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Spirit media : charismatics, traditionalists, and mediation practices in Ghana

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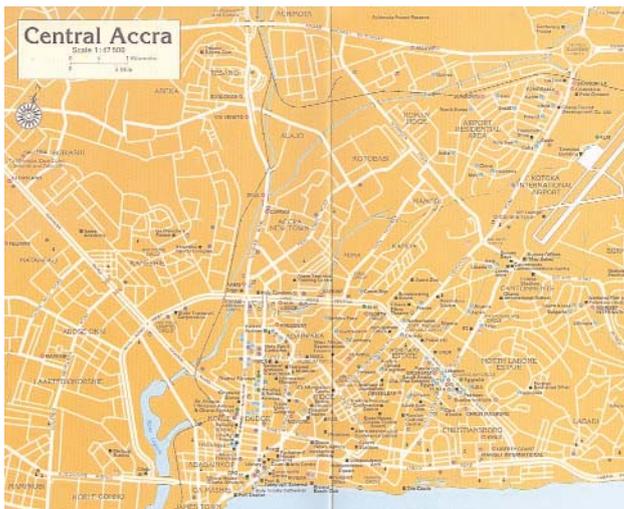
PART I
GETTING IN TOUCH

Introduction

Excitement rushed to my finger tips as I switched on my mini disc recorder to capture the voice of the 'notorious occultist' Dr. Beckley. Three hours of waiting on the wooden bench in the Afrikania Mission hall had uncomfortably settled in my buttocks, but they were gone as soon as I sat in the intimate presence of the man who had over the past months been overrepresented in the Ghanaian media with stories and images of snake juju, flying coffins, human organ trade, and other evil beyond imagination. In the bare room that Afrikania had offered him after the destruction of his Accra shrine by an angry mob, the friendly anti-hero received me at his desk, a burning candle, a handful of cowry shells, and my recorder and microphone between us. My ethnographer's heart beat speeded up as I opened my mouth to pose my first question. After many failed attempts to meet him, I was pleasantly surprised by his welcoming attitude and the ample time he took for the interview despite the numerous clients waiting outside for 'spiritual consultation.' We talked about the media scandal that had evolved around his persona, about media and personality creation, about the media representation of 'traditional religion,' about politics and spirits, and about his travels, studies and work as an 'occultist' and a medical doctor. And all along, the silent buzz of my sound recorder reminded me of the immense research value of this controversial figure's speech stored in the materiality of a disc. 1h26m the display told me as I switched the device off. I felt jubilant.

A week later, as I prepared to record an Afrikania service and searched for the end of the previous recording, I got baffled with disbelief. The disc was blank. My fingers started tingling, I got dizzy and my sight grew dim as I stared at the piece of technology in my hands and realised that Dr. Beckley's powerful spirits had interfered with its operation. I had been using the recorder for nine months and never had one event not been recorded. Never had one recording been accidentally erased. Why had

Fig. 0.1 Map of Central Accra.

it now? Why this particular interview? This crucial, hard-gotten interview with this crucial, hard-to-get person, that I would never be able to re-do. What had I done wrong? I had felt disbelief when Osofo Fiakpui poured libation to Legba, asking for his benevolence towards the successful completion of my research on Afrikania. Had Legba sensed dishonesty in my offering of a 5000-cedi note? Was this how he punished me? I should not have

Fig. 0.2 View over Jamestown, Central Accra (photographer unknown).

laughed inside when Pastor Dan laid his hand on my forehead as he commanded the Holy Spirit to come upon me and uproot the work of any demons against my doctoral victory. I immediately regained myself. I did not believe in spirits and demons. Still, reason left me empty-handed in explaining why Dr. Beckley's voice had refused technological representation. And to my surprise I found myself seduced, if only for a split second, into a preconscious and somatic turn to the invisible presence of spirit powers.

Looking back at that brief moment in December 2002, when I was in Accra to carry out anthropological research on two religious groups and their engagements with mass media, I realise that at the crossroads of media, religion, and the senses, on which I found this thesis, I find also my own body, my own technological devices, and my own underdeveloped sense of the metaphysical. I also realise that the tension between immediate presence and media representation that runs through the chapters that follow exists not only on an empirical, theoretical, methodological, and epistemological level. The possibility of a gap, and of its bridging, between a sense of immediate presence of spirit power and the techniques and technologies of mediation that make this power sensible (capable of being sensed) touches the intimate level of my own tingling fingertips and sudden dazes. Of course, I knew that the tabloid images of snake juju, flying coffins, and victims' skulls were absurd photographic constructions, that the libations surrounding my interviewing of Afrikania's 'spiritual consultants' were acts of knowledge sacralization, that it was pastor Dan's firm hand that pushed me down in the Christ Temple and not the Holy Spirit. They could not convince me. And yet, the power of such religious mediations (and many others that I encountered during my fieldwork) was such that at other, unexpected moments it suspended, or better perhaps, temporarily cracked my disbelief in supernatural agency to open up a little space for a sense of awe in the face of the possibility of spirit intrusion. I do not think that the convincing power of religious media(tions) worked essentially different for the religious people I studied. In the

midst of my efforts at understanding the public manifestations and sensory regimes of religion in Accra, I discovered that my body had become tuned to the tactile omnipresence of the supernatural.

Power in Presence

In Accra the religious blends in easily with the powerful and unavoidable appeal the city makes on one's senses. Every morning the city awakens to the sounds of twittering birds, the rhythmic *shww shww shww* of brooms sweeping concrete compounds, the Muslim call for prayers, and the singing and praying voices of devout Christians, escaping churches and private rooms through the open louvre windows. Not much later it comes to full life and engulfs one with a cacophony of traffic sounds and human voices. Its humid air, heavy with dust and exhaust gasses, sticks to one's skin and penetrates one's nose. Amidst the shouts of *trotro* (minivan) mates, calling out their destinations - *Sèk sèk sèk* (Circle, fig. 0.3); *Kanesh kanesh* (Kaneshie) - , ramshackle sliding doors, accelerating engines and tooting horns, one may suddenly be caught by a song. 'Do something new in my life, oh Lord!' Radio and music cassettes blast from taxis and *trotros*, pavement kiosks, and open-air drinking spots, merging in competition for sonic presence. Preaching, music, news, jingles. 'Radio Gold, your power station.' With bells and yells street vendors and peddlers try to sell their wares on pavements, along main roads, and around *trotro* stations and taxi ranks. Squeezed thigh-to-thigh in a *trotro*, in an intimate exchange of sweat with one's neighbour, one sees pens and panties, batteries and bibles, trinkets and T-rolls passing by the window. Scents of peeled oranges, meat pies, talcum powder, or mothballs coalesce with their sellers' high-pitched and melodious *'aarange, ankaaaa,' 'meeeeeet pie,' 'powda, powda,' cááámfaaa.'* A preacher boards the vehicle and loudly pours out God's promises on the passengers. The veins in his neck swollen, his eyes red with passion, beads of sweat running down his face, his voice hoarse with shouting. The Holy Spirit in its most bodily manifestation. Or a 'false prophet,' faking divine inspiration for material gain? From a billboard along Ring Road (fig. 0.4) the magnified portrait of pastor Ashimolowo looks down and makes one feel small. Advertising billboards throughout the city assure one that 'Guinness brings out the power in you' and invite one to 'celebrate your life in style' with Star. Slick bus shelter adverts urge one to watch *Power in His Presence* on Ghana Television, because 'at Royal House Chapel Jesus Christ

Fig. 0.3 Nkrumah Circle, Accra (photographer unknown).

Fig. 0.4 Billboard advertising a Christian convention by pastor
Matthew Ashimolowo.

sets the captives free' (fig. 0.5). And sometimes, amidst all the audiovisual violence of Christianity and commerce, a sudden aromatic trace of Florida Water alerts one to the much less showy, more secret, but equally powerful presence of traditional spirituality in Accra.

'Power in His Presence.' The title of this television broadcast by the charismatic pastor Korankye Ankrah nicely summarises the understanding of religion that I favour and points to the central paradox that makes religion so fascinating for me. Religion is about the presence of power(s) beyond the sensual. And yet for making this power experienceable, even imaginable, religion depends on sensory mediation, as provided by, for instance, the performance of religious ritual or, indeed, by television. Rather than referring to an abstract system of beliefs, symbols and distant spirit beings, religion refers to people's contextual recognition of the immediate presence of forces beyond control and beyond understanding that can touch one's daily life for the good or for the bad and their everyday practices of connecting to and disconnecting from these forces as they may cross the self-defined boundaries between 'religions.' Understood in this sense, religion always needs mediation. Religion, then, is a practice of mediating the imagination and experience of supernatural presence.

Two things struck me about religion in Ghana. First, the vast representation of religion in the mass media and in public space. And second, the physicality of religious practice, the tactile and bodily modes of engaging with the spiritual. Even a casual immersion in Accra's sound- and imagescape is enough to notice that religion is conspicuously present in the media and in city space. It is the charismatic-Pentecostal churches above all that have since the late 1970s entered the Ghanaian scene with an overt strategy of public presence, informed by a double passion for spreading the gospel and marketing churches and pastors. They have by now become highly visible and, above all, highly audible in the public sphere. Loudly amplified sounds of music, preaching, and prayer emanate from impressive buildings, mass gatherings at open-air spaces, or smaller area meeting grounds. Huge billboards along the city's main roads show the most 'powerful men of God,' bus shelters publicise church slogans, 'power quotes,' and religious broadcast frequencies, and posters and banners on walls, bridges, containers, and pillars in every corner of Accra call people to Christian crusades, conferences or concerts. Sermon and gospel tapes circulate from hand to hand and are played in numerous homes, taxis and *trotros*, kiosks, shops,

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work places, and waiting areas. But most spectacular is churches' appropriation of broadcasting technologies. Since the deregulation of the Ghanaian broadcast media in 1992, privately-owned, commercial FM and TV stations are mushrooming, enabling prosperous charismatic and Pentecostal religious leaders to buy airtime. Televised church services led by celebrity pastors, prophecies and miracles, Pentecostal video movies, commercials for healing crusades and prayer summits, radio preaching, prayers, and phone-ins, and gospel charts and video clips make up for a large portion of urban airtime.

Fig. 0.5 Bus shelter advertising Christian TV broadcast Power in His Presence.

Confronted with the new axiom that being seen and being heard is what matters in the religious scene today, older 'mission churches,' Islamic organisations and neo-traditionalist groups increasingly feel the need to also enter the public sphere and compete for public presence. Hence Islamic Ids turn into spectacular, commercially sponsored music and food festivals covered on radio and television. Quranic exegesis is fitted into to the formats of television talk shows. The Afrikania Mission goes to great lengths to attract newsworthiness and media coverage for African Traditional Religion. And on a TV station in Kumasi the Etherean Mission advocates an intriguing mix of 'the mystical traditions of Africa,' 'the principles of Jesus,' 'the natural sciences,' eastern philosophies, and New-Agey 'spiritual technologies' and 'soul processing,' also available on tape and in MP3 format. With the new media freedom pushed by neo-liberal reform, the Ghanaian public sphere has become a site of religiosity. This boom in mass media religion struck me first during an earlier stay in Ghana in 1998, when I studied Asante funeral celebrations. It made me return to Ghana to study the charismatic-Pentecostal International Central Gospel Church and the neo-traditional Afrikania Mission, and their media practices.[1]

If my initial interest was primarily in media, in the field I became fascinated with the role of the body and the senses in religious practice. The spectacle and decibels of charismatic worship and healing suck crowds into a multisensory experience of ecstasy and spirit power. Pastors laying their hands on people's heads, pushing them to the floor, anointing body parts with olive oil, exuberant dancing and clapping, stamping on the devil, going down on the knees, holding hands among the congregation, touch featured centrally in charismatic ritual. Sound had a similar tactile quality to it. The loud and penetrating voices of pastors preaching, surround-sound amplification, crowds of born-agains praying aloud and speaking in tongues, and the
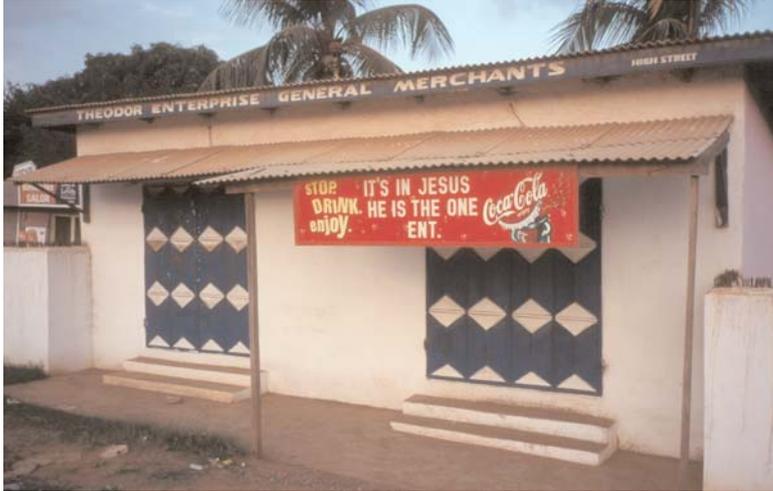
Fig. 0.6 'It's in Jesus' Enterprise.

moving beats, rhythms, and melodies of praise and worship music made an impact on one's senses that went beyond mere hearing and touched not only one's eardrums, but made one sense the sonic vibrations from toe to fingertip. Much like the gradual building up of hand beats on leather drumheads in a nightly possession ceremony produced an urgency that made it hard not to be carried away into dance. Ever since a deity in the bodily manifestation of a slight, middle aged woman, went round to slap my and everyone's hand so forcefully that it left a lasting tingle, I never forgot about the tactile presence of invisible spirit forces. Whether these forces were understood as God, the Holy Spirit, demons or deities, the body was the primary locus of people's interaction with them.

Struck by the prominence of the body and the media in both 'religions' I studied, I asked myself how such tactile, embodied modes of engaging with the spiritual relate to the audiovisuality and the intangible, disembodied nature of mass media. What is the relationship between bodily and electronic mediations in producing a sense of presence of spiritual power? How did those media-minded religious groups get from power in presence to power in representation? What makes a religious media representation powerful, convincing, touching? I take this 'problem of mediation' as the point of entry to analysing the intersection between modern mass media, religious practice, and the senses that forms the core of this thesis.

This is an ethnography of the public manifestation of religion in contemporary Ghana, where the synergy of mass media, commerce and democracy has generated and enabled new religious forms. It investigates the interrelationships between two mass-mediated forms of religion that are at first sight at opposed ends of Ghana's religious landscape, but on closer inspection show remarkable overlaps. The first is the audiovisual culture of 'charismatic Pentecostalism,' with Mensa Otabil's International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) and its 'media ministry' as a case study. The second is the public representation of 'Afrikan Traditional Religion' by the Afrikania Mission (Afrikania).[2] Both the ICGC and Afrikania struggle with the problem of mediation, if in different ways. Charismatic Christian belief and practice evolves around 'Power in His Presence.' Believers profess the immediate presence of God through the Holy Spirit and seek to connect to this 'presence' through embodiment, spoken words, music, (biblical) texts, and other, including electronic forms of mediation. But, denying that mediation is necessary to experience God's presence, they see the 'anointed

Man of God,' the Bible, or the spoken 'Word of God' not as media, but as manifestations of God's immediate presence. At the same time, they are wary of 'media,' including the human senses, that may stand in the way of an 'immediate' connection with God's power. The Afrikania Mission is first of all concerned with public 'representation' of Afrikan Traditional Religion, but has to convince its audience that the form it uses to do so is not devoid of presence. Its slogan *Sankòfa, biribi wò hò*, 'Return (to tradition) to take it, there is something there,' alludes to the presence of 'something' powerful. The adherents of traditional religions that Afrikania claims to represent are much more concerned with the presence of ancestral, territorial and other spirit powers and connect and communicate with these powers through embodiment, libation, divination, objects, and music. They are often wary of electronic media, because what for Afrikania is a harmless representation, may for them become an improper or non-authorised presence.

What is at stake in the problem of mediation, then, is what is perceived as medium and what as immediacy, when so and by whom. While a religious perspective locates power in 'His' (or another spiritual entity's) presence, from a social science perspective power is not so much in presence, but in the attribution of presence. The question is under what circumstances certain religious media come to be recognized as mediation or representation (and hence as implying a certain kind of distance or absence) and others are not experienced as mediation, but naturalized and authenticated as an immediate manifestation of presence.[3] Looking at how the ICGC and the Afrikania Mission enter the new field of power relations constituted by the mass media, this thesis investigates two intimately related issues. The first is the paradoxical dynamics between charismatic Pentecostalism and African traditional religion in Ghana and what the increasing mass mediation of both does to these dynamics. The second, comparative question is how the problem of mediation works out for the ICGC and Ghanaian charismatic Pentecostalism in general and for the Afrikania Mission and the traditional cults that it claims to represent. For both, mass mediating a religion that centres on multisensory experience and embodiment of spirit power poses challenges. But the specific contradictions arising from their efforts at public manifestation differ and so do their modes of solving them.

Charismatic Pentecostalism and African Traditional Religion

This is not a study of two religions in Ghana. It is a study of religion as it manifests within and across the frameworks set up by two religious organisations in Ghana's religious field. Official and popular representations of 'religion in Ghana' or 'religions in Ghana' (e.g. population censuses, school books, info sheets, tourist guides) generally slice up Ghana's diverse and volatile religious field into the categories of 'Christianity,' 'Islam,' 'African traditional religion,' and 'other.' Sometimes the category of 'Christian' is further subdivided into 'Roman Catholic,' 'Anglican,' 'Presbyterian,' 'Methodist,' 'spiritualist,' 'Pentecostal/charismatic,' and 'other denominations.' The Population and Housing Census of 2000 (Ghana Statistical Service 2000) for the first time had a separate entry for 'charismatic and Pentecostal,' which indicates that

charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity has now become recognised as mainstream. According to the population figures Christians make up 69 per cent of the population, Muslims 15.6 per cent, followers of African Traditional Religion 8.5 per cent, and others 6.9 per cent.[4] More specifically, 24.1 per cent of the total population and 45.8 per cent of all Christians in Accra regard themselves as charismatic-Pentecostal. These figures suggest that charismatic Pentecostalism has become the main religious orientation.

This neat categorisation of people into religious tick-boxes forms part of the dominant discourse, which people of various religious affiliations also use to categorise themselves (in fact, the census is based on self-categorisation). In practice, however, the boundaries between different religious categories are not all that rigid. As the stories of several people presented in this study will show, people's religious itineraries involve moving back and forth and dual or multiple affiliation, and religious practice may vary according to context or specific needs. Religious identification or practice differs between the public and the private realm. Census taking or Sunday worship clearly belong to the former, while visiting a shrine for spiritual consultation and healing is often kept strictly secret. It may not be understood as 'religion' at all, and even less as 'religious affiliation.' Of course, this is common knowledge among scholars of religion in Africa (and elsewhere). And still, even if they take the plurality of religious fields into account, they mostly take as their object of study one 'religion,' 'religious group,' or 'religious movement.' Like the people they study, anthropologists of religion also group themselves into distinct sub-fields such as the anthropology of Islam and the anthropology of Pentecostalism.

The spectacular rise of neo-Pentecostal or charismatic churches has been considered the most significant phenomenon in the history of Christianity in Ghana (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005a; Gifford 2004; Meyer 2004a), Africa (Anderson 2002; Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Gifford 1998; Meyer 2004b), and worldwide (Anderson 2004; Coleman 2000; Martin 2002; Robbins 2004). This neo-Pentecostal boom, starting in the late seventies and peaking in the nineties, has been accompanied by an equally exponential growth of a body of scholarly work dedicated to understanding and explaining it. It seems too obvious to state that the anthropology of Pentecostalism, or Pentecostal Studies in a more interdisciplinary sense, has focused on Pentecostals. Or, more broadly, the anthropology of Christianity (Cannell 2006; Robbins 2007) has focused on Christians. Anthropologists have examined the influence, effects, and significance of conversion to Pentecostalism (or Christianity), and the tensions produced in converts' lives and in the wider social and cultural realms. Those who study Pentecostalism have thus studied the people who embrace it and belong to it, but not those who do not belong, who do not subscribe to it.

I suggest that an anthropology of Pentecostalism should not remain limited to studying Pentecostal churches and movements, and people who consider themselves Pentecostal. It should equally take into account the ways in which through the media Pentecostal and charismatic ideas and forms have their repercussions outside Pentecostalism (Omenyo 2002), on non-Pentecostal and non-Christian religions, on broader popular cultural forms (Meyer 2004a), and on what counts as 'religion' or 'being religious.' What is so interesting about the new mass-mediated form of

Pentecostalism is that it is not limited to the particular churches that produce it or to their media programming. As I will argue throughout this thesis, it has become a powerful model for the public representation of religion in general and is being taken over by other, non-Pentecostal, and even non-Christian groups seeking media access. Some work on Islam in Africa has hinted at the influence of Pentecostal styles and tel-evangelism on Islamic movements and their media use (Larkin n.d.; Schulz 2006; Wise 2003). African traditional religions, however, have generally been placed outside the realms of public representation, media, and globalisation, and hence, outside the influence of mass media Christianity.

In studies of African Pentecostalism reference has been made to African religious traditions and the ways in which these have been incorporated into African forms of Pentecostalism. Studies of older Pentecostal groups and African Independent Churches in particular have paid much attention to traditional religiosity and the issue of 'Africanisation,' both 'from above' and 'from below' (Comaroff 1985; Fabian 1971; Fasholé-Luke et al. 1978; Fields 1985; Meyer 1999; for overviews see Fernandez 1978; Meyer 2004b; Ranger 1986). Studies of the newer charismatic-Pentecostal churches have also noted continuities with traditional religiosity (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005a; Bediako 1995; Gifford 2004), but have on the whole tended to stress these churches indebtedness to global networks (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Englund 2003; Gifford 1998, 2004; Marshall-Fratani 1998; Maxwell 2006; Van Dijk 1997) more than to indige-

Fig. 0.7 'Born Again' hand cart.

nous religious traditions. Apparently, their strong global inclination seems to absorb researchers' full attention.

In studies of traditional religions and neo-traditionalist movements in Africa, attention has been paid to the presence of Christianity (Peel 1990, 2003; Schoffeleers 1985, 1994; Werbner 1989), but most studies of traditional religion are ethnographies of relatively closed, rural communities. As Birgit Meyer has observed in her survey of literature on Christianity in Africa, 'it seems that a sophisticated treatment of African religious traditions in relation to Christianity is still relatively scarce' (2004b:455). African charismatic Pentecostalism and African traditional religions have rarely been studied together on an equal basis. This may be due to the fact that they seem so intrinsically different in terms of religious doctrines and practices, outlook, and popularity. The hugely popular charismatic-Pentecostal 'media ministries' and Afrikania's much less successful efforts at media representation can indeed hardly be compared. In many other respects too they appear as each other's opposites and this impression is strengthened by their antagonistic tendencies.

This study takes seriously, however, the inextricable intertwinement of charis-

matic Pentecostalism and (neo-)traditional African religion as part of one religious field with a shared history and a shared 'audience' and examines them together. The point is not only that African charismatic Pentecostalism, as part of a global religious movement, cannot be studied without reference to the local religious contexts in which it manifests. The point is also that African traditional religion, generally understood as 'local,' should equally be studied as part of the historical globalisation of religion (Chidester 1996; Ranger 1988; Shaw 1990). Just as Ghanaian charismatic Pentecostalism, despite the 'complete break with the past' it requires (Meyer 1998) and the very real changes it produces (Robbins 2007), shows remarkable continuities with traditional religion, neo-traditional reformulations of African traditional religion often show remarkable continuities with Christianity, despite their explicit rejection of Christianity (see also Schoffeleers 1984). Instead of treating charismatic revival and traditionalist revival as mutually opposed and distinct religious phenomena, then, this study takes as a point of departure that one cannot sufficiently understand the rise of new religious movements without understanding how they influence each other, borrow from each other, and define themselves vis-à-vis each other (Larkin and Meyer 2006).

This is not to question the sincerity of Ghanaian charismatics' claims of being 'born again,' of 'a complete break with the past,' nor to argue that they are 'still' caught up in traditional religious worldviews. Just as it is not to argue that Afrikania's claims to continuity with African traditional religions are false because Afrikania is actually discontinuous and shows much more continuity with Christianity and thus these people are actually Christians (in fact, most of the leaders of the movement are ex-Catholics who converted to Afrikan Traditional Religion). As much as I welcome

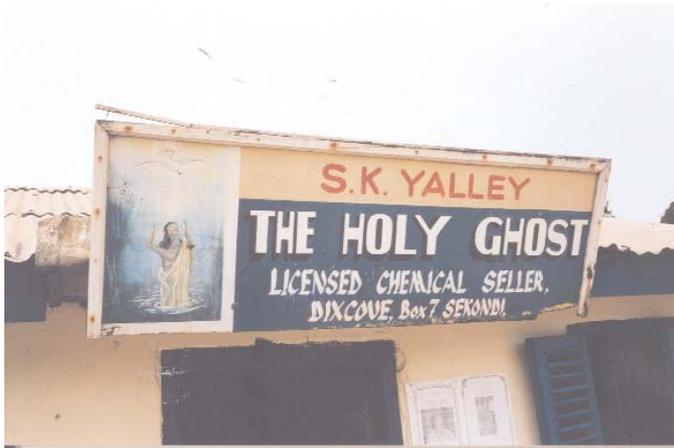*Fig. 0.8 'Gye Nyame' (Only God) electricals.*

Fig. 0.9 'The Holy Ghost' Chemical seller.

Joel Robbin's (fc.) call for investigating the distinctive 'culture of Pentecostalism,' a strong emphasis on discontinuity (Robbins 2007; fc.) risks reinforcing the assumed boundaries between Pentecostalism and other religions instead of problematising them. I agree with Robbins (2007) that people's own assertions of break, boundaries, and radical change are to be taken seriously and not written off as fake or shallow if we want to understand what becoming and being Christian or traditionalist is all about. But we should take them for what they are: assertions, claims and (conversion) narratives that are part and parcel of the religious culture people belong to or wish to belong to, that is, of a politics of self-representation. We cannot take them for granted as analytical notions. As claims, their authenticity is also contested by others in the religious playing field: Afrikanians claim that born-again Christians are fake, that they only pretend to be possessed by the Holy Spirit, but that 'real power' is with the traditional priests; traditional shrine priests suspect Afrikania of being Christianity in disguise; born-again Christians critique mainline Christians for being superficial and say that 'they are not real Christians,' and some Catholics do not take the traditionalist escapades of their walk-away-priest seriously, because 'once a Catholic always a Catholic.'[5] The point is that charismatic Christian and traditionalist leaders operate and manifest themselves in a single religious arena, in which they seek to convince widely overlapping audiences of their claims to authority and authenticity. In other words, they compete for the same 'metaphysical space.' This arena is increasingly constituted by mass media and so are the modes of being present in it.

A dual focus on these two manifestations of Ghanaian religion reveals the paradoxical dynamics at work in the relation between them: in opposing each other, the Afrikania Mission and charismatic Pentecostalism also become like each other. African charismatic-Pentecostal churches 'fight' against traditional religion, yet implicitly incorporate the logic, spiritual forces, and ways of worship of local religious traditions as media through which Christian spirituality is communicated. The Afrikania Mission 'fights' (charismatic) Christianity, yet adopts Christian formats in its reformulation of 'Afrikan Traditional Religion.' The entanglement of religion and mass media reinforces these dialectics. On the one hand, the growing public presence of religion extrapolates the antagonism. Religion increasingly becomes a site of public clash (Hackett 1999), especially between Pentecostals and traditionalists. At the same time, religious mass media generate and disseminate similar religious formats that have a
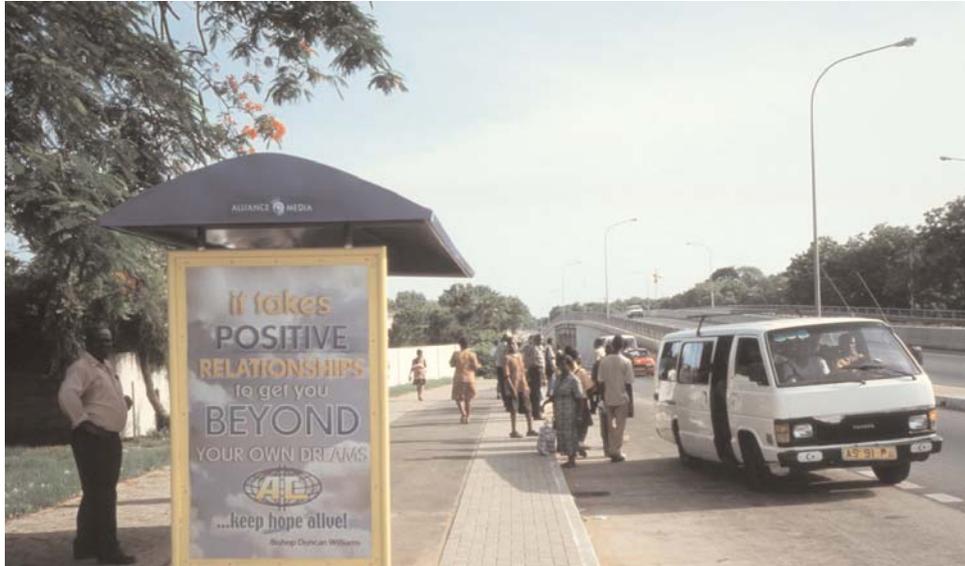
Fig. 0.10a Bus shelter advertising the Action Chapel International.

cross-religious impact on the public representation of religion. I will argue that charis-matic Pentecostalism, being the dominant and most publicly present religion, has become the template for religion as such and, surprisingly, also for Afrikania's public representations.

The importance of mass media is well recognised in the literature on African charismatic Pentecostalism. David Maxwell, in an editorial to a special issue of the *Journal of Religion in Africa* on Pentecostalism in Africa (1998:255), stated that 'the appropriation of electronic media has become part of Pentecostal self-definition.' In the same issue Rosalind Hackett spurred scholars to keep up with this strong and continuing media trend in Ghanaian and Nigerian charismatic Pentecostalism (1998). Similarly, Paul Gifford commented on Ghanaian charismatic Pentecostalism: 'This Christianity is a media phenomenon, to the extent that services are often built around the requirements of television' (2004:32). Yet, despite this recognition of the central role of mass media for the development and life of charismatic Pentecostalism in Africa, no studies have taken this as their prime focus. Media have been treated as 'a feature' of charismatic churches, as one of their distinctive 'characteristics.' Up till now, no in-depth study of an African charismatic church has appeared that has taken up the question of media and mediation as its central problematic. This study seeks to do so.

There have been calls for investigating how the mass mediatisation of Pentecostal and charismatic churches and the circulation of their images across the globe leads to a globalisation of religious expression (Coleman 2000; Robbins 2004). Indeed, this thesis shows how charismatic-Pentecostal performance in Ghana is influ-enced, through mass media, by the styles of worship, preaching, prayer, dress, body movement, and facial expression exhibited by charismatics and Pentecostals across the world. Yet, a focus on the global spread of Pentecostalism alone may fail to notice how

Fig. 0.10b Bus shelter advertising the Action Chapel International.

in the local religious and media landscape, such styles are appropriated outside of Pentecostalism. This thesis, then, also looks at how they have achieved media hegemony and cross religious boundaries. It takes as point of departure that other religious groups' appropriations of Pentecostal formats and styles are part of the culture of Pentecostalism and should be explored if we want to understand the implications of charismatic-Pentecostal churches' extensive use of mass media.

African traditional religion is generally thought of outside the context of modern mass media and the public sphere. A host of studies have appeared on mediumship in various traditional cults (e.g. Beattie and Middleton 2004 [1969]; Behrend and Luig 1999; Boddy 1989; Kraamer 1993; Stoller 1989a; Willis 1999), but virtually nothing on electronic media (but see Behrend 2003).[6] Partly, this may be due to the rural bias of most literature on traditional religions in Africa, and partly to the mutually reinforcing tendencies of African media institutions and practitioners to censor traditional religion out of the media and of traditional religious practitioners to be wary of accommodating modern media. This thesis contributes to the debate on religion and mass media by focusing on the specificities of the relation between audiovisual mass media and a religion that has usually not been associated with public representation.

The International Central Gospel Church and the Afrikania Mission

The two religious organisations in this study appear diametrically opposed in many respects. With over 7000 members, about 100 branches all over Ghana, in other parts of Africa as well as in Europe and the United States, its 4000-seat Christ Temple in Accra (fig. 0.11), a weekly prime time TV programme, and daily radio broadcasts, the

Fig. 0.11 Christ Temple, International Central Gospel Church, Abossey Okay, Accra.

International Central Gospel Church is one of the largest and most influential charismatic churches in Ghana. Its leader Mensa Otabil (fig. 0.12) is a public personality. His well-established media presence and flamboyant appearance have given him celebrity status. His 'life-transforming teachings' strike chords with a broad audience across Ghana's religious field and he is widely perceived as 'the teacher of the nation.' The Afrikania Mission is dedicated to representing and reviving 'Afrikan Traditional Religion' in Ghana's Christian-dominated public sphere and on the international stage of 'world religions.' In contrast to the ICGC's well-oiled and capital-driven media machine, the Afrikania Mission lacks resources and struggles to find alternative ways into the media. Intended as a counterweight to the Christian hegemony, it presents a strong voice for the defence of traditional cultural practices, but remains rather marginal. Although the movement seems to attract a growing number of followers in rural areas, the attendance of its worship services in Accra, where the movement originated and is still headquartered, is a far cry from the mass spectacles of charismatic worship. Lastly, the emphasis in traditional religion on secrecy and seclusion make Afrikania's relationship to the media and the public sphere a lot more problematic than the ICGC's with its explicit strategy of outreach and evangelisation.

But there are also striking parallels between the two groups. Both celebrated their 20th anniversary during my research period in a building that pales their

Fig. 0.12 Rev. Dr. Mensa Otabil (photo: AltarMedia).

Fig. 0.13 Afrikania Mission Headquarters, Sakaman, Accra.

humble beginnings in the early 1980s. In a period of political turbulence and new cultural awareness, the Afrikania Mission was founded in 1982. Two years later, amidst a wave of Christian enthusiasm and new spiritual awareness, the International Central Gospel Church was founded in 1984. Early meetings were held in a small classroom, but to accommodate the rapidly growing membership a garage, a cinema hall, and a scout hall were rented respectively. In 1996 the church completed its own, huge church hall, the Christ Temple, which it uses for regular services, conferences, concerts and a host of other activities. Meanwhile the Afrikania Mission moved from renting a drinking spot at the National Cultural Centre for its meetings and worship services to building its three-storey headquarters, used for services, celebrations, education, press conferences, and more (fig. 0.13).

There is also, surprisingly perhaps, a considerable overlap between the visions of the two movements' leaders (figs. 0.12, 0.14). Behind the obvious antagonism of Pentecostal anti-traditionalism and traditionalist anti-Pentecostalism they express, both Mensa Otabil and the subsequent Afrikania leaders propagate an explicit message of Africanist emancipation. Both strive for values of African pride and self-awareness, seek to come to terms with the question of Africanness and modernity, and are well-versed in the Pan-Africanist discourse of 'liberation of mental slavery.' Both also expose a strong political awareness and a critical attitude towards the Ghanaian state. They differ fundamentally, however, in how they flesh out this emancipation. For Afrikania it implies a rejection of Christianity as 'inherently foreign,' as the religion used to 'dominate and exploit Africans,' and a revitalisation of 'traditional religion and culture' as the only source of selfhood for Africans. For Otabil, it implies an Africanist re-reading of the bible and a very critical approach to 'African culture.'

The two religious organisations also share a fundamentally contradictory

*Fig. 0.14
Osofo Komfo
Kofi Ameve.*

nature. For both ICGC and Afrikania, internal and external contradictions produce a continuous dynamics, but the specific contradictions were different in both cases. This made working with their leaders and members a fascinating trip all along. The Afrikania Mission aspires to be a 'church' like all other churches, a 'religion' like all other recognized 'world religions.' In this aspiration, it takes over, as I will discuss, many Christian forms. This 'mimetic zeal' (Mary 2002), however, is paired with a 'distinctive zeal,' an explicit self-definition as non-Christian, to the extent that it legitimises the movement's existence. It fights for the revival of Afrikan Traditional Religion against Christian suppression and claims to represent all traditional religious practitioners and adherents. In practice, however, the leadership finds it very hard to connect with local religious cults and shrine people. The specificities of particular cults are hard to fit into the 'common religious form' Afrikania has created and undermine its 'neutrality.' Its concern with 'cleanliness,' 'orderliness,' and 'beauty,' moreover, is hard to match with practices like ecstatic possession ritual and blood sacrifice. For the people Afrikania seeks to attract and represent such practices are highly meaningful and powerful. Afrikania's intellectualist and modernising approach to traditional religion, then, produces a tension not only with religious practitioners outside Afrikania, but occasionally also with those who have joined the movement.

In the ICGC Otabil's passion and plea for knowledge, education, and critical thinking stands in tension with the emotional expression and concern with spirits of charismatic-Pentecostal religiosity, also within his own church. He criticizes and sometimes ridicules the spiritualist tendencies of many charismatics and his rationalist message of self-development sets him apart in the field of Ghanaian charismatic Pentecostalism today (see also Gifford 2004; Larbi 2001). But at the same time he also depends (for his celebrity status, for his followers, and thus for his income) on the charismatic wave that sweeps the country. His message does not easily fit with charismatic practices like exorcism, divine healing, and reliance on divine intervention, but he has to tolerate them in his church. In addition, Otabil's Africanist message is contradictory in that he wishes to promote African self-consciousness, but defines 'Africanness' in such a way – innovative and stimulating as his argument is – that he empties it of all its possible content and leaves people with nothing more than perhaps a black skin. Another contradiction is less specific to the ICGC, but characterizes all charismatic mass churches. This is the tension between on the one hand the emphasis this Christianity puts on the individual, on personal experience and development and on the other hand the mass character and bureaucratic structures of the church, that easily make individual church members get lost in anonymity.

All of these contradictions will be explored in the coming chapters, but one contradiction stands out and affects both the ICGC and Afrikania: the leaders of both organisations are mass media enthusiasts and their movements exist by the very grace of mass media. For both, however, it is complicated to mediate the spiritual power on which their authority and attraction ultimately thrive. It is only at first sight that Afrikania's thorny efforts at media representation stand in stark contrast to the explosion of unlimited publicity of charismatic-Pentecostal media activity. Both struggle

with the problem of spirit presence and media representation. For Otabil, his authori-
ty hinges on charisma, on his ability to set in motion what people experience as a flow
of Holy Spirit power. This flow risks being broken by the fixity of Otabil's media for-
mat. The successful formula of his television broadcast threatens to overrun its own
success and be seen as a 'mere' media format. For Afrikania, the perpetual challenge is
how to represent in public a religion in which authority is rooted in restricted access
to spirit powers, mediated by practices of secrecy and seclusion, and threatened by
openness. Its media representations are met with caution by shrine priests for whom
images may not remain 'mere' representations, but mediate spirit presence. For both
the ICGC and the Afrikania Mission, then, entering Ghana's new media sphere is far
from smooth and self-evident, but implies a constant negotiation of conflicting
impulses. Solving the problem of mediation requires a careful balancing act of revela-
tion and concealment. It is these efforts that are investigated in this thesis.

Thinking religion, media, senses: theoretical considerations

The theoretical approach taken up in this study seeks to account for the triangular
relationships between religion, media, and the senses. It consists of a) a conception of
religion as a practice of mediation, b) a focus on the bodily and sensory regimes of
religious traditions, and c) a cross-sensual approach to mass media.

Religion as mediation

The problem at stake in this thesis is not so much the meeting of 'religion' and
'media,' but rather the intersection of religious and technological forms of mediation.
This study is part of the NWO-PIONIER Research Programme 'Modern Mass Media,
Religion and the Imagination of Communities,' directed by Birgit Meyer. This pro-
gramme has gathered a team of social scientists to examine the intersections of reli-
gion and mass media in a number of postcolonial societies.[7] To do so, we have found
it fruitful to conceive of religion as a practice of mediation (De Vries 2001; Meyer
2006a; Stolow 2005). Rejecting the remarkably resilient modernist view of media and
religion as separate fields, we have posited that media are intrinsic to religion. 'Media'
as commonly understood bridge a distance in space and/or time and make it possible
to experience the presence of another person, through his/her voice and/or image,
even if s/he is no longer there or is somewhere else. Religious practices and objects
bridge an ontological distance between what is conceived as the 'physical' world and
the 'metaphysical' world and thus make it possible for religious subjects to experience
the presence of 'divine' power.[8] At the same time media enable the very conception of
this 'metaphysical' realm. As a practice of both imagining and engaging with 'the
metaphysical,' religion always needs media: the Bible, the Quran, the Torah; prayer,
prophecy, glossolalia; music and dance; spirit mediums, diviners, priests, healers,
prophets; amulets, icons, rosaries, prayer beads; oils, powders, incenses, liquids;
shrines, temples, chapels, mosques. In a million ways written texts, ritual speech,
sounds, human bodies, objects, substances, and spaces function as media for religious

inspiration: they enable people to conceive of and establish, maintain, and renew ties with the presence of spirit beings. Religion, in other words, is a practice of producing a sense of connection, of connecting people and spirits.

This understanding of religion as connection resonates with the etymological explanation of the Latin word *religio* as deriving from the verb *religare*, to bind (again), to reconnect, and referring to the bond (*liga*) between man and God, or between man and the divine more generally.[9] Both media and religion thus denote a practice of binding together, of connection.

The idea of religion as media also resonates with emic discourses in Ghana about communication with the spirit world in terms of technology. In charismatic circles, anointing with oil is said to 'establish points of contact.' Money offerings 'create a divine connection' and work as 'spiritual electronics.' Speaking in tongues is 'a direct communication line to God in the spirit.' Praise and worship helps believers to 'tune to the power of the Spirit' and prophecy, 'seeing powers,' is likened to 'radar' or 'röntgen' technology.[10] African traditionalists explain the presence and working of spiritual powers as 'radio or television airwaves' and compare divination to 'computer technology.'[11] A 'spiritual scientist' described his work as follows:

> People may call it juju, but it is not juju. It is spiritual science, because it is a matter of putting the right things together in the right way for the power to enter and the thing to work. It is like a mobile phone, if it is not arranged well, it will not work. Or a TV and the remote, there is a power working between them, which you don't see.[12]

References to 'juju' as 'remote control' or 'African electronics' are widespread.

At first I saw this as interesting metaphors. Later I realised that the connection between spiritual power and media technology was not just metaphoric. Media technologies enabled people to experience a connection with spiritual powers.[13] People reported having received Holy Spirit baptism through a TV broadcast and being healed through live-on-air radio prayers. People could 'catch the anointing' by listening to sermon tapes, watching religious videos, or reading and touching religious books. They could be healed or harmed through their photographs (Behrend 2003). Or they could be affected by evil spirits through prop shrines on film sets (Meyer 2005a). The relation between media technologies and the spirit world is thus not merely a metaphorical one. As media shape people's imaginations of the metaphysical, their experience of connecting to this invisible realm may be channelled through media technologies. This is what Friedrich Kittler meant when he wrote that 'The spirit-world is as large as the storage and transmission possibilities of a civilization' (1999). The available means and modes of representation make possible (and limit) not only the religious imagination (Van de Port 2006). They also enable and constrain the expression and experience of divine power. In their capacity of making the divine imaginable and rendering it present, then, modern media technologies such as television or radio are not so different from older or other modes of religious mediation such as holy books, sacred spaces, divine objects, or ritual performance. It would thus

be misleading to assume that 'media' are some kind of external actor doing something to an already constituted religious formation. Any religious formation is the outcome of particular practices and technologies of mediation, which precede the 'arrival' or 'adoption' of modern media technologies. In other words, religion and media are mutually constitutive.

The idea of religion as a practice of mediation has implications not only for how we conceive of religion, and thus for the study of religion, but also for how we conceive of media, and thus for the anthropology of media. I take as a point of departure that media are not to be conceived as mass media only (Mazzarella 2004; Mitchell 2005). The anthropology of media (Askew and Wilk 2002; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002) generally limits its subject to electronic or print media. I propose to widen the notion of media to denote practices of mediation and analyse media as intermediaries in processes of communication, of connection, of establishing, maintaining and transforming links between people, and, in the case of religious mediation, between people and what they take to be the supernatural.

And yet, modern media technologies cannot be assumed to be unproblematic extensions of older forms of religious mediation. On the contrary, 'media and mediation constitute inherently unstable and ambiguous conditions of possibility for religious signifying practices' (Stolow 2005:125). The question of media and mediated presence is often strongly disputed by and within religious groups. Protestant iconoclasm is of course the classic and violent example that comes to mind. But precisely because mediation is inherent to every form of religion, media (old or new) are always possible sources of caution, concern, and conflict, as in the cases of the rejection of the written bible by Masowe Apostolics in Zimbabwe (Engelke 2007), the debates surrounding the circulation of audio recordings of the Islamic devotional genre na't in Mauritius (Eisenlohr 2006), or the controversy over the production of home videos by and for Candomblé cultists in Bahia (Van de Port 2006). The point is that the immediacy of the supernatural, as an extrasensory presence, always needs media for being experienceable and imaginable. These media may range from the bible to the body, from prophets to television, and from mini discs to cowry shells. But what classifies as immediacy and what as mediation is not given but negotiated (Engelke 2007). Which texts, bodies, or objects are 'media' or 'representations,' and which texts, bodies, or objects are manifestations of 'immediate' divine presence is contested and varies with religious traditions and their 'semiotic ideologies' (Keane 2003) that define the relations between words, things, and subjects.

Thus, whereas the immediacy of God's word in the bible has been a long held value in Christianity, Zimbabwean Masowe Apostolics reject the bible because they see the materiality of the book medium as a barrier to a 'live and direct' faith marked by immateriality of God's presence. Ghanaian charismatics reject any kind of priestly mediation between the believer and the divine and profess the 'unmediated accessibility of spiritual gifts,' but the charismatic authority of their pastors and prophets rests on the presence of God they are held to embody and manifest. The Afrikania Mission's eager adoption of television is problematic for the traditional shrine priests the movement seeks to *represent*, because for the priests TV images could make the

spirits *present* in non-authorised contexts beyond their control. They rather privilege the body as the appropriate medium for the manifestation of spirit powers, through possession and other bodily techniques. Charismatics also authenticate the born-again Christian's body as the prime locus of Holy Spirit power, but they also expose a strong distrust of the bodily senses as media through which knowledge of the world can be gained and prefer 'spiritual knowledge' coming 'directly' from God. Finally, whereas traditional diviners use cowry shells as media to communicate with the spirits, born-again Christians are often highly suspicious of such cowry shells as they take them to make dangerous demonic spirits present.

What these examples of different semiotic ideologies point out is that the dichotomous categories of mediation and immediacy, distance and intimacy, presence and absence, or presence and representation can never be taken at face value. I use them therefore not as analytical concepts, but analyse them as attributes, for they are not intrinsic qualities, but qualities ascribed via particular semiotic ideologies. They are made and attributed to certain objects, bodies, words, sounds and images in a process of religious authentication that invests them with authority – or denies them authority – in the relationship between a religious subject and the divine (cf. Engelke 2007:9). In a semiotic ideology of immediacy, mediation can thus be found problematic because it implies distance and counteracts the ideal of authentic, immediate religious experience and/or because it challenges established forms of religious authority by facilitating new ones (see also Schulz 2006). At the same time, the acceptance of particular media and forms of mediation as legitimate often goes together with a denial of mediation. Religious practitioners call upon media to define, construct, and experience their relationship with the spiritual world, but sacralize or naturalize these media so as to authenticate a religious experience as immediate and 'real.' Such denials of and debates over media and mediation point to, as Mattijs van de Port (2006:457) has put it, an 'ongoing struggle over the proper ways to render present the sacred' found in the relationship between religion and media.

Obviously, this struggle takes very different courses and has different outcomes in various religious traditions. The key concern of this thesis in comparing charismatic-Pentecostals' and neo-traditionalists' adoption of modern media technologies, then, is to investigate the relationship between practices of technological mass mediation and other/older practices of religious mediation and the different forms the problem of mediation takes for both groups. The observation here is that charismatic Pentecostalism denies mediation, positing the direct access of every born-again Christian to the power of the Holy Spirit, but enthusiastically takes on electronic media technologies, while African traditional religions emphasise the need for mediation, channelling access to spirit powers through various types of religious intermediaries, but find it, as said, very difficult to accommodate new media.

The sensibility of religion

A theory of religion as mediation implies a focus on the human body and its sensory media in and through which religious presence get materialised. The current revival of interest in the senses across the humanities (e.g. Bull and Beck 2003; Classen 2005;

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Howes 1991, 2004; Seremetakis 1994; Van Ginkel and Strating 2007) offers intriguing avenues for the study of religion. As a practice of engaging with an extrasensory world, religion depends on the senses for making that world experienceable and real. Different religious traditions organise the sensory mediation of divine presence differently, through particular regimes of mobilising and disciplining the senses and the body. The sensuous dimension of religion is receiving increased attention from scholars of religion, especially in the fields of anthropology (Classen 1998; Csordas 1997; Hirschkind 2006a; Mahmood 2004; Meyer 2006b) and history (Chidester 1992, 2005b; Mellor and Shilling 1997; Schmidt 2000). Critical of taken-for-granted assumptions about the primacy of the eye in hierarchies of the senses, such studies tend to investigate how the human sensorium is culturally and historically informed and how embodied forms and sensibilities help shape religious subjectivity, belonging, imagination, and experience. Focussing on the senses in charismatic Christian and African traditional practices of religious mediation, I wish to contribute to a rehabilitation of bodily and sensory formation as a crucial area of research on religion.

Much of the current interest in the body and the senses is inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's (1980) elaboration of the notion of *habitus* and Marcel Mauss's (1973 [1934]) work on techniques of the body.[14] For Bourdieu, habitus is the principle through which 'objective social conditions' are inscribed in the body and generate a structure of embodied dispositions that operate beneath the level of consciousness and mediate between socio-cultural patterns of (class) behaviour and subjective experience. Bourdieu's emphasis on the unconscious power of habitus, however, leaves little room for exploring the explicit practices through which a habitus is acquired (Mahmood 2001). Recent anthropological work on religion and the senses has focussed on the body as a site of training and has shown how particular religious traditions discipline the body and tune the senses through conscious learning and rehearsal of bodily and sensory techniques (Alvez De Abreu 2005; Hirschkind 2001b; Van Dijk 2005; see also Csordas 1997). Religious sensory regimes organize the ways in which religious subjects relate to the divine and thus 'modulate people of flesh and blood, seeking to inscribe religion into their bones' (Meyer 2006b:24).

Although more concerned with sensory metaphors than with sensory regimes, David Chidesters book *Word and Light* (1992) provides an illuminating example of how the senses are implicated in the problem of mediation. Recognising seeing and hearing as the two dominant sensory modes of Western religious thought, Chidester observes a basic tendency to associate visual metaphors of light with presence and immediacy and auditory metaphors of word with transcendence and mediation. He shows how an emphasis on the visual by Christian thinkers like Augustine and Bonaventura reveals a preference for the contemplation of God as immediate presence, whereas priority given to the auditory by authors like Arius and Melanchton comes with a greater emphasis on God as inaccessible mystery.[15] I do wonder what Chidester's focus on the senses of seeing and hearing alone left out with regard to the other senses – and indeed, in a later publication he explicitly addressed the tactility of Christianity (see below). But his analysis brings out well the merits of trying to define the particular semiotic ideologies of the senses, and, I would add, the practices by which these are embodied, in different religious traditions and currents.

Analyses of the particular sensory metaphors and regimes that shape the charismatic Pentecostal subject's engagement with the divine have tended to privilege the visual (Meyer 2006c; *Material Religion* 1(3)) or, to a lesser extent, the auditory (Van Dijk 2005). I wish to argue that the sense of touch is particularly well tuned in charismatic Pentecostalism. This has important consequences for how we conceive of its relationship to the sensory regimes of traditional African religiosity and to those of audio-visual mass media. Stressing tactility, however, I do not seek to privilege touch as an alternative to vision and hearing, as much of the anthropology of the senses tends to do. Rather, as will be outlined below, my plea to take seriously the sense of touch extends to touch as it is implicated in sound and image.

The Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako (1995:106) understands African Pentecostalism, in resonance with African traditional religion, as 'a system of power' and living religiously as '*being in touch* with the source and channels of power in the universe' (my emphasis, MdW). The idea of African religion as a system of power is recognised by various scholars of religion in Africa (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005a; Ellis and Ter Haar 2004; Meyer 1999) and is a much needed correction to the dominant definition of religion as a system of symbols, beliefs, or ideas, that, as Talal Asad (1993) has argued, is rooted in modern Protestantism, but has acquired a problematic, universalist application (see also Chidester 1996). Leaving this discussion for chapter 5, what I want to stress here is the tactile dimension of African religiosity and of Pentecostalism worldwide. I do not want to oppose this tactility, however, to the 'system of ideas,' that Bediako holds Western Christianity for. Presenting 'African religion' as a religion of touch risks reproducing a longstanding stereotypical opposition of detached Western modernity and African embodiment and authenticity, manifested in forms as varied as Western romanticist fantasies of the Noble Savage and Africanist Christian searches for 'African authenticity' (see chapter 5). I wish to emphasise, then, that 'touch is a bodily experience deeply encoded in Christian culture' (Sennet 1994:225) and in the very notion of religion as a practice of binding (Chidester 2005b: 51).[16] I equally wish to oppose the assumption that the touch is immediate and, by implication, authentic. The appreciation (or fear) of touch as more immediate than the other senses is part of a particular semiotic ideology of the senses that authenticates touch as immediate.

In the West African context, this tactility of Christianity, and Pentecostalism in particular, comes to be expressed in relation to religious traditions that authenticate the body as the primary medium for spirit beings to become manifest and in human form communicate with human beings (Geurts 2002; Lovell 2002; Rosenthal 1998). As a practice of mediation, Ghanaian religion is a practice of getting and keeping in touch with spiritual powers, the Holy Spirit in the case of Pentecostalism, various kinds of deities and spirits in traditional religions. But it is also a practice of getting and keeping out of touch with other, evil or unwanted spirit powers. Religion as a practice of connection is always also a practice of disconnection. In my analysis 'being in touch' and 'being out of touch' is not to be understood metaphorically, but points to the centrality of the body, of embodiment and tactility in African charismatic Pentecostalism and African traditional religion alike. In both traditions, practices of religious mediation and the sensory regimes

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that shape religious subjectivity centre on the body and the sense of touch.

What happens to the embodied, tactile dimension of religiosity in the public sphere? When being in touch is effectuated by mass mediated sounds and images? And being out of touch ensured by restrictions on visibility and audibility, by conceal-ment and silence? To rephrase the central question, how do audiovisual practices of technological mediation relate to performative, tactile, bodily practices of spiritual mediation? How does the adoption of new media technologies reconfigure the senso-ry mediation of religious imagination and experience?

Cross-sensual media

Even though 'from the Frankfurt School onwards, the question of our sensory engage-ment with media has been at the centre of debates over their social implications and effects' (Mazzarella 2004:359),[17] media have been largely absent from the anthropolo-gy of the senses, just as the senses have been largely absent from the anthropology of media. Constance Classen's (1998) lamentation over the 'proliferation of technologies of representation in contemporary culture' and 'the rule of sight' at the expense of 'the organic, synaesthetic cosmos of premodernity' is only one example of an often taken-for-granted view of modern media technologies as disembodied. Conversely, her cele-bration of the 'lower senses' of taste, smell, and touch seems to entail an assumption of these senses, in contrast to sight and hearing, as outside mediation, as im-mediate, and thus outside the field of media.

In order to explore how the audiovisuality of mass media and the embodiment of religious performance – the media and the body – intersect, I propose a cross-sen-sual approach to media that combines the insights of the anthropology of the senses and the (re)turn to bodily perception and response in cinema studies (Marks 2000; Sobschack 2004) and art history (Freedberg 1989). The for scholars of mass media less obvious question of touch helps explaining how the entanglement of mass media and religiosity mobilises the sensorium in new ways and alters the formation of the reli-gious subject through sound and image practices that go beyond mere seeing and hearing (Verrips 2002, 2006). It is especially the seeming absence of tactility from mass mediation that interests me, because of the central role of physical touch in the media-tion of spiritual power in both charismatic Christian and African traditional religious practice.

Scholars of religion and mass media have increasingly addressed the question of how spirituality is informed by the visuality of the mass media (e.g. Gillespie 1995; Meyer 2006c; Morgan 1998, 2005; Pinney 2002, 2004; Spyer 2001; special issue of *Material Religion* 1(3)). This has yielded exciting theoretical approaches that go beyond an understanding of vision as distanced gaze and think through the power of images to touch the beholder (Freedberg 1989). The recognition that people's engagement with images is not limited to the eye, but is multisensory and bodily, produced a plethora of evocative terms from 'corpothetics' (Pinney 2004), 'haptic visuality' (Marks 2000, 2002), and 'teletactility' (Benthien 2002) to the 'corporeal eye' (Turvey 1998) and the 'cinesthetic subject' (Sobchack 2004). The return to aesthetics in the Aristotelian sense of *aisthesis*, as referring to the apprehension and interpretation of the world

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through the totality of the senses (Classen 1998; Hirschkind 2001b; Meyer 2006b; Verrips 2006), helps us explore the relationship between performative and mass mediated practices of religious mediation.

While image, vision and visuality are well theorized, sound, hearing, and aurality, however, are only beginning to receive serious attention from scholars of religion (Hirschkind 2001b, 2006a; Hughes 2002; Oosterbaan 2006; Van Dijk 2005). In studies of television, film, and video the audio dimension of these media silently disappears (but see Hoek fc.; Hughes 2005). Most scholars of religion and film seem to subscribe to what Star Wars sound designer Randy Thom called 'the ridiculous idea that film is a visual medium' (cited in Henley 2007:61). While I recognize the importance of vision and visuality, especially in Pentecostalism, I argue for taking more seriously the power of sound to evoke (religious) experience. Henley (2007) has argued that sound has a more powerful visceral impact than image, exactly because it demands our conscious attention much less than (moving) images do. Not surprisingly perhaps, it is mostly in the absence of images, in the field of music, that the possibility of acoustic touch has been theorised (Henriques 2003; Putnam 1985; Stoller 1989a; Van Maas 2005, 2007; Zuckerkandl 1956). A significant observation is that auditory and tactile sensations share a highly invasive quality (Putnam 1985:61). As sound penetrates the listener, fusing the material and the nonmaterial, the tangible and the intangible (Zuckerkandl 1956), religious sound is often found to be a powerful medium for connecting to and accessing the effective power of spirits.[18] Sander van Maas (2005), in an evocative essay on the touch of contemporary electronic music, draws our attention to the particular formal qualities of music, in his case the use of low and ultra-low frequencies, in effectuating this touch. He argues that by engaging the body the 'sonic presence' of electronic music – and of the phenomenon of music in general – 'problematizes the difference between insides and outsides. It destabilizes the distinction between sound and its mediation, between content and form, between interior and exterior' (Van Maas 2005). Music, and for that matter sound, always engages the body in musical/acoustic perception, but it is important to pay attention to the specificities of particular sounds, or the sonic texture, that enhance or reduce the possibility of being touched.

When we recognise that the senses in their aesthetic interaction shape the religious and cultural imagination, we thus have to look at how the sonic and the visual dimensions of mass media work together to produce a sense of divine touch. The question then is how the possibility of visual and acoustic 'teletactility,' opened up by electronic media and their particular formal qualities, transforms the sensory mediation of religious imagination and experience.

Religious formats

Religion always needs mediation and mediation always needs forms. It is important to recognise that the formal properties of a given medium condition its social potential and enable and constrain the control and dissemination of information in particular ways (Mazzarella 2004:358). This is true not only of 'media' in their conventional understanding, but also of religious ritual, which involves 'the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances encoded by

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someone other than the performer himself' (Rappaport 1999: 118). Mass media and religious ritual share certain modes of formal organization, characterised by fixity and repetition that I propose to call 'format.' I use the concept of 'format' to refer to a more or less fixed set of stylistic features and sequence of ingredients applied to arrange and/or to (re)present certain contents, be they textual, visual, aural, or performative. It is a form meant for repetitive use. I conceive of format as a practice: a practice of selection, editing, shuffling, of fitting in and cutting out. As such, formatting also hides: representation is both revelation and concealment. My understanding of religious formats comes very close to Birgit Meyer's (2006b:8) understanding of 'sensational forms' as 'relatively fixed, authorized modes of invoking, and organizing access to the transcendental.' What the concept of format helps bringing out is not only the relative fixity of particular forms through which people are made to experience the presence of divine power, but also their repetition and reproducibility. Continuous repetition is what makes a format powerful, because it makes the format disappear and unconsciously recognised and the content convincing.

The concept of format is also attractive, because, as a key concept in the media and entertainment industry, it is also an emic term, used by Mensa Otabil's media team in the context of their media productions. In line with my plea for broadening the anthropological study of media beyond its current focus on mass media, I have extrapolated the term from this specific media-related use to broader religious practice and in particular ritual, in which similar processes of formal organisation, structuring, and repetition, indeed, of formatting, take place. Format and ritual share two key features of fixed form and repetition. When people are continuously exposed to particular media formats, they become so accustomed to these formats that they get naturalized and shape people's sense of what is convincing and what is not (Van de Port 2006:455). Ritual, a church service for instance, is also a repetitive form, that draws its convincing power from being repeated all the time and thus disappearing, being naturalized. Formats, then, play a central part in the processes by which (religious) mediations get authorized and authenticated.

The concept of religious formats allows us to fine-tune the problem of mediation. Religious formats enable believers to experience a connection – being in touch – with a supernatural presence. Continuous repetition of these formats naturalizes them and conceals the work of mediation they do, so that believers perceive this experience as immediate and true. In charismatic terms, people 'experience the free flow of Holy Spirit power.' That is, if a religious format works. It may also not work, for a particular person or in a particular context. When an awareness of the format as human construction takes precedence over the feeling of supernatural power, a religious format is not convincing. Religious formats thus mediate a sense of spirit presence, but also risk 'killing the spirit' or keeping it absent. A basic tension thus underlies the problem of mediation: a tension between format and flow, or, to be more precise, between the awareness of the mediating power of format and the sense of an immediate flow of spirit power.

How do the formats and bodily techniques of religious performance relate to the formats and technologies of audiovisual mass media representation? When does

representation become presence? And when does it not? How can format allow for flow? And when does it preclude flow? In what follows I will bring out the contradictions involved for both the International Central Gospel Church and the Afrikania Mission in tying into the dominant formats and styles of the mass media.

Doing religion, media, senses: methodological considerations

What does a researcher do with religion? And what does the religion a social scientist studies do to the researcher?[19] This is a question many anthropologists and sociologists of religion have asked themselves, although not much has been written about it (but see Poloma 2003; Verrips 2005). The same question can be asked with regard to studying mass media and the senses. What does a researcher do with and to media? And what do the media a media scholar studies do to the researcher? How are the researcher's own senses and sensory experiences implicated in the research?

Let us return for a moment to the interview experience I had with Dr. Beckley described at the opening. It brings out how I was sometimes carried away by the convincing power of religious mediations, and at other times totally amazed at people's belief. At unexpected moments I was sucked into the sensory experiences and modes of thought that I studied (see also Harding 2001). I had similar experiences in the Christ Temple. When during an intensive prayer session I suddenly felt so dizzy that I almost fainted, I immediately thought of my visit to a shrine the day before. The opening vignette also highlights the sensuousness of doing fieldwork, including seemingly disembodied methods of interviewing or note writing. Most importantly, then, it points to the illusion of maintaining an outsider position and the impossibility of writing myself out of the story.

For a total of fifteen months, from July to September 2001 and from March 2002 to March 2003, I lived in Accra with my husband, in the lively middle class area of Dansoman. We first stayed in the house of my father-in-law, a retired journalist. In July 2002 we moved to a two-room apartment in the house of a middle-aged lady, accidentally also a journalist, in the same area. From our house(s) in Dansoman I listened to the sounds that entered through our louvre glass windows: churches and prayer grounds, a Buddhist community, the noisy Club 250, the daily street commerce, the neighbours, and the birds. I smelt the burning firewood or charcoal, and the soups that needed too much time to cook for the gas stove in the kitchen. The penetrating stench when a neighbour burnt his waste. I felt the sea wind blowing through our bed room, and endlessly wiped the red dust that it brought along. I caressed the smooth surface of the hardwood writing desk that we had ordered from a downtown carpenter and I enjoyed the coolness of the terrazzo floor under my bare feet. In the darkness of the night, behind the well on my father-in-law's compound, I rinsed the sticky heat off my skin with a cold bucket shower, a rough sponge, and lots of foamy *Village Fresh* soap.

Moving about in Accra, I gradually acquired practical knowledge about the geographical structure of the city, its various neighbourhoods, *trotro* and taxi routes, cross roads, major stations, and landmarks. I learned the logic of public transport, its particular communicative practices of hissing, shouting and gesticulating destinations

and immersed myself in the hectic of the rush hours, the long queues for taxi's and busses, the jam-packed *trotros*. When I started driving our own car, I was disoriented, my knowledge of routes, connections, and landmarks proved insufficient. I needed a different 'mental city map' (cf. Wiegele 2005:59-62), an aerial view of streets and how all neighbourhoods are located vis-à-vis each other. It was only then that I started using my (however outdated) KLM/Shell map to find the shortest route from the Christ Temple to the Afrikania Mission, from the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation to the National Media Commission, and from Radio Gold to TV3.

Studying religion

In many respects my ways of learning about the religious groups that I studied did not differ so much from the ways in which members or aspirant members learnt about their (new) religion. I bought and read lots of Pentecostal and (fewer) Afrikania publications, bought, listened to and talked about sermon tapes, videos and CD's, and watched and listened to religious TV and radio broadcasts. I did (and often recorded) interviews and had informal conversations with leaders and members, and did a questionnaire survey among Christ Temple and Afrikania members (which was more successful in the former case). My main way of learning, however, was participant observation in religious services. I went to church every Sunday, most often to the Christ Temple and the Afrikania Headquarters, sometimes to other ICGC or Afrikania branches, or to other churches. Sometimes I attended two services in a row at different places. I audio or video recorded the services and took part in dancing, listening, and taking notes, which in the ICGC was what one was supposed to do. Next to church services, I attended other ceremonies like baptisms, weddings, and funerals, musical events and religious conferences, and rehearsal sessions or meetings of various kinds of smaller groups within the Christ Temple and the Afrikania Mission. Both organisations also celebrated their twentieth anniversary during my fieldwork.

I also participated in religious education. At the Christ Temple I followed the series of twelve 'discipleship classes' that prospective members are required to go through. After that I joined several courses at ICGC's Living Word School of Ministry. At the Afrikania Mission I followed the two week intensive course in 'Afrikan Traditional Religion' at the Afrikania Priesthood Training School. Participation in this kind of religious education not only taught me much about the ideologies, beliefs, and practices of the two groups, but as much about their modes of transmitting knowledge and doctrines. Moreover, the group discussions that were always part of the classes (at both places) brought out interesting points of tension.

Both the ICGC and the Afrikania Mission put great emphasis on 'knowledge' and studying and my eagerness to learn, indeed, to study, was often interpreted as religious commitment or even zeal. This confronted me with the question of sincerity and the limits of participation. Sincerity towards others implied the question of how open to be about my own religious convictions, or rather the lack of it. Obviously I did not go to church with 'non-believer' written on my forehead. Neither did I make any conscious effort to hide that I did not consider myself a Christian and was also not considering becoming one. I always introduced myself to leaders and members as

a researcher and not as a potential member. Traditionalists mostly took my interest as international recognition of their religion. For born-again Christians, it was often an invitation to evangelise and try to convert me. My strong interest in the church and its teachings and my not being a Christian was confusing and many people expected that I would soon 'see the light.' But after a year I still did not fit into their mutually exclusive categories of 'believer' and 'non-believer.'

Sincerity also turned towards myself. Although I participated in many aspects of religious ritual and was often drawn into participation by others, participation also had its limits. In the Christ Temple I did stand up at prayers for pregnancy,[20] but I was much more hesitant to have myself anointed with olive oil. That happened twice, once by my own in-promptu decision and once when a prophet called me forward too explicitly to ignore. I did easily participate in dancing, clapping, and singing, but my sporadic attempts to speak in tongues and my occasional participation in communion caused a gnawing feeling of hypocrisy. But why this limit? What is the difference between prayer and anointing, between dancing and communion? And why did I feel insincere more often in the Christ Temple than when participating in Afrikania's worship services? Certainly there were limits there too. I learned about spiritual consultation, but did not consult the spirits myself, even if this would be the only way to witness an Afrikania consultation session. I declined the invitation to be initiated as an Afrikania priestess, even if this excluded me from witnessing the initiation rituals. I also declined any invitation to 'celebrate mass' or sit with the priests during service.

Clearly, the fact that I studied two self-conscious, mutually opposed religious groups, also informed these limits. At the Christ Temple I did not hide the fact that I was also interested in the Afrikania Mission, and vice versa. My asserted 'neutrality' did not temper both groups' strong evangelising tendencies. Leaders and members on both sides pushed (or rather pulled) me to convert and become a member. Both Mensa Otabil and Kofi Ameve tried to incorporate me into their broad religious visions. Otabil envisioned me as a pastor in the Netherlands, rallying young Dutch people for Christ in an effort to halt what he feared to be the 'islamisation of Europe.' To my objection that I was not even a Christian, let alone a pastor, he only said 'that can be dealt with.' Ameve liked to present me as an Afrikania priestess to members and visitors of the mission, as I followed the introductory course for prospective Afrikania priests. He envisioned me delving deeply for the traces of any 'indigenous religion' in the Netherlands, dating from before the advent of Christianity there. When he realised that that did not really strike a chord with me, he wished me to join in his struggle for Africanist revival in Ghana and wanted to initiate and publicly ordain me with my fellow students. My objection now was that, in contrast to them, I knew nothing of the herbs, techniques, and practices of traditional priests, so how could I claim spiritual authority? Ameve then trivialised the spiritual power of Afrikania priests and said that it is only people's belief that they have 'something' that counts. While pulling me in to become an insider and belong, both Otabil and Ameve also tried to capitalise on my presence as an outsider for their strategies of public representation. Ameve in his sermons and speeches often alluded to my and other people's foreign academic interest in Afrikania as recognition of African traditional religion in the international arena. Otabil in interviews with me presented the image of

himself that he also publicised through his PR team and other channels, thus conceal-
ing or trivializing aspects that would make him appear less distinctive, sophisticated,
or intellectual in the field of Ghanaian (and global) charismatic Pentecostalism.

Reflecting on the limits of participation in religion, I wonder why it is that a
good number of anthropologists studying traditional healing or possession cults in
Africa (or elsewhere) become initiated and some indeed practice as spiritual healers
themselves (e.g. Stoller 1989a; Stoller and Olkes 1987; Van Binsbergen 1991, 2003;
Willis 1999), but those studying Pentecostalism do not become born-again, prophets,
or evangelists.

Researching mass media

Anthropological research on mass media inevitably poses challenges to the classical
anthropological methods of participant observation. If 'presence,' or 'being there,' is
the ultimate source of authority for an anthropologist, anthropological research on
mass media raises the question 'being where?' For this study I have combined
methodologies of ethnography and media studies (Gillespie 1995; Ginsburg 2002;
Hasty 2005): I have looked at and participated in practices of media production, dis-
semination, and consumption and the socio-cultural contexts in which these practices
are embedded and analysed the media products themselves, their images, discourses,
and formats. Of course, these methods cannot really be separated. A focus on media
products already requires participation: buying a television and an antenna in a
downtown electronics shop, having the antenna mounted on your roof by an area boy,
arguing with your landlady about how to share the electricity bill when using a TV, a
radio, and a laptop, and dealing with power cuts tells much about how people's prac-
tices with media technologies are implicated in local infrastructures, power relations,
and daily life. Not to speak of listening to radio broadcasts in taxis or reading and
buying newspapers at roadside news stands.

I collected a great number of media products: I regularly bought various kinds
of newspapers, magazines, and other print media. They included the national dailies,
regional weeklies, tabloids, entertainment magazines, radio and television guides,
posters/calendars, religious publications, and popular literature. I regularly watched
and listened to all kinds of television and radio broadcasts and recorded some of
them. I also bought audio and video tapes and CD's produced by different religious
organisations. In analysing these media, my focus was on how religion and religions
are represented in different kinds of media and on how the liberalisation of the media
was debated. A focus on media products alone is not sufficient to understand how
they are embedded in people's daily life and in wider socio-cultural and political-eco-
nomic processes. My major focus has therefore been on practices of media production.
To gain insight into the Ghanaian media scene, I did a short internship at the maga-
zine department of Ghana's first private TV station TV3, where I tasted the daily prac-
ticalities of documentary script writing on a shared computer, of collegial competition
over the few available cameras for shooting on location, and of production research,
shooting, editing, presentation, and lunch breaks. I also interviewed professionals
working in the media field, with public and private radio and TV stations and with

organisational bodies like the National Media Commission and the Frequency Board. Most of my time, however, was spent on 'participant observation' of the ICGC media team and of Afrikania's interactions with the media. In the ICGC I followed mostly the production of Otabil's *Living Word* broadcast and its spin-offs: audio and video tapes and CD's and promotional material such as radio and TV commercials and flyers. This took place in the auditorium (shooting), in Otabil's office (shooting), and in the church's media studio (post-production). Afrikania's media events took place at the headquarters in Accra, at rural branches, shrines, and in media studios and concerned press conferences, media coverage of important Afrikania events and traditional festivals, the making of a television documentary on the movement, and radio and television talk shows.

I must admit that my choice for a focus on media production rather than consumption was not a well-considered one. It was informed by a series of intriguing media event at the Afrikania Mission, which always left me puzzled. It was informed by the unexpected and fascinating encounters I had with the ICGC media people, and by their surprising willingness to open up their editing studio and their daily work routine to my frequent hanging around. To put it differently, my methodological choice was informed by my sheer excitement about what I was getting at. This 'choice' implies that the consumption side of religious media remains under-exposed.[21] A source of information on the reception of Otabil's media ministry in particular was the collection of letters and emails sent to the church by viewers and listeners in response to the programme. I also talked with people about their media consumption practices and about the programmes they watched or listened to and the things they read. Sometimes I watched or listened together with people in the houses were I stayed or when I visited people in their homes. Although this rather casual method does not allow me to analyse media consumption in any detail, it did give me some insight into viewing, listening, and reading practices and into the chords religious media stroke or did not strike.

Sensory ethnography
The anthropology of the senses has offered stimulating reflection on the senses in ethnographic fieldwork and the methodological problems the senses pose (see Bendix 2005; Geurts 2002; Stoller 1989b). Pleas for 'sensory ethnography' and 'participant sensation' (Howes 2006), however, are often based on an implicit, but problematic distinction between embodied knowledge and cerebral knowledge, with the first to be gained through participation and the second to be gained through interviews and other supposedly 'disembodied' research methods. By talking to people one learns about their viewpoints, their life stories, their opinions and imaginations. Through participation a researcher gradually embodies 'native' cultural knowledge about sitting, eating, greeting, giving, and taking. One learns, in Ghana that is, not to sit with one's legs crossed and never to use one's left hand in any kind of social interaction. One learns how to end a handshake with a finger click and when not to do so. This knowledge becomes part of one's bodily routine to the extent that is hard to abandon when 'back at home.' Through participation in religious ritual one experiences how

religion calls upon the senses and forms the body and its postures and movements; by talking to people one can find out how they think about and imagine the body and the senses. But although there are different modes of ethnographic learning, there is no distinction between the methods of 'interview' and 'participation' with respect to the ways in which the senses are implicated in the research process. Doing an interview is also a physical, sensory experience and involves participation in cultural modes of communication and interaction, which profoundly engage the researcher's body and senses. It does make a difference whether one has an interview over a shared bowl of *fufu* with *nkakra* (pounded cassava and plantain with hot pepper soup) in a bustling chop bar or over an ice-cold sparkling mineral water, seated on a luxurious sofa in a head pastor's air-conditioned office. The interview as an interactive event tells us much more than its audio recording alone. Next to recording interviews, therefore, I also made notes about the non-auditory aspects of the interaction and my own sensory perceptions.

A related assumption often made is that 'the technologies we bring to the field … have stood in the way of allowing [us] to recognize [our] own body as a primary instrument of research' (Bendix 2005:8). The conventional tools of ethnography – pen and pencil, sound recorder, typewriter, laptop computer, video and photo camera – are expected or experienced to close off the possibility of using our senses as a research tool. It may be clear from the opening vignette and my theoretical approach of media technologies as cross-sensual, that this need not be so. Rather, using media technologies myself has made me more aware of their appeal to the body and their relationship to non-technological modes of data storage and communication. In the media conscious environments that I studied, it also enabled me to participate in a way that would not have been possible without these technologies.

Writing and reading

Since James Clifford and George Marcus' *Writing Culture* (1986), the problem of presence - being there, participation - and representation - writing - has attracted much anthropological reflection. As William Mazzarella stated, '*Writing Culture* and the critique of representation tackled the cult of immediacy in ethnographic writing, that is to say the disavowal of the mediating work done by means of naturalized literary devices' (Mazzarella 2004:360). As anthropologists we no longer believe in the illusion of immediacy conjured up by the 'ethnographic present' and have become critically aware of our own representations. It is important to realise that an awareness of mediation is not the privilege of the ethnographer, but is as much a concern for those we study (see also Ginsburg et al. 2002). This is especially (but not only) so when one works with media professionals and leadership figures. Conversely, the problem of mediation, which, I argue, is at the heart of the ICGC's and the Afrikania Mission's struggles with media formats, also pertains to my own struggle of transforming a fieldwork experience into the format of a book.

The medium of representation, written language fixed in the materiality of ink, paper and glue, has serious limits. One of these is the impossibility of simultaneity.

Words, sentences, paragraphs, sections, and chapters have to follow each other, and they have to do so logically. But there is no single sequence in the story of this book, which seeks to capture the symbiosis of two religions without placing one before the other and the intersection of religious and technological forms of mediation without suggesting that one precedes the other. Another limit of writing, and of the very medium of language, is that words – concepts – cannot be separated from the politics of representation that generates them. All key terms of this thesis (religion, African Traditional Religion, charismatic Pentecostalism, media, mediation, representation, presence, senses, body) do not exist outside people's – including anthropologists' – practices of imagining, defining, and categorising the world they live in. These practices are profoundly political as they are imbedded in power struggles (local and global) over who defines what classifies as 'religion' and what not, and what counts as 'knowledge.' As anthropologists we can study these struggles, but we are forever part of them. The terminology we use is thus always problematic. And still we have to write. We thus have to deal with the limits of the medium of writing, including its linearity.

Borrowing from Julio Cortázar's novel *Rayuela*, translated into English as *Hopscotch*, I suggest several routes through the chapters that make up this book. The easiest is to obediently follow the chapters in the order in which they are bound in this cover and arranged into the three parts that make up this thesis. Chapter 1 provides a background to the public manifestations of the ICGC and the Afrikania Mission that are discussed later on. It shows how the shifting relations and blurring boundaries between the state, broadcast media, religion, and commerce have set the conditions for a 'pentecostalisation' of the Ghanaian public sphere. The result of neo-liberalism, democracy, globalisation, and infrastructural expansion, is a new politics of representation that is particularly favourable to charismatic churches. This has serious consequences for how we can think about the public sphere.

Part two and three form the core of the thesis and present the International Central Gospel Church and the Afrikania Mission respectively. The two parts relate to each other in two ways. First, they examine the dialectical relationship between neo-traditionalism and charismatic Pentecostalism. They show that, even though African traditional religion and charismatic Pentecostalism can in many respects be considered antipodes, they are, as said, deeply implicated in each other. Secondly, the two parts seek to make a comparison. They analyse the different ways in which both organisations make use of mass media and relate the different challenges and dilemmas they face to the specific relationship in both religions between the modes of communicating spiritual power and knowledge and the formats of the mass media.

The central thread running through the three chapters on the ICGC is the tension produced by the mass reproduction of charisma. Chapter 2 presents ICGC leader Mensa Otabil. It examines the constitution of religious authority through the convergence of charisma and marketing strategies of branding. It argues that Otabil's mass mediated charisma hinges on a fragile fusion of modern celebrity and traditional mediumship. Chapter 3 shifts focus to the church and the religious practices in the Christ Temple. It analyses practices of mediating Holy Spirit power that constitute religious subjectivity through at first sight contradictory, yet inextricably merged

processes of charismatic flow and ritual format. It argues that the transformation of the born-again Christian happens through a convergence of spiritual and rational power in the human body in a way that collapses the western distinction between body and mind. Chapter 4 examines the ICGC media department and its production of the *Living Word* broadcast and its spin-offs. It shows how the formats of televisualisation of religious practice create charisma, inform ways of perception, and produce new kinds of religious subjectivity. Investigating the relationship between the embodied process of becoming a religious subject and the experience of viewing or listening to a religious broadcast, it argues that the possibility of feeling touched by the Holy Spirit through radio or television is predicated upon particular sound and image practices and modes of listening and viewing that involve the whole body.

The thread that weaves together the four chapters on the Afrikania Mission is the tension produced by the movement's preference for representation over presence. Chapter 5 presents the movement and its subsequent leaders. It addresses Afrikania's dilemma of representing 'Afrikan Traditional Religion' (ATR) in a public sphere that is dominated by Christian voices and formats and situates this dilemma in a genealogy of conceptualising 'Africa,' 'tradition,' and 'religion,' that can be traced back to the earliest encounter between Europeans and Africans on the West African coast. Recent developments in Afrikania are analysed in relation to the growing public presence of charismatic-Pentecostal churches. Ironically, in staging African traditional religion for a broad public as an alternative to Christianity, Afrikania adopts Christian, ever more Pentecostal styles of representation. Chapter 6 deals with the tense relationship between Afrikania's intellectualist project of public representation and shrine practitioners embodied modes of engaging with the presence of spirits. It analyses the dilemmas Afrikania faces in mediating between the public that it addresses, the members that it attracts, and the priests and priestesses that it claims to represent. Chapter 7 illustrates these dilemmas with three case studies of public debates over traditional religion and culture, in which Afrikania participated as the representative of ATR to counter Christian voices. Chapter 8 presents the specific media strategies and formats Afrikania employs in its efforts to access the public sphere. It shows how Afrikania's project of representation is complicated by its awkward position in between the dominant formats and styles of representing religion and traditional practices of mediating spiritual power and constituting religious authority.

A concluding chapter draws the two movements together for closer comparison and discussion of their intertwinement. It also offers further reflection on the question of media technology, religious mediation, and the senses in a broader, cross-cultural perspective.

It may be interesting to read the chapters in a different order. Chapter 1 is to remain anchored at its place, but chapters 2 to 8 provide promising shuffle options. A worthwhile alternative would be to simply swap part 2 and part 3 and read the chapters on the Afrikania Mission before the chapters on the ICGC. This would make sense, because the argument advanced in part 2 about the proximity of Ghanaian Pentecostalism to traditional religion draws on analyses of traditional religion made in part 3. The more adventurous, brutal, but perhaps more interesting game variant would be to cut up the parts and rearrange the chops into three pairs, of which the

constituent halves may again be swapped to taste. This may bring out better the differences, parallels, and dynamics between the ICGC and the Afrikania Mission, and between African charismatic Pentecostalism and African traditional religion.

Chapters 2 and 5, then, present both movements, their leaders, their histories, their messages, and their relationship to the state, the nation, and the public sphere. They treat the public nature of both religious groups and the dilemmas both leaders face in the public representation of religious authority. They also discuss their shared concern with African identity and modernity. When chapter 5 is read before 2, the discussion of the history of conceptualising African tradition in chapter 5 serves as a background not only to Afrikania's representation of ATR, but also to Otabil's thinking about Africanness, culture, and modernity discussed in chapter 2. Chapters 3 and 6 shift focus from the leaders to the members, from religious authority to religious subjectivity, from message to practice. They show how the public images and messages of both groups, characterised by an intellectualist approach to religion, stand in tension with more embodied forms of spirituality both within the organisation and in the broader movement that they form part of or represent. Chapter 7 can be read as an interlude where pentecostalist and traditionalist voices meet in debates over religion and culture. Chapters 4 and 8 investigate the ways in which both religious groups make use of mass media and analyse the relationships between the formats and technologies of mass media and the body and the senses in mediation of spiritual power. The conclusion recapitulates and goes deeper into the proximity and difference between two religions.

I leave it up to the reader which route to take through the pages that follow. Both routes lead into the public manifestation of religion in Ghana's new media sphere. This manifestation is not a self-evident process, but an ongoing search. I explore how religious leaders and followers in dealing with modern mass media, have to deal with the much broader problem of mediation. In this search charismatics and traditionalists appear at once sharply opposed and closely entangled.

Notes

[1] In this thesis I use the term 'charismatic-Pentecostal' to refer to the new wave of independent Pentecostal groups and churches that emerged in Ghana from the late 1970s and are also known as neo-Pentecostal churches or charismatic ministries. I use the term 'neo-traditional' to denote a conscious reformation of what is considered to be 'tradition.' I recognise that it is a pleonasm, because the very category of 'traditional' is already 'neo,' that is, a product of 'modernity' and thus a reformulation of what existed before. Problematising terms is not just a matter of covering myself. The realisation that all key terms of this thesis, and arguably even the key words of every sentence, need quotation marks, points to the limits of the medium of representation, in this case written language. The question of the limits of mediation that is at the heart of this thesis concerns my own writing as much as the media practices of the people I write about (see below for further discussion).

[2] 'Afrikan Traditional Religion' is Afrikania's spelling (see chapter 5 for further discussion) and I use it to refer to Afrikania's imagination and reformulation of it and distinguish it from others', including anthropologists' imaginations of 'African traditional religion.' Both 'African traditional religion'

Introduction

and 'charismatic Pentecostalism' are academic (including theological) constructs to a comparable degree. This is well recognized and problematized for African traditional religion (see chapter 5 for further discussion), but much less so for (charismatic) Pentecostalism (Droogers 2001:46). Like African traditional religion, Pentecostalism lacks a central organising architecture and encompasses a wide variety of different types of Pentecostal churches and groups and an equally wide variety of different doctrines, practices, styles, and moralities. Both designations are also used by leaders and adherents of these 'religions' themselves, but this does not mean that we can take them for granted. The usage of such terminology for self-categorisation and consolidation of religious identities forms part of religious groups' struggles for and over public presence and recognition investigated in this thesis.

[3] This question not only applies to religious media/mediations. Outside the religious context, Mazzarella (2006) has argued that 'one of the great structuring ironies of our age is the tendency for increasingly elaborate systems of mediation to be deployed in pursuit of immediation.' See also Sconce's fascinating book (2000) on the social construction of 'electronic presence' in the history of telecommunications media from telegraphy to television and McCarthy's (2001) discussion of television's 'ideology of liveness.' I will return to the intersection of religious and media ideologies of liveness, presence, and immediacy in the conclusion.

[4] The 2000 census attracted much controversy as both Muslims and traditionalists contested the outcome of the census, claiming that the figures for the number of Muslims and traditionalists were far under-reported. To prove its point, the coalition of Muslim Organisations, for example, cited statistics provided by the US government's Central Intelligence Agency, according to which the population of Muslims in the country stands at 30 per cent of the population, while Christians comprise 34 per cent, and followers of traditional African religion, 38 per cent. The Afrikania Mission equally called for the withdrawal of the census results, contending that the entire process was 'fraught with inaccuracies' and could not be accepted as the statistical representation of the people of the country. Drawing on figures provided in both national and international surveys, its leader Osofo Kofi Ameve concluded that 'There is every indication to buttress the fact that the adherents of the African traditional religion form the majority in the country.' The public outcry over the census document, which 'invoked emotions and passion,' not only points to the difficulties involved in categorisation and gathering statistics, but stands at the heart of the struggle over public representation of religion examined in this thesis.

[5] Catholic Canon Law says: *Tu es sacerdos in eternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech* (You are a priest forever according to the Law of Melchisedech).

[6] Some work has appeared on discourses about witchcraft and other 'occult' forces in the press and radio broadcasting (e.g. Bastian 2001; Englund 2007).

[7] Apart from Ghana (Birgit Meyer, myself), the countries included in the programme were Nigeria (Brian Larkin), India (Stephen Hughes), Bangladesh (Lotte Hoek), Brazil (Mattijs van de Port, Martijn Oosterbaan), Venezuela (Rafael Sanchez), and Sint Maarten/Saint Martin (Francio Guadeloupe).

[8] From an anthropological perspective the 'metaphysical,' 'supernatural,' 'sacred,' 'divine,' or 'spiritual' exists only in people's practices of imagining and relating to this realm. Such terms and the distinctions that they evoke (natural-supernatural, material-spiritual etc.) are thus always problematic and are part of a politics of perception and authentication that extends also to the power relationships between anthropologists of religion and their religious interlocutors (Van Dijk and Pels 1996). When I use these terms in this dissertation I understand them as constituted by religious practices of

ture that spoken, sung or drummed words do not just have meaning, but are vibrations of air that physically contact and influence the addressee (cf. Stoller, 1989a:111).

[19] This was the starting question for a valedictory symposium for André Droogers, now professor emeritus in the anthropology of religion, held at the Free University, Amsterdam, on 23 June 2006.

[20] When my first daughter was born, I remembered these prayers and the prophecy that I had received from a Christ Temple pastor on my departure, that I would give birth to a child within a year. When I returned to Accra with my husband and one-and-a-half year old daughter and showed the pastor that his prophecy had come true, he immediately took our picture to publish our 'powerful testimony' in an international charismatic journal that he worked with.

[21] For good ethnographies of religious media consumption, see Gillespie (1995), Oosterbaan (2006), Wiegele (2005).