, Anabaptist theologian John Howard Yoder’s powerful parochialization of this language in light of what he considers to be more important matters: “A mainstream Catholic tradition, being concerned to give account of the way in which the values of non-Christian reason are gathered up in a “catholic” synthesis, will be concerned to give account of the relations of nature and supernature or nature and grace. I am still willing to be shown that this distinction is helpful at the point of providing moral guidance. It may well be illuminating as a principle of classification and description. The morality of discipleship would be classified by some as a morality against or above ‘nature.’ Others would claim it to be most natural. How we classify it is neither here nor there, as long as one is clear that discipleship is what God asks of those who confess Jesus as Lord” (Yoder 2001: 113).

meticulously defined procedures that would eventually typify the canonization process.³⁶ The first allowed for and demanded an account of “nature” – fast becoming a more orderly and autonomous concept than that inherited from the patristic tradition (see Ritchey 2009) – that would explain with newfound rigor its regularities and anomalies in equal measure; the other sought through exacting methods, above all the interrogatory, to ascertain whether the extraordinary deeds attributed to would-be saints had been brought about “naturally” (i.e., with the aid of herbs, stones, or other medicinal things) or “supernaturally” (i.e., through prayer and, as Aquinas was concerned to emphasize, the grace that accompanies a life of virtue). From this overall desire for systematicity, devised in part to withstand the barbs of skeptics but also, clearly, to manage nascent heterogeneities of doctrine and conduct, arose a categorization of phenomena commensurate with their differential relations to “the order of natural causes” – a matter, it should be stressed, of nature’s habitual custom rather than of nature’s inviolable law – where the designation *miracle* is now reserved for phenomena whose distinctiveness is said to derive from their departure from this order.³⁷

Hardly a chronicle of unbroken discursive practices overlaid with mere terminological novelties, what we have instead are a succession of transformations constitutive of the practical and theoretical horizons of the discourse itself. For the language of the (super)natural which

³⁶ On the “Aristotelian synthesis” in the institutional pedagogies of the Middle Ages, see Nederman 1996. For a wide-ranging study of the birth of papal canonization, see Vauchez 1997.

³⁷ Hence the addition of yet another technical term: *mirabilia*, or marvels, now counted as distinct from *miracula* insofar as, paraphrasing Aquinas, they may be contrary to the usual course of nature but not – as with divine miracles – to nature intrinsically, and so also may be astonishing to us simply because we are ignorant of their causes. See Daston 1991.

flourishes in the late medieval period does not simply express what had, in a different idiom, been there all along – nor, as Amos Funkenstein (1989) among others have demonstrated, does it leave untouched the meanings and uses of the constellation of concepts it insistently bears upon. “What is a miracle?... We call a miracle whatever is done contrary to the usual course of nature [*contra solitum cursum naturae*], hence we wonder.” What happens when such definitions, here proffered by Caesarius of Heisterbach in the early thirteenth century, become dominant? For one thing there ensues, so Bartlett suggests, what he describes as “a contraction of the sphere of the supernatural” in social and legal settings, a claim he substantiates by citing debates surrounding trial by ordeal and the ultimate demise of that institution around 1300.³⁸ And Bartlett is not alone in this assumption: it is a commonplace of medieval historiography to regard the shift from trial by ordeal to the inquisitorial techniques of the later Middle Ages – of which torture was a significant feature – as a progressive movement toward “logical” (i.e., less “mythical”) juridical procedures.³⁹ If this was in fact the case, that is, if the growing tendency was, as Lorraine Daston puts it, to segregate the natural from the supernatural, “having recourse to the latter only as a last resort” (Daston 1991: 156), and if, on the other hand, the

³⁸ Widespread in Latin Europe during the early and central Middle Ages, the ordeal involved the resolution of a dispute not by the usual legal means of oath-swearing, the testimony of witnesses and the hearing of relevant evidence, but by submitting the accused or one of the parties in a civil suit to a dramatic physical test, such as carrying a red-hot iron, plucking a pebble from a boiling cauldron, or being cast into a pool or stream. The result would determine the verdict: in the ordeals of hot iron and hot water, the hand had to be healing cleanly after a given period, usually three days; in the ordeal of cold water, the accused were deemed guilty if they floated, innocent if they sank. Thus the underlying concept of trial by ordeal, Bartlett observes, “was not a random test but a carefully staged ritual in which God would give his verdict – and *iudicium Dei*, ‘judgment of God,’ was in fact a standard medieval term for ordeal” (Bartlett 2008: 28).

³⁹ A brief overview of this perspective can be found in the chapter “Pain and Truth in Medieval Christian Ritual,” in Asad 1993: 84-90.

so-called sphere of the natural came eventually to extend itself over an exponentially diversified terrain, then it stands to reason that magic, surely the stuff of the supernatural if nothing else, would in due course find itself similarly “contracted.”

But the opposite appears to have happened: the ontological footing of *miracula* is ensured by imputing to magic a wholly *natural* disposition, causing it to proliferate on an unprecedented scale even as, somewhat paradoxically, its identification and hence elimination became increasingly problematic. Thus Aquinas’ observation that false miracles “are performed through some forces of natural things, which *although hidden from us*, such as the miracles of demons, are performed by magic arts,” not only refigures demonology as a form of natural knowledge but implies that detecting it may indeed prove troublesome (Aquinas 1928: 3.102-107).⁴⁰ In the end, far from doing away with magic and its newly minted kin (e.g., witchcraft, astrology, divination, and so forth), its naturalization and simultaneous diabolization simply meant that an emergent repertoire of forensic procedures was increasingly called upon to adjudicate its putative incidences.

I have no intention of deducing with any conclusiveness how the scholastic formulations sketched above found their way into the structure and verdicts of such inquiries. It seems clear enough that, at least from the standpoint of the church establishment, “magic” remained an object of worry and derision, but how it was located and defined, under what circumstances

⁴⁰ This understanding of demonology as “a form of natural knowledge” informed the early modern view that, in the words of one German cleric, “even the devil’s greatest masterpieces must be placed within physics and within nature, not above it, for only the Lord God can alter nature, and work anything against its course, not the devil, who works according to nature, not against it.” Paulus Frisius, *Von dess Teuffels Nebelkappan*, 221, in Clark 1999: 168.

and to what ends, is a question that confounds hasty generalization. So it is in the spirit of defied expectations that I quote at length from one additional source: Eamon Duffy's magisterial treatment of "traditional religion" in medieval England. Looking to the *Malleus Maleficarum* – what he calls "the most exhaustive manual against witchcraft and superstition produced in the Middle Ages" – for proof of what he considers to be "the symbiotic relationship between the official practice of the Church, orthodox devotions like that to the Holy Name, and even apparently 'superstitious' practices and prayers," Duffy writes:

Though it spelt out at some length the conventional warnings against sorcery and reliance on the Devil in conjurations, and laid down strict conditions for the lawful use of charms and incantations, the *Malleus* nevertheless recognized that many popular 'magical' practices, though fallen into the hands of 'indiscreet and superstitious persons,' were in their origin 'entirely sacred,' and were legitimate when 'applied by pious men,' even lay men and women. It brought arguments from St. Thomas to justify the use of charms and benedictions invoking sacred names and things... and even permitted the use of written charms, such as passages from the Gospels or other 'sacred words,' to be hung around the neck or placed by the sick or given them to kiss. Even if the lay user of such charms could not understand the words thus written the practice might be legitimate, for 'it is enough if such a man fixes his thoughts upon the Divine Virtue, and leaves it to the Divine Will to do what seems good to his Mercy.'...

This broad approach was no doubt in part dictated by realism in the face of popular practice: it was certainly amply reflected there. The *Malleus* had cited St. Thomas to the effect that the incidents of the Passion or the words of Jesus might be invoked as 'lawful means' of working the signs promised in the last chapter of St. Mark. These signs were as concrete, miraculous, and concerned with life's ills and dangers as anyone could desire: casting out demons, drinking poison unharmed, healing the sick, taking up serpents unharmed. Therefore charms against unstaunchable wounds, invoking the Wounds of Jesus or the nails or lance that caused them seemed legitimate. Joshua's prayer that made the sun stand still and Christ's word that made the sea stand still might be invoked to make thieves unable to move if they touched the devotee's goods. Phrases from the Gospels such as 'Jesus passed through the midst of them' might be used to ensure safe passage through perils, or 'not a bone of him shall be broken' to heal a toothache. Christ's harrowing of Hell and breaking of its gates might even be invoked to open jammed locks. To a twentieth-century eye this is clearly a form of

sympathetic magic; to its users and to the ecclesiastical authorities it might seem a perfectly legitimate application of the principles set down by St. Thomas or the *Malleus*, and an extension of the practice of the liturgy (2005: 285-286).

If Father Bazaanah's denunciations are somewhat difficult to square with the past episodes he otherwise affirms, so too is it tricky to reconcile the hypotheses of Bartlett or Daston, and the philosophico-theological conceptualizations mobilized to confirm them, with passages such as these. Yet whatever leniency might be inferred from Duffy's account, whatever concessions his "realism in the face of popular practice" might appear to intimate, it should not divert our attention from the simple fact – a fact, however, that at least one of Duffy's critics has accused him of purposefully ignoring⁴¹ – that texts like the *Malleus* were fashioned and deployed precisely as handbooks for the prosecution of heretics, which is to say, for the purging of that vast crowd of recalcitrants positioned beyond the pale of even the "broadest approach" whose practices and ideas were deemed superstitious – decidedly *sans* quotation marks – not merely to "twentieth-century eyes" but to the Church authorities who ordered them tried and burned.

Perhaps, in this light, we would do well to heed Talal Asad's reminder, itself born of an attempt to come to terms with the disciplinary modalities of Latin Christendom, that heresy – like magic? – is an ecclesiastical category, a distinctive ecclesiastical event enacted by ecclesiastical judgment. That judgment and its objects and effects, Asad argues, "the asymmetrical dialogue they set up particularly in and through the inquisitorial process, are all

⁴¹ See Aers 1994 for a withering appraisal of what he describes as Duffy's homogenizing and deeply ideological account of the socio-religious milieu of pre-Reformation England.

very real. But they are not to be reduced to a particular kind of subjective experience. ‘Heresy’ [and, I would tentatively add, ‘magic’] is first and foremost the product of a power process in which *Truth is authorized and Error anathematized*. That process is central to the Church’s strategy for dealing with the dangers (moral, intellectual, political) which threaten it” (Asad 1986: 356, original emphasis). Asad’s reflections, though not addressed to magic per se, help direct us to the play of interests that came together to objectify and encode magic as at once intellectually mistaken, morally pathological, and politically dangerous – a falsehood to be anathematized, as Asad might say. And yet it was the Church’s competency in telling truth from falsehood that a host of reformers soon called irrevocably into question, accomplished in part by harnessing the very category which had previously marked the tradition’s exemplary aberration.

Among the numerous practices targeted early on by reformers were an assortment of liturgical and devotional forms, with the doctrine of transubstantiation in particular coming to stand as the apotheosis of fallacious belief. John Calvin, for instance, mocked the words of consecration in the Roman sacrament as “a sort of magical incantation,” while the Puritan William Perkins reckoned the Eucharistic performance as of a piece with “Popery,” or “one entire system of anti-Christian magic” (Calvin 1958: 193; see also Perkins 1631: 3). (Little surprise, then, that the expression “hocus pocus” is widely believed to have descended from “*Hoc est enim corpus meum*,” the consecratory words whose pronouncement in the Catholic Mass denotes the conversion of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.) It is in light of these and similar attacks that historian Keith Thomas notes – and here again we glimpse the

looping effect of anthropological definitions – what he considers to be a chief legacy of the Reformation, namely, its painstaking attempt

to take the magical elements out of religion, to eliminate the idea that the rituals of the Church had about them a *mechanical efficacy*, and to abandon the effort to endow physical objects with supernatural qualities by special formulae of consecration and exorcism.... The Protestants were helping to make a distinction in kind between magic and religion, the one a *coercive* ritual, the other an *intercessory* one. Magic was no longer seen as a false religion, which was how medieval theologians had regarded it; it was now seen as a different activity altogether (Thomas 1971: 75-76).

Thus carrying forward both the anti-Catholic predilections of radical Protestantism and an Enlightenment contempt for ritual and ceremony, the speculative pronouncements of Frazer and his Victorian peers comprised not only anthropology's first attempts at a science of comparative religion – wherein the idea of magic as a “different activity altogether” was now accorded the standing of Sociological Truth – but also comprised what Webb Keane has referred to as the more general purifying impulse typical of the climate in which the discipline took shape. According to Keane, what characterizes the work of purification, a term he borrows from Bruno Latour, is the incisive and in many respects perpetual labor of boundary demarcation and abstraction – of humans from nonhumans, nature from society, subject from object, science from politics, and on and on – in relation to which, he convincingly argues, emerges a, if not *the*, decisive project of modernity (Keane 2007: 76-77). Anthropology's own special although – and this is partly Keane's point – by no means exclusive contribution to this project was strikingly and self-consciously encapsulated by Frazer's immediate predecessor in his conclusion to *Primitive Culture* (1864):

It is a harsher, and at times even painful, office of ethnography to expose the remains of crude old culture which have passed into harmful superstition, and to mark these out for destruction. Yet this work, if less genial, is not less urgently needful for the good of mankind. Consequently, active at once in aiding progress and in removing hindrance, the science of culture is essentially a reformer's science (Tylor 1920: 453).⁴²

It would be a mistake to regard the objective of this “reformer's science” as the eradication or decline of religion in any simple sense.⁴³ Rather, what so distressed these armchair theorists about the attitudes and behaviors of “crude old culture,” what rendered them not merely obsolete or irrelevant but on the order of “harmful superstition,” was their conviction that in those attitudes and behaviors could be evinced earlier – albeit dangerously alienated – versions of their own ethical and religious norms. Especially illustrative of this anxiety was the remarkable reception and social life of the notion of taboo. The “problem” of taboo,

⁴² It is worth remembering that it was not merely or even primarily the customs of so-called primitive societies that the “reformer's science” of Tylor and his colleagues sought to denigrate; rather, they saw themselves as contributing to the important task of exposing, so as to expunge, the remnants of mystification in Catholic and, to a lesser extent, certain strands of Protestant belief. One could argue, moreover, that Tylor's interest in the “lower races” extended only insofar as their outmoded habits could be instrumentalized against those similarly backward beliefs that persisted in European culture: “Theologians all to expose,” Tylor wrote in an 1881 poem, “'tis the mission of Primitive Man” (Stocking 2001). See also Peter Pels' (2003) discussion of the fascinating debate between Tylor and the naturalist Alfred Wallace over the place of spiritualism in the pursuit of scientific “facts.”

⁴³ The classic articulation of this view is Evans-Pritchard's Aquinas Lecture, “Religion and the Anthropologists” (1962). See also Stark 1999. It is easily forgotten or trivialized by such critics that the early exemplars of this “anthropological atheism” – positivists like Saint-Simon and Comte – remained convinced of the necessity of “religion,” albeit one reconfigured toward specific sociopolitical objectives (hence, for example, Comte's so-called Religion of Humanity, founded in the 1850's and replete with its own priests, sacraments, festivals, hagiography, and church calendar). It is tempting, to be sure, to dismiss these attempts at devising a secularized religion as comical and anomalous (“Of course, they weren't *really* religious”) but in doing so, I would suggest, we elide the crucial question of precisely what it was that made “religion” the attractive, even necessary, category it was for these nineteenth century reformers; what work was “religion” doing for them at the time? For Comte's complicated views on these matters, see Pickering 1993.

anthropologist Franz Steiner explained in his posthumously published lectures on the topic, enjoyed such extraordinary prominence in nineteenth-century European thought and society for two primary reasons: on the one hand, due to the increasing traction of “the rationalist approach to religion,” and on the other, because of the proliferation of taboos in Victorian society itself (Steiner 1999: 132). By “the rationalist approach to religion” he meant the growing sense among the more enlightened members of the educated class that religion could, and at its peril must, be “adapted to the needs of an industrial society” – or, to be precise, that “the ground held by religion could [now] be covered by various ethical theories” (ibid., 133). As Kant had shown in the previous century, however, not all human beliefs were equally amenable to this transposition of religion into ethics,⁴⁴ and nowhere were these beliefs more prominently displayed than in the taboo customs of Polynesia on which the evolutionary gaze of the Victorian era became so tenaciously fixed. In them the Victorians saw, writes Alasdair MacIntyre, “what they took to be primitive anticipations of their own scheme of rational ethics, but in a form disfigured by superstitious conceptions of the sacred and of sacred power and by a failure to distinguish genuine moral rules from arbitrary and irrational prohibitions” (MacIntyre 1990: 27). Or as Steiner himself puts it:

⁴⁴ What Steiner termed “religious *residua*” Kant had much earlier referred to as “mere dogma” which, however, could be purified by (true) religion: “To indicate precisely how religious belief purifies dogma, I think the following proposition is the most convenient touchstone we can use: to the extent that any dogma gives out merely statutory teachings of faith as essential religious teachings, it contains a certain *admixture of paganism*; for paganism consists in passing off the externals (non-essentials) of religion as essential. This admixture can be present to such a degree that it turns the entire religion into a mere dogma, which raises practices to the status of laws, and so becomes sheer paganism. And a church cannot escape this rude name by saying that its doctrines are, nevertheless, divine revelations” (Kant 1992 [1798]: 89, original emphasis).

The more the links, props, and joints of the socio-religious thought structure were absorbed into theories of rational ethics, the more isolated became the little islands of prescribed ceremonial behavior, the logical model of sacrifice, and the manifold “don’ts” of religious prohibition. Consequently, these residual contexts – those which could not be dealt with in terms of ethical ratiocination and subjective theories of value – were put under the headings of magic and taboo, and were favored with a certain type of objective approach which it became fashionable to call scientific. In this way magic and taboo... emerged as the two main categories of religious *residua* (Steiner 1999: 133).

Once stripped of its magical surplus, in others words, and once it had taken leave of its irrational prohibitions, religion – here reconstructed as the responsibility of agents *for* their actions and *to* their God – could be counted as the original site of morality; magic and taboo, along with those other so-called religious practices that continued to partake of them, were henceforth to be seen as antithetical to it. So it was no accident that “taboo” was first discovered by and became an obsession for Protestants like Robertson Smith, since, as Steiner is careful to emphasize, it was in the hands of such self-styled reformers that the category would acquire its distinctive dual-use function: indispensable for at once shedding light on the groundlessness of premodern rituals and proscriptions⁴⁵ (including those that continued to

⁴⁵ Thus Freud’s well-known differentiation between the magically conditioned prohibitions in the Oedipus story and those of a genuinely ethical kind: “Taboo restrictions are distinct from religious or moral prohibitions. They are not based upon any divine ordinance, but may be said to impose themselves on their own account. They differ from moral prohibitions in that they fall into no system that declares quite generally that certain abstinences must be observed and gives reasons for that necessity. *Taboo prohibitions have no grounds and are of unknown origin.* They are unintelligible to us; to those who are dominated by them they are taken as a matter of course” (Freud 1960: 18). Steiner dismantled claims such as these with the observation that taboos only appeared irrational or groundless when detached from the contextual frames – the practices and attitudes – that had originally given them their sense.

flourish in Victorian England⁴⁶) and for marking the limits to be overcome in freeing the human subject from its religious – which is to say its moral as well as intellectual – immaturity.⁴⁷ In fact, many of the features of what we now associate with secularism are traceable, though certainly not reducible, to a succession of quintessentially Protestant reconstructions of a “religion” from which moral action could be said to emanate uninhibited.

To the extent that purification is animated by emancipatory pretensions, then, it supplies the telos for a story – an affect-laden, utterly passionate story – of conquered impediments (“marked out for destruction,” in Tylor’s words) and eventual redemption (“for the good of mankind”). Myriad antagonisms and alliances attach themselves to this romance, one whose signature ethos is that of a “heroization of the present,” its persona dramatis the stubborn actualization of a “transfiguring play of freedom with reality” (Foucault 1992: 312).⁴⁸ In its most familiar versions, Webb Keane observes, liberal Protestantism stands alongside such semiotic ideologies as “referential language (as expressed in the values of transparency and truth) and the signifying practices that underlie abstract value (as expressed in money and

⁴⁶ Steiner (1999: 134) mentions Samuel Butler’s utopian novel *Erewhon* (1872) as an example of the pervasiveness of “taboos” in Victorian society. “It must not be forgotten,” Steiner says, “that scholars like Frazer grew up among people who preferred, in certain circumstances, to say ‘unmentionables’ rather than ‘trousers.’”

⁴⁷ The concept of taboo remains a powerful weapon to be mobilized against the enemies of reason. Elucidating its uses in contemporary Europe against the encroaching threat of an immigrant Muslim population, Talal Asad asserts that “for the worldly critic, there can be no acceptable taboos. When limits are critiqued, taboos disappear and freedom is expanded. However, *this* criticism doesn’t merely liberate ideas from taboos, it also reinforces the existing distinction between the paradigmatically human (‘Judeo-Christian’ Europeans) and *candidates* for inclusion in humanity (Muslim Europeans), who do not as yet display full ownership of their bodies, emotions, and thoughts. It reinforces, in other words, the ideological status of Muslims as not fully human because they are not morally autonomous and politically disciplined” (Asad 2007: 606).

⁴⁸ Of course, Foucault speaks not merely of a “heroization” but rather an “*ironic* heroization of the present” (emphasis added). In displacing the irony, so to speak, I am wagering on the contingent as opposed to the essential priority of that disposition in the constitution of the “historico-critical attitude.”

commodities)” in opposition to “paganism, the past, performative and magical language, and ceremonial exchange.” The list can no doubt be expanded and nuanced on both sides. What I want to register here, however, is Keane’s suggestion that within this nexus of processes, which in turn furnishes the leitmotif of what he will otherwise call the “moral narrative of modernity,” can be glimpsed one suppressed link between modernist views of language and things, on the one hand, and the more theological concerns expressed by Protestant and other religious reformers, on the other: specifically, the assertion that “the value of freedom and abstraction lies, at least in part, in their offer of transcendence” (Keane 2007: 222). And this impetus to transcendence, as is well known, is one which despite (or precisely due to) its Euro-American pedigree was soon emplacing itself over an ever-widening itinerary of foreign landscapes, focusing and emboldening, as it touched down in that part of the colonial world, the struggles of several generations of Christian missionaries and their converts to expunge from the Northern Territories of the British Gold Coast, and later from what would become northern Ghana, that surplus of “religious residua” bestowed upon the present by the “benightedness” of an African past.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ As the abolitionist and influential Pan-Africanist Alexander Crummell (1819-1898) prophetically put it: “And here, first of all, we have to observe the sad and startling fact, that mental and moral benightedness has enshrouded the whole of the vast continent of Africa, through all the periods of time, far back to the earliest records of history.... So far as Western Africa is concerned, there is no history. The long, long centuries of human existence, there, give us no intelligent disclosures. ‘Darkness covered the land, and gross darkness the people.’... Doubtless all intelligent persons have contemplated this fact; but perhaps they have not had their attention called to the recent transitional state into which that continent is passing, on the way to enlightenment and salvation.” He continues: “I remark that the facts I referred to *are full of promise of that future glory in Christ which is promised, and which will surely be given to Africa.* She has passed, sadly, wearily, through long ages of agony and woe; but the end is approaching. ‘The night is far spent: the day is at hand.’ The day when civilization and true religion shall make triumphal march through all her quarters, is rapidly drawing nigh. Yea, the time has

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Still, for all its familiarity, there is something not quite adequate about this way of putting things. For if the conceptual history I have been recounting leads ultimately in the West, or, more precisely, leads ultimately in what is now a largely discredited auto-narrative within the West, toward ever-intensified levels of *Entzauberung* – i.e., “disenchantment,” the Weberian deployment of which implies not (as is often suggested) a loss of religious belief but instead a thoroughgoing “elimination of magic” – such that the Reformation becomes a founding moment in an inexorably secularizing teleology whose end is the conflation and eventual banishment of *both* magic and miracle from the modern world, there is little to suggest that these figures suffered a similar fate in Ghana’s northern hinterland. We would do well to remember, after all, that it was the purported contrast between manipulation and supplication, between “my will be done” and “Thy will be done,” between, in short, magic and miracle that first led us down the preceding path; it was not, *pace* Keane, a modernist incitement to rationalism, objectivity, abstraction, and so forth. So while similarly positing magic and, before long, animism, sorcery, paganism, juju, voodoo, witchcraft, and fetishism – all of which, by the early twentieth century, began to stand in for “magic” as the more fashionable terms to denote the alterity of African beliefs – as mistaken and potentially injurious, it seems to me that Father Bazaanah’s accusation and, say, the liberal Protestant moralization and subsequent interiorization of faith belong to and are animated by markedly dissimilar semiotic ideologies:

already come when rudeness and barbarism shall be replaced by culture and refinement” (Crummell 1862: 121, original emphasis).

the one presupposing a necessary and necessarily unbridgeable distance between those wondrous events that bear witness to God's sovereignty and those (perhaps no less extraordinary) feats that, at the end of the day, testify only to themselves, and the other presupposing an immanent realm of more or less autonomous facticity – call it natural law, call it the evidence of experience – in relation to which any distinction between magic and the miraculous becomes only a semantic or even anachronistic one.

Which is but another way of saying that not all denigrations of “magic” are created equal. Born of a desire neither to consolidate institutional hegemony nor to delegitimize certain behaviors as irreconcilable with the light of reason, the Vicar General's peculiar charge that day, though certainly resonant with, if not made possible by, a number of the moments described above, was nonetheless leveled by a man who for the past several years has seen his church's influence relegated to the periphery of Ghanaian social and religious life, and who has looked on, understandably with some frustration, as the event which so dramatically established Christianity in his corner of the world has largely been reduced, for the non-Catholics who are even aware of such things, to little more than a quaint precursor to the spectacular shows of spiritual strength that currently permeate the continent.

Indeed, if the religious milieu within and against which Father Bazaanah's accusation was leveled tells us anything, it is that his diagnostic vocabulary, refracted through the constellation of demarcations that attend his assertion of the inescapable frailty or creatureliness of human existence, is itself a carryover from another time and place, a doctrinal artifact estranged from the cultural and ontological frame in which it originally gained its purchase. To

a certain extent, then, Father Bazaanah can be situated alongside his counterparts in Ghana's other "orthodox" or "mission" churches as a defiant representative of a mode of religiosity whose traction and intelligibility in this West African nation has, by all accounts, quite rapidly dissipated – perhaps not unlike those fourth-century writers and preachers who, according to historians such as Peter Brown (1981), were eventually forced to reconcile the austerity of their Christian Platonism with a growing obsession with *prodigia* among congregants within the early Constantinian church. Seen from this perspective, and against those who would render Pentecostalism as an essentially self-contained phenomenon, we might be tempted to conclude that what we encounter in Ghana today is merely the latest in a long series of impassioned confrontations between the gatekeepers of Christian orthodoxy and those sudden outbursts of charisma and reform that, then as now, are taken to jeopardize the tradition from within or beyond its borders.

Yet who could deny the patent singularity of the present conjuncture? The alternatives are as predictable as they are insufficient: rupture *or* continuity; difference *or* repetition; unforeseeable emergence *or* the return of the same. It would, I think, be wrongheaded to adjudicate, much less to dismiss, such matters in the abstract: better, it seems, to add to the voices and trajectories presented thus far – the miracle that establishes Christianity in the Northern Territories and the incapacity of the ancestral spirits to counteract it; the present-day influx of charismatic churches into that same region and the attempt, in rhetorical if not practical terms, by a Catholic priest to thwart their success; the shifting juxtapositions, variously mobilized by Greek science, patristic theology, medieval canon law, Reformation

invective, and early anthropology, between miracle and its typically “magical,” usually dangerous but at times simply pitiable others – one additional episode whose elucidatory value lies not only in attesting to the widespread preoccupation among Ghanaians of all stripes with determining the nature and parameters of the authentically, and so the falsely or diabolically, miraculous, but in showing just how particular the lineaments of that preoccupation are to the contemporary moment.

My hunch is that Father Bazaanah’s indictment, hardly an offhanded or inconsequential triviality uttered by a marginalized priest, rather indexes and opens onto a much more pervasive, distinctly popular concern with fixing the meaning and proper uses of miracles and, therefore, with delimiting the boundaries – however indeterminate those boundaries may appear at times, and however improvisatory their reinscription may prove to be – that distinguish miracles from formally comparable but substantively rival manifestations of supernatural power. If anything, then, it is the theological underpinnings of Father Bazaanah’s denunciation that have fallen into obscurity; not, emphatically, the more general concern to which it was oriented. And nowhere, I suggest, was this concern more conspicuously exhibited, and the complex, often contradictory interplay between miracle and its adversaries more strikingly condensed, than in the controversial, heavily publicized set of circumstances that in April-May 2008 captivated Ghana’s popular imaginary and supplied the backdrop for Father Bazaanah’s dismissive pronouncement: namely, the events that led to a dramatic showdown between a celebrity miracle pastor and the country’s most notorious fetish priest.

When a theology of signs gives way to an economy of wonders, as we shall see, the work of purification loses none of its urgency.

Chapter 2

“If He Defeats Me, Go and Burn My Church...”

What must it have been like to be there that day? To have been standing around in the sticky heat, amid the gossip and speculations, the crowd growing larger and the stories funnier as the hours passed, sporadic bursts of laughter set against the ambient bustle of a Kumasi workday? Maybe you're with friends – classmates, say, from the local polytechnic – or maybe you've come alone, curious how it will all go down, anxious, after following the challenges and counter-challenges on the radio, to see the “dreaded” Nana Bonsam with your own two eyes. A giddy nervousness is palpable. Reluctantly you leave your position, a prime spot near the front of the vast concrete enclosure, to buy some food or to urinate, knowing there will be little chance of squeezing your way back to this coveted vantage point. An hour later, still shifting from foot to aching foot, still waiting for something to happen, you toss yet another empty water sachet to the ground and listen to the banter of the girls behind you. Like everyone, they've begun to doubt, not only whether the time and place of the “spiritual contest,” as the radio talk-show hosts have been calling it, was accurately announced – 11am on Thursday at Jubilee Park – but whether the whole thing was ever going to take place to begin with. “I mean, how can you trust a juju man to keep his promise?” one of them says, followed by a punch line that has been making the rounds all week. “And two juju men are even worse!” You're not a member of Ebenezer's church, and your walk with the Lord has undeniably suffered in recent years, but these jokes are beginning to grate on you. Who are these market

girls to question the anointing of a man of God? You've seen the miracles for yourself, broadcast on MetroTV every Saturday morning for the past several months. The last service in particular remains lodged in your memory: as the scene shifted from a segment dubbed "Demonology," which ended with a young girl, a newly-professed witch, writhing on the floor while the congregation furiously chanted "Jesus, Jesus," the ushers proceeded to carry a small, naked boy to the altar who was suffering, they told the pastor, from severe ulcers. With his mother standing by, the camera zoomed in on the boy's disfigured testicles and tiny penis. "Spirit of disease, in the name of Jesus!" you can still hear the pastor shouting, his voice slicing through the tinny cacophony of tongues ringing out of the television's speakers. "I command you to leave this boy!" No, you think to yourself as the giggling continues, we shouldn't joke about this man's anointing. Yet no sooner have these words crossed your mind than, toward the entrance of the park and seemingly out of nowhere, there materializes a man – you see that he's wearing *batakari* and, squinting into the sun, that his body's smeared with a sort of whitish substance – whose arrival is sending the assembled throng into a euphoric, almost threatening frenzy. Bobbing slowly up and down over this sea of bodies, he appears to be gliding forward on the crowd itself, propelled along the surface of their heads and flailing arms. It strikes you, as the sweaty elbow of one of the market girls presses sharply against your back, that whatever reservations you had been harboring only seconds before have now dissolved into an anonymous surging mass of energy. Yours, your brain registers faintly beneath the noise, have become but another pair of eyes straining to catch sight of this gradually approaching figure. The bedlam reaches a fever pitch as three cars begin to force their way through the gathering,

trailing behind them, in the narrow swath cut open in their wake, your first unobstructed view of the grotesquely scarred face of Kwaku Bonsam. Suddenly you realize why *sika, sika* has been reverberating throughout the park. A smiling Bonsam, sitting tall astride a dark brown horse, is holding out his empty palms and, with a quick flick of his wrist, causing thick wads of cash to appear which he casually, unceremoniously flings into the outstretched hands of those around him. You find yourself pushing forward. “My mission today,” the fetish priest yells into a makeshift public-address system some minutes later, “is to shame these so-called men of God. I want to show Ghanaians that there is dignity in traditional worship.”

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Six weeks earlier, so the newspapers reported, Collins Agyei Yeboah, founder and general overseer of Vision Charismatic Chapel at Kato in the Brong Ahafo Region, had been humiliated and nearly lynched when an unknown fetish priest stormed into his church and, with an entourage of men behind him, demanded the return of a potent juju. Were it not for the intervention of the police, readers were told in an article entitled “Pastor Loses His Powers,” the church’s irate congregants would have beaten the pastor to death. (“One minute we were waiting in line for private prayer sessions with Rev. Agyei Yeboah,” an angry female church member told the paper, “and the next minute the pastor is going to the rear of the church to retrieve a fetish object.”) Apparently the backstory went like this: in January 2006 the aspiring pastor had visited Nana Kwaku Bonsam’s shrine in Akomaden-Afrancho to acquire a special juju for the establishment of a church at Kato, his hometown. The fetish priest obliged – for a hefty fee, of course. Thus having agreed to a payment plan – 2 million cedis, or approximately 200

dollars, to be paid up front, with an additional 3.5 million cedis to be delivered by the end of the year – Agyei Yeboah returned to Kato with his newly purchased juju and went on to found what, by all accounts, became a very successful ministry. But when, “after numerous reminders to him to pay the remaining 3.5 million, Pastor Agyei Yeboah refused to honour the payment with the flimsy excuse that the juju he collected did not work,” the gods, according to Kwaku Bonsam, “were incensed and spelt out two options for me: either the juju must be recovered from the pastor or I, Kwaku Bonsam, would lose my life in a matter of hours” (*The Daily Guide*, April 23, 2008).

Now all of this, we should bear in mind, is being mediated for us by the popular news outlets – normally a story is broken by one of several daily papers, disseminated throughout the country in ubiquitous roadside kiosks, and then picked up and discussed on television and radio programs and websites such as Ghanaweb.com – so it is instructive to consider some of the idiosyncratic features of their narration of such episodes. For instance, in the article from which the preceding account was drawn (having originally appeared in *The Daily Guide*, a relatively well-regarded source of “real news”), as well as a number of the other newspaper articles, radio discussions, television reports, and web forums that together comprised the public representation of this sequence of events, Kwaku Bonsam is recurrently portrayed – in marked contrast to the pastors and evangelists he derides – as a veritable paragon of law and order, with the sensational and esoteric significations of his fetish work counterpoised by distinctly pedestrian images of a sensible, upstanding Ghanaian citizen. When we are told, therefore, that upon arrival in Rev. Agyei Yeboah’s hometown Kwaku Bonsam and his

associates went directly to the Divisional Police Commander of Bereken to seek permission before proceeding to the church premises, and that that same police commander was later forced to rescue a hitherto respectable but now thoroughly mortified pastor from the violent indignation of his congregation, we are immediately made aware (irrespective of whether or not such events actually transpired, although the veneer of realism is certainly noteworthy) of the account's emplotment, in Hayden White's (1992) usage of the term, within a story form that has become familiar to students of West African cinema and urban popular performance: a story form, that is, in which the easily recognizable enemy, often of an undeniably Satanic sort, is recast as something of an anti-hero by virtue of his (or, with significantly different ramifications, her) disclosure of the unseen wickedness of the flamboyantly righteous man (or, again with quite different implications, woman) of God (see, e.g., Shipley 2009; Green-Simms forthcoming).

If, in the previous chapter, we observed the looping effect of anthropological understandings of magic vis-à-vis the formulations of historians and missionaries, we can now take note of a similar process at work in the apparently nonpartisan (though no less titillating) reportage of scandals such as these. Or is it merely a case, not so much of life imitating art, but of a profusion of a multiplicity of media – video films, biblical accounts, sermons, journalistic reports, public testimonies, and, not least, flesh-and-blood scenes of confrontation – all converging in a seamlessness of life at varying thresholds of visibility and invisibility,

concealment and exposure?¹ Where the Devil's only virtue, as it were, issues from the fact that his depravity lies in plain sight, available for all to see? (This invocation of the Devil is neither flippant nor inadvertant; while in traditional Akan discourse "bonsam" generally designates a male witch, in the Christian vernacular, as the fetish priest's many detractors never tire of pointing out, it stands for Satan or the Devil.²) As if the moral no less than spiritual panic occasioned by such disclosures of ecclesial dissimulation is sufficient to effect, however tenuously, a kind of Malinowskian solidarity between the force of sorcery and the force of law?³ As though there is some implicit rapprochement between the law in all of its interrogatory, unmasking potential and the vocation of the "fetish priest" himself, whose most basic task, let us

¹ "In these conditions," Mbembe argues, "the great epistemological – and therefore social – break was not between what was seen and what was read, but between what was seen (*the visible*) and what was not seen (*the occult*), between what was heard, spoken, and memorized and what was concealed (*the secret*). To the extent that reality had each time to be transformed into sign and the sign constantly filled with reality, the problem for those whose main activity was publicly to decipher the world was to interpret simultaneously both its obverse and what might be called its negation, its reverse" (Mbembe 2001: 144).

² In the name as much as the person of Kwaku Bonsam, it would seem, are compressed those elaborate and imaginative processes that, in Ghana and beyond, saw traditional cosmologies and religious forms translated into a specifically Christian lexicon, such that, as Birgit Meyer (1994) has convincingly shown, the work of diabolization became a key conceptual interface between the missionaries' variant of Protestantism and the traditional pantheon of gods and spirits. Meyer traces this nexus of diabolization and translation as far back as Justin Martyr (c. 103-165) who, she suggests, was among the first to assert that the pagan gods were actually demons in service to the Devil.

³ In a very different ethnographic context – postwar, post-genocide Guatemala – Diane Nelson has compellingly probed the limits, preconditions, and affects/effects of duplicity in a number of guises. Duping, she observes, can be "world shattering," which might help to explain the violent reaction of Rev. Agyei Yeboah's congregation to the revelation of his spiritual two-facedness. Needless to say, not all duplicities are equally destructive – particularly when, as with the state or its politicians, we are more apt to "see it coming" – but at its worst, Nelson writes, "trust is deceived, betrayed. You've been double-crossed. Not only is confidence in the other shaken, but so is faith in one's own judgment... A familiar narrative is shattered, and the pieces fall together in a new configuration. The very I that thinks – and therefore is – becomes uncertain" (Nelson 2009: 10-11). That whole genres of Ghanaian popular culture have now sprung up around the figure of the duplicitous pastor has seemingly done little to blunt the shock of its local instances.

not forget, is to show that what appears to be one thing – a stone, a bird’s egg, a pastor – is actually quite another?⁴

In any case, the saga did not end with the undoing of Collins Yeboah (an undoing whose coda, incidentally, was as pathos-infused as the original transgression itself: “Later in an interview,” *The Daily Guide* reported, “Pastor Agyei Yeboah admitted taking juju from Nana Kwaku Bonsam but asked his church members and the townsfolk to pardon him, stressing that never will he commit such a sacrilegious act again. He said he was ready to continue with the church if only its members would forgive him”⁵). No, like any decent showman, Kwaku Bonsam saved the best for last. Just two days after news of the juju-in-the-church incident began making its way through the various spaces – the internet cafés and taxicabs, NGOs and medical clinics, *pito* houses and outdoor markets – that make up the everyday scenes of life in Tamale, and as intimations of the episode began finding their way into the churches’ weekday prayer services and Bible studies (could anyone doubt what the incessant references to Matthew 10:16, where Jesus’ disciples are admonished to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves,” were all about?), and, though less in the form of “intimation” than outright ridicule, as imams in the local mosques began to incorporate the scandal into their Friday sermons (“Even Muslims

⁴This seems as good a place as any to gesture toward the peculiar life of the concept of the fetish, which in contemporary Ghana, as in other West African countries, is more or less taken by Christians and Muslims, university professors and traditional religious practitioners alike, as a matter of practical and terminological fact. Attempts at problematizing (usually by way of historicizing and politicizing) the idea of fetishism have been legion – even leaving aside the concept’s circulation within Marxist and Freudian terminologies – but among the studies I have found most helpful, all of which orient themselves around the term’s imperialist beginnings in West Africa, are Pietz 1985, 1987, 1988; Mitchell 2005; Simpson 1982; Taussig 1980. For a fascinating appraisal of “the meaning of fetishism” in West Africa (“The Land of Fetish,” as he calls it) by a colonial anthropologist, see Rattray 1927: 9-24.

⁵“Pastor in Juju Scandal,” *The Daily Guide*, April 23, 2008.

are being fooled by these false prophets, these wolves in sheep's clothing!" I heard one preacher exclaim that week), as all of this was unfolding in much the same manner as a thousand such incidents have in northern Ghana, a follow-up interview with Kwaku Bonsam was broadcast on Joy FM and published the following day in the *Ghanaian Chronicle*. My friend Sammy, who heard the interview on a transistor radio in his drinking bar, was the first to call and tell me about it. As expected, there was to be no paucity of the sensationalistic. Moving quickly through a batch of preliminary questions, some of the responses to which I will discuss further below, the male interviewer (sounding nervous, Sammy recounted with a laugh) went on to ask:

Q: Is it true that some pastors come to you for powers?

KB: Yes, it is true. I give powers to perform miracles to a lot of pastors. Currently I have over one thousand, seven hundred and something pastors; I might need to look into my register for the figure.

Q: How do you give the powers to them?

KB: When they come to me I give golden rings to some of them after taking them through a ritual bath. I give them the ring and a Bible and the power I want them to get is what I put in the ring. I give some the power to heal, others to see into the future and/or the past, or to do anything I want them to. It helps their churches get more members, who always want to see signs and wonders.

And then, a few minutes later:

Q: What does a fetish priest know about false pastors?

KB: Why do they come to me all the time? Listen to how they preach in their churches and mention the names of their church members who have AIDS as if it is not an embarrassing disease and should be kept confidential. Such pastors preach with much arrogance and are not humble. Why are they riding in a lot of cars when their church members are hungry? The Bible itself says we should all bring our belongings, sell and share with the poor and needy. The necklace on the necks of some of [these pastors] is longer than that on a burger who just returned from Holland. (You might be too young to know what a ‘Burger Kuperlee’ is.) Some of these pastors are using the church for fashion parade and sell their anointing oils at very high prices – some as high as five hundred thousand cedis...

Q: But they aren’t all...

KB: Was that not why Jesus beat up the gamblers in the temple? Some pastors today are virtually being worshipped by their church members, when Jesus himself was a humble person. If we had time we would have gone into some biblical doctrines. But as for these so-called men of God, let them preach the gospel and leave me alone.⁶

Seventeen hundred “and something” pastors in Ghana whose wonder-working powers are alleged to have come from Kwaku Bonsam – and a social-theological critique to boot. This, it could be said with confidence, was no ordinary fetish priest. But then, the man who would become his challenger, the self-proclaimed Prophet One, turned out to be no ordinary pastor.

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The rod of Aaron redux. A spiritual showdown of epic proportions. “I urge you all to disregard the so-called Kwaku Bonsam and to detest his claims that he has powers and that some pastors even consult him for powers to establish churches. I am ready to face Kwaku Bonsam squarely and I will bring his evil works to an end on that day. I will command him to fall from his horse; he cannot match me because I serve the living God. As David confronted

⁶“I Give Pastors Kofi Kofi,” *Ghanaian Chronicle*, May 7, 2008

Goliath who was making a mockery of the Israelites, God's chosen people, so I will defeat Kwaku Bonsam to give glory to God. If he defeats me, go and burn my church.”⁷

To which the fetish priest replied: “I want the whole world to hear me loud and clear that I proudly accept to challenge Rev. Yiadom or any other pastor. I can conjure money from nowhere. I can plant a tree and make it grow that same day. I can pull the edge of a sharpened cutlass along my throat without it cutting me. And I can heal a lot of sicknesses.” He added, “I hear Rev. Yiadom can open the eyes of the blind, so I have gone to see the authorities of the School for the Blind at Akropong to tell them I need two busloads of blind people. I am also arranging for two busloads of the deaf and dumb plus a busload of cripples. I want to meet that pastor and his group for us to see who is who. Anytime he is ready I will face him live and colored, or else he is not the pastor he claims to be. He threw the challenge and I have accepted it. When we meet and I fail to do my wonders, then I should be called a liar. But I will laugh at him if he fails to do his part.”⁸

And laugh he would. Long story short, the pastor failed to “do his part”; he failed, in fact, to show up at all. It would no doubt be frivolous to dwell at too great a length on the accusations and counteraccusations, hyperbole and insults, conjectures and conspiracy theories that surrounded the pastor's surprising no-show, so I will try to limit myself to what seem to me the most significant details. Like many of Ghana's self-styled prophets, evangelists, and healers, an aura of inscrutability has attached itself to the biography and persona of Ebenezer Adarkwa Yiadom, popularly known as Ebenezer, with what little we know of his life trajectory

⁷ “Kwaku Bonsam Dares Man of God,” *Daily Guide*, May 3, 2008

⁸ “I Give Pastors Kofi Kofi,” *Ghanaian Chronicle*, May 7, 2008

coming mainly from sermons and public addresses and, much less frequently, the rare interview with the pastor himself. Yet the hesitancy and circumspection, the reticent air of “Well, if you *must* know” with which he has divulged the particulars of his early life, is surely intended to induce surprise when the drama (albeit, to be sure, drama of a somewhat generic sort) of his pre-ministry background is grudgingly conveyed. *I was a child, maybe fourteen or fifteen years old, when the Lord first called me. Yes, fourteen, because that’s when my mother died. By then life was very tough. I struggled to get a place to sleep, I couldn’t find anything to eat, so I had to leave home and stay with some Muslim friends who were Yorubas from Nigeria. Soon, there came the need for me to become a Muslim because I was staying with them. But on the day of my initiation, the Imam in charge called me aside and told me this: he said that the Lord had called me to be a pastor. He told me that he had two months more to spend on God’s earth, and that after his death I should leave the house and heed my divine calling as a man of God. Well, I soon found myself on the streets again, singing and going on dawn preaching⁹ and was surviving on what people gave me as gifts. I spent almost two years at Atwia in the mountains, praying, fasting, and waiting on God. I remember there was a time when a Good Samaritan had to put me in a basket and carry me on his head because I was too weak to descend the*

⁹ By “dawn preaching,” also known in charismatic circles as “dawn broadcasts,” Ebenezer is referring to a proselytizing technique whereby a young, typically itinerant evangelist stands outside the bedroom window of houses known to be occupied by unsaved or backslidden members of the community and, at the top of his lungs, preaches or recites verses of scripture. While less prevalent in the Muslim north, I have heard a number of (perhaps apocryphal) stories about zealous charismatic youth who attempted this practice in Tamale and were severely beaten as a result. In the larger cities of the south, on the other hand, where dawn broadcasts are much more common, the practice (like public preaching on lorries or *tro-tros*) is known to elicit begrudging admiration among bystanders and targeted parties alike.

mountain. “That is how far the Lord has brought me,” Ebenezer characteristically concludes, “and I have been doing God’s work for the past twenty-two years.”¹⁰

Doing God’s work, perhaps, but not uncontroversially. Though Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre, whose membership in 2008 was estimated at approximately 20,000, has managed to grow into one of the nation’s largest megachurches, with the requisite television program and a private radio station in Kumasi, its witch-finding, corpse-raising senior pastor (this among other titles; in recent years he has taken to referring to himself as Prophet One and, in more formal settings, Reverend Doctor Ebenezer Opambour Adarkwa Yiadom) has not, as they say in the churches, been “above reproach.” So it seemed an almost natural development when Ebenezer – who, as it happens, figures prominently in Jesse Weaver Shipley’s 2009 article on the emergence of “fake pastors” in Ghana, appearing first as the target of a scathing report by a hospital administrator and later as the subject of parody when the author’s friend fails to receive a promised healing – stepped forward as the fiercest challenger to Kwaku Bonsam and his declaration of having given, or rather sold, an unnamed multitude of pastors their spiritual anointing, for in the eyes of many Ghanaians Ebenezer would have felt especially threatened by the promulgation of such claims. For his part, and against those who contended that a man of God has no business provoking a fetish priest to a duel (a constant refrain on the web forums, with one person after another pointing out that “Jesus did not challenge the devil but rather rebuked him”), Ebenezer maintained that he got involved only

¹⁰ See, for instance, Halifax Ansah-Addo, “I Raised the Dead: An Interview with Rev. Adarkwa Yiadom,” *Daily Guide*, May 27, 2008

“when Kwaku Bonsam started shouting that he can perform the same miracles God is using His pastors to perform in the church,” arguing that, because “such claims would make many Christians stop attending church,” the fetish priest “had to be called to an open battle for the world to see who is more powerful – the God I serve or the fetish gods Kwaku Bonsam serves.”¹¹

But alas, on the day of the fateful showdown, the pastor was nowhere to be found.

The Jubilee Park, which was filled to capacity, simply exploded when the man who claims to be commander of spirituality finally arrived at the grounds ready for action. Hundreds of enthusiastic observers who started trooping to the grounds at about 10:00 am had to stand under the scorching sun for several hours waiting for the arrival of the two spiritual combatants. The glorious arrival of the famous fetish priest therefore brought much relief to the excited crowd who were expecting great miracles, though the Reverend Minister made no show. In a brief speech before he swung into action, Kwaku Bonsam said his mission was to shame Rev Adarkwa and his colleagues who claim to be men of God, so that people would come to the realization that there is dignity in traditional worship. He pointed out that he was battle-ready for any pastor who thinks he has what it takes to perform sensational miracles. Nana Kwaku Bonsam was given moral support by another fetish priest at Akabreso, a suburb of Obuasi, who told DAILY GUIDE that he also supplies juju to pastors. What promised to be an exciting show notwithstanding Rev Adarkwa’s unexpected absence, was intermittently disrupted by the thick crowd which became uncontrollable.

Though several police personnel were detailed to the grounds to ensure sanity, the crowd which grew bigger by the minute, overwhelmed the security agents, thereby making the maintenance of law and order difficult. Several jubilant observers had their valuables such as mobile phones, watches, and wallets stolen by miscreants, while others sustained minor injuries in their efforts to see Kwaku Bonsam perform. In spite of the difficulty in controlling the multitude, the celebrated traditional worshipper managed to put up several fantastic shows to the amazement of the crowd. Some of the wonders he displayed included the sowing of a palm nut seed which germinated right after planting, as well as conjuring live birds and monies in different denominations. Nana Kwaku Bonsam had to end the display of his spiritual exploits when the crowd

¹¹ Halifax Ansah-Addo, “I Raised the Dead: An Interview with Rev. Adarkwa Yiadom,” *Daily Guide*, May 27, 2008

jostled him in the struggle to grab some of the money he was conjuring. The renowned spiritual leader instead handed the undisclosed amount of money he commandeered to the leader of the police team detailed to the place, to be given to the Kumasi Children's Home. The thick crowd which was still determined to have a share of the money, nearly beat up the police officer but for the intervention of other officers around, who whisked him away in a waiting police vehicle. The police personnel had to fire tear gas and warning shots to disperse the crowd so the police leader could be taken away. Despite the bombardment of tear gas, the crowd still followed Nana Kwaku Bonsam and his entourage when he was leaving the Jubilee Park, therefore causing vehicular traffic on the road in front of the Prempeh Assembly hall.

This same article, one of several that appeared in the days following the near-faceoff, ends with an associate of the absentee pastor averring that Ebenezer was told at the last minute that the confrontation, originally scheduled to be held at Jubilee Park in Kumasi, had been moved that morning to the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation's forecourt in Accra.¹² When few, predictably, were convinced by this explanation, a widely ridiculed Ebenezer took to the airwaves and, with a degree of vitriol that shocked even his closest colleagues, began to heap curses upon anyone who would dare mock him. "In the name of the God that I serve faithfully," he told Nkosuo FM's listening audience that afternoon, "Any girl who teases me about this issue, I swear poverty will be her portion all the days of her life. And any boy who will make mockery of me about the Kwaku Bonsam affair will always be a slave and will beg before he gets his daily bread. I assure you that boy will never prosper in his life."¹³

¹²"Kwaku Bonsam Floors Pastor," *Daily Guide*, May 16, 2008

¹³"Pastor Gone Crazy?" *Ghanaian Chronicle*, May 21, 2008

An Economy of Wonders

There is a great deal more I could say about Kwaku Bonsam and Ebenezer Adarkwa Yiadom. I could mention Ebenezer's ensuing feud with Bishop Daniel Obinim, founder of International God's Way Church in Tema, over, among other things, accusations leveled by Obinim that his fellow pastor's spiritual prowess had been acquired by nefarious means, and fueled by Ebenezer's incensed riposte that Obinim, of all people, ought to know about such dealings with the darker side, since only days earlier, Ebenezer alleged, the Bishop had hired a group of men to bury snakes, candles, and human bones on the premises of Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre (on March 22, 2010, Obinim was cleared of the charges by Ghana's Attorney General).¹⁴ I could discuss the implications of Ebenezer's subsequent and very public upbraiding at the hands of Rev. Fred Degbe, General Secretary of the Christian Council of Ghana – and the latter's invocation of the oft-summoned Psalms 105:15 (“Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm”) in distancing himself, and thereby the Christian Council as well, from any insinuation that it was Ebenezer's status as a “man of God,” and not merely the pastor's actions on this particular occasion, that was being called into question.¹⁵ Or, alternatively, I could explore the ramifications of Kwaku Bonsam's growing celebrity in the wake of the Jubilee Park performance, or his disclosure in a much-discussed television interview of his longstanding membership in the Seventh Day Adventist church (“I am a Christian,” he announced, “and I cannot challenge Almighty God. I am called Steven Osei

¹⁴ “Police Query Bishop Obinim,” *Ghanaian Chronicle*, November 30, 2009; “Clash of Prophets: Obinim and Yiadom Battle on Television,” *Daily Guide*, October 1, 2009

¹⁵ “Christian Council Hits at Feuding Pastors,” *Daily Graphic*, October 27, 2009

Mensah”),¹⁶ or the all-night gatherings he organized in 2008 to pray for peaceful elections, or his increasingly savvy deployment of popular media technologies (including a personal website replete with Shakespeare quotes, multimedia galleries, client testimonials, and a detailed catalog of services provided).¹⁷ I could mention that, just this morning as I sat down to write this paragraph, I received an email notifying me that Nana Kwaku Bonsam had accepted my friend request on Facebook.

And yet, tempting though it may be to continue following Bonsam and Ebenezer into their fascinating and, to be sure, expertly engendered scenes of spectacle and controversy, I now want to return to the question, not only of the inextricability of miracles from the history and ongoing emplacement of Christianity in northern Ghana, but of the extent to which the very territory of the miraculous has been constituted by the encroaching threat of its surrounding waters: the possibility, in other words (to reverse Simon During’s earlier-cited formulation apropos of magic), that had miracle no enemies there would be no miracles at all (During 2003). This, I suggest, was as much the case with Father McCoy’s rain event – could there have been a miracle without the contrastive powerlessness of the *tendaana*, or, for that matter, the stubborn unbelief of the adjacent villages? – as it was of Ebenezer’s (arguably

¹⁶ “I am a Christian, says Devil,” *Daily Guide*, May 24, 2008.

¹⁷ In an unpublished essay, Birgit Meyer (2008) has observed that one of the striking aspects of Kwaku Bonsam’s sensational move into the national limelight is the way in which his adoption of popular mediatic forms has effectively eroded the longstanding image of “traditionalists” operating in a realm of shadowy secrecy in opposition to the conspicuous, nothing-to-hide practices of their Christian contemporaries. Indeed, Meyer suggests, it is precisely Bonsam’s *reversal* of this stereotype – whereby it is the charismatic pastors, with their clandestine dealings with fetish priests, that trade on secrecy, while the fetish priest himself assumes the role of making things public – that has served to consolidate his notoriety.

counterproductive) attempt to wrest miracles, precisely the kind “God is using His pastors to perform in the church,” away from their would-be usurper. Whatever equivalences can be said to obtain between these two moments, however, should not obscure the differential effects of their animating conditions. The British protectorate upon whose desiccated soil the rain poured down in 1932 was a considerably dissimilar place than the 21st century “African success story” via whose televisions and radios and internet café computers the stories and rumors surrounding the Bonsam-Ebenezer saga were disseminated. Without resorting to a facile presentation of Father McCoy’s world – the world he entered as much as the world he inculcated – as a neatly structured terrain of straightforward relationalities and obvious antagonisms, one in which everybody knew exactly who everybody else was (the administrators over there, the natives over here, the missionaries somewhere in between) and knew exactly which god(s) they worshipped, we can nevertheless register some of the critical reorderings, captured by what I earlier referred to as the ascendancy of an economy of wonders, that transpired over the intervening years. Take, as exemplary of these shifts, a sermon preached around the time leading up to the miracle showdown.

Real Power

He arrived at the house with a small black plastic bag hanging from the handlebar of his barely functioning motorbike. A newly christened “shepherd,” or lay minister, in the northern branch of the Accra-based megachurch Lighthouse Chapel, Emmanuel – single, in his mid-twenties, and hailing from a small village in the Ashanti Region – was fast becoming one my

primary guides through the thickets of Tamale's burgeoning charismatic landscape. I had read earlier that morning of Ebenezer's infuriated outburst on Nkosuo FM and was anxious to hear Emmanuel's thoughts on this latest development. "I've brought you something," he said as he approached the veranda, holding the plastic bag at his side. He had just come from a weekly pastoral meeting where, although the Ebenezer affair was only obliquely spoken of (this in keeping with a peculiar propriety I observed in many public gatherings, whereby talk of "some pastors" or "a certain political party" stood in for more direct references to a person or situation of which all present were, nonetheless, perfectly aware), the discussion quickly turned to the matter of spiritual anointing and the ways, in these "end times," by which to discern those who truly possess it. It had become clear from previous conversations with Emmanuel, who perpetually managed to exude an unflagging (and, to be honest, at times exasperating) confidence, that the downfall of Collins Yeboah and the ensuing embarrassment of Ebenezer had done little to diminish his faith, so it was unsurprising that he came away from the pastoral meeting with fresh artillery to combat any cynicism he might encounter. That afternoon, the cynicism, I suppose, turned out to be my own; the artillery turned out to be a compact disc. It had been handed out at the meeting, Emmanuel said, and he thought I would benefit from listening to it. The writing scrawled in marker on the CD's face announced what I took to be the title of a sermon, "3 Signs of an Evil Congregation," underneath which was written May 4, 2008 – the day, it occurred to me, after news initially broke of Ebenezer's challenge to Kwaku Bonsam. Late for another errand and so unable to stay and chat, Emmanuel said goodbye and, kick-starting the motorbike, urged me one last time to listen to the disc.

I listened to the sermon on my laptop, jotting down notes as it went along. The smooth, lightly accented voice of Dag Heward-Mills, the self-appointed Bishop of Lighthouse Chapel and founder of Healing Jesus Crusade International, was immediately recognizable, as was his trademark style of forgoing the usual prefatory anecdotes and launching directly into the theme in question. I could see why, in light of the week's events, Emmanuel and the leadership at Lighthouse would find this a timely sermon, for not only did it serve rather forcefully, and parodically, to distinguish pastors such as himself from "other" (again, this is the closest Heward-Mills will come to mentioning Ebenezer by name) less reputable figures, but it effectively secured, even intensified, the primacy of the miraculous in the face of an otherwise potential threat to its legitimacy. The second and third "signs of an evil congregation" – a congregation that fails to modify their behavior when confronted with the truth ("You easily hear the messages, but you don't *change*") and a congregation that refuses to travel to hear the Word of God ("Write it down: the prouder you are, the less willing you are to travel"), respectively – were given short shrift and quickly rushed through at the end; it was the first one, on the perils of being a "sign-seeking congregation," that was probed and unpacked at length. (We can surmise that Heward-Mills' admonition against being a "sign-seeking" church did not extend to the title of the sermon itself.) "It is an *evil* generation that craves signs. Such people, these Christians who run after signs and miracles, they are prone to sleeping with others [i.e., to frequenting other churches]. I wouldn't want to lead such people, because they're bound to be an *adulterous* people. You must be a *Word-loving* Christian instead of a *sign-loving* Christian."

Deftly shifting the onus of responsibility from the “man of God” to the individual believer, Heward-Mills soon has his own congregation in stitches with a series of exaggerated impersonations: first of a female church member telling her friend about an upcoming “all-nighter” featuring a prophet renowned for his ability to perceive dwarves in the surrounding trees, and then of a woman who leaves her church to follow an evangelist whose anointing consists in his extraordinary power to put audiences to sleep, and, finally, of a man who stops going to church because of a dream in which he sees a black cat with glowing eyes, and decides to begin attending “Glorious Identity Blessing Centre” where, henceforth, he is surrounded only by white cats. In one fell and undeniably funny swoop, I remember thinking at the time, Heward-Mills had contemptuously dismissed – as gullible, superstitious, and probably unfaithful – that large segment of the Ghanaian public that had been swept up and seduced by the spectacle of an impending spiritual contest between a pastor and fetish priest.

Writing now, my headphones again filled with the sound of several thousand laughing Lighthouse members, I am struck by the import of this specific juncture in the Bishop’s sermon. Had this, for instance, been the homily of an Anglican rector in late seventeenth-century England, such derisive caricatures of a prevalent thirst for “signs” and an excessive credulity among dissenting “Enthusiastics” would have been followed by a reaffirmation of the doctrine, going back to the early reformers and rooted in their repudiation of the ritualistic trappings (the saints, relics, and holy places) of Roman Catholicism, of the cessation of miracles after the apostolic period, or, if the preacher was more philosophically inclined, he might even have propounded a deist skepticism toward the very possibility of miracles as such (Champion 1992;

Daston and Park 1998; Harrison 1990).¹⁸ Had it, on the other hand, been Father Bazaanah, whose suspicions regarding the incursive charismatic churches were expressed to me in the wake of Kwaku Bonsam's scandalous unmasking of Collins Yeboah, a playful satirizing of the Ghanaian obsession with all things preternatural would have been followed by an exhortation to resist the allure of instantaneous effects and sensational outcomes and, in doing so, to hold fast to the practices of steadfastness, prayer, and repentance that characterize the Christian life. Dag Heward-Mills, however, without question one of the three or four most prominent pastors in Ghana and likely among the most influential religious leaders in West Africa, chose to take his sermon down a decidedly different route.

“Now what I'm telling you today,” he says as the laughter dies down, “could easily make you stop believing in miracles and wonders. But that would be equally mistaken. No, what I'm talking about today is *real* power.” He calls a woman forward to testify. The interview goes like this. *One time, I went to South Africa for a crusade, and you traveled from where? Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe, and I was ministering to you about what? Spiritual battles. Spiritual battles – after I ministered to you about spiritual battles, what did you do? I went home and resigned from my work. She resigned from her work! A power that moves a woman to resign! And then what happened? I came to join the ministry, and that day as I was listening to the Word... Come now, say it well!* As I was listening to the Word, I was transported to Mexico. *You were transported to Mexico! And you realized you could speak fluent Spanish – please, say something for us.* [Indiscernible Spanish spoken.] *Oh, our God is mighty!! And let me ask you something* [a hush falls over the auditorium]:

¹⁸ For an excellent survey of these perspectives, with particular attention paid to the significance of extant miracle claims in the formation of scientific institutions such as the Royal Society, see Shaw 2006: 21-50; 144-173.

did you need a visa to get to Mexico? The congregation erupts in cheers and laughter, as, one after the other, the Bishop beckons people to the stage to share their testimonies, all of which consist of having been supernaturally transported (for what duration of time it is unclear) to distant lands – this one to Ireland, the next to Papua New Guinea. Then, after making fun of “many of our African brothers and sisters” who will leave everything to follow the first evangelist or prophet who “can make them fall down in the Spirit,” came the dénouement. A man who has just given his testimony is told to lie down on the carpet, as though he has been slain in the spirit. “Reverend Prince,” he calls to one his assistants, “please, go to my office and get a measuring tape.” (In my headphones there is protracted murmuring as the assistant fetches the tape measure; presumably, the man on the carpet continues to lie still. I wonder if the congregation has any idea what’s going on; I certainly don’t.) “Okay, now measure from here... ..to here,” the Bishop says fourteen minutes later. It takes me a moment to realize they are measuring the distance between where the man was originally standing and where he is now positioned on the carpet. “.001 meter,” Reverend Prince dutifully announces in the microphone. “Okay, Prince,” the Bishop says, “now measure from here to Papua New Guinea.” Before he completes the sentence the congregation, finally comprehending the point of this elaborate demonstration, again bursts into wild applause and laughter. “Now I want to ask you a question: which one is *real* power? The one that takes you .001 meter, or the one that sends you around the world?!”

Here, finally – literally, affectively, and yes, quantifiably – seems to be the measure of the miraculous; suffice to say, it has little to do with the “weakness” of God.¹⁹ In his novel *Elizabeth Costello*, J.M. Coetzee stages a telling argument between Elizabeth, the aging Australian novelist of the book’s title, and her estranged sister, a classics scholar turned longtime missionary to South Africa. Nearing the end of an uncomfortable visit to the rural Zululand hospital her sister helped to establish, Elizabeth disdainfully remarks that perhaps, in the end, it would have been better for Europe to have kept its “utterly alien” religion to itself, or at least to have given Africans a choice between the beauty and aspirations of the Greeks and the “ugliness and mortality” of the crucified Christ. In response, waving her hand “towards the window, towards the hospital buildings baking under the sun, towards the dirt road winding up to the barren hills,” her missionary sister asserts that, given such a choice, Africans would invariably choose the latter. The Zulus, she says, know better. “This is reality: the reality of Zululand, the reality of Africa. It is the reality now and the reality of the future as far as we can see it. Which is why African people come to church to kneel before Jesus on the cross. Because they suffer and he suffers with them” (Coetzee 2003: 140-141).

19 The phrasing is Paul’s: “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength. Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one* might boast in the presence of God.” (I Corinthians 1:21-29, NRSV)

Yet the Bishop's words, as with nearly all of the prayers, conversations, songs, and sermons recorded in this dissertation, seem to suggest otherwise. Here is a *mighty* Christianity, a *conquering* Christianity. If these "African people come to church," it is not to "kneel before Jesus on the cross," and it most definitely is not because "they suffer and he suffers with them." It is because he is resurrected and they are resurrected with him. Because death has been destroyed, the darkness vanquished. *This* is the "reality of Africa" – or, in any case, the reality whose arrival in a tiny area of that continent's west coast this dissertation is trying to come to terms with.

It was a miracle that brought Christianity to northern Ghana, and today – amid the scandals and accusations, amid the Bonsams and Yeboahs and Ebenezers, amid the specter of "evil congregations" – the efficacies of the miraculous remain very much intact. Return again to the crucial point in the Bishop's sermon, the point at which he has just comically and unequivocally denounced the folly, the "evil," of being a sign-chasing congregation, a denunciation so comical and unequivocal that he realizes how easily it could lead his church to reject miracles and wonders *tout court*. And so the decisive move: "What I'm talking about today is *real* power." The "real" in this locution is as significant as the "power." The "real," in marking the critical refutation, in carrying out the differentiating break, intensifies the "power"; in fact, one could argue, it is constitutive of it. Contained within this "*real* power" is the subtle dialectic of falsification and vitality, refusal and potency; it looks backward in disavowal, forward in anticipation. The testimonies, the teleportations, the measuring tape – these do the

indispensable work of showing that the Bishop is not merely talking about “*real* power.” He is living and breathing it.

Note, then, that “critique” (i.e., the critique, or negation, insinuated by the descriptor “real”) is not prior to or outside of this demonstration of power, as though the act itself were merely, so to speak, the icing on the epistemological cake; rather, critique becomes inseparable from and consists precisely in the demonstration of power, and vice versa. As with Aaron and Moses in Pharaoh’s court – whereby the invalidation, and, in a very real way, the naming and making of sorcery is wholly immanent to the moment in which one snake eats the other – so, too, with what I am describing as the Bishop’s double gesture of denigration and display. The object of denigration (whether “magic,” “fetish,” “juju,” or, for that matter, “some pastors”) and the force of demonstration are mutually implicated in the sense that it is exactly a weaker or specious or even dangerous power that is being mobilized (indexed, conjured up) not only to render the attendant display that much more potent or effective, but – and this is the fundamental move – to constitute the object *as* object in the instant that the miracle is constituted *as* miracle. In “*real* power” we see how miracle makes its others. And likewise, it seems to me, how those others make the miraculous.

The previous chapter concerned itself with tracking the variable modalities by which the limits and frontiers of what is pronounced or otherwise *shown* to be the genuinely miraculous have been identified, modulated, and often polemically reinscribed. Here I want to propose that the work of purification, of boundary drawing and the separation of elements, remains as urgent a task in Ghana’s charismatic churches as it was for their forebears and

counterparts (and not only their Protestant forebears and counterparts) throughout the Christian tradition – including Father Bazaanah and, we might add, certain philosophers and anthropologists. In fact, one could make a convincing case that if “Pentecostalism” or “charismatic” name anything, it is the radicalization of that reformist impulse and its concomitant intrusion into the deepest depths of praxis and interiority. And yet, by ridding themselves of the doctrinal, liturgical, and institutional infrastructure – ridding themselves, in short, of the very idea of tradition – that for centuries supplied at least a modicum of assistance in discerning the coordinates of truth and falsity, these churches (a term I use advisedly, as the designation “church” is itself rejected by some charismatics) find themselves in a situation whereby the impetus for purification (and hence the conditions for anxiety and suspicion) grow ever more acute while the determination and maintenance of the most basic identifications becomes increasingly problematic.

When I point – tentatively, provisionally – to the displacement of a “theology of signs” in favor of an “economy of wonders,” I mean to signal just such a drift toward this precarious, anxiety-inducing play of freedom and indeterminacy (but then, many charismatics would say that this play of freedom and indeterminacy is as good a definition as any for the work of the Holy Spirit). In an economy of wonders, it is not so much that the sign (*semeion*) is now subordinate to power (*dynamis*, or potentiality), but that *semeion*, for all intents and purposes, has collapsed into and become indistinguishable from *dynamis*. Among theologians as well as anthropologists, it has long been the question of “source” (or, put in slightly different terms, mediation), as opposed to the “result” or “effect,” that has served to distinguish miracles from

magic – the *OED* takes this for granted when it defines miracle as an “event not ascribable to human power or the operation of any natural force and is therefore attributed to supernatural, esp. divine, agency” – and it has above all and necessarily been by way of a theological forensics that such sources have been established.²⁰ However, to the extent that *semeion* and *dynamis* have come to be regarded as essentially coterminous with one another, so that the source of miraculous power (God or nature? Man or Satan?) is taken to be recognizable primarily through its effects, or lack thereof, it is the *magnitude of the effect* that becomes the locus of circumscription: it is in the contrast between .001 meter and whatever distance separates Accra from Papua New Guinea that the evidence of divine action is taken to reside. (And in this, perhaps, we are reminded of the ambiguity of miracle’s Latin roots, where *mirari*, from which *miraculum* emerges, lays emphasis not on the “source” but on the feeling certain phenomena evoke in their witnesses, a feeling of wonderment.) Consequently it is particularly alarming when Kwaku Bonsam professes to be able to bring about *the same effects*, to quote Ebenezer, “as God is using His pastors to perform in the church,” and more threatening still when the capacity of those pastors to perform miracles is revealed to derive from Kwaku Bonsam, which

²⁰ The hegemony of this view among anthropologists is striking. In a review essay, Robert Shanafelt (1994) notes that for anthropologists from Frazer to Radin to the Turners, the difference between miracles and magic has tended to rest not in the character of the “result,” but in its *source*. The issue of mediation is central, in that, for people like Radin, there is in “every magical act” an attempt to establish “a relation of such a kind to the object that it can literally be at one with the ego” (319). In this sense, miracles differ from magic inasmuch as the former is thought to be the manifestation of a transcendent God, and the latter the result of “those who connect to a spiritual immanent realm in nature” (319). Likewise for the Turners, while the sacred pilgrimages they studied may have *resembled* magic (or, precisely, “contagious magic”), they in the end rejected this category, in favor of “miracle,” because the pilgrimage was *mediated* “through a carefully learned theology of incarnation...” – that is, like others, they saw the difference between miracles and magic in terms of their variable (i.e., immanent or transcendent) sources, and in terms of the overarching theology that provides pilgrims with the interpretive skills to recognize this source.

is to say, taking the fetish priest's surname at face value, from none other than the Devil himself.²¹ Amidst this economy of wonders, theology is by no means obsolete. It simply becomes ad hoc and improvisatory. And as long as it works, there is always the measuring tape.

²¹ Such a scenario, it seems, would have been unthinkable for church authorities like Augustine, who, Marina Warner reports, believed that “the devil cannot perform real miracles or alter real phenomena,” for the devil is only “a mimic, an actor, a performance artist, who imitates the wonders of nature and the divine work of creation. He is merely the ape of God, the master of lies, of imitating and simulating and pretending – impotent when it comes to really altering substance and matter” (2006: 123-124).

PART II

Chapter 3

“And the Light Has to Push Against It”

Victoria

Victoria pulled two plastic chairs from a stack of six or seven and wiped them down with a dirty cloth; the cooler but oppressively gusty days of the harmattan had been upon the region for several weeks, coating every surface indoors and out with a thick layer of fine red dust courtesy of the Sahel. Navigating the labyrinthine paths leading from the lorry stand at Hospital Road to the cluttered hodgepodge of stalls and kiosks among which their house is situated was rendered especially difficult this morning by the “harmattan haze,” as it’s affectionately called, whose density at times (but fortunately not too often in Tamale) made finding my way about in this overcrowded neighborhood a decidedly frustrating task. By the time I reached their house, however, the winds had died down considerably, and Victoria, bundled in a heavy winter coat, suggested that I wait outside while Kwesi finished his morning devotions. Taking the chair opposite me we chatted for a couple of minutes, laughing each time she interrupted herself to sneeze into her hands. “Does it ever get so *coold* in your hometown?” she asked with an exaggerated shiver, turning incredulous at my account of a recent ice storm in Durham that managed to bring down dozens of telephone lines and even more so at my description of the annual springtime pollen that manages to do to our cars and houses what the harmattan dust does to theirs.

Victoria’s laid-back demeanor was a welcome foil to Kwesi’s austere intensity, and on the few occasions when the three of us were together – for a shared meal or, like today, when

Kwesi asked that we meet at the house instead of his shop – we took pleasure in teasing him into a more affable mood. Both in their early thirties (although I recall Kwesi saying she was a few years younger), they had been married for about three and a half years when we first met; their daughter, Suzanna, now crawling around in the dirt in front of us, was almost a year old at the time. They live modestly to say the least, their rented house consisting of a single bedroom, a tiny kitchen, and a common area whose sparse furnishings, resting on a concrete floor covered over by “plastic carpet,” included two threadbare couches, a tape player, a VCR, and a color TV, all of which have definitely seen better days. To Victoria’s dismay, there is no bathroom in the house; rather, a row of four wooden lavatories (two male, two female) have been constructed beyond the veranda and are shared among the neighbors. As far as I can tell, their sole luxury possession, one which initially led me to assume they were relatively well-off, is the car sitting proudly beside the house, an early model Nissan Maxima given to Kwesi by a senior brother living in Cape Coast. The car is integral to the success of Kwesi’s ecclesial and secular vocations alike (in addition to his work at the church, he has recently opened a small but surprisingly profitable perfume shop in town), allowing him to travel and pick up congregants in service to the former and to exude the appearance of affluence so critical to the latter. And, indeed, to the former as well.

From joking about the weather our conversation turns to Tamale and the village to which Kwesi and I will be traveling this morning for a weekly Bible study. “So tell me, how do you find this place?” Victoria asks with a wry grin, bending forward to take Suzanna into her arms. Before I can answer Kwesi calls to her from inside the house. Excusing herself, Victoria

goes to see what he needs. I can tell from her tone of voice, from the vaguely – how to put it? – conspiratorial way she asked the question that she expected me to share her feelings about *this place*, feelings that, as with many *ayaagdogo* (foreigners, aliens, from the south) who have settled in the area, are bound to be ambivalent at best. I gleaned from previous interactions with Victoria that leaving her family and friends in Kumasi, where she and Kwesi began their relationship, had been quite painful, made especially so by the threat, real or imagined, that some iteration of the so-called Guinea Fowl War of 1994-95, or, more recently, the riots that followed the decapitation of the Dagomba paramount chief in 2002, might reignite the Northern Region at any moment. But employment in Kumasi was hard to come by for the newlywed couple, and they believed that Tamale, with its fast growing population and comparatively untapped commercial prospects, would prove a more auspicious environment in which to start a life together.

Still, their first two years in the north were fraught with financial frustrations: not only did Kwesi's plan of becoming an electronics dealer fall through when a family friend reneged on his promise to secure a regular supply of used gadgets and appliances from a cousin in the diaspora, but this lack of income meant that the "chop bar" (food stand) Victoria hoped to open – she had graduated with a degree in Hospitality and Tourism Management from Kumasi's esteemed Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology – was looking less and less feasible. So, in the absence of steady work, they threw themselves into the daily activities of a nearby branch of Lighthouse Chapel, whose small but vivacious congregation, many of them Ashantis like themselves, provided Kwesi and Victoria with the moral and spiritual support they

so badly needed, as well as, significantly for Victoria in particular, the comfort of a familiar sociality. The church also, crucially, provided them with a way of renarrating – transvaluing – their arrival and subsequent hardships in the northern capital, recasting what had originally been a rather prosaic desire for employment and financial opportunity (mixed, to be sure, with a degree of longstanding Akan prejudice toward the hinterland and its inhabitants) into a divinely ordered assignment, a *great commission*, oriented around the redemption and eventual reclamation of the region itself. In fact, in retrospect, Kwesi would draw a striking parallel between the lukewarm faith and accompanying indigence that characterized their (his and Victoria’s) early experience in Tamale and the aberrant condition of the “Muslim stronghold” in which they now resided – a condition which, much like their own, would surely stand someday as a testament to the transformative power of the living God.

Minutes later, when Kwesi joins me outside, I notice that in spite of the cool weather streaks of perspiration are making their way down his shirt and forehead. With a hasty greeting he apologizes for interrupting my conversation with Victoria. “The two of you can talk when we return,” he says over his shoulder, walking quickly toward the car. “We were supposed to be at Fushegu at eleven.” Victoria catches my glance and rolls her eyes with a sigh of exasperation. *Then why did you take so long with your devotions?* her gesture seems to reply. Yet she knows better than anyone that when it comes to his morning devotions, or any activity having to do with his ministry or discipleship – which, even when he is at the shop, comprises the bulk of his waking hours – her husband simply cannot be rushed. It calls to mind something Kwesi once told me about his understanding of time, an understanding which, as he describes

it, denotes the distance between his past and present spiritual compartment. *You know, if this land is going to be won for the Lord – and we know it will – we will need to begin to walk in a new sense of time. More than our energy, more than our resources, it will require patience. That is the main difference between nominal Christians and those who have genuine faith – more than anything, to be born again is to learn patience. Of course, there is urgency, but there is no anxiety; that is the main difference. We need to rest and know that God is in control. We need to hurry, but we don't need to hurry, if you understand me... It's just like the Devil: we are aware of his plans, we are aware of his schemes, but it is not our focus. It is the same with time. We are aware of the urgency of the time, but that is not what drives us. Because once that begins to drive you, then you have become a slave to time – and isn't that what the Devil wants to do, to make us a slave to time? So we are aware of the urgency, we need to be aware of the urgency of the time – the scripture says we need to redeem it because the times are evil! So we are aware of time, we are aware that our world is timed. But that should not be our driving force – in other words, time should not become our master. Jesus Christ is our master. But we need to be aware of time, because it's finite. I need to be aware that twenty-four hours is all I have today and any other day, but I also need to be aware that in that twenty-four hours, which belongs to God, he is going to guide me in how to use it. So I need to be listening very closely... You know, I used to think that the things charismatics did was a waste of time – the prayer, the fasting, always waiting on the Lord. But to be born again means to know that it is God who owns time, not the Enemy. The Enemy wants us to be impatient, to hurry because time is running out. But we know that with God, we have all the time we need...*

I say goodbye to Victoria and ask if we can continue talking later. I'm concerned that our abrupt departure may have hurt her feelings – and besides, I'm hoping she will have more

to say about her experience in the region. “Of course, don’t worry about it,” she responds with a smile. By now Suzanna is resting snugly against her back. I roll down the Nissan’s dust-covered window and watch as she restacks the plastic chairs. She waves again as the car pulls away. There is a hint of melancholy, even dejection, that tinges her typically playful demeanor. Perhaps she was hoping to come along with us? Then again, I suspect that staying alone in their dusty house and joining us in the village are probably equally unappealing options.

In Fergusonia

Prior to the induction of the “tribes of the Ashanti hinterland” into the ethnological canon with the publication of R.S. Rattray’s landmark study by that name in 1932, prior even to the fleeting but momentous appearance of those tribes in Rattray’s earlier inquiries into Asante law and constitution, religion and art, there had already accumulated, thanks largely to the efforts of a certain George Ekem Ferguson, a body of knowledge about the inhabitants of the northern savanna that would prove indispensable to the acquisition of that land and its people during the closing years of the nineteenth century. A Fanti born in 1864 in the central Gold Coast port town of Anomabu, Ferguson was “among the outstanding West Africans of his generation,” eulogizes one contemporary historian, having “carved out for himself a career in government service by his ambition and intelligence, his education at Methodist schools in Cape Coast and Sierra Leone, and his luck in catching the notice of a British governor at a time when a mere handful of Africans were being recruited for minor clerical posts in the Gold Coast government” (Dumett 1975: 716-718). Ferguson’s was an abbreviated, accomplished – or as

accomplished as was possible for a Gold Coast native at the time – yet generally unsung career; between his death at the hands of Samori’s Sofa army in 1897 (he was thirty-three when he died) and the publication of his field reports in 1974, only once did Ferguson’s life and work receive any kind of serious scholarly assessment (Thomas 1972). That his numerous competencies, which ranged from a talent for mapmaking and diplomacy to geography, linguistics, mineralogy, and astronomical physics, were put to decisive use in the consolidation of British jurisdiction over the savanna hinterland is, however, now undisputed among students of the prehistory of the area’s fraught contemporaneity.

On April 25, 1892, Ferguson set out from Accra on what was to become a six-month expedition into the outer reaches of his known world. “It has been decided by Her Majesty’s government,” read a telegraph sent a few weeks earlier from Lord Knutsford, Secretary of State for the Colonies, to the Governor of the Gold Coast, Sir William Brandford Griffith, “that steps should be taken to secure the influence of Great Britain over the Hinterland of the Gold Coast beyond the 9th parallel of latitude, and I have to request an efficient officer at once for this purpose.” If possible, the message went on to say, treaties should be sought with the local rulers – “not treaties of protection, but treaties of free commerce and friendship,” the latter establishing, at least for the time being, a less formal relationship than the definite political configuration entailed by the former¹ – with the additional stipulation that “the Native Chiefs

¹ Included in such “treaties of friendship” was the provision that “British subjects shall have free access” to all parts of the territory in question, and “shall have the right to build houses and possess property according to the laws in force in the Gold Coast Colony; and they shall have full liberty to carry on such trade or manufacture as may be approved by any Officer appointed for the purpose of Her Majesty’s Government and should any difference arise between the aforesaid British Subjects and the King, Chiefs or Principal Headmen of the Country as to the duties

should bind themselves not to accept the protection of or make any treaty with another Power without the consent of Her Majesty's Government" (quoted in Arhin 1974: 66). With France advancing from the northwest and Germany from the east, the British authorities had grown apprehensive about maintaining the integrity of the Gold Coast's trade circuits, some of whose primary loci were situated within the savanna region which, as of 1892, had yet to be placed under the protection, or for that matter the "friendship," of any foreign Power. The Governor's decision to send Ferguson to negotiate the treaties that would render Great Britain the sole claimant on the interior terrain was a predictable one, for not only had the young surveyor shown himself to be a capable diplomat in his first mission to Atebubu, a contested Asante province, two years earlier, but he was simply among the very few colonial officers who possessed the skills and, more significantly, the stamina that the physically demanding frontier work would require. For Ferguson, a zealous champion of the British administration and its humanizing endeavors – the editor of his collected papers conjectures that he was "either too young or too busy to philosophize on the rightness or wrongness of colonial rule," adding, somewhat halfheartedly, that his enthusiasm was "probably due to a concern for the advancement of his own peoples" (ibid., xi-xii) – it seems that his decision to leave the

or customs to be paid to the said King Chiefs or the Principal Headmen of the towns in that Country by such British subjects, or as to any other matter, that the dispute shall be referred to the Officer mentioned in Article IV whose decision in the matter shall be binding and final; and that the King Chiefs and Principal Headmen will not extend the rights hereby guaranteed to British Subjects to any other persons without the knowledge and consent of such Officer." It further stated that "Her Majesty's Government will respect the customs of the Country but will not permit human sacrifices, and slave dealing when brought to the notice of the Government will be punished according to the laws of the Gold Coast Colony" (Arhin 1974: 150-151).

familiarity of the coast for the as yet uncharted environs beyond Asante was an equally unambivalent one. (It is with obvious pride that Ferguson, quoting Ernst Georg Ravenstein, describes himself as taking part in “a race for African territory which has been nowhere as active than in the region which lies between the Gold Coast and the lower Niger” [ibid., 115]). Five years later, in the wake of his death and brutal dismemberment near Wa in what is today the Upper West Region of Ghana, Lieutenant R.N. Henderson wrote that with Ferguson’s passing he had lost “a valued friend and the Colony an invaluable servant,” one whose “untiring devotion to duty and readiness to give any assistance in his power shall never be forgotten” (ibid., 165).

The documentation of Ferguson’s forays into the terrain he often referred to as “our Hinterland” provides a striking counterpart to the encyclopedic, mostly depoliticized (and for that reason arguably more insidious) writings of government ethnographers like Rattray and A.W. Cardinall, to say nothing of the ethnographic portraits offered by subsequent researchers such as Fortes and Goody. Unlike these later anthropologists, Ferguson harbored no illusions about the nature of his investigations nor about the moral, political, and economic projects they would be put into the service of bolstering. The geography of the interior was to be assessed solely for the purpose of exploiting its material resources, while the life forms of its inhabitants were to be catalogued only to ascertain the likelihood of their susceptibility to British influence – or, failing that, their capacity to resist the persuasiveness of British weaponry.

Letters to his superiors are schematic in this regard, precise in their enumeration: no extraneous details, no superfluous pedantry. Take, for instance, Ferguson’s account (c. 1894)

of his travels in Bona and neighboring territories, conveniently split into four discreet topics: (A) “The resources of our interior”; (B) “The condition of the people composing it”; (C) “The extent of our influence therein”; and (D) “Its boundaries considered in relation to the commercial requirements of the Colony” (ibid., 98). The report’s effortless movement from matters of fauna and topography – from crystalline rocks, paleozoic sandstones, elephants, buffaloes, gazelles, malvaceous plants, groundnuts, indigo, gum, and other resinous trees – to matters of custom and dress, and thus from a preoccupation with the variable intransigence of a landscape to the variable intransigence of a population, is by no means unforeseen in the annals of imperial reconnaissance. Likewise, that Ferguson’s calculus of extraction would look upon this newly encountered frontier as a barely differentiable mass of minerals, trees, animals, soil, and human bodies, with an eye to the possibility of their eventual cultivation, is hardly anomalous in and of itself.² What is remarkable are the ways in which the undeniably generic disposition of such reports manages to contrive the highly specific lineaments of a territory and a people, or a territory-people, a *cible*, in the Foucauldian sense of a “targeted complex of men and things,” at the moment of its appearance as an object of modern power.³

² On the convergence in the colonial encounter of “cultivation” in both its moral-developmental and agrarian valences – the cultivation, in other words, of desires and habits as much as land and soil – see Pandian 2009. The theme of cultivation is also explored at length in Chapter 4.

³ Discussing Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, Foucault specifies the object or target of sovereign power as a territory, on the one hand, and its inhabitants on the other. He distinguishes this principle of sovereignty from that of government, the latter being concerned, following its conceptualization by Guillaume de La Perrière, with the proper arrangement of “men and things,” or “men in their relationships... with things like wealth, resources, means of subsistence, and, of course, the territory with its borders, qualities, climate, dryness, fertility, and so on,” as well as with “things like accidents, misfortunes, famine, epidemics, and death” (Foucault 2007: 91-98). In conflating these two modalities of rule (sovereignty and government) I do not mean to disregard the salience of Foucault’s analysis, but rather want to suggest that at this early point in the hinterland’s colonial trajectory power

This simultaneous inscription and inauguration of what will come to be glossed simply as “the north” is exhibited most acutely in Ferguson’s taxonomy of “the condition of the people composing it.” Here it was necessary that the homogenizing impulse succumbed to by many of his fellow officers be eschewed in favor of a classificatory scheme more commensurate with his present purposes, the fulfillment of his mission being dependent, after all, upon the existence of a stratum or remnant of native rulers for whom an agreement with the British would be regarded as not only obligatory but advantageous. To this end, Ferguson subdivides the “principle elements in the Hinterland of the Gold Coast Colony” into two basic categories: “semibarbarous tribes with a form of organized government,” on the one hand, and “wild tribes, naked [and] living in independent family communities” on the other (Arhin 1974: 105). (Later, significantly, he would amend the list to include “Mahomedan converts and traders.”) Among the first group, whose modes of rule are characterized as “despotic” and generative of an “an almost superstitious reverence for the person of the King,” Ferguson had little trouble procuring the desired treaties. In fact, so amenable were these “tribal potentates” to the Colony’s overtures that Ferguson at one point declared, with an uncharacteristic, almost giddy candor, that “had our policy some years ago permitted us to extend our influence northward it is my belief that the ‘white man who conquered Ashanti’ [a reference to the invasion of Kumasi in 1873] would have founded a large empire northward of the Gold Coast” (ibid., 74).

had not yet ossified into a single programmatic logic or strategy. On the notion of a “cible” in relation to Foucault’s account of the arts of governing, see Mbembe 2001: 134.

About the second group, however, particularly the so-called “Gurunshi” tribes scattered throughout the middle Volta savanna (included among whom, incidentally, were the Talensi later made famous by Meyer Fortes), he was a great deal less sanguine.⁴ “The people are very low in the scale of civilization,” he wrote,

and resist intercourse, even among their own selves, with showers of arrows. These people, together with Lobi, Dafina, Nieniege, and Kaprisi, move about in perfect nudity, their lips, noses, and ears, are pierced, into which straws and beads are inserted as ornaments. They all appear to have similar ideas and practise fetishism. They believe that spirits are white and that the phantom spirit of man could leave his body and practise witchcraft. Some of them, principally those through which caravans fight their way, live in village communities with a strong man (who has arrogated to himself the position of a chief) as the head of the community. He demands transit dues and makes various extortions which are often the cause of a fight. As a tribe or district, none of them is capable of negotiating with a European Power, and can only be civilized by the force of arms (ibid., 76).

If British influence (“prestige”) among the centralized tribes was destined to ensure their continued fealty,⁵ there seemed to be little prospect of securing the allegiance of the “wild

⁴ The appellation “Gurunshi” (or “Gurunsi”), like “Frafra,” was likely concocted by Mossi-Dagomba intruders and had clear pejorative connotations. First appearing in the historical record in 1817, when it was said that “Gooroosie” lay two days’ journey north of Gambaga, Allman and Parker observe that for both the warrior elites of the savanna states and their Asante overlords, and ultimately for the agents of European conquest, the term carried particular implications of primitive isolation and violent barbarity. Yet attempts at defining the exact boundaries and constituent ethnic identities of these “Gurunsi” peoples would be fiercely debated among early colonial administrators and ethnographers on both sides of the Anglo-French imperial frontier (Allman and Parker 2005: 30-31, 56-57).

⁵ Ferguson discovered upon arriving in the north that the British had already accrued a certain amount of “prestige” due to their having earlier “rid the area of the savage oppression and barbarous tyranny of Ashanti.” Prior to the British occupation of Kumasi in 1873-74, the Asantehene had demanded an annual tribute of 1,000 slaves from Gonja and Dagomba, and in order to obtain the slaves, Ferguson explains, these kingdoms were compelled to conduct raids among the weaker tribes. Thus it was not only or primarily to protect against the imperialist advances of France and Germany that the northern rulers entered, usually enthusiastically, into treaties with the British; it was also to maintain their autonomy in the face of threatening neighbors. (This partly accounts for why, on the cusp of independence, the majority of northerners – and not, as is often assumed, only the chiefs – balked at the idea of decolonization, fearing as they did a return to the pre-colonial hegemony of southern interests.) This prestige, Ferguson suggested, “can be used to good advantage... and from a philanthropic, as well

tribes” in the absence of concerted military action; as senior administrator A.W. Cardinall put it nearly forty years after Ferguson’s expedition, in an effort to justify for posterity the deployment of martial tactics and the subsequent imposition of chiefs as a necessary response to the “chaos” the British had encountered in much of the Northern Territories: “Conditions in the North were even worse and the present districts along the Northern frontier were in so anarchic a state that the astute Mr. Ferguson found himself forced to ignore them in his great treaty-making expedition of 1894, for therein he could place his finger on no single king” (cited in Hawkins 2002: 109). Still, Ferguson believed that if the outcomes achieved through these operations were to be sustainable, an intensive and systematic “analysis of the diverse dialects” of these tribes, along with a “comparative study of their customs, manners, history, migrations, wars, and in short all of their physical and political features” would need to be undertaken (ibid., 116). This, of course, was a gap all too willingly filled by Rattray and his colleague ethnographers.

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“One or several people setting off to drift, for a more or less extended period of time, forsake generally accepted reasons to displace oneself and to act, as well as their personal relationships, work and hobbies, to follow the pull of the land and its corresponding encounters.”⁶ Over the ensuing years, as with other liminal zones across Africa and beyond,

as economic, point of view nothing should be done to compromise or sacrifice it” (Arhin 1974: 101).

⁶ Guy Debord, “Theory of Drifting,” quoted in Phillippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* (New

some would drift into the interior landscape; others would *go* there. The difference between these forms of movement lies in something like a sensibility or disposition, the accumulated longings, fears, seductions, and repudiations that impel one to take off in a particular direction, and in a particular way. It would be foolish to assume that the forces that propelled Ferguson along his own trajectory could be deduced from the three hundred or so pages of reports and official letters he left behind – reports and letters, presumably, that constitute a very different genre, and therefore a very different assemblage of tonalities and affects, than that of the memoirs or travelogues scrutinized, for instance, by Johannes Fabian in his absorbing study of the sensuous, often inebriated fever dreams of explorers in central Africa (Fabian 2000), or by Ann Laura Stoler in her careful investigation of the “rough interior ridges of governance,” the epistemic dead-ends, confusions, hesitations, and insecurities, disclosed in the letters and diaries of the nineteenth-century colonizers of the Netherlands Indies (Stoler 2008). Suffice it to say that the story of this African polymath and homegrown civil servant, whose aspirations and uncertainties remain so peculiarly obscure to us and yet whose legacy continues to suffer the fate of all the predictable reductions, has still to be adequately written.⁷

And so we are left with the “land and its corresponding encounters.” Looking forward to the panoply of stereotypes, images, and events, to the range of diagnostics (political,

York: Zone Books, 2004), 171

⁷ “Ekem Ferguson Needs a Lasting Memorial,” *Ghana News Agency*, July 14, 2003, accessed at: <http://www.modernghana.com/news/37394/1/ekem-ferguson-needs-a-lasting-memorial-omanhene.html>

humanitarian, religious, economic) according to which the pathologization of “the north” will persist into the following two centuries, while at the same time looking back at the pre-colonial expropriations and prejudices that found the inhabitants of the region variously figured as fearsome, spiritually formidable, and of questionable humanity, Ferguson’s papers comprise an opening, a portal of sorts, through whose timeworn architecture of banal reportage and indignant moralism the futures past of northern Ghana can be glimpsed in all the contingencies of their emergence.

And then, of course, there is the name itself. If, as Wittgenstein once remarked, the act of naming might be construed as a kind of occult procedure, where “[n]aming appears as a queer connexion of a word with an object” (Wittgenstein 2001 [1953]: 16e),⁸ then it comes as little surprise that Dr. J.B. Danquah, one of Ghana’s founding fathers, would seek to conjure for his incipient nation an unbreakable filiation between the life of a long-deceased Fanti surveyor and the life of the territories he helped “discover”:

I conceive that the first act of the constitution-making body will be to make a clean break away from the memories of the old days of exploitation and imperialism, and the colonial adjective Gold Coast will give way to the substantive name of the people of the country, Ghana and Ghanaland. The Colony will become South Ghana, Ashanti will remain Ashanti, and the Northern Territories, which were made part of the Gold Coast by the enterprise of George Ekem Ferguson of Anomabu, will become either North Ghana or Fergusonia.⁹

⁸ According to Wittgenstein, the act of naming comes to resemble an “occult process” or, switching metaphors, the “baptism of an object” when, as he famously put it, “language goes on holiday,” which for him looks something like the philosopher who tries to bring out the relation between name and thing by staring at a given object and, mantra-like, repeating the word “this” over and over again (Wittgenstein 2001 [1953] 16e).

⁹ J.B. Danquah, *The Doyen Speaks: Some of the Historic Speeches* (Accra: West African Graphic Company, 1956), 7, cited in Kwame Okoampa-Ahoofe, *Dr. J.B. Danquah: Architect of Modern Ghana* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2005), 58

Kingspride

He whispers solemnly after finishing the prayer. *Let me tell you a story.* This is our fourth or fifth semiformal interview (pen and notepad, recorder in plain sight) since I returned to Tamale to commence extended fieldwork, and, like every previous such meeting with him, we have begun with a word of prayer. But this time, standing behind me with one hand placed gently on my head and the other on my shoulder, he spends several minutes praying God's protection over me, asking that his Spirit encompass and accompany me all the days of my life, that I will feel God's pleasure as I go about my research. It is a moving prayer, and I can tell from his words and the way he speaks them, the way he tenderly, meditatively intones "God I pray, God I pray" before finally saying amen that, despite everything that has passed between us over the last several years, despite the distance between this moment and the days when in all seriousness he would introduce me as his son, I still mean something to him. Reflecting now, today, I can't help but feel embarrassed by how much I prized such moments. It's been a long time since we've spoken.

"Let me tell you a story," he says again, settling onto the couch. "To help you understand what you're dealing with as you move around."

One day we were coming from Duba, a village near the Volta River. And we came to a town, near the main road on the way to Bolga, called Gushiegu. But just before we got to the town, we saw a little girl walking, carrying a bucket of water on her head. Just as we saw her, she also saw us. She stood there,

staring at the truck. Then she began to run. She dropped the bucket of water and started running. She kept running and running and running – she was running very hard. Finally she fell. But before we could reach her, she got up and ran into her village. And the running that she was running, we could see that it was no ordinary running, but it seemed to be the kind of running like her life was in danger. So when we got to the village I stopped and asked the guy who was riding with me, he speaks Dagbani fluently, I said to him, ‘Go into the village, find that young girl, find out what the problem was.’ Because from the way she was running, it seemed like her life was in danger. So he went into the village, found the girl – the girl was in the house – and he asked the girl, ‘What was chasing you that would run like this?’ And the girl spoke. ‘This is what I saw,’ she said, ‘I heard your car, and when I turned around to see, I saw that the car was covered with blood – blood was dripping from all around it. I became afraid. So I started running.’

That was all she said. . . . And so you see, Brian, the Lord used this to reveal to me clearly that the children of God are marked by the blood of Jesus. That blood is the same blood that the demons see, it is the same blood that the workers of evil see, and so they cannot attack us – but it makes them very afraid, and they will do anything to keep us out. This is extremely important to know as you’re going around. Because when the light comes into this place, it’s not coming into a vacuum – it is not coming into virgin territory. The darkness reigns in this place, and the light has to push against it.

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There is no denying that I have never known anyone like Kingspride Hammond. I remember thinking within the first few minutes of our first encounter that this man, this tall, striking, middle-aged Ghanaian with an intense demeanor and a contagious laugh, would

somehow become a force in my life, that in some significant manner I would learn from and, perhaps, come to be changed by him. It was only later, during my initial stays in Ghana, as the voice which to that point had been one of nourishment and affirmation began, to my ears, to be drowned out by *ressentiment* and hypocrisy, and as the faith out of which had previously sprung (what back then I would have called) “authenticity” and “community” began to engender the basest justifications for his everyday displays of control and petty vindictiveness – I’m thinking of the time he fired their elderly cleaning woman, their servant really, a widow who traveled daily from her distant village, for failing to come to work in the midst of a prolonged illness, or the time he berated and summarily sacked a close friend of mine for daring to request a small raise from the (even by Ghanaian standards) pathetically inadequate salary which, in the name of “discipleship,” was paid to each of the recently converted, unskilled laborers who worked on the construction of the mission compound – it was only later that I realized how inextricably that initial admiration and affection had grown steadily interwoven with a hidden, stammering anger. And yet, as Elaine reminds me, King has always cut an entirely irreducible figure – a character of nearly Pauline proportions is how I once described him – and it would be disingenuous to imply that, for myself as much as others, he was ever incapable of again becoming, often with the simplest of gestures, the same man whose acuity and apparently boundless joy had won my admiration, and piqued my imagination, that morning in downtown Atlanta eleven years earlier.

It was through King that the words “northern Ghana” first entered my consciousness. The eldest son of the paramount chief of Ga-Adangbe, whose boundaries lie within what is now

greater Accra, King – King’s pride – nevertheless spent his childhood and adolescence cut off from his father’s kin, his mother having been ostracized by the royal family in the wake of, as King tells it, her decision in the mid-1950s to become a born-again Christian, with all the refusals of tradition such a decision inevitably entailed. It was immensely painful, he says, growing up in such close proximity to one’s brothers and cousins while remaining so thoroughly excluded from their company. Thus something of a loner and determined to leave Ghana at the earliest opportunity, he worked hard in school, joined the military, and eventually earned a scholarship to study business administration at Berea College in Lexington, Kentucky. Only after achieving a certain measure of success in the world of business did he slowly return to the faith he had resolutely left behind in Accra, the faith which had been at the source of his abiding isolation, his almost constitutive alienation from the very name he carried.

Over the intervening years between the liquidation of his import-export firm in the late 1980s and the day I met him in 1997, King’s career, as he likes to say, became a great deal more interesting: after committing himself to a life of full-time ministry and marrying an African-American woman from rural Alabama, he was ordained by a major Pentecostal denomination based in Cleveland, Tennessee (Church of God) and subsequently became the resident pastor at the homeless outreach where, during the summer of my sophomore year in high school, for reasons not worth mentioning here, I was compelled to volunteer on a weekly basis. Even at that time I remember being struck by his astonishingly total spiritual abandon, on the one hand, and his manifest unwillingness to perform what friends and audiences alike presumed to be his “African” identity on the other. Nobody could have foreseen that this man

who had at long last discovered a home, a family, a calling in the United States, this man who was apt to break into spontaneous tongues-filled prayer while chatting with a complete stranger (a restaurant waiter, for instance, as I witnessed on more than one occasion) yet who invariably exhibited the most awkward reticence when asked by friends to share the barest details of his Ghanaian past, would soon announce that God had directed him in a dream to return with his wife and toddler to the country of his birth – not to the Christian south, he was at pains to emphasize, but to the Muslim north which, much like himself (though I never heard him put it in quite these terms), had been estranged from this thing called “Ghana” virtually from the moment of its inception. At their goodbye party he left me with an open invitation to visit at any time.

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So it was that King became a missionary to northern Ghana, and so it was that, four years later, looking ahead to a senior thesis in anthropology, I finally joined him there for what turned out to be the first of several stays of two or three months at a time. My arrival in the Northern Region capital of Tamale, preceded just a couple of days earlier by the murder and public decapitation of the overlord of Dagbon along with thirty members of his family, and thus by the pronouncement of a state of emergency and attendant curfew that would remain in effect for the following two and a half years, merely served to bolster, at least initially, an impression of King – and therefore, concomitantly, of northern Ghana – which he had been busy cultivating in newsletters and conversations and emailed prayer requests, an impression, that is, of the missionary to the north as a heroic sufferer, one whose decision, in King’s case,

to relinquish every comfort for the sake of obedience to the Lord, and to take on the ubiquitous hazards associated with bringing the Gospel to an “Islamic stronghold” (and this in the wake of September 11, 2001), could only be counted as a kind of latter-day martyrdom. In projecting this persona,¹⁰ I came to recognize, King was hardly unique, for common among those Christians, Ghanaian and otherwise (but especially Ghanaian), who find themselves residing in the north is a propensity to narrate their presence there in terms of a reluctant, apprehensive, but nonetheless trusting deference to God’s ultimate plan for the region; more than once was the figure of Jonah – and every Jonah needs a Nineveh – invoked to underscore this reluctance.

In an earlier version of my engagement with the region, I would have tried, no doubt unsuccessfully, to steer the conversation in a different direction when confronted with King’s bellicose characterization of “this place.” But today, behind the buffering presence of the recorder, I asked him to say more about the story and what he intended to convey with it.

The thing is this, King began. God created the heavens and the earth. And when he created, then he said, I’m going to create someone to oversee this for me. So he creates man. When you read

¹⁰ Seven years after that initial trip to Ghana, I still found myself surprised by King’s projections of himself and the north. Thus on June 26, 2008, during a brief stay at the Baptist Guest House in Accra, where I was staying before returning to Tamale and King was staying on his way to the U.S., I recorded the following in my field notes: It was interesting to enter the dining room this morning to find King surrounded by a short-term mission team from Tulsa, fielding questions from a group anxious to hear what it’s like to be a missionary to the north. Like many such teams that pass through the guest house, this one would be in Ghana for a total of ten days, staying just long enough to make a quick visit to the Volta Region – where they will pass out evangelistic tracts, visit chiefs, distribute mosquito nets, and take several thousand pictures – and then return to the guest house. ‘What’s the life expectancy in the north?’ an older man asked earnestly. ‘I imagine it can’t be very high,’ added another. ‘What about genital mutilation – is it true they still do that up there?’ King pandered to their ideas about the region, feeding them detail after detail of the north’s numerous maladies – conflicts, floods, illness, poverty, and of course Islam. Here King’s own perception of the north dovetailed nicely with the team’s, for although King has never encountered any serious resistance from Tamale’s Muslims, he nevertheless continues to portray Tamale – the “stronghold of Islam in Ghana,” as he put it this morning – as the frontlines in the battle for the north’s salvation, and himself as a maverick and beleaguered warrior in that battle.

Genesis – in fact, God uses a word that is so excellent, because he said to man, ‘Multiply and subdue.’

That word – subdue – you don’t normally hear it preached, but that is the word he says there. To subdue – and you know, to subdue takes power. And authority. And effort. It takes authority to subdue, it takes power. But it also takes effort to subdue something. I mean, the power to subdue doesn’t just fall out of the sky. You got it? So that was when God literally gave the key to his creature, who is the man. He said: ‘Take authority.’ God always does things verbally – so he verbally gave man the authority. It was not an assumed authority, it was a verbal authority: multiply, fill the earth, SUBDUE it. But then the Enemy comes, and he believes the Enemy, and he literally hands over the keys – the authority – to the Enemy. Once he hands the authority to the Enemy, creation has come under the sway of the Enemy. Just like it was under the sway of man. You see?

Okay. So let’s pause right there. From that point on, all of creation, not only man, not only earth, but – as it says in Romans – all of creation is groaning ‘for the revelation of the sons of God.’ All of creation is groaning, waiting for God to liberate it from this sin that it has been shackled with – by the caretaker! The whole of creation is groaning under the strain of sin that is pressing on it. And that is – it has come under the sway of Satan. It’s groaning, screaming ‘God, when am I going to get relief? When am I going to be what I was created to be?’

So – having said that then, this is what it means: If there is a kingdom here, which is the kingdom of darkness, and we belong to the kingdom of his dear son Jesus Christ, which is the kingdom of light, and we are coming into the kingdom of darkness, then the only way we can get a toehold or a foothold is to PRESS against the kingdom that is here already. In fact, it says in Matthew – I think it’s chapter 22, I’m not sure, I need to look – it says that when a thief comes into a house, the only way he can take over is to

get the strong man and bind him, tie him up. So if the strong man ruling this place is darkness, the only way the light can have position here is to OVERCOME the darkness before it can have a space of its own. So that's where we are. That's why everything we do seems to take so much effort in terms of prayer, in terms of fasting, in terms of obedience, in terms of diligence, and, most of all: perseverance. Because there IS a kingdom here, and it's a kingdom that the kingdom of God's is overtaking. So there is a pressure here. There is a battle going on. That's the reality. It's not a physical reality, it's a spiritual one. That's why everything is so spiritually... so spiritually charged. [A pause.] But you know, when you look around this place, when you compare it to other parts of the country, you realize it's a physical reality too.

As concise a synopsis as one could want of Kingspride Hammond's theology of creation and, by extension, his purpose in coming to northern Ghana.

Profane Illuminations

“Twenty years of rapid economic development in Ghana has done little, if anything, to reduce the historical North-South divide in standards of living. While rural development and urbanization have led to significant poverty reduction in the South, similar dynamics have been largely absent from Northern Ghana, which covers forty percent of Ghana's land area.”¹¹

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For a long time – a hundred and nine years to be exact – any impression of an asymmetry, whether systemic or accidental, between the opportunities for material well-being

¹¹ World Bank, *Tackling Poverty in Northern Ghana* (Washington, DC), March 2011. Available online at: <http://www.worldbank.org/wds>

afforded those populating the area north of the Black Volta, on the one hand, and those residing south of the famous river on the other was based primarily on a rather motley array of dispersed and usually fragmentary sources which, with only a few exceptions, treated that asymmetry as a subsidiary rather than a central concern. To be sure, the existence of a gulf between the two regions had been an open secret, a social fact, in Ghana long before there was even a “Ghana” to speak of¹² – witness the differential reactions among southerners and northerners to the looming prospect of independence itself, with the majority of the latter preferring, as an elderly Mallam put it in 2004, the domination of the British over the slavery to which they had been subjected prior to their arrival; or the fact that as early as 1953 representatives of the Northern Territories were proposing that a distinct institution be established with the express mandate of enabling the neglected region to “catch up with the rest of the Colony”¹³ – but, in tune with the handful of mostly out-of-print scholarly monographs that sought to elucidate, for instance, the political-economic and sociological entailments of “the northern factor in Ashanti history” (as Ivor Wilks’ 1961 book was titled), the overwhelming bulk of official documentation was concerned less with the developmental divide per se than with those broader, putatively more significant phenomena of which it was taken to

¹² It is important to note that these two “regions” are in fact comprised of a total of ten administrative regions, three north of the Black Volta (Northern, Upper West, and Upper East) and seven south of it.

¹³ The 1953 attempt to establish a government institution dedicated to facilitating economic and educational progress in the region, captured by local politician J.A. Braimah’s rallying cry “Down with Black Imperialism in the North,” is discussed at length in Ladouceur 1979: 99-211. On the ambivalence regarding independence among northerners of all stripes, which, according to some scholars, prefigured the fact that in the immediate post-independence period “developments tended to mirror the first few decades of colonial rule, thereby undoing the tentative moves toward local government in the Northern Territories during the colonial withdrawal,” see Hawkins 2002: 126-128.

be an effect (and one worth approaching only obliquely at that). A convoluted archive to say the least.¹⁴ Convoluted, that is, until you opened the morning newspaper and were bombarded with: “Tamale Hospital, a Blot on Our National Conscience”; “Northern Development Forum Calls for Peace at Bawku”; “Violence at Bunkrugu Yunyoo Again”; “ISODEC: Stop Under Funding Education in the North”; “VP ‘Cries’ for Girl Porters from the North”; “Maternal Deaths on the Rise in Northern Region”; “Calm Returns After Tamale Fighting”; “Development in the North: Heaven Helps Those Who Help Themselves”; “Northern Sector Has Highest Infant Mortality Rate”; “Prophet: The Lord Wants Abundance for Our Northern Brothers and Sisters” – a veritable mountain of evidence, all of it culled from the headlines and editorial pages of the country’s leading papers (*The Chronicle* and *The Daily Graphic*) over the span of a single month in 2008.¹⁵ What the academics and NGOs lacked in pie charts and statistical forecasts, we might infer, was more than sufficiently counterbalanced by several decades worth

¹⁴ See Wilks 1961; Staniland 1975; Saaka 2001; Ladouceur 1979; Hawkins 2002; Brukem 1997; Mahama 2004; Apter 1972; Bening 1999; Ferguson and Wilks 1970; Oppong 1973.

¹⁵ An op-ed posted around the same time to the immensely popular GhanaWeb, submitted by Sandow Seidu Kpebu, is exemplary for its giving voice to the anger felt by northerners toward those preachers and politicians who sermonize on moral and material uplift. “Mr. Andrew Awuni,” writes Kpebu, “has once again exhibited his arrogant and pompous side contrary to his northern upbringing. The backyard of President Kufuor’s sidekick is the poorest of all the regions in Ghana. Yet Mr. Awuni has the filthy audacity to tell Ghanaians to get rid of their ‘poverty mentality.’ ... Can he travel up north, look the people with pin point eye contact and belch satisfaction of life of his people? How many hours does it take him to travel to his village by road? Are his people provided with JUST basic social needs such as education, healthcare, water, electricity, motorable roads, and accommodation? Pupils up north study under trees, walk to school on barefoot, carrying their own stools and lack of uniforms. A journey to our hospitals is a journey to any cemetery. It was reported recently that the delivery suites of our hospitals use sachet water to deliver babies in this 21st century. ... The last time I was in Tamale, last year September, I travelled up north and the daily hustle of the people was graphic and grotesque. The poverty level of the northern sector stares and welcomes you as you approach the region. ... Awuni’s call on Ghanaians to pretend to be rich is a rather dangerous mentality created by this present government. If in the midst of abject poverty, desolation, hopelessness, and constant tax imposition and price hikes, the government displays vulgar opulence and corrupt attitude without regard to the plight of the citizens, then God help Ghana.”

of data, proffered from every corner of the Ghanaian public sphere, establishing that there was and still remained a – pick your metaphor – glaring blind spot or innocent scapegoat or inveterate menace threatening the forward-facing trajectory of the pioneering postcolony. The only thing left to be determined was the reason this was so.

It would seem a bit of a stretch, then, to suggest that the appearance in March 2011 of *Tackling Poverty in Northern Ghana*, a sprawling, purportedly exhaustive study commissioned by the World Bank and undertaken by a team of over thirty researchers, marked anything like an event for a populace already, intuitively, more or less conversant with its findings. No, the momentousness of the report lies not in the force of its reception (at least not yet) but rather, if anything, in the extraordinary specificity and precision of its analysis and the sheer profusion of information, the ominous dramaturgy of facts and figures, marshaled to bear it out. Indeed, as regards this particular region, there is arguably one historical precursor to a policy-oriented study of such breadth and rigor: the *Annual Report for the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast Colony*, which, predictably, not only adumbrated (in alphabetical order) the local status of health and criminality, roads and “native affairs,” but also contained up-to-the-minute statistics pertaining to virtually every aspect of commercial and agricultural productivity. Whereas the authors of those reports tended to leave it to their superiors in London and Accra to arrive at their own conclusions, however, the World Bank analysts – as they are wont to do – abandon any pretense of disinterested observation.

Their case is straightforward and persuasive: Ghana’s success story in poverty reduction, indicated by the country’s speedy advance toward meeting its Millennium Development Goals

by 2015, is the success story of its south; therefore any development strategy for Ghana “must put poverty in Northern Ghana at center stage, and acknowledge its specific causes in the design of possible interventions.”¹⁶ With its 113 pages of graphs, tables, and diagrams that synthesize the findings of dozens of earlier censuses from the area; with its painstaking investigation into domains hitherto unexamined, or examined only glancingly, in the literature (“The Evolution of Spatial Disparities Over Time,” “Migration, Remittances, and Poverty,” “Contemporary Livelihoods in Northern Ghana,” “The Case for Geographical Interventions,” “The Social Protection Architecture in Northern Ghana,” “Migration and Road Networks,” “A Conceptual Framework for Livelihood Determinants”); with its innovative metrics and sophisticated analytical models and, at several junctures, unexpectedly progressive diagnostics (notably, the claim verging on autocritique that “economic liberalization associated with the structural adjustment period,” and the prioritization of mercantile and service sector interests as well as cocoa, mining, and timber extraction that attended it, has “returned Northern Ghana to its previous position as a pool of labor”¹⁷); with its moralizing and impassioned plea to foster the region’s “human and physical capital” (“To cope with the various shocks to which they are exposed – floods, droughts, insects, diseases, conflicts, each of which are preventable with relevant infrastructure, public services, insurance, and conflict resolution mechanisms – the

¹⁶ *Tackling Poverty in Northern Ghana*, vii. Less straightforward is what motivated the publication of a report of this scope and magnitude at this specific moment, but, if the appearance of the phrase “oil revenues” at sixteen distinct points throughout the report offers any clue, it has something to do with Ghana’s expected emergence as the world’s latest petrol economy.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6. As in other places, economic liberalization policies promoted by the World Bank led to the removal of government subsidies for agricultural inputs, irrigation schemes, and farm extension services. See also Harsch 2008: 4.

poor tend to mortgage their prospects to eventually escape poverty by depleting their human and physical capital and adopting risky behaviors, including child migration or illegal artisanal mining”) – with all of this, it stands to reason, whatever uncertainties remained as to the quantifiably hence categorically real (as opposed to merely figurative or ideological) state of penury in the north, and, conversely, whatever confidence remained as to the credibility of the promise that the government is well on its way to ameliorating it (as then-president John Kufuor emphatically declared in 2006), should now effectively be dispelled.¹⁸ What else is there to say?

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The air is stuffy, hot, and dank; the racket coming from the television blares practically unabated; sundry pieces of debris – empty water sachets, soda bottles, fruit rinds and banana peels, peanut shells – glide aimlessly down the aisle; everyone, it seems, is well past the point of feeling good. It’s not the sexiest of arrival scenes: less tristes than *Tedious Tropiques*. Our plan was to be in Tamale a week ago, but when we got to the station to buy our tickets we were told that, with the African Cup of Nations beginning the following day, and with the matches being staged not only in Accra and Kumasi and Takoradi but in Tamale as well, every seat on every bus was booked for several days at least. Earlier this morning, after arriving at

¹⁸ During the press conference at which the report’s findings were announced, a World Bank representative exclaimed, “This is a moment of glory for the statisticians. Usually starving behind piles of numbers, now is their coming-out time, and it happens to bring bad news. But we need the true numbers, whatever they tell us, or *we’ll be working in darkness*. ... As we speak, Government and partners are discussing a new way to support evidence-based public policy making. We are committed to go all the way” (*The Daily Graphic*, March 30, 2011, emphasis mine).

the station at 5:30, we managed to snatch up the last two seats available. So here we here.

Aside from three or four stops of varying length – twenty minutes here to relieve ourselves and buy some food, two hours there to wait for a mysterious mechanical issue to be resolved – we have been on the road for close to fifteen hours now (we were supposed to be there in nine), the dazzling glare of the morning and afternoon having long since been deposed by a moonless savanna night whose total dominance is challenged only when the headlights of an approaching car or truck intermittently flash across the bus’s windshield.

As much as I enjoy the films and my fellow passengers’ often hilarious interaction with them, shouting insults at the screen and dispensing commentary at every turn, the Nollywood melodramas for which the country’s bus rides are rightly famous – some of the videos containing recognizably Pentecostalite plot lines and many others (notwithstanding the occasional dwarf or sea monster or snake leaping out from a woman’s vagina) providing a more secular West African spin on the low-grade daytime soap opera – have been booming nonstop since we left Accra; there is quiet only when the potholes for which the country’s roads are equally famous cause the bus to lurch, thus the VCD player to skip, every ten minutes or so. To my dismay, the Dramamine I took earlier this morning, which seemed like a good idea after my previous experience with the State Transport Company, has worn off sooner than anticipated; to Elaine’s dismay, the seat in front of hers is broken, causing the comatose woman occupying it to recline obliviously into her lap. At some point, somehow, I fall asleep.

“Hey!! The north is coming up!!” I’m awakened by the commotion. At first, I assume they must be talking about the recently constructed stadium – a gigantic, Chinese-built,

ultramodern-looking structure which, according to a BBC sportscaster's no doubt hyperbolic reaction earlier in the week, "just might be the finest football arena in the whole of black Africa" – but, as I open my eyes, I realize they're not talking about the stadium at all. They're talking about the lights. A year ago, you wouldn't have known you had arrived in Tamale until a few moments prior to the bus pulling into the station. Tonight that same road is irradiated luminously, brand new streetlights lining the middle divider, orange light streaming through and past the bus's windows. Everyone is awake now, laughing, excited. Some have been away for months, even years.

In just a few days, after the football matches are over, after the teams and their fans have headed south, many of these lights, like a lot of the new infrastructure that accompanied the tournament, will inexplicably – nobody knows the reason – go kaput, stop working, be extinguished. But tonight they're blazing bright, these ultimate indices of development. Tonight the north is coming up.

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In November 2010, the AOP Gallery in London mounted a major solo exhibition of the work of photojournalist Peter DiCampo, recipient of that year's prestigious International Photography award from the British Journal of Photography. The exhibition marked the culmination of a long train of international accolades for DiCampo's project: prominent write-ups with accompanying photo essays in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The New York Times*, *TIME*, *Newsweek*, *Vanity Fair*, *Wired*, *National Geographic*, *The Boston Globe*, *Guernica*, and *The Wall Street Journal*; segments on MSNBC and PBS; a solo exhibition at the VII Gallery in Brooklyn; a

screening at the Visa Pour l'Image festival in Perpignan, France; and awards from The Carter Center, Medecins Sans Frontieres, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. Months later, DiCampo's work was shortlisted for the Anthropographia Award for Human Rights and was a runner-up for the PDN Photo Annual. Here is how *The New York Times* described the project.

It's hard to personalize a story if the faces of its subjects can't be seen. When the photographer Peter DiCampo encountered this problem in an area of northern Ghana where most communities live almost completely without electricity, his solution was simple. He captured haunting portraits lit only by flashlight. Mr. DiCampo, 26, lived in a small village called Wantugu for two years as a Peace Corps volunteer. When he went there, he promised himself he would put his camera back on the shelf. But as a graduate from a photography program at Boston University and a former intern with the VII agency in Paris, he couldn't put the camera down. He chose to show people's lives after dark.¹⁹

What resulted was *Life Without Lights*, a multimedia (video, audio, still photography) piece whose humble beginnings in Wantugu, where DiCampo sought to show what the people in his host village could see by shooting only with the little light that was available, belies its current status as a crucial pictorial archive of – and its author a prominent spokesperson against – what has come to be known as “energy poverty” in northern Ghana and beyond.

By any measure, DiCampo's project is at once a striking, technically inventive artistic accomplishment and an astute glimpse into a dimension of African rural existence that, one imagines, has seldom been captured – surely not in photographic form – with such nuance and

¹⁹ Kerri MacDonald, “Nights in Ghana, Captured by Flashlight,” *The New York Times* (July 15, 2010), accessed online at: <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/tag/peter-dicampo/>

sensitivity. That it continues to garner broad acclaim is doubtless deserved. By design, however, it is not just a work of art, nor merely a piece of visual anthropology; it is also (according to DiCampo first and foremost) a fervent attempt to call attention to the abiding cynicism and indifference on the part of a Ghanaian ruling class that would permit, indeed *force*, so many its fellow citizens to go without having this most basic of needs met, and, concurrently, to persuade the battalion of NGOs operating within the region, and the donors back home who finance them, that facilitating access to electricity, whether on-grid or from alternative sources, among the country's poorest is well worth their time and money.

Because living without lights, DiCampo avers on the project's website, is more than a minor inconvenience. "Electricity provides a paramount step on the ladder of economics, and northern villagers know what is being kept from them." At present, an estimated 73 percent of communities in the "neglected north" (as he calls it) subsist without electricity. And so, he concludes, "potential economic growth is stifled and poverty's cyclical nature is perpetuated."

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We might suppose that DiCampo's project is simply providing a microperspective on an aspect of the "historical North-South divide in standards of living" that documents such as *Tackling Poverty in Northern Ghana* are addressing on the much larger scale of policymaking and institutional reform. It was the World Bank, after all, that only three years earlier launched its vaunted Lighting Africa campaign, a joint initiative with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) whose fundamental premise is that development of any sort is unthinkable and unsustainable without dependable, safe, affordable access to electric (as opposed to fuel-based)

lighting.

Yet, oddly enough, there is virtually nothing in *Tackling Poverty in Northern Ghana* to indicate, as visitors to Lighting Africa's stylish website (www.lightingafrica.org) are led to believe, that the World Bank has put the eradication of energy poverty at the very forefront of its objectives. On the contrary, when electricity (conspicuously *not* "energy poverty") is finally mentioned 91 pages into the report, it is buried amidst a rather dubious cost-benefit analysis of consumer and farmer subsidies, the gist of the argument being that while "connection" (versus "consumption") subsidies are more likely to benefit "target populations," it must nevertheless be assured that "cost recovery is adequate in order not to increase sector deficits further."²⁰

Why the document places so little emphasis on an issue that is otherwise referred to as "a vital focus of the World Bank's agenda of reducing poverty and enhancing quality of life," as Lighting Africa's promotional brochure puts it, is anybody's guess. Could it have something to do with the report's overriding preoccupation with delineating southward migration and agriculture as the primary conduits of development in the north, where universal electrification (or for that matter education, which is also given short shrift in the report) could potentially find itself at cross-purposes with these enterprises? Or perhaps it has to do with how politicized energy, particularly electricity, has become in Ghana today, with the longstanding monopoly of the state-owned – and, since 1961, World Bank-funded – Volta River Authority (VRA) coming increasingly under attack for its notorious tariff hikes, lack of accountability, and preferential, erratic service (Edjekumhene and Dubash 2002: 117-138)? Or maybe it was an

²⁰ *Tackling Poverty in Northern Ghana*, 91-92

innocent oversight. Whatever the explanation, one thing is clear: if the Lighting Africa literature is meant to leave readers with the impression of having touched down in a village whose hapless inhabitants can call Copenhagen or Los Angeles on their cell phones but are unable to charge them at the end of the day, the World Bank's report on northern Ghana simply leaves us with the impression of having touched down in a hapless village.²¹

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The Lighting Africa initiative was by no means the first to equate electricity with uplift and development. Writing in the immediate wake of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, an event which saw the "civilization of the century" showcasing not only its singular prowess in the nascent science of anthropology – the Exposition proved to be a watershed moment for the discipline²² – but also its spectacular innovations in the field of electrical engineering, a journalist for *Cosmopolitan* magazine succinctly, if somewhat histrionically, captured the quasi-vitalist potentials believed to be associated with this emergent technology. Here, as will so often be the case, electricity is sublime. "The same mighty, subtle, delicate, formidable agency and mastery permeates the atmosphere that compasses the universe," the writer exclaims, "and all this is but one breath of the all-embracing vital air, one sparkle of the surf that is the boundary of oceans, the great deeps beyond, unfathomed, but one

²¹ As I was finishing this sentence, I noticed that I had just received an email from Africa Confidential, a periodic newsletter that offers analyses of various goings-on around the continent. The subject: "The Ghana Energy Summit 2011." I couldn't believe the coincidence. But when I opened it, I saw that it had nothing to do with electricity; rather, the conference was to address "the revolution that was set in place" when Ghana became an oil producing country. It is perhaps understandable, then, that the World Bank would similarly forget about such trifling matters as rural electrification in the present conjuncture.

²² Lee Baker (2010: 90-104). provides a fascinating account of anthropology's role in the Exposition and the civilizational values the discipline both buttressed and expounded there.

may believe not unsearchable” (Simon 2004; 254).²³ Clearly, with its resplendent displays of everything from household appliances to the cutting edge of electrophysiological research, the fair confirmed a promise: electricity, at last and forever, was being harnessed in the service of human flourishing. (It is worth noting that the Exposition’s flamboyant attestations of the thresholds that had been traversed in America’s bid for technological superiority were exactly contemporaneous with the crossing of a decidedly different frontier in the interior depths of the Gold Coast in 1893, as a little known indigenous civil servant worked to secure the treaties that, nine years later, helped to bring the Northern Territories into existence.) Yet if it is indeed the case that, over the ensuing century, electrification would provide the world with “perhaps its most vivid symbol of modernization and development,” fusing as it did a “powerful image of universal access to the national grid with the classical Enlightenment motif of illumination of the darkness,” then it is equally true that vast portions of the globe would be cut off – disconnected, to use anthropologist James Ferguson’s felicitous term (Ferguson 1999: 242-243) – from this vital force, from the “mighty, subtle, delicate, formidable” energy that so intensely galvanized audiences at the Chicago fairgrounds.²⁴

²⁴ As Linda Simon observes in her absorbing cultural history of electrification, electricity’s reception at the turn of the century was far from unequivocal: forty years after Thomas Edison invented the incandescent bulb, only twenty percent of Americans had wired their homes, even as electrotherapy emerged as a popular medical treatment for everything from depression to digestive problems. Simon argues, moreover, that a certain vitalism lay at the heart of this ambivalence. “Vitalism, which held that electricity was the source of life itself, justified the conviction that applying electricity to the human body could strengthen and energize; at the same time, vitalism contributed to a fear of artificial electricity, since the force that energized this new technology was, in the popular mind, the same force that coursed through one’s nerves. ... While people were willing to submit to the invasion of electricity into their bodies, with their own permission and administered by a physician whom they trusted, they were suspicious about allowing electricity to flow into their homes, where the force could stealthily invade

Disconnection, on Ferguson's account, is the condition of abjection, that peculiar complex of shame and debasement, betrayal and humiliation, that attends the collective experience of expulsion from a life and from a world that has become distinctly unavailable: within sight but no longer within reach. The concept is elaborated in the final chapter of his pathbreaking ethnography of decline in Zambia's beleaguered Copperbelt region, where, after a short-lived foray into the orbit of other "emerging economies," the ravaging effects of deindustrialization and neoliberal economic policy essentially turned back the clock on whatever measure of prosperity had been achieved. For Zambians, theirs is a state not of lack but loss; not exclusion but active abandonment. To render this predicament, Ferguson argues, we must go beyond our received images of mere deprivation (in today's nomenclature, "bare life"). Just as dependency theorists "once usefully distinguished between a state of being undeveloped (an original condition) and one of being underdeveloped (the historical result of an active process of underdevelopment)," so too must we differentiate milieus that are simply unconnected ("an original condition") from those that have slowly or abruptly, deliberately or inadvertently been disconnected ("the historical result of an active process of disconnection"). It is a question of relationality, of – albeit negative – interactivity. As Ferguson says, it is the difference between being hung up on and having never owned a phone (Ferguson 1999: 234-238). Or the difference, to put it differently, between "The darkness lay over the surface of the

their body in ways that they might not be able to control. It might even kill them" (Simon 2004: 7). See also Jonnes 2004; Klein 2008.

deep” (Genesis 1:2) and “Turn off the lights.”

Development as connection; disconnection as de-electrification: the connotation is not lost on Ferguson. There was a moment, he explains, primarily during the 1950s and 60s, when Zambia’s main export brought the material fruits of modern life to the newly established nation, when the copper wire bars produced by Zambian refineries not only facilitated, quite literally, the interconnection of the world at large via telephone and power cables, but also enabled that “most potent sign of a specifically modern form of world connection” – electricity – to course through its cities and townships. In the new Zambia, it was believed, “electricity [...] would link all of the country’s citizens in a universal, national grid of modernity” (Ferguson 1999: 18-19). It turned out to be a fleeting prospect. Today (or rather 13 years ago, when the book appeared), Ferguson tells us, the townships are still wired for electricity. “But the service is intermittent, as equipment often breaks down, and the copper power cables are from time to time stolen for sale as scrap. What is more, few township residents can afford to pay the monthly charges for the use of electricity, so electric appliances go unused as women huddle around charcoal fires preparing the daily meals and the township’s skies fill with gray smoke each morning” (ibid., 243). Arguably more than any other technology of everyday life, electricity’s presence – its promise and potential – is felt most acutely in its absences; Ferguson likens the aftereffects of its unavailability in the Copperbelt to “the phantom pains from a limb long ago amputated” (ibid., 238). And then there is this: the growing ubiquity of fiber optics and cellular communications technology has gradually decimated the market for copper wiring.

Is it too banal or self-evident to point out that such has become a generalized

phenomenon across the continent as a whole? That from Cape Town to Kinshasa, Monrovia to Maputo, an entire lexicon of breakdown and obsolescence – of chronic blackouts and outages and serial malfunctions – has been grafted onto the register of the ordinary, the normal, the unremarkable (as in: no longer worth remarking on)? That if Africa, however tastelessly or insensitively, has once again been dubbed “The Dark Continent,” as it was in a 2007 article by that name in *The Economist*, it has less to do (at least overtly, although in the case of *The Economist* it is undoubtedly there between the lines) with a paucity of reason or enlightenment than with the continent’s bare empirical lack of lights?²⁵ The numbers tell an alarming story – Africa accounts for over a sixth of the world’s population, but generates only 4 percent of global electricity; 589 million people on the continent live without access to a public electricity facility; as of 2009, grid connections in Africa stood at just 35 percent; among Africa’s on-grid population, more than a third suffer frequent shortages and are considered “under electrified” – and so do the pictures. (It is instructive, in considering the belief among many Ghanaians that the north, with its violence and destitution, is dragging Africa back into a nation trying desperately to leave Africa behind, to situate the article’s accompanying satellite photo of “Africa at night” alongside the World Bank images of a northern region darkened by poverty.)

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There is a striking aside in Sarah Nuttall’s contribution to *Load Shedding*, a collection of non-fiction narrative essays penned and compiled in the midst of that country’s elongated

²⁵ “The Dark Continent,” *The Economist* (April 16, 2007), available online at: <http://www.economist.com/node/9660077>

period of rolling blackouts. She is writing about her husband, the famed Cameroonian theorist Achille Mbembe.

Every time the lights went out, planned or not, he completely lost it.

“What’s wrong with Africa?” he would shout, quite unlike himself, his body collapsed on its frame, a dark figure in the fading light of dusk, a Kentridge cutout hunched against the pool fence, or spewing candles across the room, with all the pent-up frustration of a man rejected by a woman he wants, or loved too much by one he doesn’t.

“Make a fire,” I would say to him then.

“Why can’t Africa ever get it right?” he would rant, recalling his beautiful house on the sea in Dakar, where he would spend Sundays, often enough, with no lights or water, in the sticky heat of the Sahel (Nuttall 2009: 243).

No doubt similar questions have been posed, out of a similar frustration and amid varying degrees of heat and darkness, by countless others over the past few decades.

Urbanists and anthropologists, meanwhile, have followed a somewhat different line of inquiry. Ferguson may have been among the first but he certainly wasn’t the last ethnographer to chronicle the vicissitudes and demise of those networked infrastructures, the electricity grid chief among them, that not so long ago stood as tangible emblems of a city and a politics and – above all – a lifestyle soon to come, as harbingers of a day in which innumerable hymns and bible verses, memorized in missionary schools and given an invidious civilizing valence in the face of all things African, would find their final, irrevocable, literal transposition into a bright and busy Hegelian future. The consummate ode to sovereignty and self-determination: *The*

light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5, NIV).²⁶ Documenting the dissolutions (and disillusionments) of this grand project of illumination, and the myriad itineraries and techniques, tactics of inhabitation and experimentation, largely provisional and extemporized, that are materializing in its place, has furnished Africanist scholarship with its *raison d'être* for the 21st century (Simone 2004; Hoffman 2011; Piot 2010; Mbembe and Nuttall 2008; Guyer 2004; De Boeck and Plissart 2004).

Yet whereas Ferguson mapped the contours of a milieu of mass abjection and abandonment, of before and after and very little in between, a spate of recent studies – not least Ferguson's own subsequent writings²⁷ – have shown that disconnection is not quite as uniform or all-encompassing (or abject) a condition as it once seemed; that variegation and translocalization and segmentation, enclosures and buffer zones, calculated alliances and uncanny appropriations, are increasingly the overproductive byproducts – and causes – of dysfunction and disuse; that, in short, the panoramic portrait of a city (or a continent) short-circuited and in the dark might usefully be augmented with one of lights flickering here and there, tenuous, siphoned, hedged in. For many of these observers, the fragmented and fluctuating status of electricity in a given locality inevitably mirrors and refracts the larger-scale

²⁶ The pervasiveness of this sensibility among African intellectuals, articulated in the twin discourses of “nativism” and “Afro-radicalism,” has been trenchantly dismantled by Achille Mbembe in his controversial essay “African Modes of Self-Writing” (2002). Interestingly enough, although constitutive of these allegedly impoverished modes of thought, the dialectic of light and darkness, of “the night coming from below and the light that undoes the world of shadows,” as he put it in a recent interview, has remained a recurrent feature of Mbembe's own oeuvre. See also Mbembe 2010a, 2010b.

²⁷ See, e.g., Ferguson 2006, where a murkier, transnational space of shadows, half-light, and partial darkness, has replaced his earlier account of wholesale connection and disconnection.

transformations underway throughout the region or even continent more generally.

Charting the surreal and often absurd trajectory of electric power in Kano, for instance, Brian Larkin is able to discern what he judges to be a momentous and far-reaching shift in Nigerian society, away from the developmental, technopolitical governing apparatus of the postcolonial state – for which material infrastructures served to join up and consolidate a dispersed and fractious population within standardized, managed networks, and political rule was mediated through the workings of railways, roads, and power plants – toward horizontal, privatized and individuated, highly competitive loci of provision and consumption (Larkin 2008).²⁸ Thus, tellingly, Larkin’s book opens with the unveiling of the new Kano Water and Electric Light Works in 1932, a spectacle that occasioned (with echoes of Chicago 1893) awestruck visions of splendor and possibility among the city’s native onlookers, and concludes, some 225 pages later, with an unnervingly dystopic – yet for residents perfectly prosaic – world of recurrent outages and constant shortages; one in which access to electricity is regulated not by the state but by how much individual consumers (as opposed to citizens) can pay for generators and bribes for preferential service; where “enclave infrastructures” beget corruption, opacity, vindictiveness, and opportunism; a world in which the necessity of “electrical autonomy” has become a basic factor in the architectonics of built space and in structures of planning, and where the “loud, smelly, coughing smoke” of the privately owned generator provides the ambient sounds and smells of Nigerian urban life. A world, in fact, in

²⁸ Larkin’s analysis of infrastructural transformations in northern Nigeria resonates in many ways with what Charles Piot (2010) theorizes as the more general post-Cold War shift in West Africa’s political, economic, and religious culture.

which “even the gasoline the generator feeds on is sold on the black market by ‘*yan daba*’ from individual drums throughout the city” (Larkin 2008: 18-19; see also Olukoju 2004). Surely it is with such an environment in mind that, in a recent review article on African cities, Jane Guyer has called for

an urban ethnography of people’s relationship to the electrical power company and its “fantastic” spaghetti network of poles, wires and cables, workshops and generators, surges and blackouts, multiple gaps and failures, Gordian knots and loose ends all over the place. The electric grid affects everyone: in work, in leisure, in artistic expression and, of course, in scholarship. The famous NEPA (National Electric Power Authority, or popularly, Never Expect Power Always) has successfully escaped any and every government’s halfhearted attempt to fix it. Its problems are ubiquitous, so we need no special theoretical effort to define the *compagnons de voyage* for this “walk with a line” out into the city. We are all in it together, zig-zagging back and forth across the unrealized possibilities that have left their ruins and their spectral presences across the African urban landscape (Guyer 2011: 490).

An ethnographic undertaking of this sort, Guyer says, would be certain to yield insights not only into incipient historical and political economic configurations but also into that confounding ensemble of “events, transformative interfaces, shadow systems, and marooned islands where people go back to diesel, kerosene, flashlights, and just making do” (ibid., 490).

Of course, one would expect to find such a pragmatics of day-to-day survival, of just “making do,” in notoriously fragile, inequitable, and readily combustible polities like Nigeria, but – as the above-cited *Load Shedding* collection poignantly attests to – it seems we are just as likely to discover vast regions of infrastructural precarity, and the distinctive psychosocial states that attend them, at the urban heart of the African exception. Indeed, the South African case, born of a constellation of economic, political, and technological arrangements relatively unique to the country (e.g., its anomalous reliance on coal-fired energy where the majority of African

nations are dependent on hydropower), might nevertheless portend the advent of a particular and somewhat bizarre brand of electricity shortage in other places as well: namely, ironically, one in which it is affluence and development itself that is diagnosed as the root cause of the “development crisis” (i.e., the crisis of electricity). In South Africa, as Sarah Nuttall notes, this took the form of attributing the frequent power outages to the precipitous growth of the black middle class, whose fridges and TVs, computers and swimming pool filters, so the argument went, were simply too much for the nationwide grid to handle (Nuttall 2008: 242).

Here, it would appear, is a textbook playing-out of the Marxian theory of capitalist self-destruction: not unlike the sorcerer in *The Communist Manifesto* who is “no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells,” it seems that the more African countries “prosper,” the more they “develop,” the more stuff they buy and produce, the greater the risk that they won’t be able to use it (Marx and Engels 1978: 478). And yet: It is significant that load shedding is no longer an everyday phenomenon for South Africa’s citizenry as a whole. The sorcerer, apparently, has managed to get the netherworldly powers under control again. The nation, at least for the time being, has returned to its “normal” state of rampant, radical inequality. And – contra the speculations of many of the *Load Shedding* contributors – it is bound to be in *this* state (and not the period of widespread, “we’re all in it together” blackouts that interrupted it) that a possible future shape of African city life can be evinced.

In a short meditation entitled “Nocturnal Johannesburg,” Julia Hornburger climbs to the top of a downtown apartment building, where, in the evening darkness, she is given a 360-

degree view over the sprawling cityscape. Reading this patchwork of electrification, she writes, “its contours and shadings, its elevations and slopes, constitutes a commentary on Johannesburg as metropolis, its terrains of access and exclusion, inequality and transformation, consumerism and scarcity, security and insecurity, its township and suburban living” (Hornburger 2008: 289). What she perceives from that privileged vantage point can arguably be extended, albeit, of course, with the expectation of discerning idiosyncratic “contours and shadings,” to countless islands and archipelagos of disconnection throughout the continent. For in nocturnal Johannesburg, as in other African towns and conurbations, “[c]ity lights create a topography of illumination – a drawing of place through light in its different qualities” (ibid., 290).

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In Ghana’s own “topography of illumination,” to hear Peter DiCampo tell it, Accra and Kumasi, Tema and Cape Coast, these are the cities of lights, and the north – well, the north is where the people come from who build (or are otherwise parasitic upon) the cities of lights. To the extent that there remains, according to DiCampo, a tragic lacuna in the regnant discourse surrounding underdevelopment and impoverishment in the region – and inasmuch as policy papers like *Tackling Poverty in Northern Ghana* go to considerable lengths to establish the terms of that discourse, there certainly seems to be – and to the extent that it was the aim of *Life Without Lights* to do something about it, the project seems very much to have fulfilled its purpose. And not only on the terrain of discourse: when DiCampo returned in 2011, he was surprised to discover Wantugu newly wired.

But the project also enfold a less tidy play of forces. For if the achievement of such favorable outcomes largely corresponds – retroactively? – with what DiCampo envisaged or hoped the project would accomplish, there is nonetheless a lingering concern as to what, if anything, the multimedia piece may be doing, what work it may be performing, that was *not* intended when it was embarked upon by its author – or, indeed, that may follow from one intention lying, so to speak, in a degree of tension with another. Here, as often happens, the question of what the author (or artist) wants runs up against the question, as W.J.T. Mitchell might put it, of what the picture wants – and what pictures want, Mitchell insists, in their “reticence” and “silence,” their “wildness” and “obduracy,” is by no means the same as “the message they communicate or the effect they produce”; nor, he adds, should anyone confuse “the desire of the picture with the desires of the artist, the beholder, or even the figures in the picture” (Mitchell 2005: 10, 46). We need not have recourse to a full-fledged theory of desire to suppose that what a picture “wants,” what it “desires,” will (like its creator but probably for different reasons) be fraught with ambiguity, mixed signals, second-guesses: with wanting it both ways. Such, at any rate, is the risk – call it the constitutive excess or instability – that shadows *Life Without Lights*.

DiCampo is not unaware of it. “I’ve been treading a careful balance with the stories I choose lately,” he wrote in an online essay, reflecting on the project three years after beginning it.

After living as a volunteer in northern Ghana, it’s important to me to tell stories that present a problem without victimizing the subject. I have no desire to contribute to a stereotypical view of Africa, presenting people as miserable and helpless – but I have every desire to use my photographs toward humanitarian means. How to reconcile the

two? (DiCampo 2010)

DiCampo does well to conceive his work, not – as might be expected of someone who trades in pictures – merely as an exercise in “depiction” or “portrayal,” but rather as a mode of storytelling; at stake in the project, he seems to intuit, is as much a question of narrating the subject in a particular manner as of producing or contributing to a certain image of it. Or, to put it in slightly different terms: it is as much a question of fabulating Africa and northern Ghana as of “representing” it.²⁹ Still, for all his angst and passion and consideration for those he worked with, there is something not quite right about his characterization of the predicament as one of desiring that his photographs be used for “humanitarian” objectives, on the one hand, and that they escape the stereotypes such objectives typically depend upon on the other. There is another, more recalcitrant ingredient in the mix, and that is the project’s undeniable, although – like many photojournalistic pieces – mostly elided and effaced aesthetic aspirations (Weylan 2011: 31-35).³⁰ Equipment and technique, editing and framing (as in Derrida’s so-called

²⁹ To his credit, DiCampo is attuned to the various narratives his project could be – already has been? – put into the service of bolstering. Yet he describes his coming to this awareness as both inadvertent and belated, as though his capacity to even pose the question – “How to reconcile the two?” – was a skill that, once learned, could just as easily be forgotten. “A few weeks ago,” he writes, “I returned to Ghana, where I showed the piece to a Peace Corps volunteer friend. She used to live in one of the villages I photographed.” It was this friend’s reaction to the photos – equivocal to put it mildly – that jogged his appreciation of the predicament. Hers, he writes, is “a mindset I remember from my own Peace Corps experience, and one that I miss” (DiCampo 2010).

³⁰ In an essay on the historical shift from reportage to photodocumentation, Jeff Wall – a celebrated artist in his own right – observes that photojournalism was created in the framework of the new publishing and communication industries, and that it “elaborated a new kind of picture, utilitarian in its determination by editorial assignment and novel in its seizure of the instantaneous, of the ‘news event’ as it happened.” This emergence, he goes on to say, was coincident with the advent of photoconceptualism, which, in a kind of tacit negotiation with its politically conscious counterpart (“You take politics and I’ll take aesthetics”), for its part tended to “abandon the social field to professional photojournalism proper, as if the aesthetic problems associated with depicting it were no longer of any consequence, and photojournalism had entered not so much a postmodernist phase as a ‘post-aesthetic’ one in which it was excluded from aesthetic evolution for a time. This,

*parergon*³¹): these are no less formative of the project's peculiar power than the content of the pictures themselves and the lengthy elucidations (facts, figures, interviews) that accompany them. They, too, are conscripted into the work of fabulation. But what exactly are they fabulating? What kind of story is being crafted here? What does this place, this people – “a village in northern Ghana” – look like when it makes its improbable appearance on the world stage?

First of all, it looks a lot like Africa. As far as “stereotypical views” of the continent go, we would be hard pressed to do better than “life without lights” – or, for that matter, “Out of the Darkness” (*Wired*), “Off the Grid” (*Guernica*), “Living in Darkness” (*Christian Science Monitor*), or any of the other titles of the various write-ups about DiCampo's project. That we are in proximity here to *the* master trope of African alterity, whereby “the earth, like the moon, has a permanently darkened half, a shadowed land fated never to receive its turn to come into the ‘light’ of peace and prosperity,” seems too well-worn a path to warrant going down (Ferguson 2006: 10). Not that this path has necessarily pushed through the precincts of postcolonial criticism into the world at large: for vast segments of the reading public, presumably, it is a very short step from Conrad to DiCampo. Ghostly and disembodied, primordial and opaque –

by the way, suited the sensibilities of those political activists who attempted a new version of proletarian photography in the period” (Wall 2003: 146).

³¹ The frame, or *parergon*, according to Derrida, is “the decisive structure of what is at stake” in pictures. “There is always,” he writes, “a form on a ground, but the *parergon* is a form which has as its traditional determination not that it stands out but that it disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy” (Derrida 1987: 60-67).

this a (non)place and a (non)story we are all acquainted with, and DiCampo's project has portraits of it in spades.

Again, the technique itself is telling. By ostensibly shooting solely with the light available ("ostensibly" because, in several photos, the subjects' faces are theatrically illuminated by flashlights), we, like DiCampo, are able to see only as much, or as little, as the people themselves can see. The shroud of darkness bespeaks a kind of ignorance, an obliviousness. Returning to Ferguson's typology, we might say that many of the subjects in *Life Without Lights* appear to inhabit a condition not of disconnection ("the historical result of an active process of disconnection") but rather *unconnection* ("an original condition"), the principle affect of which, one could argue, is not abjection but unknowing. The former implies politics, history, relations – an "active process of abandonment," in Ferguson's words; the latter implies a people who, for better or worse, don't know what they are missing: they are, after all, *in the dark*. A familiar story about Africa, to be sure, but also about northern Ghana. For anyone concerned with the ways in which the region has been objectified, narrated, captured in time even as it has been thought, at times, to be something quite outside of time, straddling a world of disconnection and a primordial ("original condition") state of nature and unconnection, DiCampo's project is an indispensable, if unintended, artifact.

But different techniques open onto different images; there are other stories, other "norths" to be discerned. This is especially the case when DiCampo occasionally abandons the aesthetic pretensions of staged portraiture and manages instead to capture his subjects, as art critic Michael Fried might put it, "absorbed in the action," caught up in the ebb and flow of

sociality and quotidian life (Fried 2006: 333-336). Consider, for example, one of DiCampo's most widely disseminated images, a picture of four young boys, maybe more, huddled around an array of booklets which, on closer inspection, turn out to be filled with what appears to be Arabic script. Flashlights in hand, we see their downturned faces, engrossed in whatever it is they're reading or looking at, but beyond that only the slightly yellowed pages of the text, a wooden desk or table, and the bright glowing colors (yellow and purple) of one of the boys' shirts. Nothing else. Even before we spot the tiny caption – "Children read the Koran by flashlight at a mosque in Wantugu" – beneath the photo, however, the rudiments of a narrative have already started taking shape. The boys seem to be reading on their own accord; for all we know, they've snuck into the room at night to steal glances at a forbidden book. Elsewhere, we can't help but think, this would be the scene of some ritual of preadolescent lasciviousness, returning to a box of Playboys as soon as the parents have gone to sleep. Here, though, there's a different story playing out, the specific lineaments of which will likely depend on one's personal inclination. Is it a story of perseverance in the face of insurmountable odds, a refusal to give up on education and the better life that might come with it, in spite of the nefarious forces that have been conspiring against them? Or is it, as many Ghanaian Christians would have it, a story about Islam and its inexorable promulgation, such that even in a place bereft of the most basic infrastructure children are being forced, or else successfully inculcated, into studying, not the English they will need if they ever manage to leave the village, but an Arabic that will only serve to pull them ever deeper into poverty and obscurity (or someday worse: radicalism)?

The possibilities are many – and that’s the point. There is a context, however minimal; an outside, however distant; a relation, however severed. A system, however broken. Life goes on: there are even movies to watch using a borrowed generator.

Tangent

Driving to Fushegu, the gorgeous flat expanse of the savanna extending in every direction, Kwesi points to a newly constructed billboard just beyond the city limits. I’ve been looking the other way and am barely able to catch its slogan as we speed past: “Domestic Violence Is A Human Rights Abuse: Stop It!” Beneath the exhortation is a rather crudely painted picture of an elderly woman doubled over in pain while a younger man, outfitted in the traditional northern smock, strikes her with a wooden switch. (That afternoon, on our way back, I craned my neck and saw that the billboard had been sponsored by a German NGO, The Human Help & Development Group.) Reading the slogan out loud, Kwesi lets out a sarcastic chuckle and remarks that those who the message is intended to reach – Dagomba men – will not be able to read its English words, nor, even if they could, would they have any idea what “domestic violence” is. “Do you really think the same tribe, the same people who would kill their own chief, and behead him in the light of day, would be troubled that beating their wives is a ‘human rights abuse?’” It is a familiar commentary on the indigenous population (and the international aid organizations, seen by many as impotent and self-serving, whose purported aim is to “partner” with them); what makes it jarring today is the fact that it is this very “tribe” whose village, one of hundreds in the area, we will be arriving at within the hour.

Not for the first time, I register the incongruities that seem to riddle Kwesi's, and, broadly speaking, the charismatic churches' relationship to the region, the contradictions that beset an avowed "love" for a place and for a people that does nothing to diminish the disdain to which those people have long been subjected – to say nothing of a "love" that, in marked contrast to the Catholic and Protestant missionaries who came before, spurs little more than a modicum of interest in the history and language, customs and complexities of those one wishes to save. Nevertheless, in tune with the remarkable shifts in Ghana's geography of conversion, shifts that, from the churches' perspective, have seen the rural village gradually supplant the city as a more fertile soil in which the gospel might take root, there has been a vaunted effort among charismatic leaders to win Tamale's surrounding villages for the Lord, such that Lighthouse pastors and lay ministers ("shepherds" as they're called) are now encouraged to personally adopt a village for whose spiritual, thus moral and material, reconstitution – or not – they will henceforth be responsible. For the past several months, Fushegu has been Kwesi's village.

That Kwesi would even "have" a village is, by his own reckoning, a momentous development in itself. Only a few years prior, after all, he was (as I often heard him say in sermons and conversations) a newly married man with a hard-earned degree in business administration, whose walk with Christ, while adequate perhaps with regard to ultimate salvation, was by no means what it could or should be; what, in other words, he had been *called* to be. "I knew if I died I was going to heaven. I was born again, I never doubted that. I went to church twice a week, I was respected by my colleagues – I never stole or cheated anyone, I

never boozed or fornicated. I had confidence that Jesus Christ was my savior. But he was not my *Lord* and savior . . .”

The distinction is an important one for Kwesi: what lordship names is the “more,” as he likes to say, in his spiritual trajectory, the transition from a life of spiritually “getting by” – resisting sinful predilections and adhering to biblical morality, attending church functions, reading scripture, occasionally witnessing and sharing the gospel – to a total and thoroughgoing Spirit-filled existence. No longer content with merely securing his standing in the next world, *lordship* for Kwesi names a grace-impelled willingness to be undone and refashioned in this one. And it was in Tamale, of all places, at the smallest of three Lighthouse branches in the city, that this process was inaugurated for Kwesi and Victoria, that, in his words, they finally died and were made anew, for it was there that they underwent a second baptism, not with water this time but with fire – that is, baptism in the Holy Spirit, believed by charismatics to intensify and perfect the initial experience of conversion, and the baptismal event that consummates it, with that assortment of gifts (tongues and prophecy, deliverance and discernment, the working of miracles, and so forth) wrought by an encounter with the Spirit.³³ They had arrived in Tamale

³³ As Ruth Marshall (2009) observes, such differentiations between first and second (i.e., nominal and real, salvific and Spirit-filled; in some cases temporally concurrent but always conceptually and theologically distinct) conversion experiences, signaled by the primacy attributed to baptism in the Holy Spirit, is an exemplary feature of Pentecostal testimonials. “I was born again in 1978,” reports one of her Nigerian interviewees, “but I can’t really say I was saved, even though I had always gone to church. I really got saved when TREM [The Redeemed Evangelical Mission] was founded and I went to a program. A Ghanaian pastor preached at the revival and I found I was speaking in tongues. That was when I really felt the power of God.” And another: “I got converted at the Redeemed Headquarters in February, 1975. I had no problem at the time, I was well-paid, so I didn’t see any real need of going to church. But my junior sister persuaded me to go with her. I went, as it was close to the house. But during the service, I felt like objects were moving inside me and something was pouring into me. I attended some more services, and two weeks later I answered the alter call. I got the baptism of the Holy Spirit in September, 1975” (Ibid.: 148-149).

seeking one thing but, having failed to achieve that objective through their own strength, discovered God had something else, something infinitely better, in store for them: it was not *they* who chose Lighthouse, they eventually acknowledged, it was God who had led them there.

Why Lighthouse? Like many in the church, their answer begins and ends with Bishop Dag Heward-Mills. Though physically in Accra, or whatever distant land he happens to be visiting on a given day, the Bishop's presence is felt in literally every aspect, every activity that comprises the church's life together, and, after watching a videotaped sermon of the Bishop's in the very first service they attended, Kwesi knew that *here* was a man worth following – to the ends of the earth, or, for that matter, week after week, to an obscure village in a region at times likened to the lost sheep in Jesus' parable. It could be rescued because he, too, had gone missing once; he too had been recovered. Not for nothing was Kwesi christened a shepherd shortly after commencing his outreach to the village.

Despite our tardiness – we were supposed to be here at eleven o'clock and it's almost noon – there are eight young men waiting for us as we pull into Fushegu, already gathered under a large baobab tree, Bibles in hand, ready to begin. How many pastors, I wonder, would travel this distance for such a meager turnout? Yet if today's attendance is surprising or disheartening to Kwesi he certainly doesn't show it. On the contrary, he leaps out of the car and greets the men warmly, trying out the few Dagbani phrases he's picked up since coming to the north, laughing as they make fun of his clumsy efforts. Watching the scene unfold, I am

struck by the gulf separating the Kwesi who, in one breath, can speak so condescendingly of “these people” and, barely an hour later, the Kwesi who is willing to embarrass himself in conveying what appears to be genuine affection for them.

Over the following weeks and months, however, as I continued to get to know him better, I came to see his weekly outreach to the village, and his relationship to the north more generally, not so much as a symptom of inconsistency or insincerity, or even two-facedness, but instead as something of an outgrowth, a working-out, of his ongoing absorption within the peculiar manner of acting and being in the world that the appellation “Christian” entails for him – an absorption that, much like his engagement with the north and, more specifically, with the people of Fushegu, is by turns rewarding, messy, frustrating, impassioned. But always ongoing. In fact – and here Kwesi is simply putting into practice an injunction preached from pulpits spanning the spectrum of Ghana’s charismatic churches – he very much conceives of his excursions to Fushegu as part and parcel of the labor he must continuously undertake on the way to fostering his walk with the Lord, to developing his spiritual capacities, no more or less meaningful than, say, studying scripture late into the evening, or resisting one of the Devil’s seductions, or healing his choking daughter. Each time he fills his car with petrol before heading to the village, he told me once (with, I thought, more than a touch of pride), every time he feels too exhausted to make the journey on a particular day, he thanks God that he has given him, Kwesi, the opportunity to carry out this important work – not least of all on himself. (And his wife, Victoria has said much the same thing about the “work,” as she called it, that God has given her: to look after their child, to cook and do the laundry, to sing on the

church's worship team, to lead a women's prayer group. Each of these, she says, are opportunities for her to grow.) Clearly, as with so many other tasks that structure his daily life, Kwesi thinks of these visits to Fushegu less as a sacrificial than as a generative activity – or both together. He is not merely bringing something; he is *becoming* something.

We make our way over to a wooden bench, shaking off the children that crowd around us. Apparently the onus is on the men to set the agenda for these weekly meetings, and today's topic of discussion, we are told by the lone English speaker among them, a taxi driver who serves as the de facto translator, is “what it means to be an apostle.” Later, I learn that only in village gatherings such as these is it permissible for Lighthouse pastors and lay ministers to forgo use of the Bishop's books (if not his teachings); in all other venues it is mandated, openly and explicitly, in the name of maintaining “loyalty” (itself a ubiquitous theme in the Bishop's books), that at least one of Heward-Mills' texts – and none by other pastors, especially African ones – must provide the basis for whatever it is that will be discussed. But in the villages, Kwesi tells me, and he emphatically concurs with the decision, it has recently been decided that it would simply be too onerous to attempt to translate the Bishop's books into terms that would be comprehensible to this particular audience. So, here at least, *solā scriptura* rules the day. It makes me wonder what else has been left behind in the charismatic forays into such milieus.

To kick off the conversation Kwesi directs us to the beginning of Acts, where, after betraying Jesus and committing suicide (“Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out...”),

Judas Iscariot is replaced through the drawing of straws by another of Jesus' followers. After reading the verse out loud from his Dagbani Bible, published in 1974 by the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy, and Bible Translation, the young man seated next to me – his name is Amos – asks how, if Judas was a true disciple, then how could he betray his master? “That’s a big question!” Kwesi laughs. He explains that in order to address this problem we’ll need to delve into some difficult theological concepts. The main issue, he says, pausing between sentences to allow the translator to do his work, is whether Judas was “forced” to betray Jesus, or if he did so on his own accord – it’s essentially a question of free will. Amos doesn’t seem to understand, so Kwesi asks him, “Before you were a Christian, were you a sinner because you chose to be a sinner?” No, he answers, I was born a sinner. “Correct!” Kwesi exclaims, clapping his hands in satisfaction.

I glance around the circle. Will any of these men, all of them (except, perhaps, for the translator) farmers with little education, ever step foot in one of the Lighthouse branches in Tamale, to say nothing of the megachurch’s enormous “cathedral” in Accra? The stylish clothes, the trendy music, the dynamism and technological savvy, the sensibility and appearance of success – how far this place, this moment, feels from the world of Lighthouse and the charismatic scene it belongs to! And yet, could it be otherwise for a spirituality that places such a premium on the tangible, outward signs of a converted self, on the public performance of material “fruit” and “blessings?” It would be easy to conclude that the role of these earnest believers is merely to serve as the mute, evidentiary fodder for the miraculous lives of others; that at best they will subsist as distant spectators to the mode of life they have been invited into

– an old predicament, one would imagine, for missionary endeavors of all stripes. But is this how they see things? Does it matter?

The discussion is wrapping up now. Kwesi points us to Romans 6, a passage that allows him to articulate the difference between being a “slave of sin” and being a “slave of God”: “You were *born* a slave of sin,” he says at one point, “but you *chose* to become a slave of righteousness...” Judging from the bewildered expressions on the men’s faces they’re not quite following the line of reasoning here, and neither am I. Or if I am, I don’t think I agree with it. Finally, after a concluding, lengthy monologue about sin and responsibility, Kwesi pauses and looks around. Have I answered your question? he asks Amos. Is there anything else you would like to say? The younger man hesitates before responding. Then, through the translator, he explains that his original question stemmed from a worry that has been bothering him for a long time now. A worry that he, like Judas, might one day similarly betray his master.

Life Without Lights

A black screen with little glowing specks here and there. The intermingling sounds of insects and village life. Nighttime in Wantugu. One after another – we can barely make them out – men and woman speak into the camera, in Dagbani, their emphatic language appearing as English subtitles. Interspersed with their words and shadowed faces is a montage of dramatic photographs. *Life Without Lights* – these are the first words that appear. And then:

NORTHERN GHANA

Life here is always moving backwards. It's moving backwards, not forwards. I don't feel good about it.

The tiny villages in the south, even the tiny villages have lights. I've traveled there, and I've seen them. I see them and then I look here, and we don't have lights. It's because there is so much poverty here. It would give us a sense of pride if we had lights.

If you are an outsider, you won't even know when you've entered the village, because we are just sitting in darkness.

And also, if there is light there will be grinding mills. We, the women, sometimes we have to carry maize and other grains to very far places, to grind them, in order to prepare food.

Whenever they post teachers in our schools, the teachers don't want to stay in our community, simply because we don't have electricity. And the school children, in the night, without lights they can't study, so instead they will just be in their rooms, sleeping.

Yes, we're happy, but the happiness we have is like somebody in prison. In prison, in the day, you will be outside in the compound, but by 6pm, they send you back to your cell. It's not until 6am that they will let you out, and you will become happy. So our happiness is just in the daytime.

Our problem is, those who are close to the government, they are not our people. In the south, they have been going to school for a longer time than us. It's those people, close to the government, that we are lacking here. That's why we are always moving backwards.

I think, even without the lights, people still enjoy themselves. Like me, I don't actually relax in the room for nothing. If there were lights, in the night, I would come out and hang out with my friends. If there is an entertainment we'll go and observe. Or, we too can just hang out and create some entertainment for ourselves.

And also like attending video shows. That is normally happening here, but we get the power with a generator. It's just recently like, now there's a lot of Dagbani films. People have learned how to make movies by themselves. We are happy here because we are born here. If I say we're not happy, I'm lying. We can't just run away from our community and go to where there is light.

They put in the electricity poles before we gave birth to these children. Now the children have grown to this age, ten years, and we still don't have lights.

If the government doesn't listen to our complaints, then we should stop voting. And continue to live in darkness.

*

We arrived in Tamale a week ago. Earlier today, standing across the road from the

stadium where the Cameroon-Sudan match will soon begin, I noticed what appeared to be a shiny plaque on the side of a small building. I pushed my way through the crowd of hawkers and football fans in order to get a closer look. It turned out to be a plaque marking the “inauguration” of the city’s streetlights, presided over two weeks earlier, on January 18, 2008, by President John Kufuor. Not the stadium, mind you, but the coming of the lights.

Chapter Four

The Miraculous Life

My text, my word, my body, its harmonies and its struggles, the bodies which fall, flow, flame, or thunder like me, all this is never anything but a network of primordial elements in communication.¹

Kwesi

We drive in silence through the din of Tamale's narrow streets, our little bubble of quiet punctured only by the refrain of the afternoon *adhan* ringing out from the city's loudspeakers and, inside the car, by the jagged bursts of indecipherable tongues that intermittently break the surface of Kwesi's soundless prayers. Exhausted, my body aching with what feels like the first signs of an impending bout of malaria, I doze off and on in the passenger seat, drinking in the precious air-conditioned coolness streaming across my face and relishing this brief respite between a frenetic day of prayer meetings and street evangelism and the undoubtedly protracted evening service at which we will be arriving at any minute. It is during moments such as these that I marvel at the apparent boundlessness of Kwesi's energy and intensity. Not once today, it seems to me, did the flow of his almost mantric praying abate for even a single instant: whether speaking about some mundane triviality or, as in the street that morning, about the unbreakable hope that will enable him to face death without the slightest trace of fear, I got the impression that the torrent of – What? Words? Intonations? – composing

¹ Michel Serres, *The Birth of Physics* (Manchester: The Clinamen Press, 2001), 123

his glossolalic intercourse had merely submerged for the time being, persisting along a kind of inner parallel track of mental activity. A few weeks earlier, when I asked him about this peculiar tendency, he half-jokingly compared it to “those machines that show the motions of the earth” – as apt a characterization as any, I thought, of the manner in which, much like the seismograph’s planes and peaks, his transactions in the Spirit seemed to churn relentlessly onward, punctuated by the occasional irruption into the world of voice and sound. As we made our way slowly through the city, I closed my eyes and returned to those seismic currents. Their oscillatory waves of surges and repetitions yielded a fitting image of Kwesi’s singular receptivity, of his diligently habituated – if, as he sees it, necessarily inadequate – spiritual praxis, of his total participation in a mode of life whose lineaments and whose force I was then only beginning to comprehend.

Such were my tired ruminations as we pulled up to the storefront that doubled as a church. Kwesi turned off the engine but continued to sit there, sensing, I assumed, my own reluctance to go into the already-begun service. It turned out he had an entirely different reason for staying put. Some minutes later he finally speaks.

“Let me tell you what happened the other night.”

The pulsating rhythms of praise and worship music reverberate from within the church; a stifling heat has long replaced whatever vestiges of cooler air remained inside the vehicle. I listen wearily, distractedly, but he refuses to proceed until he is assured of my rapt attention. Were it not for my recorder, which, as so often amidst these periods of fatigue, proved to possess a deeper reservoir of stamina than that of its owner, I am sure that the contours of

Kwesi's narrative would have blurred into the dozens of similar such stories recounted to me during the course of my stay in northern Ghana.

In the middle of the night, Kwesi says, speaking quietly at first but growing increasingly animated, he awoke to the terrified screams of his wife coming from the other room. *She rushed in holding our baby, our daughter. She said I must take the child to the hospital. She was choking on something, Victoria said, and would die unless we brought her to the hospital immediately. Suzanna, her eyes were... she was just lying in my wife's arms, but I knew she was in terrible pain. I told my wife to be quiet, to stop yelling. I said, 'Leave me here with the baby.' She said no, she kept crying, and I asked, 'What are you crying for?' She said the baby was going to die. I said, 'Who told you – who told you that! That is a lie from the Devil, you must leave this room.' She didn't move, so I shouted, 'Please, walk out from this room!' Finally she left, and I held the baby in my hands. I said, 'Satan, you are a liar.' I just spoke straight to him, I said, 'Satan, you are a liar! Come out from her and stop this thing!' You know and I said it, I said it with some word in my spirit – I had been given a secret word to speak. Would you believe, I never trembled, no anxiety took any hold of me, nothing. My wife was waiting outside, she was still crying, so I walked the baby into the corridor. I set the baby down and I decided... I said, 'Devil, I'm not going to pray. I'm going to do something else, and you will give way.' So I started to sing. I didn't know the song but I began to sing from my spirit. I sang, 'Glory be to my God – Hallelujah.' I was just singing it little by little. 'Glory be to my God – Hallelujah!' I began to love that song, I loved it with all my heart. All of a sudden, I heard my baby sigh: 'Ahhhhh.' Victoria took her and she couldn't believe her eyes. You know, if I had listened to my wife's evil report, if I had taken her to the hospital, that would have been the end of the girl. That is why you need to know... you know, we were talking about the*

miraculous, about the miraculous life. That is why I am giving you this testimony. When you are walking in the Spirit, Brian, you will never live in anxiety. When you are sleeping and eating and thinking in the Spirit, you will never shake. You will know peace. Because the reality that my wife saw and the reality that I saw, they were not the same. They were not the same at all. But you must train – like all good things, you must work for it. Once you're living it, though...

These last words of his trail off as he places his hand on my left shoulder. I am sweating from the heat and from what I now feel with certainty to be the onset of a fever. I take a sip of warm water, wishing I was anywhere but in this car, this space, about to be prayed over by a man who seems convinced that my enervated state is due to a deficiency of faith and, likely, a coordinated attack of the Enemy as well. “What God is trying to give you,” says Kwesi after finishing the prayer, “is his word in your spirit. And when that word is in your spirit, when you see with new eyes, when you hear with new ears, you can create a world. You realize what I’m saying?” he asks. “You understand this power? You can create a world with a word. So seek it.”

So Many Images

My aim in this chapter is to delineate what exactly is involved in living a “miraculous life,” as Kwesi called it, and the means – the exercises and habituations, disciplines and techniques – by which this form of existence is to be cultivated and secured. What modes of feeling and disposition does this way of life necessitate, engender, or foreclose? How is its distinctive grammar of the miraculous disseminated and multiplied, inhabited and made

intelligible? If this “new religious imaginaire,” as Mbembe terms it, promises to remake the polis no less than the individual believer – where both self and polis “arise from the interaction between the world of the empirical and what cannot be reduced to it” (Mbembe 2002: 269-70; see also Marshall 2009) – how are styles of personal conduct and sensibility, as well as political belonging and sociality, being recast in light of the reality that attends it? What configurations of desire and anticipation obtain when people are incessantly summoned to recognize themselves as the bearers of spiritual gifts, the harnessing of which enables otherwise unfathomable possibilities to materialize within the crevices of the everyday? How to think the vitality of a power, both generative and destructive, to conceive oneself and, by extension, the world as perennially recreatable?

The answers to these questions cannot be sought in the abstract; neither are they to be found in anything like a generic “charismatic” or “Pentecostal” orientation per se. Even if one wished to speak of such an unqualified picture of Pentecostalism in and of itself (an endeavor, as many have pointed out, that is by no means without its intrinsic difficulties), to do so in the present context would be to obscure the resolute singularity of the conditions that spurred the incursion of these particular Christians into this specific area of West Africa during the early years of the new millennium. Thus Kwesi has said repeatedly, for instance, that since arriving in the north a few years prior his spiritual practice has taken on a much more concentrated and intensive, even urgent cast. As with many of his charismatic peers, this urgency is attributed to the condition, at once pitiable and pathological, considered to be endemic to the region and its inhabitants: a condition for which words like violent or backward or underdeveloped or, in a

more local idiom, *odonko*, an Akan epithet used to denote persons of questionable humanity, have long served as colloquial shorthands (see Chapter 1). Today, amid Ghana's attempt at refashioning itself as the consummate African success story – where the negative force of the northern hinterland may be said to lie in its spectral reinscription of “Africa” into the Ghanaian present – the region's longstanding history of vilification and abjection is increasingly being translated, for the charismatics who have recently settled in the area, into an impassioned project of moral and spiritual redemption. Evangelism and deliverance, healing services and outdoor crusades – these are among the weapons, they like to say, in their battle to “take back the north for the Lord,” and it is only within this matrix of circumstances that the questions posed above can, I think, be productively addressed.

Of course, my insistence on the aleatory or *occasional* character of the practices under consideration might well be construed as an invitation to ethnographic nominalism, a rejection of any comparative project in favor of the incommensurability of a given elsewhere, the recondite uniqueness of “other voices in other rooms” (Geertz 2000: 247). I intend nothing so ambitious, nor, indeed, epistemologically suspect here. My purpose, rather, is merely to register the fact that little can be presumed beforehand when dealing with a religiosity that so vigorously stresses the correspondence between the contingent, improvisational work of the Spirit in and through history (as substantiated by, among innumerable other things, gestures, prophecies, events, visions, sensations) and the direction given to one's everyday manner of inhabiting and acting upon the world. “To imagine a language,” goes a famous line in the *Philosophical Investigations*, “is to imagine a form of life.” Nowhere, we could say, is

Wittgenstein's methodological dictum more palpably borne out than in the lives and in the worlds that have been spoken by the word *miracle* in this chapter.³

Yet, as I discovered during the course of my research, knowing what to do with this word is far from a simple matter: a whole range of presuppositions, many of them unarticulated and inchoate – about nature and materiality, evidence and causation – had led me to assume I would recognize a miracle if I saw one. Why, then, would my friend refer to his impending graduation from the local teacher's college as a miraculous gift from God? Surely he meant this figuratively? How could that elderly woman from last week's deliverance service characterize an apparently nonsensical dream as a sign of the Spirit's activity in her life? And what did such testimonies have to do with, say, the capacity of a pastor to discern and subsequently destroy a throng of demon-animals that had invaded his bedroom in the middle of the night, or Bishop Dag Heward-Mills' sensational ability, his "*real power*" (recounted in Chapter 2) to instantaneously teleport congregants from one area of the globe to another? How is it that the literal, physical killing of one's enemies, both human and nonhuman, could be counted, as one young prophetess told her prayer camp attendees during an especially riotous evening session, among the "inheritances" bestowed upon all genuinely born again believers? Confronted with an ever diversifying gallery of phenomena collected under the rubric of the miraculous, and puzzled by the spectacularly wide-ranging variety of contexts in which the obscure affirmation of an Old Testament prophet (Isaiah 8:18: "We are for signs and wonders in Israel, from the

³ For an instructive exploration of the pertinence of this Wittgensteinian motif for anthropology, see Das 1998:180-182.

Lord of hosts who dwells in Mount Zion”) managed to be invoked, I quickly began to empathize with those modern historians who, uncertain what to make of the striking heterogeneity of miracle stories related in the biblical record, took to devising elaborate taxonomies that would allow for the disaggregation of miracles into their supposedly component types (e.g., exorcisms, healings, predictions, epiphanies, rescues, resurrections), narrative genres (“folkloristic fairy tales,” “mythic fables,” “historically-based events”), and, as the analytical focus shifted to the miracles of the early Roman and medieval church, their variable political and ecclesiastical functions.⁴ At a time when many humanists persisted in relegating the miracle tale to the historical dustbin filled with the myths, folklore, and superstition of a putatively superseded epoch (see Goodich 2007: 24), this attempt, by all indications successful, to bring a measure of circumscribability, legibility, and hence respectability to the study of miracles was undoubtedly a considerable scholarly achievement.

Whatever intellectual comfort may have accrued from marshaling similar explanatory strategies for my own research, it occurred to me that such an impulse, while likely enabling the production of a certain type of serviceable knowledge, would nevertheless have sheltered me from a knowledge of a very different sort, the kind which, as Arnold Davidson writes in his fascinating study of St. Francis’s stigmata, “at every moment involves one’s whole existence, that is, which determines not only a new theory, but a new experience” (2009: 453). Gaining

⁴ For classificatory schemes that attempt to divide miracle accounts into an array of narrative genres, see Ashe 1978 and Van der Loos 1965; for a typology of miracles in accordance with the specific acts performed in the biblical record, see Kelsey 1976 and Theissen 1983; and for those that differentiate miracles according to their social and political deployments, see Brown 1981 and Kee 1983.

access to this type of knowledge, which necessarily, on Davidson's terms, is never far from one's participation in it, would entail our accompanying, or rather following, a word like miracle back into the weave of affinities and associations in which it lives and breathes; or, at the very least, allowing our bodies to linger within spaces – Kwesi's car for example – where we might be haunted, *affected*, by the realization of our unwillingness or incapacity to do so. In my case, and in much the same manner that I came to appreciate the impossibility of thinking "Pentecostalism" as somehow separable from its emergence in and through the vicissitudes of locally contingent histories, this meant gradually coming to acknowledge how mistaken it would be, rhetorically or analytically, to disentangle miracles from the ensemble of pedagogies and doctrines – evangelism, spiritual warfare, deliverance, prophecy, fasting, intercessory prayer, the study of scripture, and so forth – that together make up, not, as too many anthropologists are wont to suppose, some exotic subspecies of Christianity proper, but instead, as one bemused charismatic friend patiently explained to me, and as was echoed in a number of sermons and interviews, "nothing more than Christianity itself – that's all this is." But it also, crucially, forced an acknowledgement of the extent to which the conceptual devices that had been handed down to me, to us, for the apprehension of such ostensibly religious forms were inadequate (not so much wrong as irrelevant) to the task of finding an expressive mode in which the realities so singularly and, at times, disturbingly heralded by people like Kwesi might somehow remain intact – in which, to put it in slightly different terms, they might be permitted to stake their claim.⁵

⁵ The call to make room for the divergent realities we encounter by fashioning new, specifically anthropological

Because it is, to be sure, a claim, and a thoroughly disruptive one at that, that Kwesi's reality wishes to stake. According to him, returning to his testimony in the car that afternoon, the world he sees and inhabits and the world his wife sees and inhabits are not the same worlds; nor, against any hope for a kind of agreement to disagree, are they to be equally valued. Although his wife, like Kwesi, was and remains a born-again believer and an energetic leader in their church, her spiritual sensorium, as exhibited by something so seemingly innocuous, so seemingly commonsensical as wanting to send their choking daughter to the hospital, was evidently a great deal less developed than his own. Where his wife saw a child in pain, unable to breathe due to an unknown object lodged in her throat, Kwesi discerned a word to be spoken, a song to be sung, an Enemy to be defeated. Suffice it to say, this was hardly a case of differing opinions: hers was not simply a mistaken prognosis, it was an unambiguously *evil* one. Fixated as he is, as he has become, on a single, incomparable, final, and exclusive reality which encompasses, outstrips, and determines all other realities, Kwesi was unable to countenance the possibility of a plurality of viewpoints on the same world or object; rather, for him it was a

forms of expression is one which, despite a disciplinary reticence toward positing difference in the wake of the auto-critiques of the 1980s (e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986), continues to be forcefully rearticulated from a number of directions. In a recent essay, for example, Stuart McLean advances an arresting vision of a reinvigorated anthropology that would facilitate confrontations "through which the parameters of the real could be renegotiated and, potentially, expanded," an anthropology whose comparative reach and empirical attachment to existing conditions "might yield not only alternative models of human social organization" but also "alternative conceptualizations of the physical universe and the various entities comprising it" (McLean 2009:235). While entertaining such a view of the ethnographic enterprise will indeed oblige us to "overcome a long-standing preoccupation with questions of epistemology and venture instead on to the altogether riskier terrain of ontology," this is by no means a terrain unfamiliar to anthropology; as McLean rightly notes, looking to the cosmogonical myths related by Malinowski, Fortune, Wirz, Lévy-Bruhl, and their successors, it is one that has been traversed by ethnographers from the very beginning.

matter of each viewpoint opening onto a world that itself contains yet others.⁶ And if such a chasm separated, however momentarily, his wife's manner of seeing (and walking and sleeping and eating and thinking) in the Spirit from his own, then how much greater was the disjuncture between *our* respective perceptual orientations? In retrospect it became clear that Kwesi's testimony that afternoon had been mobilized as an object lesson whose illocutionary force, whose *intentio*, as Walter Benjamin (1969: 79) would have it, consisted in its desire to falsify, to give the lie to, the coordinates of truth and falsity that organized my reality – a reality held hostage to, among other things, a defective image of thought as regards the Holy Spirit's action in the world and human participation in it; which is to say, the very possibility of a “miracle” as such.

This notion of a defective or dogmatic image of thought comes from Gilles Deleuze, who, first in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1983) and then in *Difference and Repetition* (1994), utilizes the term to designate the impediments, those hidden orthodoxies or conjectures, that for

⁶ I borrow this phrasing from Deleuze 1997. In his perspicacious “Translator’s Introduction” to Heidegger’s *The Essence of Reasons* (1969), filmmaker and one-time philosopher Terrence Malick provides a striking account of the concept of “world” in Heidegger that strangely resonates with what Kwesi may have meant when he said “the reality that I saw and the reality that my wife saw, they were not the same. They were not the same *at all*.” It is worth quoting Malick at length: “The world, on his [Heidegger’s] definition, is not the ‘totality of things,’ but that in terms of which we understand them, that which gives them measure and purpose and validity in our schemes. What leads Heidegger to offer the definition is not obvious, but it may well be related to explaining why we must, and no less how we *can*, share certain notions about the measure and purpose and validity of things. And presumably it is important to have that explanation because sometimes we *do not*, or do not seem to, share such notions. Where Heidegger talks about ‘world,’ he will often appear to be talking about a pervasive interpretation or point of view which we bring to the things of the world. This, in any case, has been the view of many commentators. *But there is little sense in speaking of ‘a point of view’ here since precisely what Heidegger wants to indicate with the concept is that none other is possible. And there is no more sense in speaking of an interpretation when, instead of an interpretation, the ‘world’ is meant to be that which can keep us from seeing, or force us to see, that what we have is one.* Heidegger’s concept quite like Kierkegaard’s ‘sphere of existence’ or Wittgenstein’s ‘form of life,’ and, with them, it enters his inquiry only at its limits, when a problem moves out of his depth, or jurisdiction” (1969: xiv-xv, my emphasis).

centuries have prevented philosophy from achieving its various rebeginnings. To bear out his strong indictment, Deleuze (1994: 129) points to the elaboration of Descartes' cogito, famously presented as a freestanding concept entirely devoid of any predetermined postulates. Yet while it is true, Deleuze observes, that Descartes successfully avoided defining man, à la Aristotle, as a "rational animal," since such a definition would presuppose the concepts of both rationality and animality, the cogito is nevertheless conditioned, he argues, by presuppositions of a somewhat different order: not "objective" or "explicit" presuppositions, which after all are easy to detect and eliminate, but rather, presuming as they do that everybody knows what is meant, for instance, by *self*, *thinking*, and *being*, what Deleuze refers to as "subjective" or "implicit" ones. And the same can be said for Kant, Hegel, Husserl, and even Heidegger, all of whom, according to Deleuze, invoke some version of an aconceptual or preinterpretive understanding of being and yet fail to appreciate the buried referents, the hidden images, upon which their otherwise dissimilar philosophies are erected. So it comes as little surprise that, in the English edition preface to *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze singles out the third chapter – simply titled "The Image of Thought" – as the "most essential and the most concrete" of the book's chapters, as well as the one which most vividly presages his future writings with Félix Guattari (Ibid:xvii), for it is there that the conditions of a "true critique and a true creation" are set against the array of paradigms that have condemned philosophy to reduplicate the *doxa* with which it has avowedly sought to break (ibid., 148-9; see also Marrati 2001: 230). What is needed, says Deleuze, is an encounter, be it with "Socrates, a temple, a demon" or some other "strangeness or enmity," that would "awaken thought from its natural stupor," that would, in

other words, through a shock of the unrecognizable and unassimilable, liberate thought from “those images which imprison it” (Ibid: 139, xvii).

Following Deleuze, who perceived the futility of composing his ontological anthem (“A single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamour of Being for all beings...”) without first ascertaining those hindrances that would prevent it from being heard, I too have found it necessary to pinpoint the cluster of images that – to reiterate something I said above – have led us to assume we would know a miracle if we saw one. Of course, in attempting to heed Deleuze’s cautionary injunction I am hardly unaccompanied: from Stanley Cavell’s (2004:293) recasting of philosophy as a therapeutic confrontation with “the chains of our bewitchment and of being captured by images” to W.G. Sebald’s (2001:72) efforts at disabusing us of “images at which we keep staring while the truth lies elsewhere, away from it all, somewhere as yet undiscovered,” this call to undertake the “destruction of the image of thought which presupposes itself” (Deleuze 1994:139) has found resonances in a number of philosophical, artistic, and, in its truest moments, anthropological registers.⁷ However, and notwithstanding their sporadic allusions to emancipation and demolition, it is no mere iconoclasm that orients these endeavors; rather, however discomfiting, the point is always to remain receptive to the

⁷ And of course, most succinctly, there is Wittgenstein: “A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.” *Philosophical Investigations*, ¶ 425. Yet, as Hauerwas reminds us, drawing on Hilary Putnam, it is mistaken to assume that Wittgenstein “opposes or thinks pictorial thinking is always a mistake. Wittgenstein does not think we can or should avoid pictures, but a too steady diet of one picture can get in the way of thought” (Hauerwas 2011: 62, ff. 2). See also Putnam 1992: 156-157.

appearance of other, divergent thought-images that might catalyze intellection (Latour 2010).⁸ “I must let my senses wander as my thought, my eyes see without looking,” wrote Henry David Thoreau in his diaries (1962:488). “Go not to the object; let it come to you.” For Deleuze, Cavell, and Sebald, such objects have arrived in a plurality of guises: in the cinema of French New Wave and Italian neorealism; in the dancing of Fred Astaire and the drama of Beckett’s *Endgame*, in the charcoal sketches of a Jewish émigré and the vertiginous depths of a South African diamond mine. For me they appeared in the paroxysms of a young boy’s Spirit-filled body, in the eyes of a self-proclaimed prophet as he heaped curses upon his Muslim neighbors, in the weight of Kwesi’s hand as it pressed down on my shoulder.

Which is only to say that, odd as it may seem, I am struck by the pertinence of Deleuze’s philosophical diagnostics to the concerns of the present chapter. For while the specific images that Deleuze sought to excavate and abandon – in this case those of identity and recognition – would appear to have little or nothing to do with our apprehension of Kwesi’s miracle, our images of the latter, I would argue, have been no less stubborn or intractable. In fact, I would go so far as to propose that our thinking and writing and theorizing about miracles has more often than not resorted, again invoking Sebald, to “preformed images already imprinted on our brains,” “set pieces which have already been staged often enough by others” (2001:73). In the variously torpid and fierce dramas that comprise the intellectual trajectories of the miraculous, the set pieces have endured with remarkably little variation: what we have

⁸ On the shift in Deleuze’s writings from a preoccupation with liberating thought from images (*Difference and Repetition*) to the production of novel “thought-images” (*Cinema 1&2*), see Marrati 2000.

recurrently been given is an image of the miraculous refracted through the figure of the Event, the exception, the transgression of, if not natural law per se, then at least what has come to be authorized as the shape of ordinary existence.

Put in more schematic terms, my contention is that we – that is, those of us formed in the crucible of a secular liberal education – have been captured by what might be thought of as a tripartite image of the miraculous, whereby (1) there is assumed to exist a “nature” against the backdrop of whose relatively determinate laws or regularities (2) a miracle is believed to constitute a transgression or interruption, the very exceptionality of which (3) requires a special brand of testimony in order to be corroborated. Emerging from the technical theological and philosophical vocabularies of medieval scholasticism, and put to decisive use in the nascent canonization processes that accompanied them, versions of this understanding can be evinced in everything from early modern debates surrounding general versus particular will – for example, Nicolas Malebranche’s assertion that “the laws of nature are always quite simple and quite general... God does not act at all by particular wills, unless order requires a miracle” (Malebranche 1992:158) – and the development of Humean epistemology to, more recently, Alain Badiou’s theorization of the unanticipated, irruptive “truth event” and Carl Schmitt’s theologico-political nexus of miracle and sovereign exception. Rupture and suspension, negation and nature and norm and intervention: these are the keywords that constitute our prevailing image, that undergird the entire edifice upon which, at least in the knowledge formations we inhabit, miracle has been and continues to be constructed.

Moreover, the ascendancy of this image of thought has been accompanied by a number

of equally entrenched – if perhaps less readily or intuitively identifiable – theoretical and political no less than theological entailments. And these entailments in turn insinuate a great deal more than we are accustomed to attributing to our conceptual investments: put simply, they insinuate a story that is itself a world. I can think of no better name for this story than that of *sovereignty*. For when Schmitt famously claimed in the penultimate chapter of his *Political Theology* that “the exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology” (2005: 36), where, as he put it at the book’s outset, “sovereign is he who decides on the exception,” (5) he was writing as merely one in a long tradition of construing miracle not only as a theological or philosophical but as a theologico-*political* thematic, a tradition in which, even when a specific arrangement of sovereignty (e.g., dictatorship or republicanism) was being opposed, it was nevertheless presumed that *any discourse on the miraculous was simultaneously and necessarily a discourse on sovereign power*. (This holds true, I would argue, even for that constellation of German-Jewish thinkers in the interwar period who, in reconceptualizing the miraculous on the terrain of prophecy and fulfillment instead of nature and suspension, attempted, as political theorist Bonnie Honig puts it, to “take exception to the exception.”⁹) A

⁹ Honig’s formulation is largely indebted to Eric Santner’s important essay “Miracles Happen: Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Freud, and the Matter of the Neighbor” (2005), in which Santner insists that for both Rosenzweig and Benjamin a miracle signifies not the state of exception, “but rather its suspension, an intervention into the peculiar topological knot – the outlaw dimension internal to law – that serves to sustain the symbolic function of sovereignty” (102-103). Rosenzweig’s and Benjamin’s thinking about miracles must therefore, Santner concludes, be “seen as critiques of political theology, but as critiques which gain their force from the resources of theology (understood as a form of ‘new thinking’)” (103). Though Santner, like Honig, wants to find in this “new thinking” a powerful intervention into and transformation of political theology rather than a passage beyond it

(ibid, ff. 47, 103), I would argue that their recast political theology nevertheless remains bound to an ongoing dialectic of sovereign power – meaning, finally, that their recalibrated political theology, however revelatory,

fuller elucidation of the extent to which this story has managed in recent years to capture our scholarly imaginations (encompassing domains as analytically diverse as economics, humanitarianism, theology, and political theory), and the potential resources for freeing ourselves from it, will need to be undertaken elsewhere. Here I will limit myself to the assertion that in continuing to reproduce the story of sovereignty – a story whose animating doctrines and motifs cut to the very heart of the Western intellectual tradition, and so also a story that, from Foucault’s (1977) regicidal effort at pitching the king’s decapitated head into the field of biopolitics to, more recently and ambiguously, Hardt and Negri’s (2009: 4-6) call to go beyond our “apocalyptic” obsession with sovereign authority in favor of “the really dominant forms of power” that confront us today (the “predominant contemporary form of sovereignty,” they write, “if we still want to call it that”), many have tried to put an end to; a story that despite or perhaps because of repeated warnings that they should resist the temptation to tell it (recall Radcliffe-Brown’s forward to *African Political Systems* in which the findings of its contributors are contrasted with what he calls the “fictions” of political philosophy, with the latter’s insistence on the state, and the notion of sovereignty, as the locus of political power [1940, xxiii]), Africanists have begun to narrate with surprising vigor, finding some new permutation, some shifting logic of sovereign power in everything from churches and NGOs to informal economies and HIV clinics – in continuing to tell this story, I want to

ends up producing little more than a revised picture of sovereignty.

suggest, we are not brought any closer to the reality Kwesi admonished me to seek.

And so we confront a question that, though seldom asked, seems as crucial as it is inevitable: the question, that is, as to whether abandoning the timeworn link between miracles and sovereign power, the great Schmittian dialectic of suspension and interruption, is to abandon the possibility of a political theology more generally. I want to argue that it doesn't, and that, whether conceived vertically or horizontally, top-down or democratically, the rubric of sovereign power by no means exhausts the forms of ethical-political life – the forms of mutuality, desire, aspiration, and indeed destruction – that might be organized by an alternative grammar of the miraculous. Taken a step further: If the minor tradition of thinking immanence from Spinoza and Nietzsche to Bergson and Deleuze can be read (and I believe it can) as a wholesale repudiation and undoing of that entire complex of assumptions about nature, politics, time, matter, perception – in short, life – that were and continue to be presupposed by a world of sovereignty, then maybe instead of trying to recast sovereignty in a gradated, even immanentist direction (see Singh 2012), we ought to countenance the possibility of life beyond the whole sovereignty edifice altogether?

Of course, some will argue that the rubric of sovereignty, while perhaps inadequate for making sense of what is happening in the churches, surely remains salient to our analyses of African states, or markets, or humanitarian regimes. There is something to be said for such a response. But it is equally the case that it is precisely the circumscription of *his* story, its consignment to some rarified domain called “the religious” (as opposed to everything else that is supposed to make up one's existence), that Kwesi's story calls irrevocably into doubt; it is the

rewriting of every story – the story of Africa and Ghana and northern Ghana, the story of development and success, the story of Islam and the war on terror, the story of death and misfortune, the story of why I was feeling sick that afternoon – that it endeavors to bring about. And, in that respect, it can be regarded as demarcating not only a political theology, but an economic theology, a medical theology, an educational theology...

Anthropologists, writes Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, must “allow that visions are not beliefs, not consensual views, but rather worlds seen objectively: not *worldviews*, but *worlds of vision* (and not vision only – these are worlds perceivable by senses other than vision and are objects of extrasensory conception as well)” (2011:133, original emphasis). Yet how to think these other grammars, these other stories, these other worlds that are so rapidly emplacing themselves across the continent today, how to think them beyond the rubrics that have been handed down to us is not an easy task. It pushes us into realms rarely visited by our queries: ones oriented, I discovered, less around “nature” than around *creation*, ones defined less in terms of “exception” than in terms of *inception*, and ones whose truth status derives not from disinterested proof or impartial evidence but from an intensive, wholly passionate (though no less “objective”) mode of *storytelling*. And it is the reality that issues from such stories, the world spoken by a word, as Kwesi would say, that comes to compose the fabric of ordinary life, a life – a miraculous life – in which miracles are received not as interruptions but as intensifications of the everyday.¹⁰ Where in another theological universe the miraculous would

¹⁰ On the crucial idea that for charismatics the miraculous indicates not a suspension or interruption but a remaking, even intensification, of the everyday – one that depends, moreover, on a certain style of cultivated (i.e., subjectivated) receptivity – see Marshall 2010: 213-215.

inevitably point the way to a metaphysics of transcendence, such that any creative act would merely mimic or analogize God's originary act of speaking something out of nothing, here "miracle" names a rather different relationality, less of vertical emanation than of immanent *participation*. If recounting this reality is a difficult task, attaining it, allowing oneself to be grasped by it, is more arduous still; like all good things, Kwesi insisted, you must train, you must work for it. Centered on the interwoven thematics of habit, receptivity, and improvisation, I turn in the following pages to the concrete ways such training is undertaken by believers aspiring to make this reality their own; and also, against the backdrop of a vigorous campaign aimed at reconstituting the social, moral, and spiritual disposition of an entire region, the ways this reality, this life, is made available to others.

Sense-Knowledge Faith

We arrive fifteen or so minutes late. As we approach the open-walled church, the smallest of three Lighthouse branches in Tamale, we hear a man screaming prayers of thanksgiving into the microphone, ear-shattering supplications roaring out of the huge outward facing speakers. The church's location makes it incredibly conspicuous in this heavily Muslim neighborhood; at one point, the afternoon call to prayers, coming from a loudspeaker atop the mosque across the road, can be heard through the tiny gaps in the pastor's spiritual warfare. I take the church's audible blasts as a full-frontal and very intentional assault on the neighborhood and its inhabitants.

We find seats near the back as I try to get a feel for the service, only the fifth or sixth I've attended since commencing my field research a couple of weeks ago. After a few minutes of preliminary prayer, another pastor takes the microphone and announces the first of several themes for the evening's intercessory prayer: "Fulfill my Prophecy," by which he means, as his subsequent entreaties indicate, that "any enemy who has come between you and your prophetic anointing should be destroyed by fire." The shouting in the church reaches a fever pitch, but just as quickly, as another man takes the mic, the bedlam fades away, like a violent tide receding into the stillness of the ocean. He says the next prayers will be devoted to "interceding to God that our requests for the remaining part of the year will be granted to us." The man encourages us to listen, as we pray and throughout the service, for what the Spirit might be saying to us. Later, I'm startled when a young woman abruptly interrupts the sermon to deliver a word, in tongues, which she has just received from the Lord.

The church is larger than I expected; I would say at least seventy-five people occupy the white plastic chairs neatly organized into several rows. The third theme of the evening is "turning around your negative situation" – the man, yet another pastor, says this can pertain to financial problems, marital issues, or spiritual matters. People stare at me as I take notes (even more so when I take photos), wary, I suppose, of this white visitor hunched over in his seat as everyone else paces in earnest prayer. So I put the notepad away and join them. I notice (writing this several minutes later as we take our seats) that as the church embarks on this particular intercessory prayer, on turning around your negative situation, a number of people, both men and women, are making combative, taunting gestures with their hands, apparently

participating with their very bodies and movements in the spiritual battles being waged in their bellowed prayers. “Let your voices be heard before the Creator!” an older woman screeches into the microphone. *“And may your trouble become your testimony!”*

There is little doubt that I am in the midst of what many would consider to be a “prosperity” church, judging not only by the content of the prayer requests and the scriptures marshalled to support them, but also by the gaudy clothes worn by the three or four pastors seated in the special cushioned chairs at the front, the men occupying their humble thrones and dressed in leather shirts and pants, three-piece suits that shine in the fluorescent light reflecting off the zinc ceiling. One of the loudspeakers appears to have blown out, but nobody pays it any mind. The sermon for tonight, announced by the man in the leather getup, is “How to Increase Your Faith and Walk in Faith.” I would say he’s maybe forty to forty-five years old, not a handsome or attractive man, but appealing nonetheless, magnetic as he glides from the punch line of a joke – in Twi, of course, the lingua franca of the charismatic incursion into the area – to, seconds later, a fierce, shouted, seething reminder that, for instance, the Enemy will receive his due, and your enemies will receive theirs. “The one closest to you shapes and influences your life and destiny,” he says, referring those of us with Bibles to Proverbs 13:20. “If there is no progress in your life, check who is connected to you. If you associate with dream killers you will go through life without a dream, but if you associate with dream carriers you too will become a carrier of dreams. May the oil of headship and favor overtake you this year!” He then recounts the topics already preached on, apparently those that led up to the present sermon, one of them being “Violent Faith.” Later, after the service, I ask the young church

member seated next to me about this peculiar theme. She tells me that one of the assistant pastors, Pastor Kwesi, the man in the three-piece suit with the little flower attached to his lapel, the one who introduced the “fulfill my prophecy” petition earlier in the evening, had preached on “Violent Faith” the week before.

The sermon proceeds. “When you walk in faith, be assured that the Devil will intensify his activities.” We need faith, he exclaims, to “grab on to God’s promise that ‘by His stripes we are healed,’” and it is a lack of faith in this promise that “prevents some of us from walking in victory, from experiencing a rapturous life.” The “threefold mission of Jesus,” he continues, is “to be saved from our sin, to live a sin-free life, and, most importantly, to have power over sin” – for our “spirit is *exactly* like the spirit of Christ.” He tells us that God has given us power, “*to be exact*,” over our bodies, that our bodies “no longer own us but are rather subordinated to the power of the living God.” What is lacking in our lives is “*sense-knowledge faith*,” the sort of faith by which we “can see and hear and touch what the Lord is doing in our midst.” To this sense-knowledge faith, fostered through the development of our “organs of perception” (as he calls it), the pastor opposes *hope*. “Hope looks to the future, but sense-knowledge faith looks to the *now*.” Real faith, he goes on, citing the woman in scripture who was immediately healed upon touching the hem of Jesus’ garment, brings about *instantaneous* results. “Hope is a wonderful thing, hope is a beautiful thing, it makes us look to a better future. But it will not give you the instantaneous gifts you are looking for. Faith, on the other hand, the kind we’ve been talking about, deals with *now, now, NOW!*”

In my notes, I'm embarrassed to report, I go on to speculate about what this now-centered ontology (as I breathlessly call it) might do for the idea of utopia, whether it is reducible to the time of neoliberalism, whether, against the "millennial capitalism" take on Pentecostalism (e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff 2001), it might in fact exceed the logics of global capital, or perhaps overpower it. I should have been paying closer attention to the sermon.

But in order to walk in this kind of faith, the pastor is declaiming, his face drenched in sweat, the oppressive heat – he must be sweltering under that leather shirt! – doing nothing to diminish his extraordinary energy as he paces rapidly back and forth across the stage, in order to walk in this kind of faith *the burden is on us to exercise our spirit, to meditate on the Word, to discipline our mind and body, to give priority in our thought processes and practical decision-making to the Word of God. As the Bishop is always saying, like a footballer exercises his body, so too must we strengthen our spiritual muscles. And then: When you're feeling sick, is your first thought that you should see a doctor? Or is it to turn to the Word to see what the Creator has to say about sickness and death? We must, he insists, incessantly listen for the voice of the Spirit, for what the Lord expects of us, what He wants to do through us, not tomorrow, not the next day, but in this very moment.* He explains that this "power of intuition," as he calls it, is only "potent" when the previous instructions have been followed: *If you don't train your spirit correctly, you won't be able to hear the voice of the Spirit when He speaks to you. If you want your faith to grow, if you want to feel the joy of walking in the instantaneous gifts God has in store for you, you need to exercise your spirit...!*

The service concludes with an offering. I dance to the front with the other people in my row and drop a few crumpled cedis into the plastic basket.

Spiritual Gifts

What really struck me about this crusade was the mighty power of God. God healed so many people and I was touched. The blind seeing, the lame walking... It was just like re-living the Bible again, it was just like being in Bible times with Jesus. So I will say Jesus was here. Another thing was the impact of the crusade on the town. Anytime Jesus went into a city, one thing that happened was that he shook the whole city, and I realized that really Jesus came and shook the city of Techiman tonight. Unbelievable! Astonishing! I was in awe and I said, 'To come in one meeting and see all these wonderful souls being won into the Kingdom, thousands upon thousands of souls... the wonders, the power of God made manifest, I think it's awesome.' But I also want to say that the Kingdom costs a lot of money, it costs a lot of money to bring someone into the Kingdom. When I looked at the setup, the generator, the trucks, the fuel, the staff and everything, I said 'Wow! A soul is worth the whole world. A soul is worth the whole world.'

The gentle baritone voice of prophet Kakra Baiden suddenly gives way to a rousing soundtrack of American-style praise and worship music and a final, melodramatic montage of ecstatic hordes of men and women swaying within a vast enclosure illuminated by gigantic klieg lights. Zooming through a dense swarm of insects that alert us to the time of year – the rainy season – in which the gathering is taking place, the camera alights on an old man laughing, dancing, waving a wooden crutch, a man in Muslim dress lifting his hands up into the night sky, a woman writhing around onstage as ushers scramble to keep up. The Bishop, the crowd, praying, preaching, rapid-fire shots of deliverance and revival. And then, panning once more over the enormous crowd as the superimposed message “Thank You for Your Support” appears

serenely over their heads and outstretched hands, the film is over. On the dirty cinderblock wall acting as a makeshift screen materializes the Bishop's earnest face. The title menu of the promotional DVD stirs the assembled group of seventeen pastors, lay ministers, prophets, and evangelists – all men – out of the rapt absorption in which they have been held for the past twenty-nine minutes. One of the Bishop's lieutenants, a muscular, athletic looking man in sharp black jeans and a red polo shirt, walks slowly to the front of the dingy classroom, trying, it seems, to preserve as long as possible the spell cast by the preceding film over its viewers. With no small amount of gravitas he picks up a box of books – “The Bishop asked me to give this to each of you as a gift” – and without further explanation begins passing the box around.

I had encountered *Ministering with Signs and Wonders* a few months earlier when a Lighthouse friend let me borrow it in preparation for an upcoming small group at Tamale Polytechnic; the text, one of several by Dag Heward-Mills on rotation within the hundreds of Lighthouse small groups that meet on a weekly basis, had been chosen as that month's focus of study. I knew the book fairly well – every word, I recalled, every section had been pored over at those meetings with near rabbinical contemplation. But now, today, encountering it again at this last-minute gathering of the Local Council of Churches, a gathering at which the Council is to decide whether or not it would take part in (and, by implication, endorse) the first Healing Jesus Crusade to be staged in the Northern Region, the book takes on new significance.

First and foremost, there is the performative power of the “gift” itself. Against a pervasive typecasting of African charismatic pastors as comparatively comfortable entrepreneurs (or worse) whose earnings have been won at the expense of their credulous

congregations, where both parties, preacher and parishioner alike, are said to have discovered in this individualistic brand of Christianity a pragmatic antidote to the ubiquitous demands of kith and kin, I knew from my time with dozens of charismatic leaders in the region that most were neither financially secure nor free of the familial networks upon which they continued to be dependent, whether in the form of employment or remittances, for their daily bread. This was certainly the case for the majority of those present at the Council meeting that day. The group could have been divided between the few who, commissioned to the north by one of a handful of Accra-based megachurches or denominations, ministered in Tamale with a degree of institutional and financial backing – though it’s worth noting that even these pastors were often forced to pursue extra-ecclesial means to make ends meet (the senior pastor of Winner’s Chapel, for instance, ran a primary school) – and the many more who had founded (in the case of one young man, just earlier that week) their own churches, prayer camps, or ministries and thus subsisted as precariously, materially if not existentially, as any of their Christian or Muslim peers. That the middle-aged “General Overseer” of Powerlife Miracle Outreach International felt compelled at a previous meeting to sheepishly request that the Council reimburse taxi fares (ranging from fifty cents to two or three dollars round trip) for those of them “barely keeping our heads above water” – a request immediately and emphatically reiterated by a number of others – speaks to the quotidian deprivations endured even by these purveyors of a gospel of superabundance.

Decidedly unlike the bevy of managers (“Everyone in Ghana is a manager,” my friends liked to quip, “since everybody is ‘just managing’”) who frequent Tamale’s drinking bars and

pito houses, however, there was not a hint of fatalism or despondency to be found among these struggling Council members: my life, my longings, my finances and relationships, my future is already secured, they affirmed unreservedly, and if I fail to see that, it is not God's problem, it is my own fault, my own incapacity to *walk in*, and into, my blessing.¹¹ Or as one prominent evangelist characteristically averred: "Your blessing is caught by the horns. It is there for you. It cannot get away. It cannot fight against the will of God. You don't have to struggle to capture a ram tied by the horns. Abraham went and took the ram. You are to go and take your blessing. There is no question here" (Anaba 2000). And if there was no question as to the manifest availability of one's blessing – a polyvalent term taken to denote the realization of a wide-ranging, indeed infinitely various array of desires and potentialities – within the ambit of the everyday, there was similarly little doubt that becoming the type of person who can *discern* the Spirit's activity, who can *perceive* what God is doing, or wants to do, requires emulating – some charismatics call it copying¹² – those singular men and women whose anointing has come

¹¹ Thus Luke 11:11-13 (NIV), one of a handful of verses invoked ad nauseam in Ghana's charismatic circles: "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give to those who ask him?"

¹² As far as I know it was at Lighthouse that the idea and practice of "copying" originated, and at times it was taken to an obsessive, almost frightening extreme, above all in the form of incessant teachings about "loyalty and disloyalty." I once raised these questions with Justice. I told him I didn't understand why the Bishop (in his books) says that someone who doesn't say "amen," or "jubilate" and "cheer" at certain points in the sermon is or has the potential to become a disloyal person. To my surprise, Justice became quite animated and confessed that, like me, he couldn't understand the message and that it bothered him greatly. I asked him if he had ever spoken to his pastor, Reverend Patrick, about this, and he said that he would never do so, out of fear that he, too, would come to be looked upon as a disloyal member. "If I asked Rev or another pastor about this issue, they would just repeat what the Bishop has already said. And even though they wouldn't accuse me of being disloyal to my face, you can guarantee they would be thinking it in their mind. It would by all means sow the seed of doubt in their minds." It was the first even remotely critical comment I had heard from Justice, and his admission that he

to bear particularly undeniable fruit. Such “fruit” can take a multiplicity of forms, from the ephemeral and affective (the undeniably “spiritual” man or woman) to the carnal and quantifiable. Hardly surprising, then, that Lighthouse and its leadership would be held in especially high esteem among the charismatics in Tamale, for it was Lighthouse – with its weekly evangelism and village outreaches, with its Land Cruisers and radio programs, with its “cathedral” on the edge of town (by far the grandest structure of its kind in Tamale) and above all with its massive, spectacle-laden Healing Jesus Crusades – that it had seemed most fully realized the vision of a charismatic presence in the beleaguered region.

Watching the scene play out in the Council meeting that day, it struck me that, choreographed or not, the gift of the Bishop’s book at that precise moment served to augment an impression that had been fermenting for the past two and a half hours (and probably well before then), an impression whose potency, whose subliminal force, not only consolidated the Council’s agreement to partner with Lighthouse in bringing the crusade to this Muslim region, but, more significantly, bespoke the facticity of an anointing that could be said to flow directly from the Bishop, on through his pastors and representatives, into the potentially rekindled spiritual senses of those of us gathered there. In a way, following on the heels of the remarkable crusade footage, the very gesture of giving the book away for free – a rare occurrence even in the larger southern churches, where it is not uncommon for a pastor to

couldn’t be honest about his doubts was more surprising still. Minutes later, however, while criticizing the behavior of another church member, Justice exclaimed that he doubted the loyalty of those – like himself, and as soon as he said it he seemed aware of the irony – who disagreed with or questioned the Bishop’s teachings.

auction off his or her books in a Sunday morning service – effectively dramatized, in its casual gratuitousness, the contents of the book itself. This is what it looks like, said the gesture in so many words, when you are *ministering with signs and wonders*.

Roland

When Justice and I pull up to the thatch roof compound house we are surprised to find the young prophet standing there, dressed in the same white gown – apparently the outfit of choice for self-styled Ghanaian prophets – he was wearing the last time we met him. He is excited to see us and immediately ushers us into his rented room: a tiny, filthy space furnished only with a dingy foam mattress, a few broken chairs and, remarkably, a small black-and-white television resting tenuously on a makeshift stand. Two postcard portraits of Jesus have been pasted to the wall. I am taken aback by the squalid conditions in which Roland lives. As I launch into the requisite greetings Justice, who has been helping me with the research, nervously eyes his motorbike through the doorway, worried, it seems, that something (I can't tell what) will happen to it; he often gets like this, assuming an unconcealed air of distaste and superiority, whenever we're in a Dagomba neighborhood (though Roland himself is not a northerner, it is as though he is guilty by association, by mere proximity). It's extremely embarrassing. Later, and not for the first time, I'll ask him to at least tone down the condescension when we're visiting people. Does he want to help with the research or not? Fortunately, Roland appears oblivious to the disrespect. In fact, he seems unaware of Justice's presence altogether. He is obviously proud of the television, for as he leaves the room to (as we soon find out) fetch some minerals, he makes a point of turning up the television (which is

now playing a popular Mexican soap opera) as loudly as possible, as if, in his absence, he hopes it will be the center of attention. Justice and I are sweating wildly. We glance at each other, wondering how long we'll have to stay here, sweltering in this dank oven with neither fan nor ventilation.

Finally Roland returns with the drinks: two sachets of "pure water" and two bottles of orange Fanta. Nothing for himself. He stands up and warmly greets me again. "Long time!" he announces with a big smile, shaking my hand, as if we hadn't gone through this only minutes earlier. After asking after "madam" and inquiring into the progress of my research (whose point he, like everyone else, appears noticeably unsure of) he gets down to what was evidently his agenda in inviting us over.

"Mr. Brian," he says solemnly, his voice barely above a whisper. "I'm wondering if you might be able to help me with something."

I avoid Justice's knowing look in my direction. Here we go, he is clearly thinking, the inevitable request for money. "You see," Roland continues, "I am planning on writing a book, or actually several books, but there's still a lot of work to do – I still need to collect a lot of information on the different topics. I thought you might know something about how to do that." Relieved, I ask him what theme, or themes, the books will address. He pulls out a notebook from underneath the television stand. "Here, take a look," he says. "I've been working on this for a long time."

The notebook is ancient and falling apart; as I gingerly open it, pieces of once-white paper and pages ripped from pamphlets and newspapers cascade around me. (One of them

catches my eye: A notice circa 2005 for “7 Days of Super Power-Packed Revival” organized by a certain International Deliverance and Prayer Ministry, on the topic “Operation Fire Your Enemies: Part 5.” A color photo of the senior pastor and his wife, both dressed in army fatigues, is emblazoned across the flyer.)

Flipping through its pages at random, and in spite of the fact that it was Roland who handed it to me, I can’t help but feel that I’m intruding in some way upon a secret and slightly disquieting landscape of interiority, almost like a movie detective who arrives too late at the serial killer’s apartment only to discover the bizarre ramblings that have been left behind. Page after page of jagged infinitesimal notes and slogans and etchings taking up every last centimeter of blank space: a prayer journal, a dream diary, a mad sketchbook.

I turn to Roland, unsure what to do with all this. He reaches over and directs me to a page toward the back. It’s covered with what appear to be dozens of titles, all caps, in quotes, for what I surmise are his prospective book projects. Among those I can make out:

“UNLOCKING YOUR FINANCIAL SUCCESS”; “THE KEY TO A HAPPY MARRIAGE” (strange because Roland is single); “ATMOSPHERE FOR MIRACLES”; “OVERCOMING THE GREAT DESTROYER”; “CHASING THE FOXES” (I don’t ask); “10 STEPS TO WEALTH”; and “NAMING THE VICTORY.” I close the notebook and hand it back to him. Justice remains quiet. “Well, I’m not sure I’ll be able to help you with much,” I tell him. “But let me know if you think of anything in particular...”

I'll be seeing Roland tomorrow evening at Police Park, where he has been invited to preach at a fellow prophet's weekly miracle meeting. He asks Justice to take a picture of the two of us before we leave, grabbing hold of my hand as Justice snaps the photo.

~~Another~~ **This World is Possible**

Enumerated in *Ministering with Signs and Wonders* (Heward-Mills 2006), which over the following weeks and months became a field manual of sorts for those laboring to bring the crusade to fruition, with references to key passages popping up in conversations during and beyond the planning sessions, were a panoply of topics running the gamut from, say, the relationship between modern medicine and divine healing (“God is not against medicine. He is fully aware of the development of medical science and common sense. But He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. That means He is still a healing Jesus, ready and capable of much miraculous power”) to “Nine Reasons Why God Performs Wonders in the Church Today” (among them: “God does miracles to authenticate His servants”; “God does miracles in order to destroy the works of the devil”; “God does miracles to announce the arrival of the Kingdom of God”). A freewheeling, self-aggrandizing compendium of anecdotes, Bible verses, testimonials, lurid photos culled from crusade footage, and seemingly random observations on all things “Spirit-filled and transformational,” the Bishop’s text, like the literally thousands of other Ghanaian, Nigerian, and American books and pamphlets that circulate daily within the country’s markets and street kiosks, is presented primarily and explicitly as an instructional device, an eminently practical and applicable guide through the thickets of spiritual formation.

Its opening chapter, “Flowing with God,” takes up this pedagogical register by underscoring the inherent unpredictability of the movements of the Holy Spirit, the surprises, at times painful and embarrassing, that await anyone who assumes they can domesticate and thereby capture the new things the Spirit is doing in our midst. What foolishness, he exclaims, what hubris to imagine that human beings can anticipate the boundless movements of God – such people he refers to as “the unspiritual and faithless” (Heward-Mills 2006: 8), and they will appear throughout the book as skeptical moderns and unthinking simpletons, as those (especially Euro-American types) who trust only uniformity and stasis and those (peculiarly African types) who run headlong into their own ideas of spiritual power and demonstration. To *flow with God*, on the other hand, is to give oneself over to a very distinctive temporal and sensorial mode: to preoccupy oneself not with what God is going to do or with what He has done but with what He is *doing now*, and to situate oneself squarely within the flux of that activity by following assiduously its palpable, material effects. “The failure to understand that God cannot be predicted and stereotyped has been the reason for failure for many well-meaning Christians,” he writes. “What you need to know and understand is: **‘What is God doing at this very moment?’** And to answer that question you must follow the visible appearances of the Holy Spirit” (5).

With these bold-lettered words the Bishop succinctly demarcates the terrain of what he will later call a “miraculous lifestyle” (98-101). He harbors no illusions, however, that this lifestyle is simply there for just anyone to take hold of. There are hindrances, he explains, impediments that prevent us from walking in the anointing that has been prepared for us – but

then, that in itself is hardly news to anyone who has stepped foot in a charismatic service. The Bishop says as much. In fact, what differentiates his understanding (his “revelation,” as he calls it) of the miraculous from that of a great many of his counterparts, and what led, perhaps, to this section in particular becoming a point of reference (and contestation) among those I spoke with, is his reluctance to attribute the absence of blessings or “victories” in one’s life to an attack of the Enemy – or one’s personal enemies – or even to chalk it up to the presence of latent or undealt with sin. Which is certainly not to suggest that he denies the pervasiveness of such nefarious possibilities, opting, like some Protestants, to account for the persistence of chronic lack and hardship by making recourse to narratives of hard work and industriousness – or, adjacently, to Protestantized (read: metaphorized and sentimentalized) pictures of the “miraculous.” He dismisses the latter with as much derision as the former.

Because it is not simply laziness, the Bishop contends, nor witchcraft power that prevents us from living a miraculous life. It is something else entirely. “It is a state of *naturalness*,” he writes, “if I may use that term” (13). Citing the King James Version of I Corinthians 2:14 (“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot he know them, for they are spiritually discerned”), the Bishop expounds on this crucial point:

The Bible states in very clear terms, that the *natural* man cannot receive the things of the Holy Spirit. This is due to the fact that ‘they are foolishness unto him.’ What does it mean to be natural? To be natural means to be a normal human being. It speaks of thinking normally, as a human being should. It is being logical, intelligent, calculating and analytical. The word natural speaks of employing all normal human faculties. **It is interesting that it is this very ‘natural’ way of being that cuts us off from the things of the Holy Spirit.** When you are natural, you will not and cannot receive spiritual things. (13)

He goes on to narrate the oft-recounted story of his baptism in the Holy Spirit, the day he first received the gifts of the Spirit, which begins with the sneering disbelief of a cocky medical student, moves through a period of rigorous prayer and soul-searching, and concludes with a soon-to-be-pastor speaking incessantly, gleefully “with the tongues of men and angels.” (It is well known that Heward-Mills left a promising career in medicine to establish a small fellowship in an abandoned primary school outside of Accra.) It is a story, in other words, of progressive, arduous maturation,¹³ of “moving out of the natural state” into a style of existence – a manner of seeing, being, hearing, experiencing – that, as the Bishop is at pains to stress, ultimately turns out to be the “most natural thing imaginable” (15).

Here, it would be tempting to infer, is a textbook instance of a world-renouncing and life-denying religiosity if there ever was one: what William James, in his celebrated reflections on “the mystic range of consciousness” in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, describes as an “anti-naturalistic” impulse, “harmonizing best with twice-bornness and so-called otherworldly states of mind” (2002: 460), or what, in a less conciliatory account of the “desire for the otherworldly,” Nietzsche refers to as “life’s nausea and disgust with life” (1999: 5). Yet such a deduction would undoubtedly tell us more about the dualisms that populate our language than the spirituality to which the Bishop’s pedagogy is directed. On his terms, after all, it is not a

¹³ The developmental trope is a favorite of Heward-Mills’, as evidenced, for example, by his frequent allusions to I Corinthians 3:1 (KJV): “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.” It is no criticism of Heward-Mills to observe that his understanding of maturity stands diametrically opposed to Kant’s conceptualization of that term in his “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’” There intellectual and moral maturity is said to consist, famously, in the ability “to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another” (Kant 1991:54), whereas for Heward-Mills it is precisely and necessarily the subordination of one’s intellect and desires to the will of another – a man or woman of God – that becomes the pathway to maturity.

better or truer – a “supernatural” – world that is precluded by a “state of naturalness,” but precisely this one, *the world as it really is*.

Needless to say, this formulation turns everything on its head. Counterposed to the normal, the intelligent, the analytical, the natural is by no means the exceptional, the irrational, the uncritical, the aberrant – far from it. According to the Bishop, it is simply that what goes by these names, “normal,” “intelligent,” “natural,” and so forth, misrecognizes itself as such. To flow with God, to bear witness to the things of the Spirit, is to live truly and genuinely in the world: it is not *we* who are otherworldly, we can hear the Bishop preaching, it is not *we* who have retreated from reality, but rather those who have mistaken their worlds for the real one, for the only world there is. A remark made by filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard in the second of Deleuze’s two studies on cinema strangely resonates with this peculiar manner of belief in the world. Asked about the characters in *Bande à part*, who for many critics were so vivacious and exuberant as to appear quixotic and unrealistic, Godard retorts: “These are people who are real and it’s the world that is a breakaway group. It is the world that is making cinema for itself. It is the world that is out of synch; they are right, they are true, they represent life. They live a simple story; it is the world around them which is living a bad script” (cited in Deleuze 1997: 171). We might say that our journey into a life of the things of the Spirit, as the Bishop understands it, involves nothing less than a complete rewriting of our inherited scripts of naturalness; to borrow a phrase from a theologian who would likely recoil at his words being invoked in such a context, it involves acquiring the capacity to discern so as to work with the

grain of the universe (Yoder 1988: 58; see Hauerwas 2001).¹⁴ Indeed, seen from this perspective, “otherworldliness” might well constitute the most basic charismatic definition of sin.¹⁵

Still, it is clear from the Bishop’s account thus far that it is the entrenchment of what he refers to as our “normal human faculties” (2006: 13) that threatens to cut us off from the gifts of the Holy Spirit. What could be more otherworldly than that? Is not the Bishop prescribing a kind of decorporealized spirituality, a transcendence of the body and its various modalities of sensory apprehension? Quite the opposite. Our path beyond a state of naturalness will be shown to lie not in overcoming or denying the materiality – the fallibility, the corruptibility – of the body and its faculties, but in undergoing a *heightened*, scrupulously disciplined revivification of embodied sensibility. At this juncture, as with so many other points along the descent into the recesses of this form of faith, we are far from the familiar precincts of liberal

¹⁴ Then again, it is likely that the Bishop would recoil at the words of the theologian, for nothing could be more anathema to his sensibility than the latter’s assertion that, as the original wording has it, “people *who bear crosses* are working with the grain of the universe” (Yoder 1988:58, my emphasis).

¹⁵ Sociologist Paul Gifford seems to share this assessment – but to a fault. As I see it, and as was evident in countless crusades and evangelistic outreaches I attended, a disavowal of “otherworldliness” among charismatics by no means lessens or precludes the hope (rather, certainty) of a glorious afterlife – although, to be sure, talk of heaven and hell, divine judgment and ultimate rewards, at times sits uneasily, even incoherently, alongside declarations that the “kingdom of heaven” has been made present in the here and now, and that all we have to do is sharpen our “organs of perception” to apprehend and thereby participate in it. Suffice it to say, any consideration of a distinctively Pentecostal-charismatic eschatology would need to reckon with such a tension. Even so, it is simply wrongheaded for Gifford to make the (conceptual as much as empirical) leap from observing, rightly I think, that for Pentecostals “it is life in this world where the victory is most evident” to asserting that “although the issue is seldom addressed... in most African pentecostal [sic] churches there is not much idea of any subsequent life at all.” Adding insult to injury, he writes: “The stress on ‘material salvation’ I trace back not to any particular interpretation of biblical or Christian tradition, but to the African religious imagination.” That Gifford would then apply Evans-Pritchard’s argument about the this-worldly orientation of Nuer religion – namely that they “neither pretend to know, nor, I think, do they care, what happens to them after death” – to the “religious worldview” of “contemporary African pentecostalism” is surely an exercise in intellectual tunnel vision (see Gifford 2011: 252).

Protestantism (or at any rate a typical rendering of it; see Meyer 2010 for a critical revision of such depictions), that is, from a brand of Christianity whose emphasis on volitional belief as the locus of religious piety has inevitably impelled the dematerialization – the stripping away of bodily disciplines, rituals, icons, even texts – by which religious purification converges with the moral narrative of modernity (Keane 2007: 87; see also Asad 1993). If, according to one contemporary philosopher, politics should be newly construed as an “activity of reconfiguration of that which is given to the sensible” (Ranciere 2004), such that our historically contingent organoleptic arrangements would determine “the conditions through and by which we might sense the world and those who occupy it” (Panagia 2009:7), then perhaps there are unforeseen rapprochements – elective affinities, as Weber would say – between a particular charismatic imaginary and certain strands of postsecular political philosophy?¹⁶ In any case, Birgit Meyer’s (2010: 759) strong assertion that the sensational forms intrinsic to Pentecostal praxis not only render “personal bodily sensation as the ultimate index for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit” but also signals “the centrality of the body as a harbinger of truth and identity in our time” can be put more forcefully still: A charismatic reality, I would suggest, is quite simply *corporeality*. And so the old Spinozist question, still outstanding, of what a body can do will be taken up and thematized by the Bishop as a matter of capacities, inclinations, manifestations: A charismatic body, in polemical contrast to what he caricatures as the lethargic, impotent stuff of Catholic or Muslim or “pagan” bodies, is, when trained properly, perpetually *in-potential*.

¹⁶ Meyer (2010:755-6) makes an important point about the need to compare Pentecostal ‘distributions of the sensible’ to alternative, nonreligious (i.e., statist) distributions.

“Organs of perception” is the name given by the Bishop to those special human properties through whose tireless cultivation these potentials come gradually to be activated.

The exegetical scaffolding carted out to underwrite this pivotal doctrine – though “doctrine” may be something of a misnomer for what the Bishop himself characterizes as singular and inspired – is assembled through a style of scriptural reasoning that for many non-charismatics is as idiosyncratic as it is tendentious. Replete with underlined, bold-lettered, and italicized phrases loudly and, it would oftentimes seem, arbitrarily foregrounded within isolated verses that themselves appear to have been brazenly plucked out of their surrounding environs, the hermeneutical method displayed in the Bishop’s books, again wholly in line with those of his counterparts, often resembles less an argument or exposition than a bulldozer intent on demolishing any thought of an alternative interpretation. Nevertheless, and against a widely held view that Pentecostalism’s emphasis on individuated anointing and spiritual spontaneity inevitably diminishes the authorizing work of scripture in the lives of believers, it is significant that not a single page of the Bishop’s book is without some reference to the biblical text, and that, at nearly every turn, he feels compelled to corroborate his didactics by recourse to its authority.

Accordingly, under the section heading “Moving Out of the Natural State,” he begins by quoting Hebrews 5:14 (again from the King James): “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of **full age**, even those who by reason of use have their **SENSES EXERCISED TO DISCERN** both good and evil” (2006: 15). The verse, explains the Bishop, clearly states that strong meat from the Word belongs to mature believers, and that “mature believers” are those

whose senses have been sufficiently educated to distinguish good from evil. Fair enough. Yet what is the verse *really* saying? he wonders. What can it possibly mean that “strong meat,” the concrete effects of God’s Word in all of its richness and provision, is given solely to those whose senses have been *exercised*?¹⁷ Here, uncharacteristically, the Bishop presents himself as an inquisitive but somewhat obtuse novice, an acolyte unsure of what to make of his teacher’s esoteric lessons. “I have always had trouble understanding what this verse means,” he confesses diffidently before assuming a more commanding tone.

But one of the laws of interpretation of the Bible is simply to accept the literal meaning of the words you read. This verse simply says that Christians who become mature have their senses alert. The word ‘senses’ is derived from the Greek word, *aistheterion*, meaning ‘organs of perception.’ **GOD HAS GIVEN YOU ORGANS OF PERCEPTION.** You are expected to use these organs of perception to manoeuvre in this life. And in this verse, the Bible is giving us an additional but very important revelation: It is telling us that these organs of perception can also be used to **discern and experience** the things of God (16).

Even so, he feigns a lingering hesitation, choosing for the first and only time in the book to call attention to the inadequacy of mobilizing (and note that here it is none other than God himself mobilizing) a solitary verse to buttress an entire teaching. All of which, of course, only serves in the end to fortify the authoritativeness of that teaching.

I told the Lord, ‘This is not enough. We need more than one Scripture to form a solid basis for this revelation.’ The Lord took me to the book of Matthew 13: ‘And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, whic saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at

¹⁷ It is interesting to note that the interpretation of a given verse is often dependent upon the particular translation being used; thus, for instance, the NIV does not mention “senses” but simply “distinguishing good from evil” in its rendering of this verse.

any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But **blessed are your eyes**, for they see: **and your ears**, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and **have not seen them**; and to hear those things which ye hear, and **have not heard them.**' (17).

A message both cautionary and affirming, decisive in the polarity it establishes, not only or necessarily between disparate, less and more spiritually attuned “peoples” (“For *this* people’s heart is waxed gross... but blessed are *your* eyes, for they see”), but, crucially for the Bishop, and for those who receive his words as an incitement to transformation, on the level of the individual believer herself. “This is the principal revelation I want to bring to your understanding. *The miraculous operates through your eyes, ears, thoughts and feelings.*” And yet, he declaims, “many of you” – that is, we, his readers – have been unable to realize this capacity. Just as the Israelites in Isaiah’s prophecy had grown incapable of recognizing, remembering, the promises of Yahweh, so too have “your thoughts and feelings, which are organs of perception, become *gross*: dull, stupid, fat and inattentive” (17).

The remaining 253 pages of *Ministering with Signs and Wonders* will be given over to detailed, largely anecdotal instruction on how to break out of this stultified state, on how to transfigure oneself – one’s energies and predilections, one’s conscious thoughts and hidden desires, even one’s dream life and emotional being; in a word: one’s organs of perception – into a living, breathing assemblage of spiritual aptitudes, a conduit for and testament to the power that is every believer’s “birthright” and “inheritance.” He is careful to stress, moreover, that it is not (or not only) our religious standing, our personal salvation, that hangs in the

balance with our unwillingness to undergo such training; unlike, for instance, the risks faced by Benedictine monks in the Middle Ages who neglected their daily disciplines, it is not simply our “inability to enter into communion with God that becomes a function of untaught bodies” (Asad 1993: 77). Rather, at stake here is the possibility, the divine promise, that the kingdom of heaven will be made manifest in and through me, that my body – its gestures, sounds, comportment, and condition – will come to stand as the material, palpable expression of a reordered world as much as a reordered self.

Hence the ubiquitous preoccupation with health and healing within charismatic circles: If my life is to be a sign of the tangibly this-worldly unfolding of the kingdom of God, what does it say about that kingdom if my body, and for that matter my clothing, my education, my job or my marriage, is in tatters? Of the miraculous healings prevalent in the first centuries of the Roman church, historian Peter Brown remarks, “A God whose generosity had scattered so much purely physical beauty on the earth could not neglect physical illness. . . . These miracles had sprouted from the desperation of men afflicted by ‘more diseases than any book of medicine could hold.’ The evident horrors of human existence, its *miseria*, assumed an urgent need for some relief, for some few *solacia*. These reliefs were some slight hint, like thin rays of sunshine entering a darkened room, of the final transformation, the glorious resurrection, of the bodies of the elect” (Brown 2000: 421). Then as now, I would suggest, at issue here is the question of an eschatological horizon and – as Talal Asad puts it apropos of what he refers to as the time of eternity – the difference it makes to the way people live and die when they invoke it

as an object of experience or when they engage in exercises that prepare them for that experience (2006: 421).

Is ethnography as we know it up to the task of drawing out the practical entailments for the human body of the fact that the kingdom of heaven has come near? What kind of anthropology would that be? Surely it is from something like this vantage point that any serious consideration of the “prosperity gospel” must commence.

Tina

And then there’s Tina.

The nervous energy she exhibited during our first conversation is very much on display as we chat under a large tree behind her house. A self-proclaimed prophetess, she has a difficult time sitting still, especially when the conversation turns to her prophetic gifts. She takes pride in her spiritual triumphs: like other prophets I’ve encountered, she enjoys nothing so much as talking about her own anointing and the miracles she regularly performs. Her ministry, she tells me, is in the middle of a four-day program whose theme is “Unlocking the Door to Your Abundance.” Clearly she’s insulted that I haven’t heard about it. When I ask how the program is going thus far she simply chuckles a bit gratingly and says the Spirit is accomplishing amazing things through her – amazing things indeed.

At twenty-five, Tina Essel is by far the youngest, not to mention the wealthiest and most controversial, among the handful of female luminaries that hold sway over Tamale’s charismatic scene. No doubt the substantial following she has amassed is due in large part to

the cryptic air that surrounds her biography, not least pertaining to the details of her past and, specifically, what it is that brought her to the north; the most prevalent hypothesis, promulgated by her numerous detractors, is that she was chased out of the Central Region in the wake of some scandalous incident in her home church. Aside from the rumors and speculations, I am able to ascertain only that she founded Oasis International Fellowship (aka Solution Center) in 2005, having recently arrived in Tamale with her husband and, if the house is any indication, large and rather affluent family. To my question of how people came to hear about her ministry, she replies that, in the beginning, “we had to do some evangelism,” but now, she says, God has told her it is time to “rest and enjoy the harvest” – this notwithstanding, I suppose, the money she spends on radio advertisements throughout the week.

An Ewe, Tina is well-known to her many “tribemates” at Lighthouse. (In fact, one of her elder brothers, who once regularly attended the church, is reviled for having impregnated a respected member of the choir, whom he soon abandoned in order to remain a “chaser,” as Justice put it.) But that’s a longer story. When I mention to Reverend Patrick that I have been to a number of Tina’s gatherings, he tells me that Lighthouse members are strongly discouraged from associating with her, adding, with more than a touch of anger, that “the woman is not correct.” Everybody knows, he says, that another “so-called prophetess,” a Nigerian woman who periodically stays with Tina, obtained her healing powers from a local fetish priest. Why should the same not be true for her host? Even the Muslims go to her for healing and harming powers. And yet, to Patrick’s frustration and dismay, several Lighthouse members continue to frequent the meetings at Oasis.

“You’ve really missed out on some amazing things,” she exclaims. She goes on to tell me about a group of witches who had infiltrated her fellowship only to be found out in a recent service. She is visibly thrilled by the story. “I don’t know if you’ve met her,” she says, “but there is a small girl who has been helping with me. I took her under my wing because I saw something special in her.” Gradually the girl became Tina’s assistant of sorts. Then, during a prayer meeting a couple of days ago, the Lord showed her that the girl had betrayed her – in retrospect, Tina says, this didn’t surprise her in the least – and that, though quite young, the girl was an exceptionally powerful witch. Rather than expose her immediately, Tina decided to wait on the Holy Spirit to show her if the girl was being assisted by any additional members of the fellowship.

As the evening wore on, she noticed that a few of the other young women were sitting with their legs crossed in a certain way – she demonstrates it for me – and a voice told her to command them to come forward for prayer. It was at that point, she says, that the Lord revealed to her that each of these five girls, all of them “devoted helpers in the ministry,” and one of them the wife of a worship leader, were witches as well – and, what’s more, were under the direction of the youngest girl. Tina exposed them in that very service (“arrested them,” in her words), and, after eliciting their public confession, delivered each of them in turn from a spirit of witchcraft. News of the drama spread rapidly throughout the neighborhood. Last night, she says, barely concealing her delight, there were no seats left at the service; everyone wanted to see the powerful woman of God. She is practically laughing with the excitement of it all.

What to make of the remarkable self-absorption, the constant self-referentiality and self-documentation, as opposed to mere self-examination, to “giving an account of oneself” (Butler 2005) that so often and unapologetically defines the horizon of charismatic style and sensibility? How to chart the lineaments of an ethos and spirituality for which such unbridled narcissism, far from a vice or aberration, seems rather to constitute an almost virtuous byproduct?

Friends are sometimes taken aback when they see my photographs from the field. Wasn't it difficult to get permission? Didn't they mind the intrusion of privacy, the close-ups of them praying and healing and exorcising demons?

A typical scene: In the middle of interviewing a young pastor he brings out a photo album of the multitude of people he has healed over the years, the witches he has exposed and the formerly barren women who now have children because of him. To this compendium of exploits he will no doubt add the pictures he is taking of me leafing through the album.

Or, I am at a church or healing camp, videotaping an especially frenzied service, when, panning across the audience, I realize I too am being videotaped, the prophet's nephew having trained the camera away from his wonder-working uncle for a moment.

So it was hardly unexpected when, following the story of the “witch discovery,” as she called it, Tina interrupted our conversation to fetch a VCD of one her healing services a few weeks back. At first, she showed little interest in what was happening onscreen, continuing to talk over the songs and supplications coming from the old Dell laptop perched on the small table separating our plastic chairs. But then, maybe twenty minutes into the recording, Tina's

high-pitched voice abruptly rang out through the computer's tinny speakers, the spiritual warfare led by one of her trusted subordinates having finally given way to the evening's main attraction. She stopped mid-sentence, smiling, pointing to the screen. The prophetess in the video began to speak in tongues and, as her praying intensified, shake violently in the Spirit. Despite the poor light of dusk now settling around us I could just make out her reflection in the glossy display, staring almost hypnotically at her own persona, grinning as if in disbelief. I studied her gaze on the outer surface of the screen for what seemed like hours. "What does it feel like to watch yourself like this?" I eventually asked, hesitant to interrupt her reverie. Tina's reply, distracted and noncommittal, struck me as less significant than her enthralled and totally unabashed attachment to the spectacle of her recorded, yet somehow defamiliarized, visage, which is to say, perhaps, to the phenomenon of the image as such.¹⁸ Surely, I mused in my journal later that night, Baudelaire's dandy has nothing on *this* brand of aesthetics of the self.¹⁹

Before saying goodbye, the video now finished and the backyard eerily illuminated by a single floodlight, I asked Tina where she had gotten her earrings. On each one was a clearly

¹⁸ Even Narcissus failed to recognize himself in the water's reflection; it is the *image* he fell in love with. As Blanchot puts it: "Mythologists do not fail to indicate that Ovid – an intelligent, civilized poet, upon whose version of the myth the concept of narcissism is modeled (as though his narrative developments indeed contained psychoanalytic knowledge) – modifies the myth in order to expand it and make it more accessible. But the aspect of the myth which Ovid finally forgets is that Narcissus, bending over the spring, does not recognize himself in the fluid image that the water sends back to him. It is thus not himself, not his perhaps nonexistent 'I' that he loves or – even in his mystification – desires. And if he does not recognize himself, it is because what he sees is an image, and because the similitude of an image is not likeness to anyone or anything: the image characteristically resembles nothing. Narcissus falls 'in love' with the image because the image as such – because every image – is attractive. The teaching of the myth would be that one must not entrust oneself to the fascination of images" (Blanchot 1995: 125-126).

¹⁹ A reference to the figure made famous by Foucault's late writings on modern self-fashioning (See especially Foucault 1994).

engraved swastika enclosed in an ornate pattern and set in bronze. I noticed them toward the end of our conversation, perplexed where she could have obtained them and, considering her apparently high level of education – her other job was at an agricultural NGO in town – how she possibly could have worn them oblivious to their meaning. But her response baffled me even more. She had purchased them in the market, she said, and only wore them on special occasions. Her smirk as she said it seemed intended to unnerve. Then, as though it might easily have slipped her mind, she told me to wait there for a minute while she went inside the house to fetch something. She returned with a piece of paper, a printout from the website of some sort of End-Times cult-watching organization. **“The Anti-Christ is coming soon!”** it warned on the page’s header. Near the bottom, clustered together with an assortment of pentagrams and other Satanic symbols, was a large swastika, its ancient and modern history detailed below it. Tina claimed she had not yet read the page. What does it say? she asked, again with a strange smile. My guess was that she had commissioned the earrings for herself after coming across the website. I just smiled and handed back the paper, and told her, honestly enough, that I had never seen such earrings before.

Intensity

“Intensity,” writes Maurice Blanchot, “is the extreme of difference, in excess of the being that ontology takes for granted.” It is an excess, “burning the thought which thinks it and yet requiring this thought in the conflagration where transcendence, immanence are no longer anything but flamboyant, extinguished figures.”

Intensity consists “not only in its generally escaping conceptualization, but also in its way of coming apart in a plurality of names, de-nominations which dismiss the power that can be exerted as well as the intentionality that orients, and also sign and sense, and the space that unfolds and the time that expatiates.” But along with all this “comes confusion, for intensity seems to restore a sort of vital vibrancy whereby the exhausted teachings of consciousness-unconsciousness are imprinted anew.”

An extremity of being; a surplus of knowledge, of belief.²⁰

Eric

The first time I met Eric he was in the middle of casting an abnormally intransigent demon out of a teenage girl. Presiding over a midnight prayer gathering of twenty or so men and women, but mostly women, in a pitch-black corner of Police Park, Eric’s bellowing could be heard while I was still a good distance away, although the exact contours of his bitter and by now exasperated denunciations, followed immediately by the shrieks of the demon’s host, were all but swallowed up in the acoustic wasteland of the immense concrete enclosure. In the daytime, entirely, disconcertingly empty with the exception of the occasional passerby, Police Park – rechristened Jubilee Park when it served as the northernmost site of Ghana’s fiftieth birthday celebrations, but the new moniker never caught on – was reminiscent of the bygone squares I once visited in Russia, and indeed its construction by Nkrumah during the heady

²⁰ Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Anne Smock (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 56-57

socialist days of political rallies and fiery speeches was doubtless patterned on the utilitarian austerity of its Soviet counterparts. At night, on the other hand, especially on Thursdays and Fridays, this normally desolate anachronism came gradually to life, as scattered groups of charismatics of varying sizes and degrees of informality, taking advantage of the government's newfound permissiveness in the face of such assemblies – which themselves might be construed as the perverse historical foil to the restive crowds of the independence moment – gathered in its darkened reaches to prophesy, to dance, to liberate God's children from the onslaughts of his enemies. The sole stipulation for their using the space, whether rumored or official I am still unsure, was that neither chairs nor amplification (microphones, speakers, and so forth), nor instrumentation of any kind, could be utilized within its confines – this presumably due to its close proximity to the police barracks from which it initially got its name. Beyond that, the charismatics were given free rein; when I attended the annual Islamic Da'wa congress at Police Park in 2008, its sun-beaten surfaces and surrounding bleachers packed with delegates from every corner of the Muslim world, it was difficult to conjure the familiar sensation of stumbling through its grounds at night and sometimes into the early morning, the afternoon heat still radiating underfoot as the reverberating entreaties of assorted pockets of spiritual warriors (and victims), the cacophony of prayers of those for whom darkness and shadows seemed to afford something that daylight could not, pierced the mist of an otherwise pervading stillness.

I introduced myself some hours later. Mopping his face with a towel drenched many times over with the sweat of a dozen believers, Eric accompanied me to the road where, with

luck at this hour, we might catch a taxi to our respective homes. And what happened to the teenage girl, the demoniac, as the King James Version would have called her? It took a long time for the malign spirit – a “spirit of lust,” it was eventually revealed – to release his beleaguered prey, but finally, apparently from exhaustion, the demon conceded to depart from the girl and never come back. She lay passed out on the cement ground for perhaps forty minutes, and then, suddenly awake, stood up, brushed herself off, and quietly, inconspicuously rejoined the group. I didn’t get a chance to speak with her that night, but I assumed that, like others in her situation, she would have maintained that she remembered nothing of the ordeal. “It feels amazing when the Spirit is moving through me,” Eric said as we walked along. “But you know at the same time, it can be painful – very painful, very frightening. Do you ever move with that kind of power?”

I came to learn over the course of our subsequent meetings that Eric, like Samuel, who first told me about his friend’s weekly gathering at Police Park, was a Talensi originally from Bolga, a medium-sized town north of Tamale and just south of the Burkina Faso border. His ongoing and somewhat tortuous journey on the way to becoming an evangelist, he told me as we sat shelling the enormous pail of groundnuts his wife had given us upon my arrival at their house that morning, began when he was ten years old, when his mother died of some unknown disease and he was sent, along with an older brother, to live with his junior father (his uncle) in Tamale. I could condense the story, trim its edges, but it’s probably best that we receive it, as I did that day on the curb outside his house, in Eric’s own words.

When my mother died I was only ten years. Ten years. So I don't know my mother. And the man I had to stay with, the man we were staying with since my mother died, he could not take care of us – he would not take care of us to go to school. It's like he forgot about us; it's okay, he had his own children to look after. So when we grown up we have to come... I was training sheep. Do you understand? I was a shepherd – a shepherd in my father's place. Just like David. So when I come here, when I come to Tamale, in fact I was finding it very difficult to go to school, because I didn't have anyone to be helping with the school fees, with going and coming, I'm telling you, even with food to eat. When they ask you to buy, you know, when they ask you to buy uniform or something like books, it was a big problem. And my father too was a poor man, actually. He was a farmer. So I have to come, myself and my senior brother, I have to come to Tamale town and start doing something small small to make money. I had to learn something that would help me get my daily bread, learn a work. I found a man who said he would teach me to know how I can be a mechanic. Some of the workers were gone south because of the war – that was 1994, the Konkomba war was going on all over the north. It was a bad bad time, a very terrible time. I was stepping over rotting bodies on the way to work. In Tamale self. They say it's better now because the fighting is smaller, but the Muslims, you know they are getting stronger and stronger. Look at those people fighting the Israelis, the suicide bombers in the Middle East – and people say it's going to get better here! I'm telling you, that's part of my evangelism. Ghana is a Christian nation, like the U.S. – but Tamale, this town is keeping us from our inheritance. Anyway, when I was fourteen, that was the place, the mechanic shop, that was the place God started speaking to me. That he want to use me. Sometimes I'll be in the work site and all of a sudden, I will sometimes bring the Bible, talking to my colleagues that they should

give their life to Christ, some of them were Muslims, some of them were traditionalists, so I used to be talking to them, praying for them.

But it got to some time, God have to ask me to stop that work and come into driving. So I was a driver for some time. And in fact one day, I was lying in my room. I just prayed and I was lying in my room. In fact I was sleeping. And I heard something like rain; something like hard rain. I heard – you know, sometime when the ceiling is not yet here, there is only the zinc. When it is raining it is loud, very loud. So I was in my room and I heard the voice like it was raining on the zinc. And I can feel it within my bones. And I'm so weak, I'm trying to wake up but I cannot wake up. The voice was raining on me, raining on me, raining on me – let me say it was fifteen minutes to twenty minutes. And before the thing stop, I pick up, I just wake up, and the whole of my body – I just feel something strong in my body. So I prayed, and the Lord told me that he has anointed me to do his work. It was my anointing. That was about six years now. I was a Christian, I was attending the church alright, I was an elder, even helping with the church – I was at Christ Apostolic at that time. And just after that day in my room, there was a program in the church and four men of God came to me and prophesied, they said God has anointed me to do his work. So I should stop anything that I'm doing and focus... They say I have to be very careful. In fact, I myself, this story I'm telling you, you're the only one I've told this to. I have never tell anybody. Some things, you know, some things the Lord gives to you, and he doesn't want you to share it until a certain time. So I'm giving you the story now. You know Joseph in the Bible, God gave him a vision, but because of impatience he exposed it too soon. He became an enemy to his mother and his brothers. There is an appointed hour for every testimony...

So anyway, it got into a time, even though the Lord told me I should stop, I was still driving a car – you know, I have a wife, I have two children, I have to try and take care of them. So I was driving a small bus from here to Kumasi. This was two years ago. These Mercedes-Benz, I was driving one from here to Kumasi. During that time I was finding it difficult to believe that word, the word about my anointing, because I am renting a room, buying the food, so I was finding it difficult. But that day I was in the car alone, I heard the Lord – it was the same voice in my room. “If you don’t stop the driving I will kill you. If you don’t stop driving I will take your life.” But in fact I didn’t take it any serious. So then, next day, I was going to church, and when I was coming on the bicycle a car knocked me. When I fell, my leg broke, my arm broke, everything broke. You see here? I have the scars. It’s still paining me today. And when I was in hospital I asked the Lord, I asked him why. Why did this happen to me? And the Lord told me, “I am aware of it. I am asking you to stop the car and do my work. But you don’t want to do it. I want to use this thing to bring you down so that you will know that I am the God who is calling you.”

He said this to me. “I want you to do my work.” And even then, even then I was not so willing. I have to surrender. But you know, I had more difficulties. You know, in some of these Pentecostal churches, if the pastor don’t have the same gifts, and seeing you as a young man and all of a sudden they see that God is pouring his Spirit on you, using you – it’s like David and Saul. You remember? It’s still existing. That jealousy – it’s still there. The pastor, the elders, they did not like it. So I’m praying, I’m praying and fasting, and the Lord told me I should leave that church. I should start my own prayer camp, I should call it Temple of Praise. And you know, the pastor was angry, but I said, I said “Can you stop what the Lord is doing in this place? This is how God called me and this is how I received my gift.” My problem – the Lord told me that my problem is I’m always waiting for some man of God to give me permission. But

the Holy Spirit was trying to tell me, he was telling me, “Now is the time to stand on your own feet. It’s time to stand on your own revelation.”

For several weeks after that conversation there was no word from Eric. It was easy, lamentably easy, for me to lose touch with people, to get swept up in the endless tide of gatherings and get-togethers that comprised my daily itinerary in Tamale and, in doing so, to forget to send the promised text message or to drop by the house as I said I would. So I was surprised when, on the afternoon of June 19, 2008, “Evangelist Eric” (an appellation I used to differentiate him from another Eric) appeared on my cell phone.

He asked if I could meet him in town to say goodbye. All I knew, and this from a mutual friend, was that he had recently been having trouble with his wife, who, since he obeyed the Lord and quit his job as a driver, had for all intents and purposes become the family’s sole breadwinner, selling fried yams and meat pies and other snacks in the market in a mostly futile effort to make ends meet. True, Eric contributed whatever he managed to collect in “love offerings” each week – as with other such ministries, the amount garnered on a given night was effectively contingent on the spiritual potency of the man or woman of God, their capacity to heal or exorcise or destroy or prophesy – but the offerings were never enough to make much difference. I later learned from the same friend that, like the uncle who raised him, Eric and his wife had long been unable to pay their children’s school fees. Still, he never suspected that Eric was planning on leaving town.

Our final meeting was brief. Kneeling in the shade of a filling station across the street from the central market, Eric said he was departing the following day for Bolga, the town of his

birth and inaugural site of the prayer camp he hoped to establish: Eden Evangelistic Ministry, in the spirit, I suppose, of new beginnings. He went on to explain that he had chosen that particular city because it was dominated by the Catholics, and therefore “unreached” as far as he was concerned, but it was clear to both of us that what he was actually or at least simultaneously saying, here and in his later complaint that “the churches in Tamale are too many,” was that, God willing, there would be less competition in Bolga, meaning that his motivation for moving there was as much a financial as a spiritual one. (Though, as so often, the possibility that these motives could be distinguished was something that occurred to only one of us). An interesting charismatic twist on the migrant laborer, I thought to myself.

Neither that day nor on any other occasion did Eric ask for money. On the contrary, and, I suspect, to his wife’s dismay, (that is, if she knew about it, which is doubtful) he insisted on footing the bill whenever the two of us bought a soda or shared a taxi. As I said goodbye to him, uncertain what to make of his emphatic assurances that he would be returning soon for his wife and daughters, I handed him a sweaty wad of cash. And I should add that it dawned on me only a minute ago, as I wrote the preceding sentence, that I never once thought to give the money to his wife instead, or to check to make sure she had not been abandoned. I handed Eric the wad of cedis and wished him all the best. I was happy for him, I said, a bit half-heartedly perhaps, that after all this time he was returning home to take up a calling whose seed had been planted in that mechanic shop so many years earlier. He hugged me and expressed gratitude for the money and good wishes. The Lord is going to do mighty works through me, he said,

and I'll be praying that he does the same through you. I stood watching him for a while as he crossed the street and disappeared into the market.

“A Sign, an Expression, a Demonstration, the Appearance of an Invisible Thing...”

There is one additional concept – a “life principle” he calls it – in the Bishop’s book that bears mentioning briefly, a concept that, according to him, marks the essential correlative of the development of our organs of perception and the ability to “flow with God” made possible by it. This is the rather grandiose notion of “phanerosis,” which, drawing on I Corinthians 12:7 (“But the manifestation [*phanerosis*] of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all”), the Bishop defines as “a sign, an expression, a demonstration, the symptom, the appearance and the materialisation of an invisible thing” (2006: 26). Lest this definition seem too abstract, however, he quickly brings the discussion down to earth. “Thank God for all the cars in Japan and Korea,” he writes, “but I need a car that I can touch and feel. Thank God for all the money in the banks of America and Germany, but I need some in my hand now. I need money I can touch, hold and spend. Thank God for the greatness of the Holy Spirit in Heaven. Thank God for all the wonders of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. But I need the Holy Spirit practically, materially and visibly *today*. This is where *phanerosis* comes in” (27, original emphasis).

If the education and subsequent reformation of one’s aistheterion, one’s organs of perception, is geared above all toward the achievement of an incessant, habituated openness to receiving and, in turn, delivering (as in “birthing”) the things of God – if, in other words, it is the divine awakening of one’s organs of perception that enables the becoming-subject of a

miraculous lifestyle – then it would be tempting to conclude that phanerosis involves the making visible of external *objects* of apprehension, which is to say, of miracles (i.e., *miraculum*, or “objects of wonder”) as such. Yet while it is true that, not unlike Augustine’s understanding of the miraculous as an activation or acceleration of so-called *semina seminum* already latent within creation, the Bishop lays a great deal of stress on magnificent happenings which, once we can see them for what they are, attest to the wonders the Spirit is doing in our midst, it is equally the case that, more often than not, it is the believer him or herself who will become “a sign, an expression, a demonstration, a symptom, the appearance and the materialisation of an invisible thing.”²¹ It is *we* who become the miracle – and in that sense, it is less the production of “subjects” and the manifestation of “objects” that is at play here than the profusion of a dizzying plurality of forms, feelings, and appearances through which, in subtle and decidedly not-so-subtle ways, we come to know and thereby participate in “the boundless imagination of our God” (89).²²

²¹ On this understanding of miracles in Augustine, see Hent de Vries 2010: 255-280.

²² Here I want to extrapolate from Heward-Mills’ book to make a point admittedly less germane to the concerns of Ghanaian charismatics than (presumably) to those in the humanities and social sciences. Since discovering his extraordinary essay “Bringing Things to Life: Creative Entanglements in a World of Materials” (2010; see also 2011), I have been struggling to come to terms with the ways in which Tim Ingold’s incisive intervention into discussions of material culture, and his critique of the conceptual reduction of “things” to “objects” (and “life” to “agency”) more specifically, might speak to our apprehension of the worlds I am attempting to narrate in this project. It would be impossible to capture the intricacies of Ingold’s argument in a footnote, but suffice it to say that, for Ingold, the impulse to objectification so endemic to post-Hegelian thought can be seen as *the* Achilles heel of contemporary social theorizing. The world we inhabit, he contends, is made up not of subjects and objects, nor even quasi-subjects and quasi-objects, but rather of *things*: “thing” understood not as lifeless matter but – to pick only a couple of Ingold’s myriad descriptions – as “a particular gathering together or interweaving of materials in movement,” a “knot whose constituent threads, far from being contained within it, trail beyond, only to become caught with other threads in other knots.” All this may sound obscure, but consider, for instance, the following argument by a prominent theorist of visual culture: “A thing is an *object waiting to happen*... Until the object is placed, *it remains a thing, held in abeyance*” (Morgan 2011: 142-143, my emphasis). It is precisely this

Such is the visceral, all-suffusing, intimate and immediate responsiveness to realms seen and unseen, but nevertheless felt and intuited, possibilities realized and soon-to-be-realized, that “phanerosis” is meant to designate. Words of knowledge and the discerning of harmful spirits; prophetic visions and angelic visitations; the gift of healing and the gift of tongues; goose flesh and chills and quickening pulses; holy laughter and holy singing; the wind of the Spirit, the rain of the Spirit, falling down under the weight of the Spirit; protection against curses and witchcraft; weeping, crying, shaking, trembling; being struck dumb and being struck blind; screams of astonishment and screams of joy; sensations of heat and burning; deliverance of demons and deliverance from death; the gentle still small voice of the Creator – these, according to Heward-Mills, are but a few of the “listed” and “unlisted” (i.e., scriptural and extra-scriptural) things we should expect to encounter once our spiritual sensorium has been stirred.²³ Or, as he says at the conclusion of each of the nine chapters that catalogue these

taken for granted dialectics of placing and naming and taming and circumscribing, of things-becoming-objects (and indeed, in terms of the “actor” doing the naming, things-becoming-subjects), that Ingold’s anthropology seeks to counteract. What does this have to do with miracles? I can venture a preliminary response: what the miraculous *life* names is, among other things, the de-emphasis on miracles (bounded objects, discreet events) in favor of an entangled “meshwork,” to employ Ingold’s terminology, of habitable, habituated existence. In that sense, following the lines of thought gestured at in the introduction to this chapter, we might say that what Ingold calls a “world of objects” would be tantamount to that “nature” which (a certain hegemonic image of) “miracle” is thought to suspend and interrupt, whereas what Ingold is arguing for is closer to the world of creation, inception, and participation that, by and large, I found to be expressed and normativized by charismatics in northern Ghana. Or, put differently, and here inspired by the resonant work of anthropologist Todd Ramon Ochoa, we could say that what the miraculous life inhabits and affirms is a “receptivity or immediacy prior to, or outside, the stasis of dialectical stabilization through primary penetration [i.e., negation, essential to the production of subjects and objects], as something that overflows, that cannot be captured, that saturates and consumes” (Ochoa 2007: 487).

²³ Each of these manifestations enumerated by Heward-Mills is accompanied by a testimony involving himself or someone he knows and/or has ministered to. Thus, in a section entitled “Phanerosis: Death” he offers the

countless manifestations of the miraculous life: “Now *that* is phanerosis. And it can be yours today!”

*

(But what about yesterday? The day, as it were, *before* all the gifts arrive, *before* the luminous rebeginning, *before* the phanerosis and flowing with God? “Yesterday is gone, another day has come, do something new in my life...” It is the “new” that always stood out to me in this simple hymn – among the few, incidentally, penned by a Dagomba convert – the “new” that the song’s earnest, almost plaintive chorus accentuated over and over and over again. “Yesterday is gone, another day has come, do something new in my life. / Do something new in my life, something new in my life, something new in my life, oh Lord...” *Yes, but what about yesterday?* The yesterday which is gone, the yesterday from which we have come, the yesterday which threatens to return, the yesterday which must be vigilantly guarded against amidst the

following anecdote: “On another occasion, I became ill and needed to take some medication. However at that time of my life, I believed that it was not necessary to take medicine if you were a man of faith. Since I was endeavouring to be a real man of faith, I had decided to go on without taking any medication at all. On this particular occasion I had decided that I would either be healed without medicine or die. As the days went by, I became more and more ill until I was confined to my room. My family did not know what was happening to me because they thought I was just resting in my room. I was determined to rise and be healed without medicine or die by faith. As time went by, I became fixed to my bed, unable to do anything. I was waiting for God to heal me. I believe the Lord knew how determined I was to be healed without medicine or die. By this time, the only thing I could do was to turn around in my bed. At one point, I turned my head to the right and there on my bedside table was an imp-like creature. I knew at once that it was an evil spirit. I knew immediately that a demon had gained access to my life. I knew that I was in danger even though I did not understand what I could be doing wrong. Immediately I knew I had to take medicine to avoid the devil gaining access to my life. I arose and took medicine at once. Through that vision, God saved me from an untimely death. Through visions and dreams, God can save your life from destruction” (2006: 47).

vicissitudes of *today* in order to secure the promises of tomorrow? The yesterday without which we would have no testimony?)

The Toil of Becoming

“It is a duty to cultivate the crude capacities of our nature, since it is by that cultivation that the animal is raised to man.” Buried in Immanuel Kant’s “Preface to *The Metaphysical Elements of Ethics*” (1889: 302), this injunction provides a terse snapshot of what has come to be recognized as a pervasive, even constitutive, dimension of Enlightenment thought – a synopsis of the “moral narrative of modernity,” as Keane (2007) might put it. All the essential ingredients are here: the mortal struggle of humanity over animality; the base yet nonetheless malleable character of our state in nature; the calm deontological assurance that uplift within the chain of being is both possible and obligatory.²⁴ Among ethnographic accounts of the multiple forms such directives have assumed in their colonial and postcolonial permutations, Anand Pandian’s study of the PIRAMALAI KALLARS, a long pilloried “criminal tribe” in rural south India, is exemplary for the primacy it grants to the work of cultivation in the pursuit of moral no less than modern life – and the complex interchange between the two – in India and beyond. Cultivation, as Pandian (2009: 19) conceptualizes the term, designates a potent and

²⁴ The formulation condenses, too, a motif that lies at the heart of this dissertation, whereby, as seen in Chapter 1 and 2, the miraculous is called into being through a peculiar interplay of demonstration and disavowal (of “magic” and its surrogates) and, as explored in Chapter 3, “the north” is figured as simultaneously abject and fecund – a jungle to be cultivated, according to George Ekem Ferguson. In the present chapter, we might say that something like this dynamic is transposed onto the domain of the inner life and outer habits of charismatic subject him/herself.

polysemous “living language of experience,” one whose conjoinment of “the material work of the cultivator and the metaphorical imagination of the cultivated heart” implies not so much the negation as the mutual absorption of what are typically thought to be dialectically exclusive categories: the social with the agricultural, the pastoral with the pedagogical, the spiritual with the terrestrial, the virtuous with the environmental – in short, the soul with the soil. It directs us, in other words, to “nature” in its twin senses (human and Mother, so to speak), the development and interpenetration of which encompasses the broad domain of what, with a nod to Foucault’s later work on Christian and Greco-Roman exercises of the self (e.g., 1990, 1997), Pandian refers to as the learned arts of living, an “ethics” directed not so much toward the subject’s adherence to an array of predetermined imperatives and behavioral constraints than toward an ongoing and site-specific responsiveness to the question “How ought one to live?” It also, crucially, begs attention to the ineluctably *placed* character of any project of cultivation and the moral horizons to which it aspires.

This understanding of cultivation as a conduit of subjectivation accords productively with the ways in which Ghanaian charismatics struggle and strive to bring their desires, deeds, appetites, and inclinations, both spiritual and corporeal (though the two are of course deeply intertwined) into conjunction with what they take to be the attributes of a victorious life in Christ.²⁵ As with Pandian’s Kallars, moreover, they are fully cognizant of the force of the local

²⁵ The centrality of victory as an organizing rubric in African charismatic circles is the subject of Paul Gifford’s “Healing in African Pentecostalism: The ‘Victorious Living’ of David Oyedepo.” Though mistaken in other ways (see ff. 19 above), I think Gifford is right to say that neither “healing, deliverance, nor prosperity is of itself the defining characteristic of African pentecostalism... [rather], to the extent there is one defining characteristic, it is

and the environmental – from the pull of kin networks and social relations to the variously holy and demonic status of certain physical landscapes (e.g., the “sacred ground” of healing camps or Satanic dominion over particular geographical areas) – in their efforts to achieve such states of being. Yet whereas the Kallars, like many farming communities, see their agricultural practices as not merely reconcilable with but as wholly intrinsic to the realization of a virtuous existence, to the extent that a kind of “agrarian civility” (ibid., 40-48) becomes the telos of a cultivat(ing/ed) citizenry, the charismatics I worked with tend to regard the rural and agricultural, if not as dangerous or corruptible in and of itself, than at least as of a piece with the backwardness, superstition, and, above all, social and material stagnancy of the African “tradition” with which they so vehemently wish to break. In fact, it is difficult enough to imagine a pastor or prophet – or anyone really – of charismatic persuasion toiling away in the fields; that they would conceive of such a vocation as somehow commensurate with or enabling of the sort of lifestyle celebrated in charismatic circles is virtually unthinkable (and in that respect their views are closer to the progressivist visions of the continental *philosophes* and apologists for industrialization than the agrarianism of the inhabitants of India’s Cumbum Valley to which Pandian opposes them).

But while the itineraries of aspiration pursued by charismatic believers may indeed exemplify the near-inverse of those valorized by the Kallars, the modalities of self-becoming

a stress on what can be called ‘victorious living.’ This victory is wide-ranging, embracing all areas of life...” (Gifford 2011: 251).

propounded by the former, I would argue, are no less inflected – albeit often negatively – by the contingent aftereffects of their encounter, their confrontation, with the particular milieu in which they find themselves. Even the most intimate *askesis* is emplaced. Elizabeth Povinelli (2011: 160) rightly suggests that “the refashioning of self cannot be separated from an entire host of relations with place,” relations that involve a panoply of both material and semiotic transfers. In Tamale, unlike, say, Accra or Cape Coast, these inflections derive not only from the charismatics’ encounter with the rural and the traditional but also from their immediate and uneasy proximity to Islam: that *other* other against whose habits and sensibilities the charismatics so assiduously define their own.

Mabel and Justice

“How many of us here tonight,” Mabel asks the group of college-aged students gathered around her, “how many of us will be getting up at dawn to spend time with our dear friend Jesus? How many of us will be waiting on Him? – will be waiting to hear His voice, as we go throughout the day?” [*Forgive!*” one of the boys exclaims. “*Mercy!*” exclaims another.] “Are we praying in the afternoon, and in the nighttime, as we ready ourselves for sleep? Do we dream *His* dreams for us – or are we dreaming our own? And when we wake up in the morning: do we rush out of the house to wash, to take *banku* or tea and bread, to visit our friends, or do we give that time to our Lord and God? You know, it’s interesting...”

Mabel, an otherwise shy nursing student, has been talking nonstop for the past ten minutes, by far the most I’ve heard her speak in public, but now she trails off for a moment,

perhaps to collect her thoughts, perhaps to allow her audience to absorb her words. Prior to this evening, my sole conversation with Mabel took place when she unexpectedly dropped by the house one day with Justice. “How do you know when someone has genuinely given their life to Christ?” I asked at one point. When they are seeing things *differently*, she responded, and gave as an example a friend who joined the church last year but had recently been absent at a number of services and church events. One day, when Mabel spotted the woman in town and asked what was going on, her friend responded, “Satan must be after me!” Mabel considered this a good thing: at least she was beginning to take the Devil seriously. Tonight that same understated but resolute tenacity is readily on display. Listening to the recording, I remember how the darkness of the evening threatened to envelope the intrepid glow of the flashlight dangling from the zinc roof above Mabel’s head, and how startled we all were when a motorcycle appeared as if from nowhere, racing down the dirt path that ran alongside our little gathering, the harsh shock of its headlights slapping everyone across the face. Despite the disruption, I can hear it in Mabel’s voice as she continues. The spell hasn’t broken.

It’s interesting, I was thinking the other day – I mean, we’re always complaining about this place, ‘Oh, it’s so hot here, these people are so rude, these people, they’re so ignorant, they make too much noise.’ [Scattered laughter.] But, as for me, each and every day, I thank and praise my Father that he brought me here. The calls to prayer – we Christians, we’re always complaining about the noise, ‘Oh, I can’t sleep in the morning, I can’t rest at night, Oh, I’m suffering.’ But why? Why should we be complaining? It really shames me sometimes. We Christians from the south, we like our sleep – but really, have we not become too comfortable? You know, many of you know this, I used to stay near Kintampo [in the Brong-

Ahofo Region], and I can tell you – was I having my quiet time in the morning? Was I meditating on the Word every day and every night? And why not? Was my sleep so important? [An extended pause.] But here – here, we have no choice. Thank God, he’s taken away our choices! [More laughter.] Some of you have been to my room, you know it’s near a mosque. So every morning I have a decision to make: will I be upset about the noise, will I grumble and complain about my circumstances, or will I be grateful to my Father in heaven for waking me from my sleep to be with him?

As for the Muslims, they’re very serious – and I’m telling you, we need to take them seriously. All we hear is their noise, their praying, but they’re very serious. Why are we Christians so quiet in this town? In Accra we make noise, in Kumasi we make noise, but in Tamale... I think we Christians should be making noise in the morning, and in the daytime, and in the evening. Why are we not making noise like the Muslims? Why are we allowing the Devil to have his way in this place? The Muslims, they don’t joke about meeting with their god, even when the rain is pouring down. Can we not find the strength to meet with our God, the one true God, as the Muslims do with theirs? We are always saying, ‘Oh Lord, give me the power to move mountains, the power of the Almighty!’ but in the morning, we don’t even have the power to move ourselves from the bed. May we pray for the strength to so.

*

Exhortations such as Mabel’s are recurrent in Tamale’s churches, as is the tendency, in sermons and testimonies, to invoke a moment in which what, at first, was experienced as bothersome or discomfoting about residing in a Muslim land has been recast as but another instance of God’s providential redeployment of the Enemy’s works for the continuing refinement of His people. Leaving aside some noticeable inconsistencies – the assertion that

Christians in the south are (rightly) “making noise” and yet her own admission that while living there she was spiritually negligent; the idea that God has “taken away our choices” even as she consistently faces a “decision” as to whether she will complain or thank God for her present circumstances – what is striking about her remarks is the more general point she seeks to make, namely, that the daily aural nuisance of the *adhan*, among other Islamic practices, could, *should*, as a kind of spiritual alarm clock, serve as an impetus for the believer to foster her own walk with God, with the accompanying conviction that, by virtue of their surroundings, Tamale’s charismatics have been furnished with an array of incitements to spiritual growth (and so, by extension, spiritual power) unavailable to their counterparts in the predominantly, comfortably Christian south.

Here, then, is a case not merely of destroying or overcoming but of harnessing, instrumentalizing the “spirit of Islam” and all that it represents; or, put differently, it is a case of the latter’s disciplines and devotional practices, inasmuch as they might contribute to the attunement of one’s own spiritual capacities – as with Mabel’s appeal to make the Muslims’ call to prayer into an occasion to foster *our* intimacy with God – becoming facilitative of precisely those powers that will ultimately defeat it. And herein lies, I was frequently told, a key divergence between the charismatics on the one hand and their mainline “nominal” Christian neighbors in and around Tamale on the other: a difference between timidly, passively observing the plans of the Enemy unfolding in one’s midst – or worse, not even recognizing them as such, the basis for the charismatics’ disparagement of and refusal to take part in any attempt at interreligious dialogue – and loudly, *actively*, through a range of sensational forms and

cultivated aptitudes, working to turn those very plans against him. (To wit, an assistant pastor's rousing introduction of the praise choir at a mid-week service of Dominion Life Power Mission: "You know, our Muslim brothers, one thing we can say about our Muslim brothers is that when they worship they worship to the extreme. So, if they can worship to the extreme, how much more should we? Let's put our hands together for a choir that ruins the Devil's plans by worshipping to the extreme!")

For their work is indeed active – and hard. While, taken alone, Mabel's reprimand might lend itself to the impression that, in contrast to Tamale's Muslim community, the city's charismatics are lethargic and unassuming, it is important to note not only the distinctive genre of pedagogical rhetoric to which such admonitions belong – where, ubiquitously, it is preached that *we* charismatics are not doing enough, that *we* do not have enough faith, and so forth – but also the simple fact that Mabel is delivering her rebuke at 10:45 on a Tuesday night, to a group of young people who have just come from a three-and-a-half hour worship service, and this after a long day of attending classes, or managing the family kiosk, or practicing with the praise and worship team, or running various errands – typically by bicycle under Tamale's merciless sun – in preparation for one of countless upcoming programs at the church. Invariably, the unremitting labor demanded of Lighthouse members is seen by those willing to undertake it as a crucial means of deepening their immersion in the currents of Christian existence, such that the grounded prosaics of diligently, faithfully shouldering one's everyday tasks and responsibilities becomes the locus of possibility for experiencing, as the Bishop puts it in his book *Understanding the Concept and Conditions for Discipleship*, a "triumphant lifestyle of

conquering sin, overpowering the flesh and the Devil, claiming the gifts and blessings that have been promised to you, and, most importantly, being able to dwell daily in God's tabernacle and on His holy hill" (Heward-Mills 2001: 27). In this sense, far from a detour or distraction, the menial becomes a vital thoroughfare on the way to the miraculous.

And yet, there is something not quite right about speaking of the menial, nor for that matter the miraculous, in such terms. Toiling in the fields, Pandian makes clear throughout his study, is charged with moral and existential potentials that extend far beyond the moment of harvesting a crop; likewise with the charismatics, I discovered, or at least those who belong to Lighthouse, the fruit reaped through the strenuous labor of cultivation is often immanent to the labor itself.

"The proof is in the process!" Kakra Baiden, a celebrated visiting prophet, declared to a crammed Lighthouse gathering one evening. My notes remind me that this particular proclamation, and the sermon ("A Winner's Mentality") from which it sprung, arrived at a propitious time for Justice, who (he told me during the ride home later that night) had been feeling exhausted after an especially intense weekend of church activities. And little wonder: after many months of trying to work around his schedule, I found that a typical day for the 26-year-old consists of waking, at the latest, at five o'clock to pray and study scripture, listening all the while for whatever "word" the Spirit wants to convey to him for the day ahead. If he had his way, this early morning ritual would go on for several hours – he looks forward to a time when he will be able to incorporate singing and dancing into his morning devotions – but alas, as a primary school teacher in a remote district, he needs to be at the transport yard by 6:30,

where a shared taxi will take him to the cluster of villages in which his school is located. Since the government's oft-reiterated commitment to paving the rural roads has gone distinctly unfulfilled, the taxi ride to the school and back is excruciating; Justice has said on a number of occasions that these four hours in the car each morning and afternoon present Satan's most obvious ploy to discourage him.

Even so, Lighthouse and its endless happenings remain his center of gravity, and, upon returning to Tamale around 4:30, he usually runs home to change clothes, grab a quick supper (that is, when the church isn't providing dinner, which it does on a regular basis), and, if possible, rest for a few minutes before heading to whatever church function is going on that evening. On Mondays and Thursdays, it's worship and intercession; on Tuesdays, a corporate worship service followed by small groups; on Wednesdays, excursions to the various villages under Lighthouse's tutelage (if someone doesn't have their own car or motorbike, hence their own village, they accompany those who do); on Fridays, programs with visiting speakers (always from other, mostly southern Lighthouse branches), all-night prayer and deliverance, or mini-crusades throughout the city; on Saturday mornings, evangelism in town; on Saturday evenings, a continuation of the Friday program or a social get-together (the most popular being Lighthouse's take on Ghana's hiplife discotheque); and on Sunday morning, beginning at seven, a two-hour Bible study, followed by a three- or four-hour teaching and healing service, which, in turn, is followed by lunch (prepared by women in the church or purchased from a nearby food stall), planning meetings among the pastors, lay ministers, choir, and musicians, and in the evening, capping it all off, a two-hour Impartation Service, in which a videotaped sermon,

culled from the vast repository of the Bishop's teachings, is viewed, consumed, expressly as a kind of spiritual supper, in Lighthouse branches around the world. Then, on Monday, it starts all over again. The point, says Reverend Patrick, senior pastor and overseer of the Lighthouse branches in the north, is not only to transform the city, the region, the world through this incessant activity, but for the church to become a world, a vibrant, joyous, beckoning world (at other times he called it a "culture") unto itself.

For Justice, what resonated in Kakra Baiden's catchphrase was the simple reminder that, contrary to what the Devil would have us think, our laboring is not for nothing, nor do we have to wait until we get to Heaven to enjoy its rewards. *The proof is in the process.* Charismatics frequently invoke the Pauline terminology of running a race to describe the endurance and concomitant "prizes" that should attend the work of any follower of Christ (I Corinthians 9:24; Hebrews 12:1; 2 Timothy 4:7). That night, as we sat talking in the darkness outside my house, Justice conjured a very different image. Whenever he grows weary or frustrated, he said, and it happens often, he remembers that Jesus, the bridegroom, is preparing a wedding banquet, a day when everything will be revealed and all will be made whole. But whereas the Bible speaks of the *church* as the bride of Christ (see, e.g., Revelation 19:7-9), Justice invokes a profoundly intimate (and, given his otherwise stereotypical enactments of African masculinity, remarkably unabashed) personalization of the metaphor, imagining himself as a betrothed woman eagerly awaiting the touch of her lover. Until the day when he is presented to his "husband," he went on to say, his utmost desire is to grow ever more beautiful in his eyes, which for him means that any time, here on this passing earth, that he opens his Bible, or begins to pray or worship,

he is actually (in his words) holding up a mirror to his face – to his heart – by which he is able to correct those flaws – his “hair” and “makeup” – that would prevent him from being the “perfect bride.” It was deeply moving to hear him express these thoughts, to be given this glimpse, however conditioned by the peculiarities of his interlocutor, into the tender, secret, and at times painful complexion of his walk with God. I wish I could convey what his voice sounded like as he spoke.

And is it not the case, he continued, that any man would want to visit his beloved before their wedding, to bring her little gifts as a sign of his affection? That’s how it is for me, said Justice. *You asked me why I’m always busy, praying, always studying the Word, doing this and that with the church – but in John chapter ten verse three it says that a sheep knows the voice of its shepherd, that any good shepherd calls his sheep by name and leads them to grass and water. So I need to know the voice of my beloved when he calls to me. There’s so much noise – it’s easy to miss his voice. But the more I work on myself, the more I work for the Kingdom... even small things, like putting out chairs before a program – the Devil wants me to think I’m wasting my time, that I’m nobody, but even in these small things I’m getting to know his voice better and better. And he likes to visit me, especially when I’m tired – that’s when he loves to bring me gifts! But like I said, if I don’t recognize his voice, I’ll really miss him. Like the other day, I was feeling tired, I woke up and thought, “I’m catching fever” – it was Saturday – “I don’t want to leave the house today.” But like the prophet was saying earlier, this Kingdom work, it’s not just for some big reward – it’s not just for the wedding day. So the Holy Spirit came to me, and he gave me some kind of word to pray over myself. He knew exactly the word I needed. And I shouldn’t be surprised – the Bishop is always talking about positive thinking, being positive that God will do what he promised to*

do, that he's given us the power to move heaven and earth — but I was so tired, and that's when he came to me. I'm telling you, it was a miracle! So I left the house and that's when we went to share the gospel in town. Remember how powerful it was? And then tonight, just some few days later, it's like I forgot all about it. But he has mercy on his bride, he loves his bride, he knows how weak I am, he knows just what I need to hear.

Impartation

The church is filled to capacity; after three morning services and then meetings all afternoon there are definitely more people here than I expected. On the stage is a small television. A hush hangs over the room. Guys and girls whisper to each other and flirt quietly while they wait for the service to begin. The delay, it seems, is due to a malfunctioning player or a scratched disc. We wait for another DVD player to arrive. Much like the “retreats” Lighthouse regularly stages for its members, where attendees are provided with cheap MP3 players upon which have been uploaded literally thousands of hours of the Bishop's sermons, which they are then instructed to play continuously on their headphones as they eat and pray and sleep throughout the weekend, tonight's service — the Impartation Service it's called — is intended not merely to communicate but to actively *bestow* upon those present, through the physical (no matter that it's recorded) transmission of the Bishop's messages, the anointing that so unquestionably distinguishes the man of God.²⁶ We in the audience, Reverend Joy told me

²⁶ Rituals such as these — listening to recorded sermons, the Impartation Service — would seem to constitute only a more radical and explicit instance of what Birgit Meyer (2011) theorizes as part and parcel of Pentecostal

earlier, are encouraged not only to take notes and absorb the content of what the Bishop is saying to us, but also, no less importantly, to pay close attention to – so as to emulate, to “copy,” as she put it – his various idioms and expressions, intonations and tones of voice, even his jokes and sense of humor. We need, said Revered Joy, we to develop our “organs of perception,” our ability to listen and receive as much as to see and comprehend. Only then will we grow capable of discerning what the Lord – and the Enemy – is doing in our midst, of “tasting and seeing” the signs and wonders that have become everyday occurrences to men like the Bishop.

Finally the video begins and a stylized, distinctly contemporary dance set to Christian hip-life music unfolds on the stage of Qodesh (a Hebrew word which, according to Lighthouse leaders, means “hallowed” or “holy” ground), the main cathedral, in the Kaneshie neighborhood of Accra: an amazing performance, at least to my untrained eye, but nobody seems particularly interested. In fact, everyone around me appears exhausted. Samson, the guy sitting next to me, told me a few minutes ago that he’s been here since six o’clock in the morning, after getting home from the crusade last night well after midnight. (“So you only got about five

practices per se: the ubiquity of media as central to techniques of mediation through which “identities are produced and ‘the sacred’ becomes manifest in the world,” even to the extent that, in many cases, the divine is not merely represented but is actually rendered *present* to practitioners through specific mediatic forms. We might say, moreover, that on Meyer’s terms the Impartation Service would signal a kind of double mediation: the mediating power of the video cassette, on the one hand, and the Bishop’s teachings on the other. These listening practices among Ghanaian charismatics also share much in common with the uses to which Islamic cassette sermons have been put in contemporary Egypt, where, according to Charles Hirschkind (2006), sermon tapes serve as an instrument of ethical self-formation and as a vehicle for honing the sensibilities and affects of pious living.

hours of sleep?” I asked. “Three hours.”) And, he added, there’s a leadership meeting following the Impartation Service. He tells me this as his baby girl dozes on his lap – a rare sight in Ghana.

But wait. Apparently the dance video was intended as a diversion, for a new DVD player has just arrived and everyone cheers wildly. Reverend Joy takes the microphone and announces the title of the Bishop’s sermon: “Lies, the Door to Demons.” When the Bishop appears onscreen the room goes silent and when he tells the congregation (in Accra) to raise their hands in prayer, every hand in our room in Tamale shoots immediately up. It looks like this will be an extremely interactive service. I look around: not a single person is without a notepad, jotting down as much as they can of the Bishop’s words. I notice the expression on Samson’s face; any hint of fatigue has suddenly been replaced by the same rapt concentration in which everyone appears to be held.

“If you took a survey of all the unmarried people in this church,” the Bishop says, “you would not find many virgins. When the prophet is talking about adulterers he’s talking to us.” He tells us to turn in our Bibles to Jeremiah 9:2-5. He calls on a woman in the congregation to read the passage aloud. *Oh, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place for travelers, the woman reads in a high-pitched, British accented voice, that I might leave my people and go from them! For they are all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. “And like their bow they have bent their tongues for lies. They are not valiant for the truth on the earth. For they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me,” says the Lord. “Everyone take heed to his neighbor, and do not trust any brother; for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbor will walk with slanderers. Everyone will deceive his*

neighbor, and will not speak the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves to commit iniquities.”

I’m getting drowsy. I’m having a hard time keeping up. The Bishop’s words are starting to blur together. “Lies, the door to demons.” – “An assembly of treacherous men.” – “Many of you, if you were in Pastor Sake’s position, you would have turned against me long ago.” – I try to focus, to take down the Bishop’s sermon exactly as it comes. “A treacherous man is like a rabid dog. One of the reasons my book *Loyalty and Disloyalty* is so popular is because it’s such a common problem. The other day this white American pastor, someone who usually has no interest in anything that comes from black Africa, he told me that his church turned my book inside out. Why? Why do you think? It’s because my book is medicine for a common disease! Who is the witch, the wizard? Is it the person you have never met? No! It is the person closest to you, the person who brings you food to eat and gives you a bed to sleep in! Treachery, especially against leadership, seems to be a prevalent problem in this church. ‘So let everybody be a guard against his neighbor,’ the verse says. Will you people recognize a thief when he’s in your house? How will you know him? Can you be sure that the man working on your house won’t steal from you, even if he’s a Christian? How would you know? Some of you are planning treachery even as I speak, and some of you won’t even recognize it when it occurs. How will you know it when it happens? Everyone wants to see the miracles, to know when the Spirit is doing wonderful things, but don’t you think we should also learn to see the darkness and lies? Don’t you know that wherever the Lord is moving, there the Devil is moving too? If you can’t see one you can’t see the other! Do you think I trust my pastors? I

don't trust all my pastors. You can train yourself to see the truth, but you can also train yourself to see the lies.”

Reverend Joy sits with the rest of us, watching, taking notes, just another Lighthouse member hanging on each and every word her “father” speaks. The Bishop continues. “One of the first times I cast out demons I interviewed the demon. I asked the demon, ‘How did you come?’ He said to me, ‘The belt of truth was loose.’ I’m telling you, demons will notice a lack of truthfulness.” Tired, my eyes heavy, I begin to lose focus again, until I hear the Bishop saying, “He’s too old, the hair’s fallen out, and the thing doesn’t work except for wee-wee.” The church laughs hysterically. – “When you see the Bishop you say peaceful things, but when he turns his back it’s a different story.” Appearances can’t be trusted. “Your outer person,” exclaims the Bishop, “is doing one thing but your inward person is doing something else.”

Suddenly the disc skips and then it stops completely. The Bishop’s face is frozen in a grotesquely pained expression. The room is quiet as everyone looks around, confused, waiting for something to happen. “Stand to your feet!” shouts Reverend Joy. “It looks like we have some demons here tonight!”

Dr. Felicia

It was her sister that brought Felicia to Lighthouse, but it was the work that kept her there. I knew her through Elaine, who regularly volunteered at the small hospital she ran in Bontanga, a village located forty-five minutes or so outside of Tamale. At the time, Dr. Felicia (as everyone calls her) was getting ready to depart for Liverpool; she would be there for ten

months, completing a government-sponsored postgraduate certificate in tropical pediatrics. Her husband, Derek, had recently been ordained a pastor with Assemblies of God, and so, due to his pastoral and other duties, he would be unable to join his wife in England. That was in 2008. When Elaine and I returned in the summer of 2011, we were anxious to catch up with the couple, and Derek graciously offered to pick us up at our guesthouse in town. We made small talk on the way out to Bontanga: about the dramatic changes underway at the hospital (they had just completed construction on a new wing, replete with a surgical theater, a pediatric ward, and in-patient facilities, and had also recently lured a second doctor to the hospital, an impressive feat in a region perennially bereft of medical expertise), about Elaine's new job at a community health clinic in Durham, about the steady growth of Derek's church, and, finally, about the still-unresolved political stalemate in nearby Côte d'Ivoire, whose cause, as Derek saw it, was the "vengeful spirit" of the Muslim Ouattara from the north.

"You know, Felicia's at Lighthouse now." It came during a lull in the conversation and was not said unambivalently. In Liverpool, Derek told us, Felicia had begun attending services with her sister and brother-in-law, both longtime and enthusiastic members of the church and both, like Felicia and Derek, Ashantis originally from Kumasi. We got the rest of the story from Felicia over an excellent dinner (prepared by her after a full day at the clinic) in their modest bungalow later that evening. It was then that we learned, too, that just a couple of days prior she had been appointed Clinical Director of Ghana Health Services over the entirety of the Northern Region – a considerable promotion to say the least, though, with her

characteristic humility, it was Derek who had to tell us about it. She was much more interested in talking about her new church.

I kept glancing over at Derek as Felicia recounted her ecclesial adventures over the past three years, what attracted her to Lighthouse and why, ultimately, she decided to leave Assemblies. What must it feel like for your wife to leave the church at which you're an up-and-coming pastor? We had never seen her so excited. Even with her sister nearby, she told us, living in Liverpool had been terribly lonely, lonelier than she anticipated, and the Assemblies of God branch she visited in the city did little to ease it – the church was none too inviting, she said, and besides, as one of the only blacks in the church, who wants to stand out in such a way? At Lighthouse it was a different story. A large, thriving congregation composed of believers of every stripe from all over the world – Asians, Africans (including many Ghanaians: she made a point of mentioning how cheering it was to prepare *fufu* with fellow church members on Sunday afternoons), white, black, rich, poor... “It was wonderful!” she exclaimed. At first she found some of Lighthouse's well-known idiosyncrasies – from its pastors wearing conspicuous wooden crosses and people shouting out peculiar catchwords (“Forgive!” “Mercy!”) during sermons to its practice of carefully monitoring individual members' tithes and offerings – to be a bit off-putting, but gradually, with her sister's help, she came to feel at home in the church and soon found herself attending three or four services a week. There was little doubt that she would move to Lighthouse upon returning to Tamale. She loved the music, the energy, the feeling of togetherness and community – but most of all

she loved the work, the endless buzz of Kingdom activity that, as she describes it, provides the foundation upon which everything else that is different or unique about Lighthouse is built.

“But the work is too much,” her husband grumbled under his breath. “It’s *not* too much,” Felicia retorted, a slight edge to her voice.²⁷ Apparently we had come to the crux of an ongoing dispute between the two of them. Yet as the conversation wore on we sensed that, although Derek disagreed with the (to his mind) excessive amount of work demanded of Lighthouse members, he nonetheless empathized with Felicia’s decision to leave Assemblies. In the older churches, he explained, only those with proper education, those who have been to seminary, are tasked with duties such as teaching and evangelism; the division of labor is very clearly demarcated between those with and without formal pastoral training. Felicia, he said, had grown tired of this arrangement, with simply showing up on Sunday morning to pay her tithe. She wasn’t growing in the Spirit and felt her gifts were lying dormant, underutilized.

²⁷ “But the work is *too much*.” This seems as apt a place as any to signal – and admit my reluctance to address – a question that, in some quarters, is considered to be among the most pressing to ask of contemporary Pentecostalism: the question of whether and in what ways this apparently emergent religious formation is amenable to, even productive of, the affective and symbolic no less than political and pragmatic investments of capitalism in its global-neoliberal guises. Needless to say, the ghost of Weber looms large over such concerns. Yet I would suggest that the limits to any affirmative link to the so-called Protestant Ethic lie not only, as Piot (drawing on Meyer and Comaroff) observes, in the fact that Pentecostals “are more assertively this-worldly and prosperity-oriented than their Puritan forebears” (Piot 2010: 176, ff. 4), but also, and I think more significantly, in the kind of “work” that is believed to be generative of such prosperity. Often, as we have seen throughout this chapter, the daily labor of cultivation from which “blessings” are said to flow is independent of, indifferent to, and in some cases wholly at odds with the sort of work prized even by the most immaterial or flexible or informal of capitalist labor regimes. Indeed, I would suggest there is something troublingly non-recuperable, something profoundly *excessive*, about charismatic practices of “wealth creation” vis-à-vis the (emergent, shifting) modalities of contemporary capitalist accumulation, not unlike the “accursed share” in Georges Bataille’s formulation of what he refers to as general economy. Simply put, much of the labor charismatics undertake does little to enhance their productivity in the “real world” of wages and employment; since (as one pastor put it) “God is our boss,” it a happy coincidence when my job (if I even have one) facilitates the realization of the miraculous life God has in store for me.

She desired to be a full participant, not a spectator. At Lighthouse, on the other hand, Derek said with a touch of admiration, everyone is invited, in fact expected, to do the work of a pastor; they are a “community of priests,” as it says in Exodus. And since joining them, Derek continued, Felicia has been busier – but also, he conceded, more fulfilled, more spiritually *alive* – than ever. She even has a village she visits twice a week, where the Lord is using her to disciple woman who have left Islam.

Elaine noted that Felicia had been swamped at the hospital. “How do you find time for anything else?” It’s not easy, replied the doctor. *And I know, it’s hard on Derek because, as you said, I was already overworked at the clinic, and now, with my promotion at GHS... Believe me, it’s hard being away from one another. But I mean, and I know Derek agrees with me, isn’t this why we came here? Why should we be sitting idle while the people perish? Why treat their physical illnesses only to leave them suffering spiritually?* She paused. *I’m telling you, though, it’s not just for the people. As I dig deeper into the Word, as I struggle to grow and to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit, God is making himself known to me in ways I never thought possible.*

*

After dinner, as the four of us drove to Lighthouse for an evening service, a rare visit to the church for Derek, Felicia said something that sharply threw into relief a dimension of charismatic (though again, tellingly, like others, she insisted on simply calling it “Christian”) life that had been sensed, certainly alluded to, yet, considering the obviousness with which she said it, left conspicuously unarticulated in my thinking and writing to that point. It made me mindful once again of the bizarre precariousness of ethnography, of how inescapably its

knowledges (its “findings”) stand or fall on the contingency of background noise or misplaced notes, or, in this case, unsolicited observations. Felicia wanted to hear more about my dissertation. All she knew was that I had spent a great deal of time at Lighthouse during our stay in Tamale. “But what exactly are you writing about?” she asked. At the moment, I was in the process of drafting the preceding section – specifically, the scene from Dominion Life Power Mission that concludes with “Let’s put our hands together for a choir that ruins the Devil’s plans by worshipping to the extreme!” – and, no doubt giddy at this rare invitation to discuss my research with someone in “the field,” I clumsily mentioned some of the disparate elements that had led me there. It was a strange moment: three years after fieldwork, two into the dissertation, and here I am back in Tamale, outlining my current chapter to a friend who recently joined the church at which the bulk of my research was carried out.

My words were met with silence. So I tried again. But what *really* interests me, I explained, slipping into a description rehearsed in countless fellowship proposals and conversations, is the miraculous life charismatics are always talking about, the things they (it sounded odd to say “they” and not “you”) do and undergo to make that life a reality and the ways, in turn, such a reality is affected by, and disseminated within, the specific environments in which it materializes – in this case northern Ghana.

Why I thought this further elucidation of my project would provoke a response I have no idea. Fortuitously, though, while Derek and Elaine remained quiet, one phrase in particular elicited a reaction from Felicia. You’re right, she said, people *are* always talking about the miraculous life. But tell me, how many are actually *living* it? Here in Ghana, she continued,

the nighttime bustle of Tamale's streets glowing around us, here in Ghana everyone believes in the spiritual realm, in witches and dwarves and evil spirits – and of course in miracles. That's why some churches can't keep their members, because Africans want to talk about spiritual things, but the churches tell them they shouldn't worry about it, they should focus on something else.

“Sure,” I interject, recognizing a familiar argument. “According to anthropologists that's why Pentecostalism is so popular in places like Africa and Latin America.” I don't know about that, she replies. *What I do know is this: A lot of people who talk about miracles, who run around from place to place looking for signs and wonders, they're just baby believers. That's what they are – if they're believers at all. Let me ask you a question: Are they growing in the Word? Are they praying and fasting? Are they destroying the works of the Enemy? Are they being disciplined by a man or woman of God? Turn on the radio, turn on the TV, you see plenty of miracles; go to Accra, Kumasi, you see miracles everywhere. You think God is impressed with so many miracles? The Devil is performing miracles all the time! Doesn't it say that in the last days there will be people prophesying, doing wonders and all that, acting like the power of the Holy Spirit is with them? Doesn't it say that? As for miracles, God is not impressed at all. What impresses God is a miraculous life. You get the difference?*

I was saying earlier, I left my previous church because I didn't see the Spirit working through me, I wasn't putting my gifts to work, and I needed that – I needed to see the power of God made manifest in and through me. That's where some churches go wrong – it's like they're afraid to see the Spirit moving. Okay, we know that. But doesn't it say we have to worship in Spirit and in truth? You were talking about the charismatics, but saying 'charismatic' doesn't tell me anything, it doesn't tell me if you're worshipping

in Spirit and in truth. And that's where the other churches, the ones you're talking about — you know they're everywhere today — that's where those churches are going wrong. All Spirit and no truth. Just a lot of miracle-chasers, like the Bishop says. I show up and I want my miracle. Give me my miracle and let me go home. But am I doing anything? Am I becoming a new creation? When we talk about a 'miraculous life' that's what we should be talking about. The Bishop says, before the Spirit is a healer or a mover, he's a teacher — see what I mean? We need to be taught, I need to be growing on a daily basis. I need to be shaped and molded by his refining fire. And as for miracles — hmmm — as for miracles they will be there like you can't even believe. In Hebrews — you know what it says in Hebrews 12? It says our God is a consuming fire. So I don't have to worry about miracle power — it'll be there! It's there for us like you can't even imagine. What really matters is the life. But let me tell you, Brian, it's easier said than done! For we have a powerful adversary. As it says in Scripture, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak...

Even now, as I write this two weeks later, I'm not sure what it was in the brief description of my project that prompted Felicia's emphatic monologue; nor can I put my finger on what exactly I should take away from it. What did she hear me saying? In any case, I know what I heard her saying. I heard her say that to focus on the *miraculous* to the neglect of a *life* is to miss the boat entirely. I heard her say that among Ghanaian charismatics — and so, too, in my writing about them? — it's tempting to get distracted, to get wrapped up in all the miracles, to forget that a *life* (of prayer and fasting, growth and discipleship, of “putting my gifts to work”) is needed not only to perform miracles, not only, as she put it, to “see the power of God made manifest in and through me,” but to apprehend them, to “name them and claim them,” as such (a lesson learned, presumably, from the Bishop's book). And not only to

apprehend them. The more we grow in the Word, I heard her say, the more we submit ourselves to the “refining fire” of spiritual disciplines and daily labor, the more we will be able to distinguish the miracles of demons and false prophets from those wrought by the inimitable (to those who know it and have been shaped by it) power of the Holy Spirit – a capacity which itself is part and parcel of the miraculous life.

But I also heard her say that anybody who thinks they can or should work toward a life (of virtue, of good deeds, of salvation or whatever else) without experiencing, living, miracles – miracle not as metaphor, not as some vaguely spiritual sentimentality about the world around us (“the miracle of life”) but as physical healings and promotions and teleportations and even bodily resurrections – if anyone thinks *that* then they are equally blinded to the truth... and the Spirit. And I heard her say, finally, that perhaps speaking of “charismatics” obscures more than it discloses, precisely to the extent that it risks eliding the most decisive of all distinctions: the distinction not between Christian and Muslim, nor between northerner and southerner; not between charismatic and orthodox, not even between saved and unsaved. No, the most basic distinction of all, I heard Felicia say, is between those who live, who work, aspire, struggle to live, the miraculous life and – appearances notwithstanding – those who don’t.

Daniel

Daniel looked tired. “Yesterday night, I did watchnight. So I was only able to sleep small.” From midnight until 5 o’clock in the morning he had been awake, alone, praying and studying the Word. He did this every Friday. “If you are a man of God,” he explained,

surprised at my surprise, “you know, you don’t need to be sleeping always. The Bible says, in the night Jesus has a place he will go and pray until daybreak.” But I could have come later, I said. You could have gotten a couple hours of sleep. “Oh, there is no problem!” he laughed. “I am used to it!” Only a minute ago he seemed tired but now he appears wide awake.

Sometimes you may try to sleep and God will speak in many ways – sometimes you have dreams. Sometimes you will dream, like the way Joseph dreamed. Sometimes you may be sleeping veeeeery quiet and God will be talking to you. But sometimes you have to keep watch, like a nightwatchman. Remember in Matthew? Jesus asked his people to stay awake and keep watch with him. That’s what I do – I can’t do it every day, but when I do it, I see things and I hear things. It was very difficult at first, because my body was not used to staying up, nobody to talk to, nobody to listen to except the Holy Spirit. But now it’s much easier. You wouldn’t believe the things I see and the things I hear! I can’t even share them with you – it’s like, would you be telling me something that your wife said to you in the marriage bed? She would be angry! But I’m telling you, you should try it . It will be difficult at first but you should try it. Just find a quiet place to keep watch and wait, see what happens.

Daniel caught my attention during a Sunday morning service at Dominion Life Power Mission, when, just after the second offering was collected, the pastor, Emmanuel, wished him a happy birthday – it was his seventeenth – and invited him to share a brief word. Soft-spoken but eloquent, handsome and passionate, it was obvious that he was a favorite in the church, not least among the female members. A week later, sitting on a wooden bench outside his rented room, Daniel recounted the story of how he first came to the charismatic faith, via Dominion Life, and of the salvation (as he called it) that he ultimately found there. He was raised in

Presby: both of his parents were lifelong members in the denomination, originally in Accra and then in Tamale for the past thirteen years. Growing up, Christianity never meant anything to him. He had been moving with some bad people, he said, and knew he wasn't saved – but he didn't care. He related the rather epic series of events that brought him to Dominion Life: how Pastor Emmanuel introduced himself in the mobile phone store one afternoon, invited him to church, and, when Daniel failed to show up, even went so far as to pursue him through his sister, who the pastor knew from secondary school. Unlike most pastors, Daniel explained, Pastor Emmanuel's ministry consists of close personal friendships with his church members and visitors – regardless of how much money they might have.

He went on to recount: the lack of “miracle power” in Presby, and hence his attraction to Dominion Life; the “teasing and persecution” he endured from friends, and later his own family, who couldn't put up with his prayers in the middle of the night and told him to find his own place; his confidence that, as Pastor Emmanuel is always reminding him, his enemies will not be able to destroy him; the prophecy he received from a visiting speaker, that he would begin to “see with the eyes of an eagle”; the many enemies that Pastor Emmanuel has accumulated, including among his own church members; the ways in which the church, for Daniel, has become his entire *life*, not just part of it; the spiritual disciplines – in addition to his weekly “watchnight,” studying the Bible, anointing himself with oil, listening to sermons and gospel music on his headphones, jogging and playing football (after all, he explains, our bodies are “the temple of the Holy Spirit!”), praying at dawn and before he goes to bed – that he diligently undertakes, and the fruit he has reaped from them; the total lack of interest in politics

(which he calls a “dirty game”) among his fellow church members; and finally his relationship to the church itself. “I love my church, I love church more than anything in my life, because I love the Lord, and I always want to be with him.”

He described what it was like to visit the church two years earlier, when he was fifteen, his skepticism upon seeing people slain in the spirit, speaking in tongues, “quaking and shaking,” in his words, and how he left that first night with plenty of doubt as to the authenticity or sincerity of these manifestations. But then, in the next service, the pastor asked everyone to lift up their hands, and before he knew it the power of the Holy Spirit was coursing through his body, he felt “a kind of heat” in his chest, and he began to shake and weep. Following the service, he asked Pastor Emmanuel to pray with him to accept Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. Three days later, at a healing service, he was baptized in the Holy Spirit. From that moment onward, Daniel said, his life has never been the same.

He was at pains to stress his disdain for material wealth. Apparently he got this from the church, whose pastor, he said, “really loves the poor more than the rich.” I was taken aback by his denunciation of “abundance.” It can be a curse, he explained, because “it makes you think that you no longer need God in your life.” Instead, as he has pursued a deeper intimacy with the Lord, he has discovered that his desires have been transformed. When he first found the church, all of his prayers consisted of begging God for money. But now, he said, now that he’s committed his life fervently and completely to His work, now that his life revolves around the church and stepping into his anointing, he can sense that his desires have been transformed. He no longer wants what he once wanted, and he longs for things that he never knew existed.

Before I left, it occurred to me to ask him if he had a favorite verse to share. Without hesitating he launched into Psalm 23. As he recited the passage in its entirety, it struck me that this verse, maybe the most famous (if not trite) in all of Scripture, had *become his own*. It was his, essential to who he was and who he hoped to become, as much a part of his biography as the stories he had been narrating earlier. He spoke each line with a forcefulness and a conviction that caused me to focus less on the specific words, than on what each word – each word standing for a distinctive truth, a distinctive promise – than on what each word obviously meant for him. *I shall not want... You restoreth my soul... I will fear no evil, for you are with me... You anoint my head with oil... My cup runs over... You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies... I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever...*

Each word spoken as if God had given it to him that morning, in the quiet just before dawn.

Anticipation

“For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs until now. And not only they, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:19-24).

Following Words Home

For all the scholarly energy expended on Pentecostalism over the past two decades, for the vast archive that has amassed as this brand of faith has erupted in nearly every corner of the earth, it is remarkable that so little has been written about how those who answer by its name actually conduct themselves on a daily basis, as they attempt, and in some instances fail, to live the realities it insinuates. That such omissions would attend those studies whose stated aim is to adumbrate the theological, institutional, and/or macrohistorical contours of the Pentecostal revival is perhaps understandable: not all analyses need be ethnographic ones, and besides, do not the bulk of these comparativist or generalizing accounts build their cases with at least partial reference to those who *have* carried out such localized research? The problem is that, by focusing predominantly on what might be referred to as the spectacle of the “mega” (and the technologies of publicity – sermons, video films, pamphlets, music, television broadcasts – that facilitate it), or by passing over such phenomena on the way to ostensibly more interesting problematics such as transnational belonging, emergent economies, development, aesthetic reproduction, political mobilization, and so forth, a great deal of these sociological and ethnographic investigations themselves leave much to be desired. To be sure, this is by no means invariably the case, and a number of recent works (e.g., Marshall 2009, O’Neill 2010, Piot 2010, Robbins 2004a) powerfully attest to the possibility of bringing the quotidian and the world-historical into fruitful articulation. Yet, in the most egregious – and oftentimes, unfortunately, most influential – versions of this occlusion, the presumption seems to be that

the public discursive forms, broadly conceived, scrutinized by the researcher can be made to stand in for detailed consideration of the ways in which believers labor, on the terrain of the everyday, to internalize, repudiate, embody, and enact that which they have been given, so to speak, on Sunday morning.²⁸

Take, for instance, a passage on morality selected more or less at random from what is arguably the best-known account of Ghana's new Christianity to have appeared thus far. In the book's preface we are told that although its author spoke over the course of nineteen months with "most major church leaders or their responsible lieutenants, and with as many participants in the various gatherings as possible," his study will nonetheless "consist primarily of personal interpretation" of what he observed in the numerous crusades, conferences, conventions, services, and prayer meetings he attended. And these personal interpretations, he admits, will at "*many important points be at odds with what my interlocutors, including charismatic leaders and church members, told me*" (Gifford 2004: x, emphasis mine). The pitfalls of this approach are on display throughout the text.

In this Christianity spiritual forces are at work everywhere, and have brought about the petitioner's predicament. We mentioned in sketching Ghana's pre-Christian religion the importance of the notion of destiny (*nkrabea*). Again, although human responsibility is not ignored, this fate allotted by God is a kind of predestination, and it is against that background that these prophets can be seen as manipulators of people's destinies. However, it would be too simple to think of this as no more than traditional religion with a Christian overlay. Traditional religion had its own context – of community,

²⁸ Or, using a pejorative favored by Ghanaian charismatics, we might say that "Sunday morning" scholars will take note only of "Sunday morning" (i.e., unserious or unfaithful) Christians. This phrasing is inspired in part by Marla Frederick's *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith* (2003), which, though rooted in a very different ecclesiastical landscape (African-American churches in rural North Carolina), seeks to counteract an analogous array of scholarly elisions.

kinship duties, obligations – a context which in a city like Accra has been largely dissolved. Nevertheless, it is obvious that this kind of Christianity, whether in its prayer camp or prophetic form, preserves many of the preoccupations, concerns and orientations of the traditional believer transposed into the modern setting. The preoccupation with spiritual agents also explains some of the salient features of these churches, not least *the almost total lack of interest in moral or ethical issues*. Although, when asked, all prophets would declare themselves against sin, that word is seldom heard, and it is difficult for the concept to find a place. It is spiritual forces that largely determine states and actions, and it is the role of the man of God, through his miraculous gifts, to reverse unpropitious situations. My experience in Accra's churches largely confirms this observation. Sin is hardly ever mentioned (*ibid.*, 108-110, emphasis mine).

Whether or not, as Gifford claims, “sin is hardly ever mentioned” in Accra's charismatic circles – a startling proposition for a milieu in which moral panics have become as routinized as paying tithes or exorcising demons – is, it seems to me, less significant than the larger point he seeks to extrapolate from it: namely, that because it is spiritual forces, as opposed to human decisions, that “determine states and actions,” little else is required of the believer than to present herself before the man of God who, by virtue of his “magico-spiritual gifts” (as Gifford puts it in the same section), is able to “reverse unpropitious situations.” From there it is a quick, predictable jump to the specter of “traditional religion,” with Gifford approvingly citing the following assertion in a footnote to the above passage: “The needs presented at the prayer centres... are not any different from those presented at the shrines by traditional worshippers in the early 1900s. The needs have not changed, only the shrines have changed. The new shrine is the prayer centre, whose leader plays the role of the traditional fetish priest” (Sarpong 2000: 121, in *ibid.*, 108-109, ff. 41). Magical cures, fetish priests, traditional shrines: it need hardly be pointed out that such facile – if surprisingly resilient – characterizations resonate

strongly with the polemical denunciations of charismatics by their secular and “orthodox” detractors alike (see Chapter 2).²⁹

But my point is not to dispute the interpretative verdicts reached by scholars such as Gifford, and still less is it to exonerate born-again believers of the charges directed at them – after all, as Felicia attests to, similar accusations are fiercely and freely leveled by charismatics themselves against those they deem lazy or opportunistic Christians, “miracle chasers” running from one healer to another in the hopes of securing a supernatural solution without having to undergo any kind of lasting spiritual transformation. My point, rather, and it is an admittedly humble one, is that the lives of Ghanaian charismatics (including Gifford’s “men of God”) are enmeshed in distinctive semantic fields whose basic lineaments – whose inclusions and denigrations, pressures and pleasures – are needlessly elided when we disregard (or worse, discount) the banal and dramatic ways in which people work, and neglect, fail, or refuse to

²⁹Needless to say, many scholars, particularly anthropologists, would find the unvarnished culturalism and ahistorical tenor of such representations to be distasteful and unwarranted. Yet, as Joel Robbins notes in an insightful review essay on the globalization of Pentecostalism, these primitivizing depictions often permeate, albeit subtly, even the most sensitive of ethnographic accounts. Addressing the anthropological disavowal of explanatory frameworks that posit continuities between Pentecostal practices and the spiritual-religious forms that preceded them, Robbins writes: “Even as most anthropologists step back from the ‘mythic’ framings of these arguments... it is important to recognize that many of them promulgate similar forms of cultural explanation when they assert that P/c [Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity] proves attractive to people around the world because it embraces enchanted and ecstatic cultural forms very much like their own. Such claims underwrite much of the work that sees P/c as highly malleable and quick to localize because it is extraordinarily open to syncretizing with indigenous forms of worship. On close inspection, however, these more anthropologically acceptable arguments often prove to be as troublesomely broad and insensitive to the nuances of cultural dynamics as their less acceptable cousins... They also overlook the very conscious antisyncretism of most P/c adherents, who are quick to point out that any resemblance between P/c and traditional practice is illusory. Finally, they fail to register the sense in which P/c accepts local enchanted cosmologies only to attack them, thus profoundly altering the way they are understood. These and related cultural dynamics, dynamics that arguments for easy local cultural assimilation based on similarity often overlook, are precisely what give P/c cultural globalization its distinct profile...” (Robbins 2004b: 126-127).

work, at becoming otherwise. Might Gifford have arrived at a different set of conclusions had he, in the end, given a bit more credence to what was conveyed to him during those “many conversations?”

Of course, nothing could be less revelatory for anthropologists than the call to take seriously the ways in which worlds are made and unmade on what I earlier referred to as the terrain of the everyday. Veena Das (2007: 2) speaks of a “certain air of obviousness” that accompanies talk of the ordinary and the everyday in anthropological writings – as though, when the disciplinary maps were being drawn up at the dawn of time (i.e., the Enlightenment), it was *this* domain that was left over for the softest of social sciences, since all the really compelling and important ones (the market, industrial society, the modern state) had already been claimed by other fields of inquiry. Perhaps, too, a sense of the obviousness or givenness of the everyday might account for the generally tepid reception of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the alleged progenitor (along with J.L. Austin) of so-called ordinary language philosophy, into anthropology’s theoretical canon, for how could a veritable discipline of the everyday approach this reputedly revolutionary figure with anything but a feeling of having heard it all before, of having anticipated his most basic insights? If, as Thomas Blom Hansen (2012) has recently asserted, “the habitual, the unexceptional, the ordinary and the culturally intimate are indispensable foci and contexts for any kind of anthropology,” so much so that “the everyday has come to occupy a position in anthropology as the site par excellence of validation of ethnographic claims, and as the empirical place and context wherein the authentically popular, the multiple, and the always unruly and obstinate life forms of ordinary people reside,” then

what can a philosopher whose signal intervention was, as is popularly believed, to have argued that the meaning of a language is in its use possibly reveal to us that we haven't already arrived at or intuited on our own?³⁰ "What *we* do," Wittgenstein (1953: 41e) declared, "is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use." Would not this affirmation, so potentially threatening to a generation of philosophers, be perfectly at ease on the tongues of any but the most essentialist of anthropologists, the self-congratulatory rejoinder (when confronted, say, with the conceits of the sociologist or the theologian) that what *we* do is bring words back from their idealized and objectified to their everyday ("real") use? And yet, Das confesses, "I have been amazed at how difficult I found it to speak of these matters" (2007: 2). So have I.

Part of the difficulty for Das, and what causes her to question whether Wittgenstein is as straightforwardly assimilable to normal anthropology as has commonly been supposed (see Das 1998), comes from her sense of the everyday less as something to be discovered or observed, than as something to be *achieved*.³¹ Thus, she suggests: "Self-creation on the register

³¹ Thomas Blom Hansen harshly – I think mistakenly – criticizes precisely this aspect of Das's project. "The ordinary," he writes, "seems to play a double role in Das' work, both of them redemptive, at least in the hands of anthropologists, one is made to understand. Firstly as the limit of language understood as a set of non-discursive and mundane practices... Secondly as the very opposite, namely the true origin and referent of language in a more authentic or original sense when she writes on the very last page of the book that the role of anthropologist is 'witnessing the descent into the everyday through which victims and survivors affirm the possibility of life by removing it from circulation of words gone wild – leading words home, so to speak.' This I take to mean that words come home to those who properly own them but are unable to utter them – without the aid of the anthropologists or other interlocutors. I find the idea that anthropology has a special capacity to recover structures of meaning and meaningfulness buried beneath language, or within those who do not speak in public, deeply problematic and potentially patronizing. One of the main problems is that such a perspective relegates actual speech, public statements and ritualized conduct by those who claim social or cultural authority in the communities studied, or those who just speak and banter, to a realm of the mediated and thus a realm of

of the everyday is a careful putting together of life – a concrete engagement with the tasks of remaking life that is mindful of both terms of the compound expression: *everyday* and *life*. It points to the eventfulness of the everyday and the attempt to forge oneself into an ethical subject within this scene of the ordinary” (Das 2007: 218). The pertinence of this thought, as I understand it, goes beyond the bare empirical fact of the precariousness that marked the field site, the “space of devastation” (2007: 74), as she calls it, in which Das carried out her research; it has to do with another concept – that of voice – to which the everyday is tightly wedded throughout her work. Inspired in large part by Stanley Cavell’s powerful restatement of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, voice, in Das’s usage, is rendered not as speech or utterance, nor, in contrast to Derrida (1988), as linked to presence (and writing to absence) but instead as “*that which might animate words, give them life, so to say*” (ibid., 6, my emphasis). Cavell, she writes, sees the banishing of the human voice in the register of the philosophical as “a suspicion of all that is ordinary, as the fantasy of some kind of purified medium outside of language games that was available to us. Words, when they lead lives outside the ordinary, become emptied of experience, lose touch with life – in Wittgenstein, it is the scene of language having gone on a holiday” (ibid).

Elsewhere, Cavell (2005: 196) will depict this place, this holiday destination, so to speak, as one that is both alluring and unsustainable, a place whose simultaneous danger and appeal is captured in what he takes to be Wittgenstein’s counter-myth or counter-

inauthenticity” (2012: 110).

interpretation of our “present condition,” the anti-habitus of a certain brand of intellectual project. Writes Wittgenstein (1953: 40e): “We have got onto slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!” Continuing along the path cut by Das’s (and Cavell’s) understanding of voice, we might say that what the everyday names is not a domain of action but rather that which *gives life to action* – gives life, that is, to walking in the Wittgensteinian sense.³² According to Cavell, far from designating a specific failure, the phrase *unable to walk* in the above passage more profoundly constitutes a “symbolical expression” (Wittgenstein: “My symbolical expression was really a mythological description” [1953: 73e]) of the moment just prior to the return of words from their “metaphysical” deployment, just prior, as Das puts it, to “the affirmation of the possibility of life” by its removal from the “circulation of words gone wild” – an act she poignantly describes as “leading words home” (Das 2007: 221). The everyday as a ground for words, as a home for practices, as a bodying forth of a whole economy – *oikos*, “home” – of practices: such is the perpetually tenuous and deceptively accessible locus of what Cavell (2007: x) refers to as Wittgenstein’s “anthropological” perspective.³³

³² Cavell asks, “How dangerous a consequence, for Wittgenstein, does the inability to walk signify? Walking is listed among the handful of capacities that the *Investigations* cites as ‘part of our natural history,’ along with commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, eating, drinking, playing – so that finding or making ourselves unable to walk (unearthed as it were) would represent a breach in our natural history, call it the natural history of the human, not unlike what Heidegger (for example, in the essay ‘The Thing’) calls the conditionedness of the human, something that presumably may be lost, or denied” (Cavell 2005: 196).

³³ Though dated, Das’s reservations with respect to anthropology’s recourse to the everyday, where the latter is regarded as the site of ordinary escapes from the strictures of power, and so also, by extension, is immunized from what Cavell (1979; see Hammer 2002) refers to as “the standing threat” of skepticism, is not irrelevant

By laying stress on the *home* to which language returns and in which practices reside as the terrain of the everyday, as opposed to accentuating (in what might be seen as the classic posture of critique) the fact of their “vacationing” or distortion at a given moment, Das draws our attention to the necessarily active, even fictive, construction of ordinary experience, and – without belaboring the extent to which it has been absent from other accounts of Pentecostalism – it is this dimension that I have sought to elaborate in the preceding pages. My hope is that the chapter has made good on the methodological conviction signaled at the outset, whereby the contours of the miraculous life can be glimpsed through “our accompanying, or rather following, a word like miracle back into the weave of affinities and associations in which it lives and breathes.” Sometimes, as we have seen, following this word will draw us into realms that may look and sound – perhaps all too deceptively – very much like the “traditional shrines” to which Gifford likens charismatic prayer camps, places where the “magico-spiritual gifts” of the man or woman of God are sufficient to authorize their anointing, where inexplicable demonstrations of incontestable power are more important than the status of one’s spiritual disposition preceding them and in their wake, places filled with swastika earrings (talismans?) and self-absorbed prophets (fetish priests?) and wonder-hungry congregations –

today. Das writes: “My sense of these [ethnographic] approaches is that there is a search in these attempts for what Hans Joas calls the creativity of social action. Rather than searching for agency in great and transgressive moments of history, it is in the everyday scripts of resistance that it is thought to be located. There is nothing wrong with this way of conceptualizing the everyday, for it has the advantage of showing society to be constantly made rather than given. The problem is that the notion of the everyday is too easily secured in these ethnographies because they hardly ever consider the temptations and threats of skepticism as part of the lived reality and hence do not tell us what is the stake in the everyday that they discovered” (1998: 183).

places, in fact, that may well approximate and evoke the very figure of sovereignty whose peculiar grammar has so thoroughly suffused the manner in which miracles (and cognate categories) have been debated and conceived throughout vast regions of the Western tradition.

But, at other times, we will be led down very different paths: ones that propel us into lives where, if you tug in a certain way on that thread called “miracle,” an entire tapestry of existence, of intimacies and antagonisms forged in the vicissitudes of the spaces they both constitute and inhabit, will begin unraveling all around you. The miraculous life. Such is the kind of home, the kind of ethos – as Giorgio Agamben has reminded us, taking up a crucial Heideggerian conjunction, the original Greek term for habit, or “habitual dwelling place,” is *ethos* (Agamben 1991: 93-94) – within which many of the voices heard in this chapter strive strenuously to find themselves, and in the course of whose composition, always protean, always improvisational, they are willing to undergo a dizzying array of disciplines. To perceive fully, to partake wholly, not of a better or different world, but the world as it actually is: full to bursting with promise.

And to take that world even into the darkest of places.

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Biography

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