THE 'YAM' THAT DROPPED

An ethnographic study of the digital life of urban, Ghanaian youth.

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Abstract

Smartphones are becoming ever more popular, and common, in Ghana, especially among urban youth. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the spring of 2015, this thesis analyses the digital life of young adults in Ghana. The first three chapters deal mainly with the context of Ghana and Accra; They introduce both the physical and the digital field sites, and the informants are introduced to the reader. They also outline the economic situation of young Ghanaians, and deal with methodological challenges. The next three chapters deal with three different social media; Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. These are all examined mainly through case studies. We will explore how one performs, exhibits, and curates the self on social media. Additionally, social networking sites are digital spaces where one forms connections to others, and where one can establish a belongingness to particular groups. In this thesis this will be examined through topics ranging from football to power cuts.

Information and communication technology (ICT) research is often carried out with the implicit assumption that Europe and North America are the norm, and if other places are mentioned at all, it is often assumed that they will follow what happens in 'the West'. This thesis is an attempt to rather centre Africa in ICT research. By focusing on topics such as normativity and appropriation, and by employing a broad range of ethnography, my hope is that the reader will gain a profound understanding of urban life in Ghana, and how ICTs are significant in young adult' lives.

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Glossary

- ❖ **Atwee:** A name from the ethnic group of the Ga, meaning the firstborn daughter. Atwee was the name given to me by my informants.

- ❖ **Chale**: Meaning 'friend', this Ga term is commonly used by Ghanaians the way Americans use 'dude' or 'man'.

- ❖ **Chop bar**: Roadside restaurant.

- ❖ **Chop money**: Money for buying food and other small things. Often used in the meaning of allowance or any small amount of money.

- ❖ **Chop**: To eat

- ❖ **DumSor**: "Off-On" in Twi, mostly used to refer to power cuts.

- ❖ **Obruni**: Commonly used to mean foreigner or white man. For a discussion about the connotations of 'obruni' see Pierre (2013: 77-78).

- ❖ **Trotro**: Also called 'Trotsky', this is the name for the privately owned mini-vans that makes up Ghana's public transport.

- ❖ **Sakawa**: Cyberfraud, linked to juju rituals.

- ❖ **Twi**: A dialect of the Akan language, spoken mainly in the south of Ghana

- ❖ **Yam**: A plant species in the Dioscoreaceae family that form edible tubers. A staple in most West African diets.

Maps

Figure 1 Map of Ghana. Source https://www.ezilon.com/maps/images/africa/political-map-of-Ghana.gif
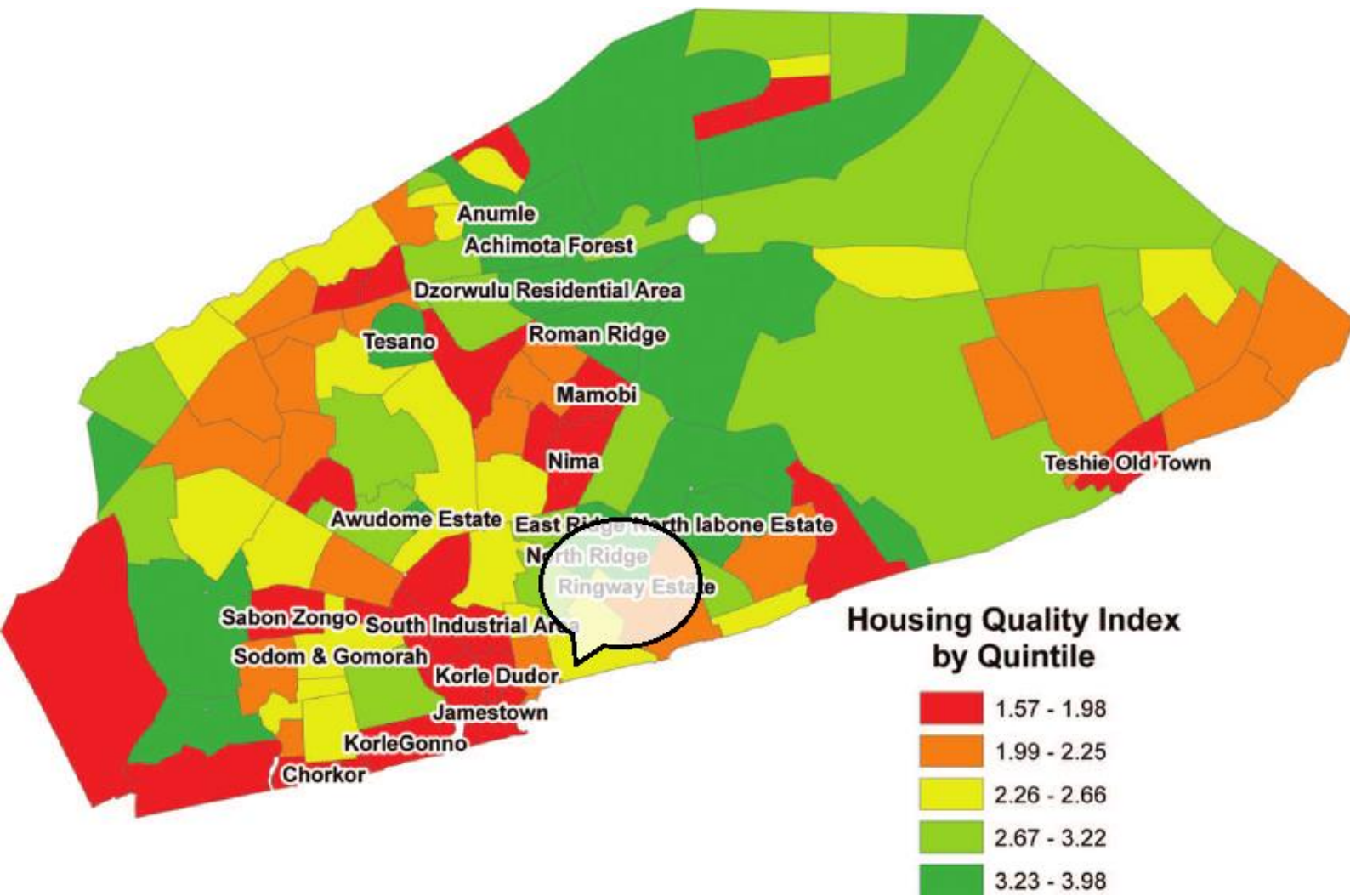
Figure 2 Map of Accra. The colours refer to differences in housing quality. The main part of this fieldwork took place within the area marked by the speech bubble. (Weeks et al., 2012, speech bubble added by me)

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Introduction

In 2014 *Tigo*, one of the largest mobile phone companies in Ghana, launched a TV commercial that instantly became a huge hit.[1] It featured famous Ghanaian actor Mercy Asiedu as the mother of the bride in a traditional pre-wedding ceremony (what is generally known as *the knocking*). The groom's phone rings and the mother discovers that he is using a feature phone, a so-called yam, and not a smartphone. She immediately goes off on a rant about how even her daughter owns a smartphone, and that he should be able to post wedding pictures on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter. His (by now animated) phone then responds in a childish voice "Don`t mind her, please, I have torchlight and radio" while his mother in law tells him to "Drop that yam!". Billboards and internet banners such as in figure 3, where the 'yam' can be seen in the background, while the new smartphones juggles icons for various *Social Networking Sites* (SNS) was a common site during my fieldwork.

Figure 3 Drop that yam!

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[1] *Drop That Yam Commercial* (17.12 2014): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMfruP7EJNU

The phrase hit home with Ghanaians[3], and during my fieldwork in Ghana in 2015 complaints about ones "yam" phone was common. When I stayed in Ghana in 2010, the feature phone, with exactly torchlight and radio, was coveted, but just 5 years later it had been reduced to just *a yam*; a big, unsophisticated and common item. I would like to briefly draw attention to the interesting nature/culture dichotomy that is evoked by calling a non-smart phone for a yam. *Yam,* of course, are starchy plant tubers, and a staple of the Ghanaian diet. By naming the non-smart phones a yam, they become 'naturalised', while smartphones, in contrast, becomes the 'cultivated' option. Those who had not yet acquired a smartphone in Ghana were frequently told by their surroundings to "drop their yam" and come and join them on SNS' such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. The intensification of circulation, travel, and mobility that characterise the process of globalisation has led to a situation today where "the increasing availability of connections, the global and the presence of global identities, issues, objects, ideas, and images have become ordinary in African societies (…)" (de Bruijn & van Dijk, 2012: 9). Madianou and Miller developed the term *Polymedia* to describe the "complex environment of multiple, evolving social media that combine with other platforms, older and newer". Through this thesis I will examine how my informants navigated this increasingly complex environment.

The fact that to an increasing extent we are all becoming global citizens, at least in the sense of being exposed to supposedly similar frames of reference, can be seen on social media in particular. A year after I had done my fieldwork I received a typical notification on Facebook; "Two of your friends have liked this video, maybe you are also interested?". Figure 4 shows the screenshot of the video on Facebook; [4]

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[2] Picture from www.tigo.com.gh , accessed 15.03 2015

[3] See the blog post *My thoughts on Tigo's "Drop that yam" Tv commercial* (25.11 2015) for a praising review: https://ghprguy.wordpress.com/2015/11/25/my-thoughts-on-tigos-drop-that-yam-tv-commercial/

[4] Throughout the thesis the colours of the censored fields have been chosen at random, i.e. the person behind the colour pink here does not equal the person behind pink in other tweets. The video, *Bright Side - Be Grateful for what you got,* can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQX3bmV6nKo

Figure 4 "Dream Car"

'Pink' is my uncle; a man in his mid-forties, living in northern Norway, while 'Purple' is one of my informants; a man in his early twenties, living in Accra. They had both watched, and liked, the same video on Facebook within two hours of each other[5]. Before ICT developed to where they are today, with social media available all over the world, such an incident would have been very unlikely.

Information and communication technology (*ICT*) research is a broad field, and covers a wide range of topics. An influential theorist, Manuel Castells has, for instance, written extensively on the emergence of what he dubs 'the information age' and 'the network society', where he examines the influence of ICTs on globalisation and, thus, on politics and economy (Castells, 2000, 2010). Castells' work has been widely influential, though he has also been criticised for falling for technological determinism and for treating the digital as 'a world apart' from the non-digital (Miller & Slater, 2000; Webster, 1997). Framing ICT in regards to age, Espen Helgesen has written about online sociality among Norwegian school children between 8-9 years of age (Helgesen, 2016), while Daniel Miller is currently leading a project called *Anthropology of Smart phones and Smart Ageing*, working with those aged 45-70 years to understand the "fundamental changes in people's relationship to age and health associated with the global rise of the smartphone".[6] In digital humanities and linguistics studies, Jill Walker Rettberg has written extensively on self-representation in social media, and is currently working on visual technologies and machine vision[7] (Rettberg, 2009, 2014a, 2014b). Claude Fischer has, using a bottom-up method, examined the social history of the telephone in America (Fischer, 1992), while Ragnhild Overå has studied the impact of cell phones access for Ghanaian market traders, particularly in relation to trust and connectivity (Overå, 2006). Furthermore, and looking to the future, Anderson and Jones have edited the anthology *Afrofuturism 2.0* " (…) in response to the emergence of social media and other technological advances since the middle of the last decade" (2016: ix). Afrofuturism envisions 'black futures', for both Africa and the African diaspora, through technoculture and science fiction and "explore futurist themes in black cultural production and the ways in which technological innovation is changing the face of black art and culture" (Nelson and Miller 2006, quoted in Yaszek, 2006: 43).

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[5] They did not receive similar notifications of each other, *I* received it as I am Facebook friends with them both.

[6] *Anthropology of Smart phones and Smart Ageing (ASSA):* http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/assa/

[7] *Machine Vision*: https://www.uib.no/en/machinevision

As these examples of very widely differing approaches show, ICT research can be undertaken in highly diverse fields, using different methodologies and exploring multiple viewpoints. In this thesis, however, I will apply a particularly anthropological viewpoint to examine the ways in which ICTs, such as smartphones, internet and social media, affect the lives of young Ghanaians residing in Accra. I will apply what can be seen as a *technology appropriation approach*, looking at how my informants make ICT 'their own'. Discussing the merits of such an approach, Sey writes:

> Although technologies are generally designed with particular purposes in mind, this often does not translate exactly to how consumers will use it. This is not just about a technology failing to meet user needs; there is an essential unpredictability about human interaction with technology that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate how users will choose to behave. The appropriation of mobile telephony in African countries, and global reaction to this trend in popular and academic circles, reflects this unpredictability. While some anticipate that mobile phones will be used prominently to generate benefits in traditional development domains (income, health, politics, etc), *it is important to accept that users often choose to appropriate phones in ways that do not fall into such neat categories* (Sey, 2011: 379, my italicaztion).

Sey is not alone in having such a perspective and the unpredictability of appropriation has been pointed at by several others. Miller and Horst, for example, highlight Terence Turner's report on the Amazonian Kayapo Indians' appropriation of video (Turner, 1992);

> (…) the moment when anthropology had to drop its presumption that tribal societies were intrinsically slow or passive, or what Levi-Strauss called cold. Under the right conditions, they could transform within the space of a few years into canny, worldly and technically proficient activists, just like people in other kinds of society (H. Horst & D. Miller, 2012a: 108).

To know what a technology becomes in the hands of its users, it is paramount to see said technology in use. This is true whether one is researching a tribal society in the Amazonian jungle or urban African youth. Africa is one of the fastest growing markets for ICTs, and yet this is not widely reflected in the amount of research done on African ICT[8]. Bart Barendregt argues that

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[8] *Africa Offers World's Fastest ICT Market* (16.09 2017) http://allafrica.com/stories/201711160770.html

Studies of digital culture have hitherto focused on the powerful centres of the information society, zooming in on research labs, geeks and youth cultures in the West and East Asia's metropoles leaving the rest of the world to be *digitally developed* (…) (2012: 219, my italicaztion).

Undoubtedly, while writing about Africa's digital development, many have paid attention to how rapid globalisation, especially due to ICTs, might lead to a greater divide, or inequality, between those who have access to said ICTs and thus are *connected* and those who are not (Burrell, 2012; de Bruijn & van Dijk, 2012; Tsing, 2005; van Dijck, 2013). In favour of this, Burrell argues that a lot of what is written on African ICT is purely about the development effect of ICT, which often focuses on the information that becomes theoretically available with ICTs, and the potential for poverty reduction and socio-economic development that this embody (Burrell, 2009; Sey, 2011). Additionally, research that does focus on how technology *is* appropriated in African contexts have often been focused on the occult sides of this appropriation; as van Dijk and de Bruijn writes;

The only way some African societies appear to understand and represent the products of modernity is by incorporating them in the domain of witchcraft and other phantasms (2012: 10)

Along this vein of thinking, Julien Bonhomme, for instance, writes on *The dangers of anonymity* (2012), pointing out the relations between modern technologies (such as mobile phones) and witchcraft, while Geschiere (1997) and Comaroff & Comaroff (1993) have all argued that witchcraft and the occult merges nearly seamlessly with 'the products of modernity'. Indeed, in an interview with Qiana Whitted, afrofuturist writer Nnedi Okorafor, says that "to be African is to merge technology and magic." (Whitted, 2016). In the context of Ghana, the practice of *Sakawa*, cyberfraud linked to occult rituals, have been examined by Joseph Oduro-Frimpong (2014) and Felix Riedel (2015).

During fieldwork I did also come across mentionings of witchcraft or other occult happenings[9], as one is bound to do in Ghana, one of the most religious countries in the world[10]. However, while both the relation to development trajectories and discourses as well as the

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[9] See for example Figure 30, page 107

[10] *Religion prevails in the world* (2017) http://gallup-international.bg/en/Publications/2017/373-Religion-prevails-in-the-world

vibrant domain of witchcraft and sorcery are interesting and important phenomena—also in the context of urban Ghana--I did not find them to be of vital importance for my informants in their relation to ICT or cell phones. Except for a few jokes, the topic hardly ever came up among my informants. Nonetheless, based on the few incidents I encountered I would suggest that this is a fruitful avenue for further research. Had I been determined to focus on witchcraft it is likely that I would also have found more of it.

When starting out, my main question was simply "how does ICTs affect urban Ghanaian youth?". Throughout the thesis I will show multiple ways that ICTs, specifically the smartphone and the internet, has affected the lives of my informants. This does not necessarily mean that their lives changed radically with these technologies, though there can be no denying that life is not exactly the same as before either. In their work de Bruijn and van Dijk encourage a shift of focus away from connective technologies—the bridge, the phone, the road –toward the *connectivity* itself (de Bruijn & van Dijk, 2012; van Dijck, 2013). Such a shift did resonate with my findings and during my fieldwork I found that it was, indeed, the ability to connect to others, both locally and globally, that led the smartphone to become such a prized object. Jenna Burrel also notes that the fact that having internet access enables Ghanaian users to *connect* is by far the most important part of that access (Burrell, 2009). *Connectivity*, in its multiple digital forms, thereby constitutes an important focus in this thesis. The feeling of *belonging*, which can be seen as one aspect of connectivity, is another focus in this thesis.

Digital anthropology is in itself a relatively new field of anthropology, introduced as late as 2012 by Miller and Horst as an emerging and important subfield of social anthropology (H. A. Horst & D. Miller, 2012). In this thesis I will adhere to their definition of "the digital":

> Rather than a general distinction between the digital and the analogue, we define the digital as everything that has been developed by, or can be reduced to, the binary— that is bits consisting of 0s and 1s. The development of binary code radically simplified information and communication, creating new possibilities of convergence between what were previously disparate technologies or content. (2012: 5)

Daniel Miller explains how social networking sites (*SNS*) "have been the fastest in terms of their ability to become a major global infrastructure" by virtue of how they

(…) redress some of the isolating and individualizing impacts of other new technologies and allow people to return to certain kinds of intense and interwoven forms of social relationship that they otherwise feared were being lost.(H. A. Horst & D. Miller, 2012: 146-148)

The title of Jenna Burrell's 2010 book "Invisible Users" alludes to exactly this; that most companies, web sites and even researchers have "the West" as their focal point when developing, marketing and researching ICTs (Burrell, 2012). Burrel did extensive fieldwork in Ghana from 2004 to 2010, especially covering the rise of internet cafés in Accra. I studied in Ghana as an exchange student in 2010, and when writing my thesis, I knew I wanted to return, and so I conducted my fieldwork in Accra in the spring of 2015. The decision to study ICTs was based on my own reflection on how ICTs have changed my own day-to-day life, and the curiosity of how digital technology would translate to an African environment. However, while Burrell's focus is on computers and internet cafes, ICTs had developed and changed radically in 2015 when I conducted my fieldwork—removing itself from the domain of cafés and the confines of fixed computers. My main focal point, therefore, ended up being not internet cafes and computers, as I had predicted, but rather cell phones and smartphones in particular.

Such a transition should not be surprising as we have seen that many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have "leapfrogged" over the landline phones and gone directly on to using cell phones (Rashid & Elder, 2009). The technology of cell phones has been easier to gain access to as there is no need to build and maintain massive infrastructure in the way that has to be done with landlines. This has made cell phones both cheaper and more reliable for most people (Rashid & Elder, 2009). The same leapfrogging can, to some extent, be seen in internet access; While the West began accessing the internet over computers, using dial-ups and then broadband connections before adding smartphones and mobile internet connections to the mix, many African countries already rely mostly on mobile data as opposed to fibre and cable and broadband connections (Stork, Calandro, & Gillwald, 2013). While only the few have access to a private computer, the rapidly declining price of smartphones and data-credit means that a lot of people will have access to the internet regardless of the availability of computers. Internet cafes are, therefore, no longer popping up on every corner in Ghana, and for my informants computers were bypassed by smartphones - with internet access via mobile data - as the must-have technology. Ann Cassiman reports similar tendencies from her fieldwork in Nima, Accra, in 2014, though her informants still use the cybercafé as it is "faster and cheaper" (Cassiman, 2018: 13). Through this thesis I hope to contribute to ICT studies with a view of Ghana and

Africa as important in "the digital revolution" as any other place, and to work against the "othering" of Africa that is unfortunately still implicit in much ICT literature.

Chapter outline:

In the chapter "Life in Faaku" I will give a primer to my field site in Faaku, and introduce my informants. I will then discuss some methodological challenges that arose when my husband arrived in the field to stay with me. Lastly, in the section "the digital field" I will give an overview of the digital spaces my informants occupied and provide a brief introduction to the digital, mobile phones in particular, in Ghana.

"How to drop that yam" is a chapter discussing some of the economic challenges my informants had, and how they in spite of this were able to get their smartphones. The chapter starts with a brief examination of some methodological challenges I faced during my fieldwork, and ends with quick explanation of the term "Sponsor" in Ghana, and how 'modern life' leads to an increase in this phenomenon. After these two chapters, that focus mainly on the context and background of my fieldwork and my informants, we will move on to two substantial chapters on digital technology; namely social networking sites and social media, and Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp in particular.[11] These have been chosen as they are among the most popular SNS in Ghana, and I will examine them mainly by case studies.

Chapter 4, "Facebook", I will illustrate how SNS are used to create an exhibition of oneself, and to be able to present what one believes to be a 'true self' to others. I will also use Facebook to examine how social media helped my informants to connect, and to feel connected, to both their near relationships and to a global space. Chapter 4 is in main a case study of Florence and Shuri, who both opened their first Facebook accounts during my fieldwork.

In chapter 5, "Belonging in a world of strangers", I will discuss how my informants managed to create a sense of belongingness to groups and networks of people who they had not always met, on the internet and on Twitter in particular. I will illustrate this by looking at *Football* in the digital sphere, and by looking at how the "Dumsor-must-stop Vigil" started as digitally mediated protest on Twitter, before becoming a non-digital protest in the streets of Accra.

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[11] In this thesis I will use the terms SNS and social media interchangeably. They are not well-defined terms, and as the digital evolves so the definitions have also had to change. Social media is colloquially the most used term, referring mostly to SNS where one can create a personal profile. In general, all SNS are social media, while not all social media are SNS. See (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) for a further discussion.

Chapter 6, "WhatsApp", is a short exploration of WhatsApp use among my informants, and the Ghanaian term "Pasco". This and the previous chapter will lead us to see how my informants valued, and exposed, their digital, cultural capital.

In chapter 7 I will sum up what I have written about and tie the bonds together.

A note on anonymity;

None of my informants wished to remain anonymous, and a few actively campaigned for me to mention them frequently in my thesis. Additionally, I do not touch upon any particularly sensitive or illegal matters in this text. While both Burrell (2012) and Archambault (2017), who both write of fairly similar fieldworks to mine, have elected to use informants' real names and pictures, I have still chosen not to do so. I often use individual case studies, and to err on the safe side I have chosen to be more rigorous with my anonymization. Throughout the text, I have changed the names of my informants, and as I had fairly few close informants, I have also elected to change a few details about their backgrounds and daily life to make them less recognisable. Additionally, in some places I have mixed a few of my informant's stories together to make them less identifiable. Where I use pictures, my informants remain unidentifiable due to distance and quality of the photo, in other cases I have pixelated their features. Where I am showing pictures of places, such as my house, they are not easily recognisable from the streets outside. When using screenshots of my informants Twitter or Facebook accounts I have censored their user names; I have not anonymised screenshots from accounts that do not belong to my informants. These have been found either by chance through my own Twitter timeline, or by searching for specific hashtags. As Twitter is a public space I have left them as is. I believe the place to be of some importance, as the context it brings to my informant's lives is necessary for the reader to understand their experiences, and I have therefor not hidden the fact that my fieldwork takes place in Accra. I have neither anonymised the group BloggingGhana, though I have given the individual members pseudonyms. I do not believe any of these techniques have made my arguments less true.

Life in Faaku; background and method

In this chapter I will introduce my fieldwork, which I conducted in the spring of 2015. In the section "Settling in 'the field'" I will provide the reader with an impression of my field site, which I have given the fictitious name 'Faaku'. I will give a brief outline of Ghanaian history, with a particular focus on Ghana's colonial past. The main focus of this chapter is the physical surroundings were most of my field work took place; the hostel I lived in and the surrounding areas. I will then move on to give a brief introduction of my informants, and discuss some of the methodological challenges I had while in the field. One of these, the arrival of my husband, I discuss in the next section; "The husband arrives". Lastly, I will provide an outline of 'the digital spaces' that I and my informants occupied during my fieldwork.

Settling in 'the field'

When you fly to Ghana from abroad, you will land at Kotoka International Airport, usually around 8pm at night, in the capital, Accra. The first thing to hit you as you alight the plane to take the small bus 50 meters to the entrance of the airport will be an intense wall of heat. You can practically smell the hot asphalt, the red dust and sand, the fumes of traffic and the sweat of 3 million people, the vague smell of the sea heated by being blown inland from the Atlantic and the smell of the plants being slowly burned by the sun.

As I exited the airport, struck by the heat and the (by now) long forgotten but suddenly familiar smell of Ghana, I met Osei. Waiting for me at the gates, he was the man I had briefly emailed before arriving, as well as transferred half a year's rent to. Having neither met before, nor even sent each other a picture to be able to recognise each other, it turned out he had been nearly as anxious as me that we would not find each other at the over-crowded airport. Thankfully we did. Accra is a difficult city to find temporarily housing in, not the least if you are not in the country yourself, and this unknown man had already been an invaluable help to me. As I let the impressions of the big city fly by me Osei guided the taxi-driver through Accra`s streets to what was to become my new home.

Ghana was a British colony until 1957, when it was the first country south of the Sahara to gain independence. Since then the country has been through 2 military coups and civil unrest, but has had a stable political environment since its first democratic elections in 1991. The population as of 2014 was nearly 26 million, and half the population lives in urban areas, such

as Accra. Accra is a large, unwieldy city. Sprung out from a small coast settlement, it has spread inland and the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area now covers about 345.18 square miles and is the home of about 4 million people. Accra was traditionally the capital of the Ga people, an ethnic tribe renowned for their strong women and nose for business. While some areas, such as Jamestown, are still mainly Ga, today Accra is a mixing pot of ethnic tribes and nationalities. It was not given that Accra should be the capital of Ghana; Cape Coast was the colonial headquarters for a long while, and was an important city on trade routes along the African coast, while Kumasi was Ghana's largest city and was, and still is, the seat of the Akan leader, the Asantehene. Accra became the capital (or more accurately; "the seat of colonial power") after a major earthquake in 1862 that "created the opportunity for colonial reorganization and planning" (Pierre, 2013: 27). From 1877 onwards, Colonial Accra was divided into three distinct areas; one for European administration, one for European residentials, and one for the natives (Pierre, 2013: 27). The policy of this residential segregation has affected how Accra has developed, and the remains of it can be seen to this day in urban division. Accra is still divided in several neighbourhoods, from the very poor in Nima, where many are migrants from the north of Ghana, to the very rich in Labone and Airport residential, where you will find gated communities and international schools.

Like in most of southern Ghana the lingua franca in Accra is *Twi* (or Twi-Fante)—the language of the Akan ethnic group. Besides being the most well-known ethnic group (renowned even abroad for their gold-work and Kente cloth), the Akan are the most populous in Ghana making up 47.5% of the population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). While there are dialect differences, their language has spread through most of Ghana and it is rare to meet someone who cannot speak it at all. Twi also has a strong influence on common spoken English, creating a form of English known as *Ghana Pidgin English* (henceforth pidgin).

All *I* knew about my new home was that it was in Faaku, a mixed income neighbourhood in Accra best known for shopping in 'Wura street' and, Euro-American restaurants and nightclubs. Osei had found me a room in a privately-owned student hostel called *Solid Residentials*, which was recently renovated. I would have my own room, and my own bathroom. As we drove through central Faaku we turned onto a street consisting mainly of sheet metal houses and broken-down cars, and my hopes of a European standard hostel sank. In the end, we stopped in the courtyard of a rather large house. In the dark, it was hard to get a feel of the place; it later turned out that daylight did not help much either.

Solid Residentials (or *The House* as I came to call it, signifying that this was my main home) had, indeed, been recently renovated. In fact, it was currently still under renovation.

After a while, I learned that this was a status the Hostel had had for the last 10 years, and if I am any judge of what is to come I will say that it will stay that way in the next ten years as well. There was a fourth floor being built, a renovation of the ground floor, a bedroom had recently become the kitchen, the kitchen would be moved and renewed, stairs that led from the first floor to the third floor did not lead to the second, you could not walk from certain rooms in the second floor to others without first leaving the building, there was half-floors and rooms with doors leading to a two floor drop and it was simply the most confusing building I have ever set foot in.

Figure 5 View of the House from the courtyard. The much-used balcony can be seen on the right beneath Uncle Stan's new office addition. The top floor was "very soon" to become student apartments and an internet café.

The surrounding area was a mixture of different neighbourhoods. A few streets to the west there was a cheap hotel, The Blue Flower, where I rarely saw anyone enter or exit, and few streets down to the east there was an expensive hotel, hidden behind large walls to keep the privacy of the outdoor pool and the cocktail garden. There were no restaurants near The House, but there were plenty of street vendors. On the main road there was a street stall selling grilled plantain and groundnuts, conveniently located just outside an elementary school. Further down there was a small square with stalls that mainly sold breakfast staples such as *Hausa koko*, *sugar bread* and *koose[12]*, and that were mostly sold out by 9am. Just on the start of our cul-de-sac there was a small convenience store stall where Florence, Shuri and I would go at least once a day to buy sugar bread, eggs or Indomie noodles. Across the street from The House there was an exclusive gym, frequented mostly by expatriates[13] and wealthy Ghanaians, in addition to some American students from a college nearby. There was a smoothie bar and a nail salon in the same building, and on the street outside there was a fruit vendor sitting underneath a bright yellow umbrella marked with the logo of one of Ghana's largest mobile companies, MTN, selling avocado, papaya, pineapple, melon, oranges, and mangos, always depending on the season.

Heading south from the House you would pass through a neighbourhood consisting mostly of shack housing and building sites, including three apartment sky scrapers under construction. Going on you would end up in Wura Street; where 'tourist stalls' selling all kinds of jewellery, accessories and African wear line the street, in addition to a shopping mall, exclusive clothing stores, mobile store headquarters and cafés and restaurants of every kind. If you passed the gym and continued east you would walk through a neighbourhood consisting mostly of walled in villas and gated communities, before ending up at the main road where you could catch a minibus share-taxi, popularly called a *trotro*, heading nearly anywhere, or you could stop by one of the many British expat pubs that are in Accra which was located there.

I found that an easy way to notice the differences between neighbourhood's income groups was to buy mobile credit. It is common to buy mobile credit as you go in Ghana, instead of having a subscription with a fixed monthly payment. The credit is sold nearly everywhere, from street vendors to shops, and consist of a paper ticket with a scratch field. When you scratch

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[12] Traditional porridge, sweetened wheat loaf and deep-fried bean cakes.

[13] Expatriates commonly refers to westerners residing in a country other than their native country. The expatriate community in Ghana consists largely of Europeans, especially Englishmen. As it is, it is quite segregated from Ghanaians general life. See Pierre 2013 for a closer look on racial segregation in Ghana, both now and through history.

off the silver lining on top, you can see a long number, usually 8-12 digits, and this is your credit code. The credit is added to your phone by calling or texting a given number and then entering the code from your ticket. By using various codes, one can also send credit to another number, or decide that one wishes all the credit to be used only for data or text messages and so on. My mobile modems were topped up using the same method, only by writing the credit code in to a special modem program on my computer. Most companies have some sort of offer that the higher value credit you buy, the more bonus credit they will add for free.

I often bought the higher value credit tickets to benefit from these offers. In Ghana the average price of 1GB post-paid mobile broadband plan was four percent of the GNI in 2016 (Alliance forAffordable Internet, 2017). In 2017, Ghana officially endorsed the '1 for 2 affordability target', meaning that 1GB of data should not cost more than two percent of the GNI. The UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development defines broadband as affordable only if the '1 for 2' target is met[14]. Ghana was second only to Nigeria in endorsing this as a national target, and yet the Sustainable Development Goals (*SDGs*) calls for this goal to be met in all developing countries by 2025[15].

I usually bought my credit tickets at the nearby small shop, where we bought most of our essentials. Here they would sometimes have 30 Ghanaian cedi (GHS)[16] worth of credit, but mostly their highest value ticket was 20GHS. I thus often bought several tickets to add up to the value I wanted; I came with a 50GHS note and left with two 5, two 10 and one 20. It seemed as if most of their customers bought their credit in the 1- 10 GHS credit range, and I usually got some looks when I bought the more expensive ones. If I, on the other hand, were to buy credit in the store by the gym, 50GHS was easy to come by and the only comment I got was why I was using mobile modem instead of a broadband connection.

As such the House was located just at the intersection of some very different neighbourhoods, where the residents, though living in close proximity to each other, hardly ever seemed to interact. When I talked with others at the gym, most had no idea that there was a hostel across the street, and I was often advised to take a taxi to and from Wura street as the walk through the lower income areas was deemed too dangerous by expats. Nonetheless, the

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[14] *UN Broadband Commission Adopts A4AI "1 for 2" Affordability Target* (23.01 2018) http://a4ai.org/un-broadband-commission-adopts-a4ai-1-for-2-affordability-target/

[15] *Ghana endorses A4AI's "1 for 2" Affordability Target* (30.03 2017) http://a4ai.org/ghana-endorses-a4ais-1-for-2-affordability-target/

Broadband commission for sustainable development 2025 targets: "connecting the other half" http://www.broadbandcommission.org/Documents/publications/wef2018.pdf

[16] The 31st of March 2015 1 Ghana Cedi equalled 0,2611 US dollars. Thus 30 GHS equalled 7,84 USD.

House was adjacent to a higher income street; our neighbours were diplomats and ministers and banks. And we tapped in on the same electrical grid as them. This was especially important as in 2015 Ghana was under a strict power saving regime, where the electricity would be turned off in designated areas, and stay off for anything between a few hours and a few days. This situation was commonly referred to as *DumSor*, the Twi words for "off and on", due to the way the lights would go on and off all the time. For us the electricity was usually turned off for around 6-12 hours at a time, no more than twice a week at most. But, it was not unheard of for people to have electricity cut off for 24 hours, in some cases even 48 hours, and for many it was a daily occurrence. I often heard rumours that there was a system to who got the power cut and when, and that you could know beforehand when DumSor would hit your home. However, I never met anyone who actually knew this system, and I sure was surprised every time DumSor hit me. So even with our pretty stable power supply I soon fell into the routine of always charging my laptop and cell phone whenever I could, and would always bring my charger if I was going out to an office or a restaurant. Electricity was not to be taken for granted, and in chapter 5 will explore the effects of Dumsor further.

Introducing my informants

My initial plan for this thesis was to write about blogging in Ghana. I was therefore very excited when I started to plan my fieldwork and discovered that such a group, called Blogging Ghana no less, existed. Before arriving in Ghana, I had already been in contact with some of its members, and while on fieldwork I met with the group's leader several times and went to their monthly meetings. As we know, fieldwork is unpredictable and it is difficult to know who you end up with as informants. As the bloggers were mostly busy, many with daytime jobs to keep up with, and living in different areas of Accra, I ended up not seeing them as much as I would have liked. However, as I settled into my life at the hostel, it became evident that the other habitants could prove to be important informants as well. We saw each other every day, we shared meals and often frequented the same spaces. Indeed, by the end of my fieldwork some of them turned out to become close friends.

The occupants of the House were mostly students at a nearby college, young people between 18 and 25 years of age. Ghana in general has a very young demographic, with nearly sixty percent of the population in between 0-24 years of age. Additionally, there were children living in and around the house, the landlord (Uncle Stan[17] as most of the students, and I, called him) and another occupant over the age of fifty, dr. Andy.

The first week at The House was an awkward time for me, where I felt out of place and in way over my head. I had no clue how to start to talk to people, and though I tried, my efforts rarely led me anywhere. The first opening to my field was provided by two girls working at the hostel. After observing me for a week's time, Florence and Shuri took pity on me. One day I had gathered up the courage to venture out in the yard to wash my clothes by hand, something which I had never done before and had precious little knowledge of how to do. I had figured it could not be so hard; just swish the clothes around in some soap and water and, hopefully, they will be clean. But as with most things in Ghana there is a special technique, and by (clearly) not mastering it I apparently looked like a confused toddler playing with water. So, these girls, who had previously been quite stand-offish towards me, came up to me and asked, well no -- told me -- that I needed help.

Initially they wanted to wash my clothes for me, and I had to insist on washing them myself, if they could just teach me how. I have spent many an hour washing clothes since then,

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[17] Calling elders for Uncle or Auntie is a sign of familiarity and respect in Ghana. Kinship terms also indicate a certain responsibility for care-taking. Some of the students called him Papa Stan, indicating an even closer relationship.

and I can say that I had not mastered their technique even by the end of my fieldwork. I did get better, but I am sure I still look like a frustrated two-year-old beating up her clothes to an outsider. My new friends did not really believe I would manage to wash my own clothes for months on end, and often came to my room asking if I had some clothes they should wash. Likewise, they would ask if they should clean my room, cook my food, or even carry my bucket of water for me. This perception of me not wanting to, or even being able to, do basic tasks was something I had to fight throughout my stay, and it is likely connected to Ghana`s colonial history. Jemima Pierre has written extensively about race and white privilege in postcolonial Ghana, and demonstrates how colonialism and the idea of 'whites' as a class separate from 'blacks' still affects Ghana (Pierre, 2013). White people in Ghana mainly occupy a separate space from black people; they go to different restaurants, live in different neighbourhoods, their kids attend different schools and so on (Pierre 2013). The crutch of white privilege was, thus, present during my entire fieldwork and its impact should not be overlooked. However, when I started to develop bonds of friendship with my informants, they also started to name me "a Ghanaian". I received a Ghanaian name, *Atwee*[18], based on the region I was "born in", that is to say the region where I became a Ghanaian. Colonial history and its lingering effects is, however, a broad and complicated topic, and although I touch upon it there is no room to do fully do the topic justice in this thesis.

No matter the colonial connotations, this initial contact over a bucket of dirty clothes was the start of the relationship between me and my informants. I am sure they took some delight in being able to teach this strange white woman how to do the most mundane tasks, and I greatly appreciated being taught. After a while, a group of young men living at the hostel also took interest in me, as they realised that I needed to be coached in the ways of Ghanaian society. They were all between the ages of 20-25 and were students of the nearby college, like most of my housemates. Of the 'GH Boys', as our WhatsApp group is now called, Bakari, Sterling, Isaach, and Winston were the core. Bakari was the self-appointed leader of the group; the 'big man' with the most connections, and the most girlfriends, always organising the next big event. Sterling was the second in command; working hard, and always quick to step up to the plate if needed, but also casually hooking up with his own connections. Winston was always quick with a cheeky joke, and one of the boys who had the most time to coach me through rough patches

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[18] Atwee is a Ga name, and the Ga is the native ethnic group of the Accra area where I lived. It means firstborn daughter. That Atwee also sounds particularly rude in Ghana's most spoken language, Twi, was certainly just a coincidence, and had nothing to do with the humour of young men.

during my fieldwork. Isaach was the academic one; quick to point out when things were getting out of hand, and often leading the debates we had. Then there were the rest of the crew; Kojo, Ebo, Kwaku, Yao, Kofi, and Kwame, all of them helping me out in one way or the other, always ready to eat, party and discuss whatever I brought up.

Having studied in Ghana in 2010 I knew that English was well understood and used in Ghana, and I had thus not prepared, either mentally or otherwise, to learn a new language. The year before I started my fieldwork I had studied anthropology in England. Trying to fit in in British academic circles I had developed a rather posh "queen's English" accent. Arriving in Ghana I had not given this much thought. I knew that nearly everyone there spoke English, as Ghana is a former British colony and English is the official language, and while I recalled that most people had a Ghanaian accent, I did not anticipate either my own or my informants' accent to be a challenge. It did, of course, turn out to be a challenge. My own 'proper English' accent was an accent that my informants only used while in formal situations. It was the accent of TV presenters, professors, and politicians. At best, it was the accent of acquaintances.

In the first week, as I sat on the terrace of the house and tried to figure out a way to get to know my housemates, I have written in my notes "Everyone is speaking Twi together! I thought they would speak English, how am I ever to understand?!". While some of my housemates did indeed speak Twi together, as time went on and my ears adjusted I soon realised that most of them were in fact speaking Ghana Pidgin English[19] (henceforth pidgin). Thus, one of the biggest tasks of my fieldwork was to become proficient in pidgin. At first, whenever I approached a group, they would switch to speaking English as I came, or one of them would explain to me what they discussed in English and then turn back to the group and continue in pidgin. This stopped me from becoming a part of the group on my own, and I therefor spent a lot of time both learning pidgin and Twi, and simply working on my accent.

One morning I had decided to walk to Shoprite to buy some necessities, Winston offered to walk with me. I had a good relationship with Winston, and appreciated the company. As we walked across the court yard he greeted some other boys that I did not know in passing. Just as we were turning around the corner they shouted "Winston! Where u dey with de Obruni?". Touching my lower back, in an otherwise innocent gesture, he turned back to them and shouted

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[19] Pidgin is "A simplified form of speech developed as a medium of trade, or through other extended but limited contact, between groups of speakers who have no other language in common" (Matthews, 2007).

"Y3n k) Blue Flower oooo!"[20] Such incidents were common the first few months of my fieldwork. Both male and female informants would speak in Twi around me, or ask me to repeat such and such phrase to them. This was inevitably something rude, and mostly sexual. Thankfully, at this moment my language lessons had started to pay off and I understood their banter. As I turned and slapped him, the boys laughed and he smiled broadly saying "Hey, Maria! So your Twi is getting better eh!". After I had shouted back to the boys that we were certainly not going to a hotel together, Winston and I continued our walk towards Shoprite, and he showed me a shortcut and taught me a few more advanced words on our way there. As my understanding of the languages used increased, and as my gradually acceptable reactions to such statements increased, such situations also occurred less and less.

While I had wonderful male informants, I had a hard time gaining access to female informants. Other than Florence and Shuri, I never managed to develop a deeper relationship with other women. I believe this might be due to my somewhat confused behaviour at the start of the fieldwork. I had no concern for class relations, which are quite important in Ghana, which I proved by my close relationship with the working girls. I then started to affiliate closely with boys which was of course in no way proper behaviour. I had however no thoughts of this as I was so grateful to finally find some friendship and gain some access to "the field". Nonetheless, I became quite distraught over this during my fieldwork, as I never did seem to get the girl friendships correctly. My fieldnotes are filled with worries of this; am I not being nice enough, am I *too nice* so that I seem like no fun, do I drink too much alcohol or not enough, am I seen as some sort of threat since I have been so welcomed by "their" boys, am I too old, are my clothes wrong, is it my humour, my way of dancing? But most of the girls of course had their own friends, were busy and probably also felt that we had little interest in common. I could not cook or dance and evident by my dismal clothing (at least in the first months) I did not seem to have any interest in fashion. Additionally, I spent a lot of time hanging out with boys and perhaps modelling my behaviour too much after theirs. However, others have also reported difficulty in gaining the trust of female informants for these kinds of digital studies, so my difficulties might not be unique (See Adomi, 2007; Alao & Folorunsho, 2008; and Fair, Tully, Ekdale, & Asante, 2009). As we will see in later chapters Ghanaian society is often traditionally

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[20] Boys: "Winston, where are you going with the foreigner? "
Winston: "We are going to the Blue Flower Hotel oh!"
3 and *)* are pronounced similarly to the Norwegian E and Å.

gendered, and my failure to fit in the role as a woman might have been a contributing factor to my failure of gaining access to female friend groups.

As mentioned, I met regularly with a group of bloggers called "BloggingGhana". The group seeks to unite those who blog in Ghana, both for social reasons and to be able to increase their influence in the media and society as a united group. I went to their monthly meetings while I was in Ghana, save one, and met some of their members outside of the meetings to conduct interviews. Blogging Ghana was at the time located at "AccraHub", a shared office-space for tech start-ups and the like in Accra. This is also where I met Chadwick, a passionate Ghanaian gamer and developer. My meetings with BloggingGhana and its members gave me some interesting insights in other parts of society as their members were mostly well educated and well off, however we did not have the opportunity to meet as often as I would have liked.

All in all, my informants came from radically different class and ethnic backgrounds, they were between the ages of 7 and 60, and were ranged between being educated within ICT and had nearly no experience with ICT at all. Some of my informants were very poor, some were middle class, depending on support from their extended family, and some again were indeed rich. Some of my informants could afford the newest smartphones, wearables, and cars. I think they were all confused as to where to place me. I was confused as to how I was expected to treat others. In the end I believe it worked out, all though I suspect that my initial fumbling did close some doors for me. However, it might indeed have opened others. What is sure however is that ICTs affected all my informant's life in such a significant way that I believe it would have been impossible to ignore it, even if one set out to study something completely different.

The Husband arrives – Spouses in the field

The week before my husband, Martin, was finally coming to spend the last month of fieldwork with me, I was constantly in a near-argument with Isaach. Isaach was convinced that if I kept up my behaviour as I had during my fieldwork my fiancé would be both shocked and appalled at my lack of properness. He felt sure that poor Martin could not be happy having such a stubborn fiancé, and kept telling me how I should behave. I had judged Isaach as one of the quieter boys, so his pervasiveness in this matter surprised me. Though we never argued, we did have many debates about my conducts, none of which left Isaach believing I was any less stubborn than I was before. As the week went by I am sure he felt more and more anxious on my behalf.

When my husband did arrive, it turned out to be a mixed blessing. On a personal level it was wonderful to have a familiar face with me again. Having my husband there in physical form proved that I had not been lying to those who had asked for my number, a date, or a kiss (" Oh no, I am married, my husband won't like that" was perhaps my most spoken sentence the first few months). It also proved, I suspect, to the girls that even though I was hanging out with a lot of boys I was not there to steal them away from the Ghanaian girls. Having a husband also elevated my status a bit, and I was respected more as an adult than before. In some ways. In other ways, I was suddenly again the child in need of parental approval. Only now, it was husbandly approval I needed.

-"Oh, does your husband know you are here?" When I was at the terrace at night, as I had been for the past 3 months.
-"Oh Atwee, has your husband seen what you are wearing?" When I was in my usual staying-at-home-shorts-and-a-singlet.
-"Eii, are you going without your husband?" When I went to the road by myself to catch a trotro somewhere.

By arriving at my field site, my husband, Martin, seemed to become the most important person in my field. At first, everyone wanted a piece of him. Discussions I wanted to be a part of were no longer for me, they were for Martin. I was constantly told to fetch him from our room so that he too could join the debate of whatever the boys were talking about. If there was a party someone had always bought beer for Martin. If there was any news, they invited him to tell everyone his opinion on the matter. If there was food he could always eat.

Martin however, was not in Ghana to do fieldwork. He was there on holiday, to stay with me. While he was flattered by the attention he got, I do not think he was prepared for it. While I had spent months listening and learning to speak pidgin, Martin could hardly understand any conversations at all. While I had become accustomed to the heat, Martin was often left exhausted by it. The overwhelming feelings of foreignness that I had had about my first weeks were now Martin's feelings. While I was committed to my life in the field, Martin often suggested that we could just buy our way out of it. We could stay at a hotel instead of the House. We could eat a restaurant instead of cooking noodles in my rice cooker every night. We could take taxis instead of trotros. We could pay someone to do our laundry instead of scrubbing away our own skin under the scorching sun. All the things which I had worked very hard to prove that I could do, Martin wanted me to quit doing. So, while Martin's presence confirmed that I was a married woman, and thus heightened my social status, and eased the sexual banter from the boys, it also increased my difficulties in conforming to the behaviours expected from a Ghanaian woman.

My own difficulty in navigating my gender role stemmed of course from the unfamiliarity of the expectations. That is not to say that for those who knew what was expected it was any easier. While I stumbled and was corrected (or realised I was wrong by how others distanced themselves from me), others felt weighed down by the demands of society. In an interview, on of the bloggers suggested that this was part of the appeal of social media; New spaces creates new rules, and for many social media has become a place where they can feel freer to be themselves and experiment with the boundaries of society. That is not to say that Ghanaians do not correct each other on social media, because they my informants 'main point of connection do; however, they also support each other. While I do not touch upon this any further in this thesis, I think it is worth noting that homosexuality is much more tolerated and supported on Ghanaian Twitter, than it is in Ghana in general. Undoubtedly, gender roles, gender equality, and sexuality, in digital spaces would be fruitful avenues for further research.

In the next section I will outline the digital spaces that my informants frequented, and outline what I call my "digital field site".

The digital field site

Early on in my fieldwork I joined a gym nearby my house. Gyms are easily a western/upper-class area, and this one was no exception. For me it was a welcome break from the unfamiliar and frankly, not well-equipped surroundings of the everyday life my field provided. While at the gym I was free to imagine being back in Europe, with showers that had not only running water, but hot water. I did not constantly have to think about how people behaved, what they were doing on their phone or how often they sent a Message, and I tried to let my mind have a break while I was there. The customers were either expats or well-to-do Ghanaians, and the staff kept a friendly joking-relationship with us, always friendly and service-oriented (which cannot be said of many customer-places in Ghana). As I sat in the hall one evening, waiting for something or the other, a Ghanaian man in his forties passed me on the way to the showers, clearly having just completed a rather though work-out. He was immersed in his phone. Seeing this the receptionist jokingly called to him "Posting the work-out to Facebook are you?". With a slight blush/ guiltily the man looked up and answered, half laughing for being called out, "No…to Twitter!". Thus, I was straight back to taking fieldnotes in my head. And this is the way it is in Accra, as so many other places. Social media simply cannot be escaped. If it is in a posh gym, the market or in a backyard in the poorest neighbourhood; the phones were always there. Social media was always present, in one way or another. people used it, people talked about it or people wished they had a way to gain access to it.

As I settled and found my field, I also had to figure out this non-physical field my informants occupied. While planning my fieldwork, I had imagined that I would focus mainly on computers and internet cafes, in the vein of Jenna Burrell's pioneering work on internet use among young Ghanaians (2012). Burrell followed her informants in intermitting periods from 2004 to 2010, and documents how they use internet cafés and chat rooms to enact a cosmopolitan self. However, I soon learned that none of my informants visited internet cafés anymore. "The cafes, they are mostly gone now, cause everyone is havin' their own internet café in their own pocket" Sterling told me when I asked if he or the boys ever did go there. The mobile phone was my informants 'main point of connection to both their friends, family and the digital world at large. All of my informants, young and old, rich and poor, interacted with mobile phones, their own and/or others, on a daily basis. As such, it was natural for me to shift my focus towards mobile phone activity.

While moving through Ghana, it is impossible not to notice the impact of mobile phones on both urban and rural space. The large telecom vendors, such as MTN, Tigo, Glo, and Vodaphone, all advertise profusely. Massive billboards are common along the roadside and marketplace vendors regularly sit under branded umbrellas. Additionally, buildings are painted and branded with company logos. This is not an uncommon sight in Sub-Saharan Africa, as many companies have figured out this inexpensive way to advertise (Bentley, 2012). In Ghana, MTN and Vodaphone are especially responsible for this, and they regularly offer private home-owners with free paint in their company colours. Some villages are painted entirely in the colours of one company, while MTN at one point even painted palms along the seaside in their trademark MTN yellow! Thus, wherever you rest your eyes you are likely to be reminded of your mobile phone.

Figure 6 MTN billboards in Kumasi

As a white person in Ghana, I was immediately recognised as an outsider. Most of those I met while doing fieldwork were therefore interested in why I was there. When I told people that I was researching "social media" they were gracious enough to say something along the lines of "oh my, how interesting, yes, it is indeed an up and coming field", and then there would be a bit of an awkward pause where they would look at me and ask again, with extra emphasis this time, "but why are you *in Ghana*?".

My favourite interaction of this kind was with one of my neighbours. As I was walking down our shared cul-de-sac a car driving by stopped next to me. I was confused at first, and thought they might be lost and needed directions. The driver was a Ghanaian man in his 60s, and he greeted me with a smile saying "Hello, how are you?". It turned out he was the owner of the house vis-à-vis the hostel, and he had seen me walking past there for a while now. He had grown curious about what I was doing there and now, finally, wanted to know. So, the conversation had quickly gone into familiar territory for me, and I started with my usual line of answers. As I said "researching social media", however, instead of the polite nod and vague interest, the man simply laughed quite loudly. "Social media? In Ghana? You have come to the wrong place, there is no social media here" he smirked, evidently thinking me quite dim for not realising this sooner. "Just those who are lazy have the time to use Twitter and sit and write small small on their phones like that".". I should have stayed in Europe or in the US, and then I could truly study social media, I was made to understand.

The reason this is one of my favourite interactions is that this man said so clearly what many others were hinting at, namely that smartphones, mobile apps and social media were not "Ghanaian" things, so why should I study them there? While some people, like my neighbour, believed I should have stayed in "the west" others did not really understand why I had gone abroad at all. All these things exist in Norway as well, and if it had to be about Ghana, surely I could have just read Ghanaian tweets from the comfort of my own home? More generally: does it really matter where the ethnography of this thesis is from?

Discussing 'armchair fieldwork', utilising the possibilities of phone calls and social media, Lotte Pelckmans states that "online communication mediated by phone necessarily reduces information to purely oral statements, which inevitability entails a loss of social clues" (Pelckmans, 2009: 35). Had I not been in Ghana I would not have met my neighbour at all, and I certainly would not have seen the smartphone next to him. I had not seen the pain on my informants faces when their phones broke or were lost, and I had not known that when Shuri got a Facebook account she laughed with joy for 5 minutes, or that Florence broke into spontaneous dance when she got her first WhatsApp messages on her first smartphone. I would

propose that these are occurrences and events that have a significant impact on my understanding of my informants, which I would not have been able to deduce from just looking at their virtual presence.

Yet, there can also be some advantages to the anonymity that pure online conversations can facilitate. Sensitive issues and private matters are more easily shared, and socially desirable answers are less likely to take precedence (Pelckmans, 2009: 35). Pelckman, therefore, argues that "doing research in different field settings (face-to-face, online, multi-local) is generating new forms of interaction, relating and knowledge (…)", which is a gain for anthropology (2009: 45). I have therefore endeavoured to follow my informants wherever they were, in the digital as in the non-digital. In this thesis I have focused on three digital spaces; Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. However, my informants were also active on Instagram and on blogs, enthusiastic digital photographers, avid consumers of both TV and radio, and in general used a wide variety of ICTs. I have followed my informants as best I could through all these, yet there is only room for so much to be included in this thesis. I hope that I, through these focus areas, manage to show the reader the dialectical relationship between digital technologies and my informants, and to bring an understanding to how "Through making, using, exchanging, consuming, interacting, and living with things people make themselves in the process (…) or to put it another way, without the things – material culture – we could neither be ourselves nor know ourselves" (Tilley, 2006 in Vannini, 2009: 23). In this thesis we will see how young, urban Ghanaians used ICTs to 'make themselves', and indeed how their use of ICTs made said ICTs particularly Ghanaian. As Miller & Horst I believe anthropology can be impactful if we "retain the insights of Bourdieu as to the way material culture socializes into habitus" (2012b: 29).

Throughout this thesis we will see that even when technology makes advances that would have blown our collective mind a mere ten or twenty years ago, society is very quick to accommodate and trivialise these advances. ICTs work in the background of our everyday life, and it is often not until they don`t work anymore you realise how much you rely on them, and are thus representative of what Daniel Miller has called "The humility of things" (1987).

> The more effective the digital technology, the more we tend to lose our consciousness of the digital as a material and mechanical process, evidenced in the degree to which we become almost violently aware of such background mechanics only when they break down and fail us. (H. Horst & D. Miller, 2012b: 25)

This normativity will be seen throughout this thesis. Additionally, Bruijn, Nyamnjoh, & Brinkman argue that "The process of appropriation suggests that technologies acquire different meanings in different social contexts." (Bruijn, Nyamnjoh, & Brinkman, 2009: 12). Thus, by focusing on the appropriation and normativity of ICTs in Ghana, I will contribute another understanding of the meanings of technologies; that of the Ghanaian context. I argue that there is a lack of African context in ICT research, which this thesis will work towards amending. Julie Soleil Archambault concludes her insightful book about youth and mobile phones in Mozambique with "If this book achieves only one thing, I hope it gives a sense of what it might feel like to be a young person growing up in Mozambique today" (2017: 159). Likewise, I hope that my thesis will give the reader a glimpse of how it might feel to be a young person growing up in Ghana today, trying to keep up with the advances of technology. I trust it will become clear why I have chosen to focus as I have throughout the thesis, and that the cases I have chosen will provide the reader with a satisfactory feeling of the state of ICTs among urban Ghanaian youth.

The talking drums of today?

When a new palace was erected in 1995, the first royal palace of the Asantehene[21] was converted to a museum. In March 2015, I went with my informants on a vacation to Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti kingdom and Ghana's second largest city, and we visited the museum together. Of the many objects on display the ones that particularly excited me, was of course the famous *Talking Drums*. These have been widely used in Africa, and West Africans in particular are famous for their drumming skills. Many African languages are tonal, and the drums can therefor "talk" by mimicking the pitch of the words (Ong, 1977).[22] Donaldson demonstrates how, thanks to the drums, sending messages from village to village was easily done by those who mastered them;

> Days before white residents heard of Queen Victoria's death, South Central Africans knew of the event. And Liberian natives knew of the outbreak of World War I long before the news reached white interior stations (1974: 40).

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[21] The Asantehene is the king of the Ashanti ethnic group. The current Asantehene is Otumfuo Nana Osei Tutu II, and he is the 16th Asantehene. For more information on the Ashanti kingdom see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashanti_Empire. See also http://manhyiapalacemuseum.org/ for information about the museum.

[22] See Ong's *African Talking Drums and Oral Noetics* for a thorough explanation of this process (1977).

As the guide in the museum described the drums' purpose for us, a fellow visiting man called out "So today we have phones and our drums are now in a museum!" to great laughter from the rest of the (mostly Ghanaian) audience. Indeed, the comparison is often made by scientists as well and the volume *Mobile Phones: The New Talking Drums of Everyday Africa* (Bruijn et al.) for example, was published in 2009. While the title, and others like it, is likely an attempt to set the stage for how mobile technology has been appropriated in Africa, they do not explain the metaphor any further. In her review of the book Amanda H. Watson therefore also expresses disappointment that the title is not further explained, as do I (Watson, 2010). Nonetheless, as talking drums were, among other things, used to convey messages over physical distances, there can hardly be any doubt that the audience member is correct in saying that the advance of cellular technology has led to the drums being museum artefacts. However, I would like to point out that this diminishes the role talking drums played in most African societies.

Drumming in general has played an important part in African rituals, celebrations and religion, and the talking drums have been at the top of the drum hierarchy. J. H. Nketia describes the drummer of talking drums in Akan societies (of which the Ashanti are the largest group) as such:

> (…) the most important is the drummer of the talking drums who alone may drum certain portions of the Akan drum language. He is considered the greatest of all drummers because of the breadth of knowledge, the skill which his work demands and the role he plays as a leading musician in all orchestras in which the ntumpan drums are used. (…) The drummer of the talking drums is called the Creator's Drummer (Ddomankoma Kyerema) or the Divine Drummer. He is in a very enviable position of being able to call the chief and his Ancestors on the drums without a preceding nana (grandsire). He could be mildly unpleasant to the chief on the drums and go scot free. He is closest to the spirit of the Ancestor chiefs whom he addresses (Nketia, 1954: 36).

Certainly, the comparison of talking drums to mobile phones is a catchy one, yet it remains insufficient. The Creator's Drummer enjoyed a great deal of respect due to his profession, and only men of a certain lineage could become one. Women were nearly all banned from drumming in general (Nketia, 1954). Drums could perhaps be called an early ICT, though this does not equal that SNS are 'modern drums'. Phones are not ceremonial or religious objects and they can be used and understood by everyone—at least to some degree. While the talking

drums main function was to send messages quickly, social media's point is rather to enable the users to connect, exhibit who they are, and to show that they belong. I thus contend that while mobile phones have replaced the drums as the main means to communicate, this does not make them the same. Phones are not ceremonial or religious, and they are ceremonially free to be used and understood by everyone. To call them talking drums, in my opinion, diminish the important role the actual talking drums play in African societies.

Summary

In this chapter I have introduced my fieldwork; the spaces which it took place, both digital and non-digital, and the informants that I accompanied there. I have discussed the importance of *being there* for digital anthropology, and some of the challenges I had during my fieldwork. These include incorporating my husband in to my life in the field, and breaking through a language barrier that I had not anticipated would be there. I then discussed the way that technologies quickly become part of day to day life, also in Ghana. Lastly, I offered a brief critique of the tendency of calling social networking sites for modern talking drums without a proper analysis of the term. While some of the properties of SNS and talking drums are equal (communicating over a distance), others are very different, such as the ceremonial value of the drums, and the theoretical boundlessness of SNS in relation to gender, social status and age. The brief meeting with my neighbour serves as an example of the extent of normalization of digital technology. My neighbour had a smartphone in the seat next to him, and even if he was not on Twitter or Facebook himself, he immediately knew what it was. I will wager that he, too, was annoyed when the power went out and his phone could not be charged. In *digital anthropology* Miller and Horst especially emphasise that "the understanding of normativity" is exactly what anthropological methods can bring to the field of digital research (2012b: 28). As Miller and Horst write

> Yet, perhaps the most astonishing feature of digital culture is not the speed of technical innovation but rather the speed by which society takes all of these for granted and creates normative conditions for their use (2012b: 28).

Again, we see this in the Tigo commercial, when the mother of the bride asks in near disbelief "Oh! You have a yam??"; even when we know that a mere five years ago, the phone of the groom would have been top modern.

How to "drop that yam"? Economic challenges for Ghanaian youth

As I soon grew tired of sitting in my air-less room, waiting for webpages to load, I gave up on the idea of constantly keeping updated on Ghana`s web content. I was content in using my credit to check on social media and read the occasional newspaper, like everyone else. In my fieldnotes I have simply written 'Check out the blogs when back home with Wi-Fi'. Reading it now it strikes me as an odd thing to write for someone who was in Ghana to study exactly blogs! At the time of writing I obviously had not given the thought of nearly omitting blogs from my fieldwork a great deal of thought, I was most likely just bored of wasting away in front of an ever-loading page. However, as I came across this sentence when reviewing my fieldnotes I realised it might say a great deal about the situation in Ghana. *Someone* was writing these blogs, seemingly without a second thought towards the credit it takes to upload and download the pictures and videos that were posted on them. The bloggers and their world—digitally represented and technologically mediated—can serve as an example of the emerging digital divide *within* Ghana: As in many African countries, the socio-economic gap between classes is quite large, and people's access to ICTs is one of the spheres where this may be observed. Not only can the poorer not afford smartphones, they also mostly live in areas where data reception is too poor to use properly (Cassiman, 2018). Even though the House was in a mostly higher income area, my mobile modem did not have good enough data coverage to attain the speed to load the pages, to stream the videos and to download the pictures on these blogs.

Money in Ghana, how to get by it and how to spend it is a complicated subject. There are many social rules and expectations, many ways of diverting these and many ways of taking advantage of them. In the next sections I will explore how my informants dealt with this, and try to outline how they found the money to buy their smartphones. I will first evaluate how I did, or did not, get to know this, in the section called "to ask or not to ask". Then I will demonstrate what happened when someone was in need of new phone during my fieldwork in the section "Loosing a phone, gaining a phone". Lastly, I will discuss the Ghanaian concept "sponsor" which, in addition to having important financial implications, shows us some of the tensions between men and women in Ghana, and among my informants.

To ask or not to ask?

One of the methodical challenges I faced during my fieldwork was that I did not always "get" what was going on, and yet I also felt it would be unproductive to ask. For, if you ask too many questions during fieldwork you will eventually distance yourself too much from your group of informants, and thus not gain the access to their daily life that is necessary. Knowing which questions are ok to ask also takes some time in the field, observing and learning (Briggs, 1986). The issues I did not push through questioning were, for the most part, relating to money and sexual relationships. The latter seemed inappropriate for me to dwell on—both as a relative stranger and as a woman in a group of men who already were preoccupied enough with my sexuality. The former, money and where they came from, seemed to be something that most only talked about in a vague, roundabout manner. In fact, one of my married informants admitted that she had no clue how much money her own husband made. These were areas where I felt that the best way to act was to not ask questions and thus imply that I knew what was going on (even if I did not). My method was often to play a long in conversations, gleaning what info I could without resorting to asking direct questions.

Sensitive or personal issues such as these are less likely to be met enthusiastically by informants. Others have written about how difficult it can be to engage unwilling informants, and how unlikely it is that one will get useful answers if trying (Bleek, 1987; Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Salamone, 1977). In addition, asking the wrong questions can also be seen as insinuation. For instance, asking an acquaintance "How did you find the money to buy this phone?" could lead to a lost relationship. As we will see in chapter 2, many would assume that such a question insinuated that they had gotten the money through illicit means. I did sometimes cross a border I did not know was there, or asked questions that my informants found to be rude. Talking to Isaach one evening he shared a cute story with me about a girl he liked, and how they had used WhatsApp to flirt with each other. A few days later I brought the story back up, and wanted to know more about what had happened between them. Isaach, however, did not want to share any more details, and though he laughingly told me that I was being 'too nosy' he was more reserved in our conversations for a few weeks after this.

What informants choose not to share, or to give roundabout, and sometimes false, answers about are often the things that are seen as sensitive or private, or that would reflect badly on the informant (Bleek, 1987). In the article "Lying Informants: A fieldwork experience from Ghana" Bleek examines how both the questions asked and the researcher and informants relationship will affect the answers we can obtain (1987). Bleek did his work on abortions in

Ghana, and through a coincidence he learned that his informants had given untruthful answers in a survey he conducted (1987). Informants he knew were unmarried said they were married, they said they had not had abortions when they I had, they said they had servants when they had none, and much more (Bleek 1987: 318-321). Bleek proposes that the reason his informants did 'lie' in the surveys were that they wanted to seem respectable to the interviewers. In an attempt to not negate the friendship that developed during my fieldwork, or increase "the likelihood that it was their [i.e. the researcher's] interrogating technique which produced the lies in the first place", I chose to refrain from pushing an issue that was left unanswered for me (Bleek 1987: 320, my brackets).

After a while I learned some things via gossip, and some things in private conversations. Had my fieldwork gone on I would undoubtedly have been in a better position, both to know which questions to ask and to have them answered truthfully (Bleek, 1987; Briggs, 1986).

Losing a phone, gaining a phone

One of the things I did not get a clear understanding of was how my informants came to possess their smartphones. Most of my informants had smartphones, and those who did not got one in the course of my fieldwork. None of them bought the phone themselves, but rather received it through various social manoeuvring. Several times during my stay in Ghana my informants experienced issues with, or the loss of, their phones. One day I was walking to the shops and I saw Winston standing in the driveway to the House and just sort of staring down the road. To see any one of the boys alone, and then not being engaged in their phone was a rare thing so I went over to talk to him. I immediately knew something was wrong, and by the look on his face I feared the worst. "What's wrong?" I asked.

> W: My phone has spoilt[23]. The screen cracked and nothing works anymore. I can't press buttons. The colours are off. It's not charging anymore. It has really spoilt.
> M: Oh No! What will you do?
> W: Chale, I don't even know! It's like my whole life is gone. I don't know anything anymore. I can't text anyone, I can't check Instagram, I don't know where anyone is.

This similar experience of despair and feeling of being completely lost without your phone emerged again and again during my fieldwork. For instance, in April, Bakari and Isaach both had their phones stolen. Due to the heat and the cramped sleeping areas, some of the boys regularly slept on mattresses outside in our compound, under a mosquito net. One morning they woke up to find that their smartphones, which they had kept with them, were gone. Their frustration of being left out of both their own personal networks, and of the general news stream was intense. Therefore, when I one day could inform them that the Duchess of Cambridge had given birth, they both lamented the loss of their Twitter feed, where they would surely have learnt of this the moment it happened, and not hours later by randomly seeing me.

When my own smartphone was stolen in March, while I was on holiday with some of the students from the House, I felt completely at loss. We were on the west coast of Ghana, far from Accra, in a small village renowned for its musical festival and nice beaches. I shared a room with one of the other girls, and when we realised we had been robbed it was the middle of the night, and I felt very much alone and in a bit of a shock. My wallet, my notebooks[24], my

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[23] As food can spoil, so can everything else in Ghana. *It has spoilt* (spoiled) is a common way of saying that *it is ruined*.

[24] My notes were thankfully written in Norwegian, and anonymised.

clothes, my phone, everything was gone; but in that moment I felt the loss of my phone most keenly. I desperately wanted to be comforted by my husband, but, of course, he was a thousand miles away in Norway, and with no phone how could I reach him? The distance was real in a way it had not been before. The time-space compression that we otherwise enjoyed, had disappeared along with my phone (Kivisto, 2012).

Thankfully, I did not feel alone for very long. As soon as word got out that we had been robbed, everyone flocked to our room. Sterling and Bakari took charge of the situation and sent others looking for my stuff, comforted me and looked around for clues as to what might have happened. Bakari lent me his phone, and via WhatsApp I was finally able to call my husband and tell him what had happened. Soon someone found my bags thrown outside, notebooks, wallet, and clothes still in them, and in my wallet my cash was gone but my credit card remained. But my phone was gone. And stayed gone. How I missed it! As soon as we got back to Accra I bought a new one.

As we lost use of our phones, either by losing it or breaking it, our top priority was immediately to get hold of a new one. That was as true for me as it was for my informants, and Miller and Horst report the same from Jamaica. This is a quote from one of their informants, which could as easily have been one of the boys, or me, talking:

> …If a man lose him phone now is a headache 'lawd, lawd me phone'. No man, the people hold them phone like how them value them house key. If you lose that phone it come in like you lose a vital part of you (Horst & Miller, 2006: 159).

The feeling of being isolated, or at a loss, without a phone when you have grown accustomed to it thus seems to occur in many different contexts. When we came back to Accra no one was surprised that my first priority was to get a new phone, neither did anyone comment the efforts the boys put in to get their replacements. While I went the conventional route to get a new phone (I bought one in a Samsung store in a super market), my informants all had other ways of getting a new phone. Winston was handed down a phone from one of his professors, which seemed to be a good sign of his academic success. Isaach got his new phone through a job he found on Twitter, and no one would tell me anything about it. Bakari was sent a new phone from his parents in the UK, but had to wait for several, frustrated, weeks to get it as it was sent with his Uncle who had planned a trip to Ghana anyway. While waiting for his phone to finally arrive Bakari spent even more hours on my laptop, checking in on Twitter and reading the newspapers to keep up.

When people saw my new phone, which was much cheaper than my previous one, some would exclaim "Oh! This is all your husband can give you? He is not happy you lost the old one, or what?". That my insurance money bought me the new one was seen as a bit of an oddity. As we have seen, none of the informants who lost a phone during my fieldwork, bought their new phone themselves. They manoeuvred through their social networks, so that they received a phone from someone else. This is in concurrence with Araba Sey's Ghanaian interview respondents, where 12 out of 17 had received their phone as a gift from others (2011: 380). Those of my informants who were in need of a new phone did not immediately have the solution of how to get one, and thus spent quite a lot of time trying out different avenues, mainly searching through their social networks for someone who had an old phone to *dash*[25] them. Similarly, Julia Pfaff notes that

> In many parts of Africa, the mobile phone is not an object which is imported, sold and then consumed by one person. Instead, it is involved in complex practices of exchange and processes of acquisition, appropriation, abandonment and selling that influence its different meanings and the role of mobility (Pfaff, 2009: 147).

In the next section I will look further at one of the ways one could obtain a phone; that of the *transactional relationship*.

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[25] To dash means to give or hand over. "Dash me some eh" is a common expression, indicating that you want some of 'that', whether 'that' is some food or a new phone.

Sponsors

In a paper written for CEDPA,[26] Goparaju et al argue that sexual relationships in Ghana are often driven by economic motivations (2003). It is not uncommon for young women to have relationships with older men, dubbed a *Sponsor*, to gain economic assistance for things such as clothes, cell phones or even rent and school tuition (Goparaju et al 2003: 6-10). After my fieldwork was done, in 2017, the late artist Ebony Reigns released the hit song "Sponsor". The lyrics describe the sponsor relationship well, and include phrases such as

> "Anyone who's younger, when I ask for something he dey cry cry",

> "Should I leave all this Gucci, Prada? Now which young girl no dey fear hunger?"

> "A boyfriend who can't buy you food when you're hungry *mtchew* is that one too a boyfriend??". [27]

In the music video, we see her sponsor buying her shoes, paying for her manicures, and even signing a lease for a house[28]. Yet we also see Ebony calling another man at the end of the video, presumably her boyfriend. This situation was one that my male informants regularly feared to be in; that they could not provide well enough for their girlfriends and so the women would find other men to sponsor them. Isaach, Bakari and Winston all believed that this had already happened to them at one point. Goparjau et al also found this situation described in their interviews;

> "If the man she loves cannot sponsor her, she will find another man who can sponsor her but also continue her relationship with her lover." (Young woman, out-of-school) (2003: 8).

While the boys felt that this pressure to provide for their girlfriends was unfair, and believed that the girls should be less occupied with material needs, the girls told different stories. They also believed the system to be unfair, but saw no real way of escaping it. Ayo found herself in

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[26] The Centre for Development and Population Activities, which is part of Plan International.
[27] -Anyone who is younger, when I ask for something he will cry.
-Should I leave all this Gucci and Prada? Which young girl does not fear hunger?
-A boyfriend who cannot buy you food when you are hungry, is that really a boyfriend?
[28] *Sponsor by Ebony Reigns* (31.05 2017) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DBPLxbjads

an uncomfortable situation in school when her teacher started to buy her soft drinks in the breaks, or bring lunch for her and him to eat together. As she had no real way of declining this without seeming rude, and feared the eventual debt he would find her in if she continued to accept, she wondered if she could instead change her major and avoid him that way. While we were discussing ways to manoeuvre these social anticipations, Florence told me a story about how a girl from her hometown had kept accepting soft drinks, food, and "even mobile credit" from a boy in her home town, because she believed she would be 'safe' if she never entered a room alone with him—until one day the boy had followed her in to her house and raped her[29], and though many people had seen it, they all knew she had been "playing with him, so that she deserved her punishment".

Nonetheless, most of the time, my informants treated this as a game of back and forth, boys vs. girls, and would discuss strategies for either how much they could fairly get without having to be physical (the girls), or how little they could fairly spend and still get physical (the boys). Writing about sexual exchange for material gain in South Africa, or *transactional relationships*, Leclerc-Madlala (2003) describes a situation that very much mirrors that in Ghana. Discussing the historical background of academic discussions of transactional relationships in Africa, Leclerc-Madlala identifies how the "conceptual difficulties of using this western-derived category [prostitution] with its narrow and morally laden assumptions" eventually led to the phrase 'survival sex' becoming the preferred terminology (2003: 215-216, my brackets). However, there is still a "(…) need to challenge theoretical assumptions that sexual exchange is primarily a poverty-induced economic survival strategy" (2003: 216). Looking at the Sponsor lyrics, we notice how they emphasise both survival needs, such as being able to buy food, and luxury 'needs' such as being able to buy Gucci or Prada clothing. This is in accordance with Leclerc-Madlala's "continuum of needs", and her point that :

> A partner who rewards a woman for her sexual favours with a gift of expensive jewellery may also provide her with food or rent money if requested to do so. Sexual exchange linked to subsistence and sexual exchange linked to consumption are not mutually exclusive (2003: 224).

The women from Leclerc-Madlala's study struggled to meet the costs of 'modern life', and she argues that for these women "Using their sexuality to access goods and services is construed as

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[29] Florence did not use the word rape, and rather she told this as a funny anecdote of what happens to "girls who goes with boys". When I responded by saying that I did not think it was funny at all, she retracted her laugh and told me that after this had happened she decided to move away from her village.

a pragmatic adaption to modern and costly urban life" (2003: 228, my italics). The women felt that they were in a mutually exploitative relationship, and framed their activities as a part of a modern, urban lifestyle (Leclerc-Madlala 2003). The framing of sponsor relationships as a pragmatic adaption to modern life was not unrelatable for my informants, and a few of my housemates were part of such relationships.

One evening I was sitting outside with Shuri, eating our standard evening meal of Indomie Noodles spiced with copious amounts of chilli pepper. We were sitting on a low brick wall outside the outside entrance of the House, a bit hidden in the shadows as the lights of the street did not reach us. A big SUV car drove by and came to a stop just in the driveway a few meters from us. Inside was a man of about 50 and one of the girls that I did not know from the House. It was early on in my fieldwork, and I had not yet heard of the term "Sponsor". As we sat there, Shuri was looking at the car and nudging my ribs to look as well, and so I asked, "who is that?".

> S: "It is Efia and her Uncle", she giggled, clearly expecting me to understand a joke
> that I did not get.
> M: "Her Uncle? Why is it funny ooo?"
> S: "Oh! Have you not seen her, how she has grown fat from going to nice restaurants
> and how she is coming back home at this late hour? Eeey Maria, what kind of uncle is
> that?"

We kept sitting in the dark, observing them until Efia left the car about 10 minutes later. While we did, Shuri filled me in on how some of the female students had Sponsors; older boyfriends who would buy them all kinds of luxuries, in exchange for the girls having a relationship with him. She laughingly told me some graphic scenarios that she believed to be happening in these relationships. Shuri herself seemed to be of two minds about what opinion to have in regards to the sponsored girls. On the one hand, she was laughing at them and the things she imagined they had to do to get their prizes ("and then they come in church on Sunday with their new clothes ooo, can you believe!") on the other hand she also complained that the boys she met were nothing but "trotro boys[30]" who did not have enough money to buy anything.

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[30] Trotros are the privately-owned vehicles operating as buses in Ghana. They usually have a driver and a 'mate' to collect bus fares. These, especially being a mate, are low paying jobs requiring little to no education, and trotro boys are thus low on the social hierarchy.

The prevalence of transactional relationships makes for a complicated, and often frustrating, dating scene, where neither party has it their way. Young men cannot afford to keep their girlfriends happy, while young women feel pressured to give more than they want to their (often older) boyfriends. Now, my experience in these matters were with young men and women in their early 20s. None of them were getting married anytime soon. Some had serious relationships, some had many relationships and some had none. But as it is with most people around this age, many of them living away from home and their parents watchful eye for the first time, the subject was always popular for discussion.

So, when Florence suddenly came to the house with a new phone, she was nearly too embarrassed to show it off. She had spent the weekend at her aunt's house in Nima, as she often did, and one of her male friends had gotten her a phone. I first learned about the phone from the boys, as they had seen it and called to me to go see "what my sister had done". The assumption of a transactional sexual relationship was unavoidable, even if it was incorrect. However, the phone was a smartphone, but it was a *Tecno*—one of the cheaper Chinese brands. While this was a massive step up for Florence, the cheaper brand also supported her claim that she had not found a sponsor. For Florence, the assumptions that came with the phone were embarrassing, but not unexpected. When the boys in the House teased her, she would tell them off and say that they should mind their own business. The new phone meant that Florence had the opportunity to reconnect with her friends on WhatsApp, something she had dreamt about for a long while. I will examine WhatsApp in chapter 6, where I will again discuss Florence's new phone.

Summary

In this chapter I have discussed some methodological challenges I met in the start of my fieldwork, and how I learned which questions I could and could not ask. I have examined what happened when I or my informants lost their phones, and how important the phone was for my informants. Lastly, I outlined the practise of *Sponsors*, to highlight gender relations in Ghana, and to demonstrate the pressure of conspicuous consumption that many have felt has increased due to social media. Sponsors can be seen as a natural extension of the idea of a "redistribution economy" that is common in Ghana (Cassiman 2018). Ann Cassiman shows how people are expected to share their wealth in Ghana, and argues that in Nima this redistribution economy is changing due to the "fast wealth" of *Sakawa boys*[31]. Cassiman argues that

> (…) the proximity of conspicuous consumption have changed the 'moral fibre' [of the economy] (…) Older forms of redistribution, whereby riches -however modest- are shared with kinsmen, friends and according to patron-client relations have changed drastically. Redistribution is now often limited to the small circle of girl -or boyfriends, helpers and accomplices (Cassiman 2018: 23, my brackets).

To be able to keep up with the pressure of conspicuous consumption having a side-job/hustle was common among the students. For instance, Adwoa altered cheap flip-flops with fabric and pearls, and sold them for a profit; Abenaa was sent jewellery from her abroad cousin which she sold to the other students and shared the profits; Akua could find you a pirate DVD with the movie you wanted to see; other students knew someone who could get you new shoes or a USB stick, and so on. Most of my informants would happily engage in such small jobs for a chance of profit, especially as the money procured from this was mostly "chop money" that they could spend as they pleased. The boys seemed to get most of their extra money from betting. I will return to this practice, which can be seen as a form for digital labour, in chapter 5, in the section on football. First, in chapter 4, I will discuss Facebook and the presentation of self on social networking sites.

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[31] The term *Sakawa* originated from a particular form of juju combined with internet fraud, and is now a term commonly used for scamming people online (Oduro-Frimpong, 2014; Riedel, 2015). *Sakawa boys* often spend long days in internet cafés and in virtual chat rooms in the hopes of receiving money from abroad (Burrell 2010, Cassiman 2018).

Facebook; connectivity and curation

Curating the self

Bernie Hogan (2010) identifies social networking sites as an *exhibition,* were the users curate the self they present to others. Hogan draws on Goffman's classic dramaturgical approach (1959), but argues that due to the removal of temporal boundaries in the digital sphere, social networking sites functions not as a stage with an actor performing the self, but rather the self on SNS becomes an artefact; curated and presented (Hogan, 2010). Hogan presents these two features of social media, which he, as do I, considers satisfactory to name SNS an exhibition space:

> 1. Information signifying an individual is delivered to the audience, on demand by a third party.
> 2. Because of the reproducibility of content and the fact that it is sent to a third party for distribution, the submitter does not continually monitor these data as an audience is receiving it, and may possibly never fully know the audience (Hogan, 2010: 381).

The first feature clearly marks SNS as unlike the 'situations' described by Goffman, as there is no need for the information being signified to be in *the present*, rather it is stored in the SNS and can be viewed at any time (Hogan, 2010: 381). The second feature "draws a line between that which is *addressed* and that which is *submitted"* (Hogan, 2010: 381). Posts made to SNS do not necessarily have specific recipients in mind; rather they are posted to the site itself (i.e. posting statuses *to* Facebook).

In the following I will apply Hogan's work on curating to Shuri and Florence's use of Facebook, and show how they curated their own 'exhibition of the self'. I will then examine this in light of Daniel Miller's work on Facebook as a 'book of truth' (Miller, 2011).

A first meeting with Facebook

My first weeks in the house I spent a lot of time on my computer. To look as if I had something to do (which I did not), and to not look so out of place. I would spend time just sitting on the terrace or in the common area, hoping to become friends with anyone by sheer proximity. On my third day in the house there was an unexpected rain storm, and the water found its way in my room through the electrical wiring, so for a while I had no electricity in my room and

thus *had* to sit outside when using my computer. My modem also allowed me to use the convenient excuse of "better coverage", claiming that I could connect to the Internet more easily outside than in my room. This was mostly not true, but it did help me feel less silly for just sitting there.

During this first week I figured that I should have a new Facebook account, specifically for doing fieldwork. Some people had already asked to add me as a friend on Facebook, but I did not feel comfortable adding them. It would be very apparent for my other Facebook friends that these one or two Ghanaians were my informants, and I was not sure if all my old posts were 'fieldwork compatible'. In February 2015, I thus established a new one, with my name but a different email address. After a day it had been closed by Facebook. I tried again. It was closed. After a long week of figuring out what the problem was, through email exchanges with Facebook customer support, it became apparent that Facebook did not believe my account was real. Apparently, it looked like a scam-account due to the combination of my complexion and my location. I had to get friends and family from back home to befriend my new account in an attempt to prove that I was in fact me, and I had to send Facebook a picture of my passport and explain that I in fact was in Ghana.

Jenna Burrell discusses the so-called "Neutrality of the Network", regarding the fact that many commercial and dating-sites block IP addresses from African countries (2012). These are "technological and material barriers that concerningly compromise Ghanaian Internet users' open access to the Internet" (Burrel, 2012: 191). Websites decide to block IP addresses mainly to avoid scammers. However. by blocking everyone from a certain country to access web-pages, or by making them jump through hoops as I did, companies do *in fact* threaten the neutrality of the net and create a digital inequality that affects all Africans negatively (Burrel, 2012: 191-198). I assume that Facebook thought I was a scammer, and that I, by using a white profile picture, lied about my identity in order to, in some way, make others send me money.

Yet, after all this trouble I ended up hardly using my new account anyway. I had already added a few informants to my old account, and it felt too weird telling them that they could now only be friends with me on my new account. Regarding anonymity, it turned out to be easier to see who I was in contact with on the new account, as I had only a few friends there. In my original account my new friends were better hidden in the mass of other friends. Finally, my new profile had very few pictures, and no earlier activity, and I became self-conscious that people would think I was hiding "the real me" when friending them on the new profile instead of the old one. When I asked Uncle Stan if he kept his Facebook profile open or closed he replied "Open, of course! Why should I hide myself?" implying that those who did have a

closed account where not being honest - "If you cannot show yourself to the world, then why is that?". For a while I reasoned that keeping separate profiles would make my field work easier. On my old Facebook profile my informants' activities easily disappeared among the other posts on my wall, while on the new one they were easily seen. However, after a few months I realised that the bad outweighed the good and stopped using it nearly all together.

During this week of Facebook troubles, I had become better friends with Shuri, and she was often with me while I sat on my computer. She knew that Facebook was very popular, but had not seen it used very often herself. While I finally got to establish my new account, adding a profile picture and interests she sat with me in the common area outside my room. On a whim I asked her if she did not want a Facebook account herself?

> S: "Yes! Of course I do! But how can I??"
> M: "Sure! No problem, we can use my computer. What is your email address?"
> S: "I don't have one", she said defeated.

Of course, my own problems with the account had made the process seem very difficult. However, when I said that getting both a Facebook account and an email was in fact both easy and free, her excitement was back. We started immediately.

When establishing her account, we sat in the common area. The room had a TV and a sofa which was popular in the evenings, but rarely used during the day. Shuri and I sat by the front door, on a round dining room table where I sometimes worked on my laptop. On the walls were bookshelves with old dusty books on them, mostly atlases and lexicons, and for a while there was also an old desk there "decorated" with dusty plastic flowers and more old books.

After a while Uncle Stan would come by while people were sitting there, commenting that this was in fact his private area—but we could stay there due to his generosity. Then he decided that we could not stay there in the evenings (we often did, to escape the mosquitos on the terrace), and by the end of my fieldwork we were not allowed to stay there at all, and what was at first known as the common area had become a private living room. Here I say we, but to be honest Uncle Stan would always comment that *I* could, of course, stay. He just did not want all the noise *everyone else* was producing by hanging out there. Of course, there was no point for me staying there alone, so I never did. And by the end of my field work I must admit that I would frequently be as responsible for the noise that occurred, by laughing and teasing with my friends and behaving as your typical annoying youth.

Choosing who to be

Rob Cover, applying Judith Butler's classic theories of identity performance (1993), argues that "social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace are the tools par excellence for performing identity coherence over time" (Cover, 2013: 59). I argue that this is well combined with Hogan's theories on exhibition, and in this section we will see how Shuri began to curate her performance on Facebook.

On the day Shuri got her Facebook account it was still early in my fieldwork, and we were still allowed to stay in the common area. It was early afternoon and I sat in front of my computer, and Shuri sat next to me. Setting up the email address first, I asked her what it should be, and explained that my own email address is a variation of my name, with some numbers added to make it unique. We agreed that her email address should also be her name. Instead of Shuri, she wrote down Letitia. Letitia was her given Christian name and although she did not use this name in daily life, she felt that her email address and Facebook account should reflect her "proper" name.

Shuri's full name was Akoto Owusu Letitia. Creating her email, we realised that Letitia Akoto was already taken, so she instead chose Owusu. However, on Facebook she stuck with using Akoto Letitia, and did not want to add Owusu and disclose her full name for everyone to see. In general, Ghanaians have at least two or three names that they go by, depending on relations and the situation. 'Christian' names (usually a Euro-American name), traditional names (often based on the weekday they were born) and nicknames abound. Knowing a Ghanaian's full name, you will often be able to tell the day they were born, the circumstances of the family at the time of birth, and what number in line they are among their siblings (Agyekum, 2006). Shuri reasoned that using her given names gave the profile a more formal and serious tone than if she would have chosen Shuri. When I later asked her why she had chosen just Akoto, and not added Owusu as well, she said she felt safer not giving out her full name the way it was stated on her identity card. In an email she wrote me after I had returned home from the field she stated, "I chose different names cos i don't people to know me much on social media cos is not save nowadays but they are all my names anyway." I would add that by not choosing to display 'Shuri' she also made it less clear that she was from the North of Ghana. The north is the poorest region of Ghana, and is by many in Accra seen as less educated. Both Shuri and Florence had tribal scars typical of northern Ghana on their cheeks, and they

both disliked them very much.[32] Shuri had less prominent tribal marks than Florence, but had additional medicine marks as she had been very sick as a child. She knew her parents had tried their best to help her, but she would still have preferred to be without the marks. When we were discussing it, they both agreed that they would never mark their own children. Florence outright stated that she felt others judged her when they saw that she was "from a backwards place, where they would do such a painful thing to child".

Then came the time to choose a profile picture. I was still the one controlling the computer, and I knew I had some pictures of her that she took with my camera a few days earlier. My digital camera had a flip-screen so that you could see yourself while taking pictures, and we had all toyed about with it. I chose one of the pictures that I liked; It was the classic "selfie" pose, looking up into the camera with pursed lips, and she had a scarf tied on her head. It clearly showed that she was on the beach, with a yellow beach umbrella framing her and giving the picture a nice glow. However, it turned out this was clearly the wrong picture – "With my hair wrapped up like that! And making a fooling face, and not wearing make-up!". While she did not say any of this at first, later in the evening she came to my room with nice clothes, her hair done up and make-up on, wearing ear-rings and a wrist watch, and with a command to immediately take a new picture of her and put it as her profile pic. The new picture was taken by me, and showed her full profile, with a hand on her hip, smiling coyly at the camera. By taking charge of her profile picture Shuri started her journey as the curator of her own Facebook profile, a 'job' she would come to take very seriously.

Friends

After I had done all this "administrative" work setting the account up, we changed seats so that Shuri was the one controlling the mousepad. But what do you do with a completely new Facebook profile? The newsfeed was completely empty, and not much seemed to be happening. Dalsgaard, applying Strathern's concept of *dividiuals* (1988) to SNS, argues that the "Melanesian understanding that a person is constituted relationally in exchange" is true for Facebook, and thus that "The Facebook-person is presented relationally, in that a profile without connections to friends would make no sense since that is the whole point of the social networking site" (Dalsgaard, 2008: 9).

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[32] See https://omgvoice.com/lifestyle/ghanaian-tribal-marks for a quick explanation of Ghanaian tribal marks. For a more thorough discussion see Knudsen`s book *Patterned Skin - the: Ethnic Scarification in Developing Ghana* (2000).

Below is a screenshot of what a completely new profile looks like for the user, and as we can see there is not much happening.
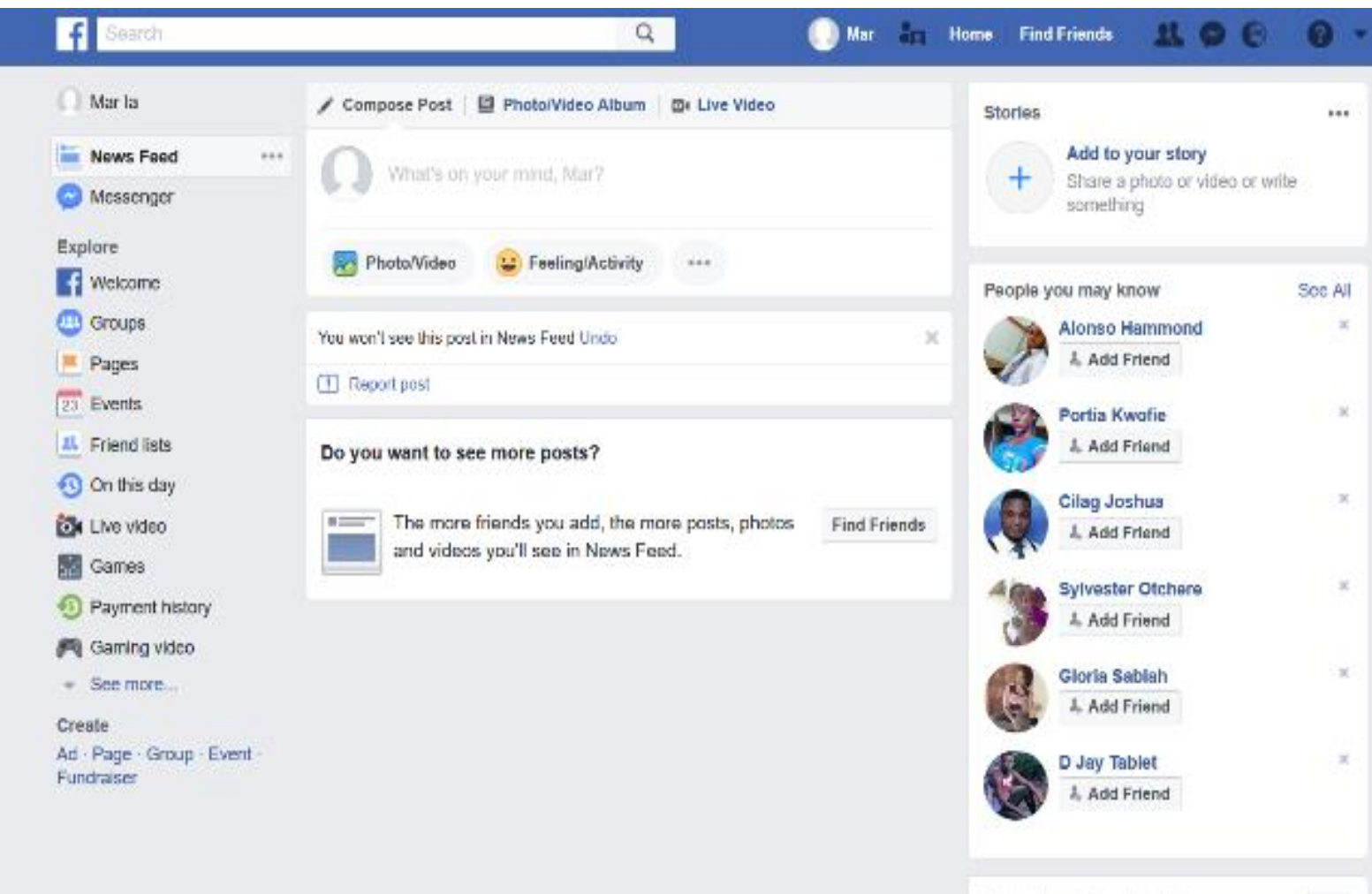

Figure 7 Screenshot of a new Facebook profile [33].

I suggested she add me as her friend, and so we searched my name. We got a list of hundreds and hundreds of people sharing my name, so I pointed to my new profile, which was near the top of the list (likely due to our proximity, both of us being registered as living in Accra). She added me as a friend, and I accepted using the Facebook app on my phone. Her newsfeed then filled up with my activities. Only pictures of me and notifications that I had become friends with people. Clearly, Facebook was not living up to her expectations yet.

We then tried searching for her friends by name, but this proved difficult. As with me, we got hundreds of results and it turned out to be impossible to find anyone in that way. With the many names Ghanaians can go by, their chosen Facebook name can sometimes be hard to

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[33] This would have looked slightly different in 2015, as Facebook has changed their interface a bit.

guess. It also turned out that most of her old friends had not used the strategy I recommended to her, of using her given name with the most common spelling. Many chose extra statements added to their names such as "RichHomie", "ManchesterForEver" and "GodKnows", some even used these as a complete replacement for their real names. Jill Walker Rettberg has examined *The Digital Aestheticisation of Oneself* online and argues that choosing a nickname online is an act of self-presentation (Walker, 2005). By being able to choose their name Facebook users can thus to an extent (re)invent themselves digitally, and present to others what they find most important about themselves. While Shuri did not add on an extra statement to her name, she did, as mentioned, leave out her traditional Ghanaian name.

Facebook uses an algorithm to help you find friends, where it analyses where you are from, where you reside, what schools you went to, where you work, who you are friends with already and so forth to suggest others who have this in common with you (Dewey, 2015).[34] The more data Facebook knows about you, the more correct its friendship suggestions are likely to be. The north of Ghana is much poorer than the south with less access to ICTs in general, and I presumed that it would be difficult to find any pages to "like" and thus help the algorithm to find relevant friends for Shuri. Mostly I was wrong. While we did not find her home town, she was able to "like" both Bolgatanga (the capital of The Upper East region) and her old high school. Especially the High School proved helpful for Facebook, and she had soon sent friend requests to some of her old classmates. Seeing people she knew she exclaimed happily "Ah, this boy! I know him!" or "See her! This girl was my classmate oo!".

When you have a few friends and some background story on Facebook, finding more friends becomes very easy. Facebook will suggest them for you, and you can look through your friend's own friend list to see if you know anyone there. Additionally, you are likely to be sent friend requests. When you become friends with someone, their news feed will reflect that, and their friends will in turn be aware of your profile. After a short while Shuri had several friend requests. As she saw the first one she was overjoyed that this person wanted to be her friend. Then more came in, and she was even happier.

Facebook was indeed starting to meet her expectations. Within the first hour of being on Facebook she had gotten requests from people she had never met before, some of who were not even Ghanaians. One of the first requests she got from an unknown person was from

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[34] Facebook help centre, *Finding Friends and People You May Know:* https://www.Facebook.com/help/www/501283333222485

someone who appeared to be an Indian man. I was wary of these requests and suggested that she declined them. Shuri, however, was very excited that this person had seen her profile and decided he wanted to be her friend. She declared that to say no to a friend request was just rude. And this man was from *India*! Someone all the way on the other side of the world wanted to befriend her, how could she refuse? Facebook was finally meeting her expectations; really *connecting* her to people everywhere! This excitement for new friends never ceased, and for a long while the first thing she would say when we saw each other was how many new friends she had.

Shuri had moved to Accra from Kumasi out of necessity to find work, and her lifestyle in Accra did not meet her expectations. She was a very social person, and loved to dance, eat, and hang out with friends. In school she had been Prefect[35] and had enjoyed great respect from the other students. Now, however, she was a live-in maid, with a poor salary and even poorer working conditions, and her social status was no longer that of a respected older student but rather that of the servant. On her Facebook profile she declined to add a job status to her profile page, but did add the schools she had attended. Uncle Stan would often call her while she was sitting with me and command her to do the sweeping now, or cook him something to eat, do his laundry etc. Due to her low salary she would also do small tasks for the students, such as laundry, to earn a few extra cedi which again seemed to confirm that she was a servant. While she was not hired to take care of the students living in the hostel, they would often take advantage of her and leave their trash and dirt in the common areas which she and Florence cleaned. None of her friends lived in Accra, and though she had gotten to know a few people their only impression of her was that of a poor servant. Florence and Shuri were each other's only close friends in Accra, though they had not known each other before starting to work for Uncle Stan. Shuri was the same age as the students living in the Hostel, and Florence a few years younger. Had they not been in such different economic classes they could have been friends. As it was, they were friendly, but their relationships were to unequal for it to become anything beyond that.

Being in this situation it is no wonder that Shuri at times felt alone, and that the friend requests she got on Facebook at first was a welcome attestation that she was, in fact, interesting. By her second day on Facebook she had 58 friends. After about two weeks Shuri had reached the Facebook-defined limit of 5000 friends and could no longer accept new requests. However,

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[35] Older students who are given some administrative responsibility by the school. They are role models for the other students and are often chosen by an electoral committee and a popular vote by the students.

by then she had learned more about how Facebook worked for her, and she had become more critical of who to add. The first man who had added her, the Indian fellow, had to her great disappointment turned out to be a scammer. At first, he had told her that he did a lot of business in Ghana and that is why he had added her as a friend. After a few days of chatting he had confided in her that he had a big delivery of computers and smartphones that were now stuck in Ghana customs, and he had sadly lost his money (was it due to a robbery?) and if she could only send him some money he would tell the people at customs that some of the computers and phones were hers and she could then "just go and pick them". She revealed this story to me by coming to my room and saying "Am I an idiot? Do you see me as stupid?"

> M: Uhmm…no? Of course not. Why?
> S: This man, he thinks I am a fool! So I should send him my money?? No! This stupid man oh! See here, is this true?

There was a glimmer of hope in her voice when she asked me if this could be true. She had, however, heard about these kinds of internet frauds before. To get back at him she had told him that she would pay as he said, and then stopped responding to all his messages. I showed her how to unfriend and block him, and we later laughed about this guy trying to scam people with silly lies like that.

A few days later, I noticed that her Facebook wall was filling up with what appeared to be pornographic video clips. One of her new friends was tagging her in the videos, and posting them on her wall. Again, we blocked the person, and quickly deleted everything off her wall. While the Indian scammer had been disappointing, but not unheard of, Shuri found this both shocking and embarrassing.

The process of 'Facebook friending' was new to Shuri, and she spent some time to make it work as she wanted. Daniel Miller describes the process of finding friends on Facebook like this:

> Friending usually begins by replicating a core group of offline friends but it quickly expands to include pretty much anyone that a person did at some time or other know personally, even if they have subsequently lost touch with them (…) Facebook seems like the end of what previously was the natural attrition of social networks. It brings all those once disregarded back into the frame of current regard" (Miller 2011: 182).

As it was, Shuri had not seen most of her friends since she moved to Accra a few years ago. This was before the smartphone became such a commonplace item, and thus for most she was not sure if they were on Facebook or not. As Miller notes, her friend list quickly expanded. She added everyone she had gone to school with, everyone she knew, even remotely, in Bolgatanga, in Accra, in Kumasi. Then she got suggestions from Facebook, and added most everyone there as well. Most importantly, she accepted all friend requests she was sent. And, as noted, in just a matter of weeks she reached the Facebook limit of 5000 friends.

Shuri's phone was constantly buzzing with messages from Facebook, people asking how she was doing, boys telling her she was looking good. Chat on Facebook is private, and so all I saw of these messages were the "ding!" coming from her phone at all hours, and her telling me it was "just someone from Facebook". Some people simply said "Hi" and then did not reply to any messages, some exchanged pleasantries of "how are you" and some wanted photos. Sometimes Shuri would be annoyed at the people contacting her, other times she seemed to talk for hours in the chat. Florence, as well, seemed to be intrigued by Letitia's newfound connections, although she was also more annoyed than Shuri herself for all the impromptu messages she got. Looking at how Shuri used the Facebook chat it is easy to draw parallels to Slater and Kwami's informant Asma;

> Asma has up to 15 MSN chat windows open at any one time, and cycles through the, spinning her plates of chat with a random selection of foreigners (…) None of the conversations seems to get much beyond ASL, and different versions of 'how are you?', 'what are you up to?'. (Slater and Kwami, 2005: 4)

In much the same way, Shuri would have several Facebook chats open, where she had brief conversations that (to me) did not seem to be much point in having. However, like Asma, Shuri also seemed to treasure her chats with foreigners the most (Slater & Kwami, 2005). Ann Cassiman discusses "the creation of 'new social spaces that transcend national boundaries' (…)" and the experience of young Ghanaians whose digital presence makes them virtual cosmopolitans (Zook, 2007 in Cassiman, 2018: 22, 20). Likewise, Slater and Kwami relates that Asma feels that there "(...) is something intrinsically enriching about being in direct contact with foreigners (…) Asma feels socially and experientially broadened by these encounters" (Slater and Kwami, 2005: 5). This connection to the global, and the feeling of being a 'virtual cosmopolitan' was part of the allure of SNS for nearly all my informants. After Uncle Stan had

sent a picture of himself and Florence to his family in England, Florence highlighted the fact that thanks to his phone "My picture is now gone to London!".

It is of course impossible to know exactly who Shuri's Facebook friends were—also as profiles can easily be faked. When they engaged in chat they could have sent that message to just her or to a hundred other women, they could be setting her up for something like Mr. India, or they could simply be just who they appeared to be. After the two less pleasurable experiences of nearly being scammed and having pornography posted to her wall, and after having reached the limit of 5000 friends, Shuri decided to go through her friend list and delete some of them. Those who did not have English lettering in their names (mostly using Arabic letters) were deleted, as she clearly did not know them. Then those who had indecent profile pictures, such as very scantily clad girls, as these were likely to be scammers or porn-bots[36] again, those she did not like the look of and were certain that she did not know were deleted. However, her friend list quickly filled back up to 5000, and so she went back and forth deleting and adding new friends, although more carefully than before. Particularly anyone appearing to be from outside Ghana was now subject to more scrutiny before being accepted as a friend. However, if they looked to be Ghanaian there was always a chance that they had met before, and they should therefore be accepted as a friend.

By connecting with old friends on Facebook Shuri and Florence gained the opportunity to re-ignite friendships that had been lost due to distance. Although informants often expressed a fear that "people spent less time together as a result of Facebook", Miller found that Facebook was "facilitating rather than substituting for offline interaction" (Miller, 2011: 183). For many of Shuri and Florence's friends, Facebook meant that they found each other again and could exchange their current phone numbers and then the conversation moved to WhatsApp, which is in line with the aforementioned concept of smartphones as polymedia (Madianou, 2014; Madianou & Miller, 2013). I will explore WhatsApp further in chapter 6. However, even when the real-time conversations were taking place outside of Facebook, Shuri still used Facebook as a media to strengthen these friendships.

Facebook makes friendships visible to the world, and this opportunity to showcase friendship can be used to make the friendship stronger. While becoming friends on Facebook is a step in recognising each other, it is not the same as being friends outside of Facebook

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[36] An automated AI program that posts links to pornographic web sites in chat rooms and on social media, such as the profile that has posted the pornographic images on Shuri's Facebook profile. On Facebook these often spread like a virus.

(Miller, 2011: 182). One can therefore say that it is when Facebook friends *choose to mention each other,* in status updates and tagging each other in pictures or in other posts, that the friendship becomes part of the actual curated exhibition. Dalsgaard states that Facebook "is a matter of exhibiting one's perspective or point of view on the social relations that one is made up of" (Dalsgaard, 2008: 9). 'The Melanesian lens' is also applied to Facebook by Miller (2014). Miller uses Strathern's work (Strathern, 1988, 1996) in particular.

> In Strathern's work a person is constituted by a network of relationships, which *come to exist through becoming apparent* (…) the very idea that is person is constituted by relationships is here [on Facebook] made entirely manifest (Miller 2014: 248, my brackets and italicisation).

Choosing to make a friendship part of one's exhibition is thus a strong signifier of that friendship. Not all Facebook friendships are equal; as we have seen Shuri accepted nearly all the friend requests she got, and her friend list therefor consist of both close friends, acquaintances, and strangers. Both Winston and Sterling did however claim that they knew everyone they added on Facebook, even though they had between six hundred and a thousand Facebook friends. Looking through my own friend list, of about 250 friends, there are several people that I have not spoken to in over 10 years and a few that I have forgotten who are. Yet they are all my friends because we share some connection; we went to the same elementary school, we know each other's friends, or we have worked together or in some other way our paths have crossed. Miller states that

> Facebook seems to take us closer to the situation of small-scale societies where all the various forms of social network such as kinship, friendship and work tend to come together in the very same place (2014: 245).

So how are close friendships signified on Facebook? A typical example is the act of wishing someone a happy birthday. Facebook notifies you when any of your Facebook friends have a birthday, and it is common to then leave a message directly on the Facebook wall of the person having a birthday. However, if you are close friends it is common to post a happy birthday wish as *your own* status update, ideally also with pictures of the two of you together.

After Shuri had moved back to her town her Facebook wall was suddenly flooded with "Happy Birthday to my best girl!" type of posts, as seen in figure 8.

happy birthday twines,luv u sooo much n can't forget de moment we shared together.May all ur dreams come to pass in HIS name n may u both live longer in peace

Figure 8 Screenshot of 'birthday post' on Shuri's profile. The pixilation has been added by me

When she finally was back with her friends, making a point of posting pictures together would strengthen friendship ties that might have been weakened by her absence. For the friends that lived away from each other posting and tagging each other's pictures became a way of confirming that they do want to stay connected, and keeping up that connection. By making the *relationship visible, SNS* makes the relationship stronger.

-life is like an egg, if not handle well may break on de way, so we have to handle it wit prayers!

[Life is like an egg, if we do not handle it well it may break on the way, so we have to handle it with prayers!][37]

One of Facebook's main features is your status update. On the top of your so-called "newsfeed"—the main field listing various posts which are generated by Facebook algorithms—there is a blank space where Facebook asks you to fill out "What's on your mind?" (see figure 7). This will then be posted to your Facebook profile, and to your friend's newsfeed. One's newsfeed will therefore predominantly consist of friend's status updates and posted pictures, as well of the posts of groups and sites you one has *liked* or *followed*.[38]. Shuri spent a lot of time contemplating what she should write there, before finally writing her first status in the afternoon. After she had posted it, she found me and asked if I had seen it yet. Her status should reflect who she was; a good, educated and grown woman. She had written:

No beauty shines brighter than that of a gud character.

[No beauty shines brighter than that of a good character]

Looks are important to most Ghanaians, and your appearance will often be commented on, and without any sugar coating. Most of my informants spent a lot of time on their appearance; making sure their haircut was fresh, that their clothes were spotless (I once spent a whole day washing clothes with Winston and Sterling, which included washing *shoelaces* to make sure they were crisp and white) and that their overall look was "on point". At one point I complained about the infamous "Ghana Time"; that is that people do things in the tempo that suits them and will leave an anthropology student waiting in the courtyard for an hour without any notice that they are late. When the perpetrator showed up at last, dressed up with a freshly ironed shirt, clean shoes and a big, gold wrist watch, I was annoyed and told him that "if he was not on time he might as well leave his watch at home!", much to the spectator's amusement as

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[37] In this chapter I have chosen to translate Shuri's status updates. This can be seen in brackets & italics beneath the original status.

[38] Facebook has experimented with what will show up in the newsfeed the most; friend's posts or organisations, groups and news outlet's posts? Additionally, one will also see personalised ads in the newsfeed.

they were all aware that his watch was likely not functional at all, it was simply a bit of decoration. To me this is the quintessential Ghanaian way; the point of a wristwatch is not at all to tell time, it is to demonstrate that you have one, and it is a nice one. Speaking of similar 'bluffing performances' among youth in Mozambique, Archambault writes: '"Performance, simply put, is potentially productive, even when those involved are themselves aware that it is precisely that: a performance" (Archambault, 2017: 59). Indeed, while dressing up for her first profile picture Shuri had in fact put on a wristwatch, which of course did not work. Shuri herself loved to dress up and "look nice", but with her job and her meagre pay check she had neither the time nor the money to do so. Shuri's statuses were always clever, and often funny as well. She took pride in writing them, and often told me to go and like it when she had updated.

> -no one is perfect das y a pencil has an eraser,so lets try to forgive easily
> [No one is perfect. That is why a pencil has an eraser, so let us try to forgive easily]

Shuri wrote in the typical informal Ghanaian fashion, emulating oral language. In the quote above she writes "das" instead of "That's" an "y" instead of "why", but she also double checked with me that she had spelled pencil correctly. Spelling is an important signifier of status and identity; online, your grammar is your voice. In the quote below there are many abbreviations and still the "difficult" words such as "difficult" "realizing" and "question" are written correctly. McLaren has demonstrated how altered spelling like this duplicates the sound of pidgin in African literature (McLaren 2009: 106).

> Life is de most difficult exam,Many fail b'cos dey try to copy others,not realizing dat everyone has a different question paper!so lets focus on hw to solve our question correct bt nt othes.
> *[Life is the most difficult exam. Many fail because they try to copy others, not realizing that everyone has a different question paper! So let us focus on how to solve our own question correctly, and not that of others.]*

I would thus argue that Shuri's, and my other informant's, 'grammatical errors' are not errors at all, but rather a complex grammatical manoeuvring to display identity. I return to this in chapter 5, in the section *ASL*. Shuri received more feedback, in the form of likes and comments, on her statuses as time went on. Her first statuses would not have shown up in that many people's newsfeed. But as she got more friends, and interacted with them, she also got more

likes and comments on her statuses. Some of the more profound statuses were also shared, that is to say; someone reposted it again on their own wall.

U eat fried rice n chicken,i eat gari n beans bt @ de end we ar all satisfied,u sleep on a good bed bt i sleep on de mat bt @ de end we all get gud sleep,u ride in a hammer bt i walk n @ de end we both reach our destination, u wear expensive clothes bt i wear anything like a cloth bt @ de end we ar both covered;that is life fr us all,sometimes it becomes soo hard fr u n u think u ar nothing bt a common being without a better future,bt u h've to remember dat everything happends fr gud n know @ dey ar better days ahead! WISH U ALL DE BEST FRIENDS.

[You eat fried rice and chicken, I eat gari[39] and beans, but at the end we are all satisfied. You sleep on a good bed, I sleep on a mat, but at the end we all get good sleep. You ride in a hummer, I walk, and at the end we both reach our destination. You wear expensive clothes, I wear anything, like a cloth, but at the end we are both covered; That is life for us all. Sometimes it becomes so hard for you, and you think you are nothing but a common being without a better future, but you have to remember that everything happens for good and know that there are better days ahead! WISH YOU ALLE THE BEST FRIENDS]

Shuri's statuses were often in the shape of advice, encouraging her friends to stay positive and trust in God and their own hard work to better their situation. She would often highlight that the poor are as worthy as the rich, and that one should try not to envy others situation but be content with one's own life. Comments were nearly always positive, though a few were out of context (mostly in the "send me your pictures" category). In the middle of my fieldwork Shuri moved back to Kumasi to retake her exams. The day she left for Kumasi, and an uncertain future, this was her status:

The same boiling water dat softens potato hardes de egg,so some problems may soften ur eyes n tears wil flow bt others 2 wil make u stand still n finally emerge as a winner.Love u frnds fr ur best wish n prayers

It's the same boiling water that softens the potato which hardens the egg. So some problems may soften your eyes and tear will flow, but others to will make you stand still and finally emerge as a winner. Love you friends, for your best wishes and prayers.

---

[39] *Gari* is dried, grated cassava flour, often seen as common food.

While she was in Kumasi she stayed with one of her sisters and worked in a *chop bar*[40]. Shuri now had to get up very early every morning, prepare the food, walk for about 15 minutes and set up her booth. The booth was on a busy street with lots of people passing by, many of them on their way to a local college. After having worked hard in the morning, she would take classes and study at night. It is not difficult to imagine how hard this kind of life is, and from our conversations I understood that she was struggling to get through. During that summer these were some of her statuses:

> Ur vision without prayer n hardwork cann't be #visaulize .
> *Your vision; without prayer and hard work it cannot be #Visualised.*

> Am greatful always nt b'cos am rich,successful,happy or am dat where my frnds ar bt am alive,hopeful n h've faith in God n hardwork dat things wil be better one day.i stil say thank u GOD fr de expensive gift dat i can't never buy wit even if i have trillion 'LIFE'.
> *I am grateful always, not because I am rich, successful, happy, or that I am there were my friends are, but I am alive, hopeful and have faith in God and hard work, and that things will be better one day. I still say thank you GOD for the expensive gift that I cannot ever buy, even if I had a trillion: 'LIFE'.*

Shuri's status update were intentional and well thought out. While she was going through a though time, her statuses were focused on keeping a positive spin on life, and that things will be ok in the end. This way, she could both encourage herself and signal to her Facebook friends that she was in need of emotional support. Shuri's statuses usually gathered the response she seemed to want. Confirmations that she said something clever or funny, or support and company (often in the form of chat) when she indicated that she wanted that. For the above post, all of the commenters were male, and these were some of their comments:

- "AMEEN SUMMA AMEEN"
- "wat a message.......very sensible"
- "Woow am inspired tank u n God give u more wisdom"
- "Tnx a lot dear"
- "don't worry that is life"

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[40] Roadside restaurant.

I never saw any negative replies, unlike in her current life where she sometimes told others similar 'wise words' and was often laughed at instead of taken seriously. Status updates like this turned out to be a much-loved part of Facebook for Shuri. We had many conversations about how she was now able to reach "so many people" with her ideas and how exciting this new opportunity was. The fact that she could put these thoughts in writing and show them to the world also meant that she was able to nuance herself to others, showing more of herself to more people than could have been easily done without Facebook.

Florence; the Facebook sceptic

At the time I set up Shuri's Facebook account I had not yet talked much to Florence. While Shuri spoke her mind easily, and rarely seemed to hold back in conversations, Florence was quiet and, if not shy, more withdrawn. I often thought she was annoyed with me, that I was just another burden to her work load; this white woman she now had to bow and wash for. This was a feeling I encountered more often than I had anticipated, and I tried very hard to disprove it. I kept on insisting to wash my own clothes, fetch my own water and so on. Yet, I was unable to stop her from cleaning my bathroom about once a month. But as time went on we got more and more acquainted and by the end of my field work Florence was one of my dearest friends.

When Shuri got her Facebook account Florence had a "yam" phone. She could only use it to text and call, and had no possibility to download any apps or access the internet. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Florence eventually got a new phone. I mentioned the gossip that accompanied her new phone in the previous chapter, but even with this hanging over her Florence was ecstatic about her new phone. Florence was normally such a quiet person, seemingly a bit distanced, but when she was really happy she always broke out in dance.

The day she got her phone we did nothing but dance the whole evening. It came preinstalled with some of the google apps so I opened a Gmail for her, and she danced. We downloaded WhatsApp to her phone, and we danced. It had a camera, so she took selfies and we took pictures together. For Florence the most important future of her phone was WhatsApp. In the months before getting the phone she had frequently expressed a wish to "drop her yam and get a 'WhatsApp-phone'". Being able to participate on WhatsApp was a big goal for her, and meant that she could reconnect with her friends in a way she had not been able to before. She could now both see and send pictures, and she could join in the all-important group chats.

While Shuri had spent much of her childhood in Kumasi and thus spoke Twi and was familiar with life in a big city, Florence had moved to Accra from her village in northern Ghana.

She spoke very basic Twi, but often felt uncomfortable when people assumed she could follow conversations in Twi. When I arrived, she was accustomed to her life in Accra, but as Shuri, she was not too happy about it.

Florence had moved to both get away from the pressure to marry at an early age, which is common for young women in the north, and to make her own money so that she could instead continue her education. That is a brave decision to make for a young woman and she was the only one of her former classmates who lived in Accra. But life in Accra was not easy and she was often feeling home-sick, missing her friends and her mother in particular. Having stayed in Accra for about two years Florence regularly called back home, but the connection she had to her friends and family was not the same as before. Even as she talked to them she could not see them, and, as anyone knows who have moved away, it takes a lot of work to keep up with the intimate gossip of your friend group.

As with Shuri I had not wanted to ask Florence outright if I should open a Facebook account for her as well, as not to force something on her that she did not feel she could refuse. However, I had seen how she was looking over Shuri's shoulder whenever she was on Facebook, how they both delighted in chatting with strangers and I figured I would take the chance. So, I asked her and got a shy yes and as with Shuri we sat together and set up her profile. I sat in front of the computer while opening an email account and a Facebook account, controlling the mousepad while doing the initial set-up. Neither Florence nor Shuri choose to fill out much personal information, simply birthday and place of residence. They both choose to hide their phone number from their profile so that strangers would not be able to reach their phone. After the initial set up was done and I had shown Florence how to search for and add friends we changed seats and she sat in front of my computer controlling the mousepad.

While setting up her account we immediately found that her high school had its own Facebook page, and through that we found many of her former classmates which again led Facebook to suggest "people you may know" and to friend requests being sent to her. While Shuri had wasted no time in requesting friendships with as many people as possible, and accepting all the requests she herself got, Florence had a different approach. Seeing how Shuri in the end knew nearly none of her Facebook friends, and how people were posting on her wall and chatting with her at all times, Florence was wearier of accepting friendship requests. She would only add or accept people she knew outside of Facebook. Due to this she ended up with having "just" nearly 100 friends. Much like Shuri, Florence was very excited to see her friends on Facebook and for many she did a little celebratory dance when found. I could not help but

celebrate with her so there we both were, dancing and laughing while looking up Facebook profiles.

"She has grown ooo!"

The first days after her account was opened, we spent a lot of time together dedicated to the beloved activity which is colloquially called "Facebook stalking". To find someone on Facebook, look through what they have posted on their wall, who their friends are and most importantly; to look through their photos. That is to say, we were viewing, and reviewing, Florence's friend's exhibitions of their selves.

The compulsion to check what everyone you went to high school with are doing now is probably recognisable for most of us. Depending on your own status and success this can be both a confidence booster (if you are doing better than most) or a confidence killer (if you are doing worse than the others). For Florence it began as a very happy activity, simply because she had not seen her friends in a long time. Old classmates now had children she had not seen before, or babies who had grown to be kids since last she saw them, they had changed their hair or bought a car, they had gotten married or moved somewhere new. All these changes in their lives were documented on Facebook, and now Florence too could witness it. But these pictures were also a stark contrast to her own life. Since she had moved it seemed all her friends had made progress in their lives, while she was still stuck in the same position she had been for years, with no clear way of moving forward. One picture of a woman wearing a nursing uniform and sitting on the stairs with her toddler in front of her especially made Florence pause. "See this girl! She has grown ooo! She is a big girl now paa". The notion of her friend now being "grown" and "big girls" kept coming up as we kept looking through profiles. She lamented that she herself was still a "small girl".

The phrase 'small boy/girl' is sometimes used as an insult in Ghana, likewise saying that someone is not grown up or is a child. This can be nuanced, and friends can tease each other with these phrases as well. Elders command a lot of respect in traditional Ghanaian societies, and to be a grown man or woman is something everyone aspires to. Especially for men the status of "big" or "grown" man as opposed to "small boy" is something they work to achieve, primarily by gaining economic independence (this may include the skill/wit to gain

financial support from others) and by living outside of their parents or family overlooking them.[41] Price writes

> Big men are those of social weight, worth, and responsibility; while small boys are, like children, insignificant social actors, of little consequence in the affairs of the community (1974: 175)

I had only heard the phrase being used a few times before, mostly in discussions between the boys. Florence's browsing of Facebook was my first time realising the connotations of the words. And yet, Florence did live without parental supervision and she did earn her own money. It seemed that her idea of a "big girl" was a mother, a married woman or someone who had finished her college education. All of these were things she was not, but it was the college education that she coveted the most. She had moved away from home specially to avoid marriage, as this would stop her from getting the education, the job, and the life she wanted. Yet, she saw the pictures of her friends, and they all looked happy, and she was not. Florence chose to be very quiet on Facebook. She posted nearly no pictures of herself and did not write any statuses. The picture she did post she was, like Shuri, thrilled to get comments on.

Exhibiting a true self

Examining Shuri and Florence's Facebook profiles with a European eye it would be easy to assume that they were creating 'fake' profiles, giving the viewer an account of their lives that do not match the reality of their lived lives. Encountering a similar situation during his fieldwork in Trinidad, where thirty-five to forty percent of the population is of African origin[42], Miller demonstrates how 'the true self' for Trinidadians is in fact the self they *choose* to present to others (Miller, 2011). He recounts the story of an informant, Vishala, who in many ways resembles Shuri; a young woman, with an impoverished background, who is now trying to work her way up in the world (Miller, 2011: 40-52). Vishala, as Shuri, puts a lot of effort in her status updates, and she further curates her Facebook profile by liking specific groups and pages, posting personality quizzes, and posing for pictures (Miller, 2011: 40-52). To her, most Trinidadians, and I would argue most Ghanaians, "the truth of a person exist in this labour they perform to create themselves" (Miller, 2011: 50). Miller concludes:

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[41] For a thorough discussion on how this duality affects Ghanaian politics, see Paul Nugent's *Big Men, Small Boys and Politics in Ghana* (1995)

[42] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afro-Trinidadians_and_Tobagonians

So Facebook's immediacy, its transience, and the very fact that it consists of surfaces judged by others – all those aspects that make other people see it as fake or superficial – make it for Vishala, and most likely for many Trinidadians, a still more effective vehicle for truth (Miller, 2011: 51-52).

Speaking of a similar form of presenting the self, boyd writes about Myspace[43] profiles as

a form of digital body where individuals must write themselves into being (…) the choices individuals make in *crafting* a digital body highlight *the self-monitoring* that Foucault describes (boyd & Ellison, 2007:128-129, my italics)

This 'curating', can be seen as what Miller calls the *truth by construction*; "This careful self-construction is much closer to the truth of a person than what they happen to possess naturally through birth" (Miller 2011: 50). Shuri *the person* was not poor, with an uneducated background, living pay check to pay check in an old hostel. That her background happened to be poor, and that she was now stuck in a bad job, did not tell anything of her and how she saw herself. However, in the spring of 2015 this was how the world saw her. By opening up her Facebook account and regaining control of how she was presented to the world, Shuri made sure that her Facebook friends could see her true self, and in doing so she also gained more confidence in herself. In her study of urban youth in Mozambique, Julie Archambault argues that "regimes of truth in this part of the world are built on what is visible (…)" (2017, 69).
By juggling the visibility and invisibility' of her circumstances, i.e. not mentioning her work, and posting pictures with a non-functional wrist watch, Shuri constructed her truth and exhibited herself as she wished to be (Archambault, 2017; Hogan, 2010; Miller, 2011). This can also be seen as a digital version of the 'bluffing' to increase one's social capital that I mentioned earlier in the story about the wrist watches. Likewise, Boellstorff proposes that his informants, in the virtual world Second Life, "become closer to what they understood to be their true selfhood, unencumbered by social constraints or the particularities of physical embodiment" (Boellstorff, 2008; in Archambault, 2017: 59).

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[43] Myspace is a Social Network Site that was popular prior to Facebook, particularly in the USA.

Summary

In this chapter I have examined how two of my informant's first meeting with Facebook developed. While both Burrell (2012) and Slater and Kwami (2005) discusses how Ghanaians use online chatrooms (such as Yahoo chat) to connect with foreigners, none of my informants were particularly occupied with chatrooms. I would argue that this is a result of smartphones and mobile data becoming more affordable, and more available. This, and the fact that Internet Cafes have become more and more associated with Sakawa boys and small-time criminals and seen as inappropriate to hang out in (Burrell, 2012: 186-187), has led to mobile phones having become the main access point for online activities for urban Ghanaian youth such as my informants. Most chatrooms are not well adapted for mobile access. SNS however have in later years been perfected for mobile phones. Facebook and Twitter now see mobile phones as their main platform, while WhatsApp and Instagram are SNS that have been developed particularly as mobile apps.

Daniel Miller concludes that "Facebook works best when used to compensate for the deficiencies or stresses of other forms of communication" (2011: 184), and I would argue that this is why Shuri found Facebook to be so intriguing. Unlike simple phone calls, or WhatsApp messages, Facebook allowed her to present herself as she felt she was, both via photos and text, and it let her voice be heard as clearly as everyone else's. The making of this exhibition (Hogan, 2010) became an important way for her to perform her identity As she got positive feedback on the self she presented on Facebook, she also grew more confident in that version of herself in the nondigital world. Indeed, this created a feedback loop that helped her manage in what was a stressful time of her life. The point of this curating then, is not to create a separate self online, but rather "online behavior is more than an expression of different ways of doing identity and, instead, as a set of acts and behaviors that constitute those very identities" (Cover, 2013: 58).

I was very happy that I introduced Shuri and Florence to Facebook, not just because they enjoyed it but also because I felt that our friendships grew stronger on Facebook. I got to know them better, and understood more about their struggles in their daily lives when Facebook revealed truths about them that I had not known prior. That Shuri was a funny girl I already knew, but that she was also such a philosopher only became clear to me when she got her Facebook profile and had a place to post her thoughts. We became friends fast during my fieldwork, and with the help of Facebook we got to know each other even faster. The truths revealed by their Facebook use I would likely have known eventually, but with our work schedules not aligning and our free time scarce I am positive it would have taken us much

longer to see these sides of each other. Now, when Shuri posted a status update this would frequently spark conversations between us that would have not come up naturally on its own. While Florence was not as active on Facebook, the conversations we had while she checked other people's pages and the few pictures she posted were no less significant to my understanding of Facebook.

Belonging in a world of strangers; navigating social relations in the digital world

In this chapter I will discuss how social media was used by my informants to create a sense of *belonging*. *Belonging*, as connectivity, is not an exclusive function to one type of social media, rather it is a primary property for most of them. We have seen how users of Facebook create and presents an exhibition of the self and a personal narrative (Hogan, 2010), and the same phenomena also take place, in various ways, on Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and other social media where the users creates a persona to present to the world. I have chosen to focus on the sense of belonging that can be created on Twitter, and argue that this is one of the main draws of this social networking site.

This chapter starts with a short introduction to Twitter, I then discuss the importance of geographical place in the chapter "ASL?". The two last sections in this chapter deal with the sense of belonging to a group. First, I discuss football, and we will see how Bakari connected to the global football scene by using Twitter and the internet, and how this creates a sense of belonging to global world. Then I will discuss the Dumsor situation in Ghana in 2015, and I will show how a digital protest became both digital and non-digital.

Twitter

Do you remember my neighbour from the introduction? The one who thought I should go somewhere else if I wanted to study social media? The social media he brought up during our conversation was Twitter. When discussing social media, Twitter always seems to be one of the first ones that come to mind. Twitter is a social media platform that allows its users to post messages, *tweets*, of up to 140 characters.[44] Florini writes that "twitter, like other social media, has developed its own distinct terminology and practices" (Florini, 2014: 225). The profiles are usually public, but can also be made private. Tweets sent by public profiles can be seen by all. One also has the option to send Direct Messages (DM) which are only seen by the recipient. Tweets can be liked by others and re-tweeted. It is common to mark tweets with so-called *hashtags*; words or phrases marked by a #.

One of my informants was blogger and actuary Duke. In his late twenties, he had been interested in "the internet" since he first encountered it in the early 2000s. He had started his journey in the digital in internet cafes, but had stopped going there since he got his first computer at home in 2004. Duke recalled how he first started using Twitter in 2010, but did not realise that there was a "Ghana Twitter" until nearly a year later. Duke had met a new acquaintance, Kofi, and through following Kofi on Twitter, Duke realised that Kofi in fact followed many Ghanaians. By finding this entrance, Duke's experience of Twitter changed radically. He felt that he "finally became part of the Ghanaian Twitter", and thus gained access to a network that he had previously been missing.

Figure 9 below shows a screenshot of my Twitter profile. My profile picture is of me, while my 'header image' is a photo I took of the Nima Market in Accra. You can see my Twitter handle (@AnthroMaria), how many tweets I have sent (551), how many followers I have (228), how many I follow (618) and how many tweets I have liked (642). You can also see that I am located in Bergen, Norway as I chose to have the geotag visible, and that I use the hashtags #Anthropology and #ICT4D in my bio, showing my interest in these topics to those who might consider following me. Lastly, you can see that my last tweet was in fact a *re-tweet* from Toby Baxendale about 100-year olds in Barbados.

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[44] This was increased to 280 characters in 2017.

Figure 9: A screenshot of the author's twitter profile

In the previous chapter on Facebook, we saw how choosing a name to be identified by on Facebook merited some thought. This is doubly true for Twitter. On Facebook you are only presented as one name, and the Facebook set-up strongly encourages you to use your real name. On Twitter however, you have two naming options; your 'name' and your Twitter handle. Looking at figure 9, notice that I am presented by my name, Maria Bakke[45], in a bold font, while my twitter handle, @AnthroMaria, is in a lighter font beneath it. Twitter requires your handle to be unique, as this makes up your personal URL (i.e. https://twitter.com/AnthroMaria brings you to my profile) and is how others will contact you on Twitter (i.e. if someone writes @AnthroMaria in a post, I will receive a notification on my profile). Your name can be whatever you choose, all though Twitter also encourages you to use your real name.

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[45] I added Ulvesæter to my name after marriage, and have chosen not to add it to my Twitter profile so that my Twitter and Facebook profile are not as easily matched. *Maria Ulvesæter* is an uncommon name and easily identifiable, while *Maria Bakke* on the other hand is very common, and thus more anonymous.

I found it useful to divide my informants in two groups when discussing social media; the students and the bloggers. The bloggers were all in all much more active on social media and especially on Twitter. While my least (still active) student informant averaged about 125 tweets a year with a total sent of 872 (Sterling), my least active blogger informant averaged 2190 tweets a year with a total sent of 21 900 (Kajsa). The most active student, Isaach, sent an average of 4 814 tweets a year and had tweeted a total of 33 700 tweets. The most active blogger was Kaluyya, who has sent a total of 194 000 tweets and averages 21 555 tweets *a year*[46]!

With both the anthropology hat and glasses on, it is tempting to, just for fun, liken twitter to the famous Kula rings of the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski, 1922).[47] As tweets are sent out in the virtual sphere of twitter, they gather fame and value as they become retweeted (or shall we say re-gifted) and thus end up being seen by more and more people. A typical mapping of twitter activity might look like we see in figure 10 below[48]:
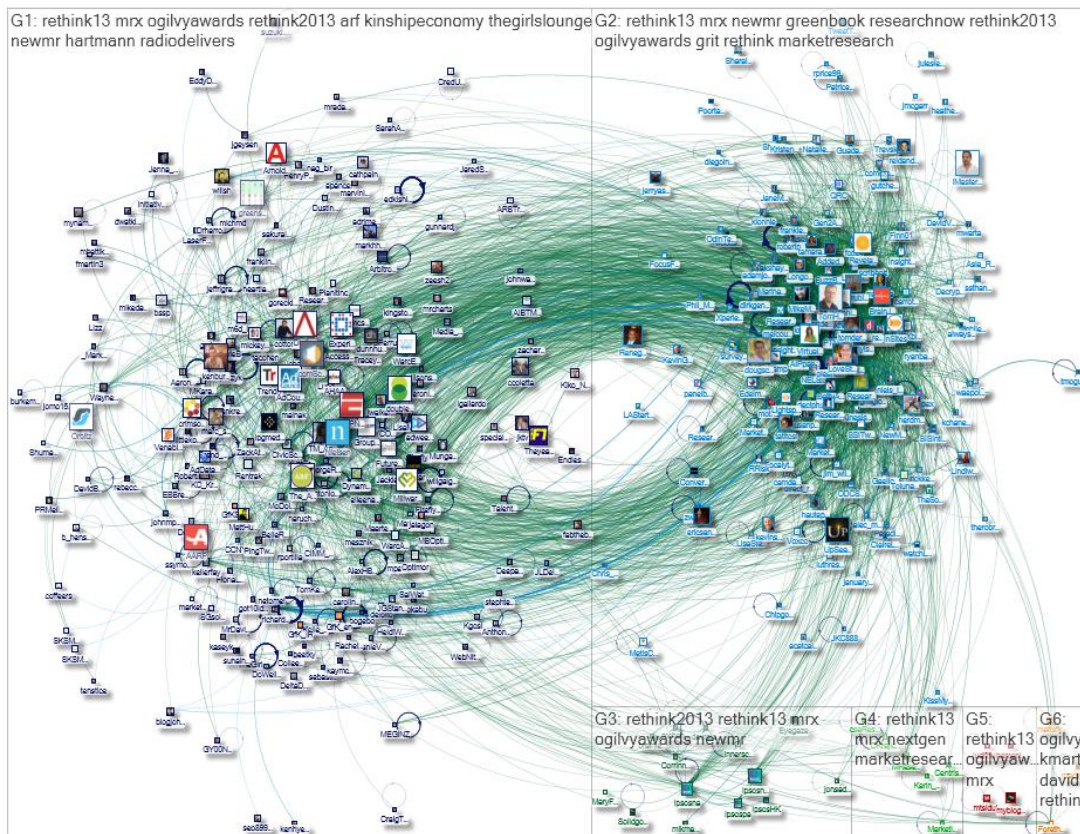

Figure 10: The graph represents a network of 369 Twitter users whose recent tweets contained "@the_ARF OR #ReThink13"

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[46] The tweet count does also include retweets and how many times an original tweet has been re-tweeted by others.

[47] Daniel Miller has drawn a similar connection between Facebook and Kula, which he particularly bases on Munn's *The Fame of Gawa* (1986) and the concept of witnessing (Miller, 2014).

[48] @the_ARF OR #ReThink13 Twitter NodeXL SNA Map and Report for Friday, 22 March 2013 at 15:57 UTC https://nodexlgraphgallery.org/Pages/Graph.aspx?graphID=3706

We can see that some users have several connections to others in the map, while some users lay on the outside of the main circle with just one or two strands of connection to the main congregations. If the tweet is retweeted enough, the original sender of the tweet also gains fame and attention, gaining more followers in the process. The value of the tweet is often seen to lie in how many times it has been retweeted, as the most valuable Kula items are the ones that have circulated the circle most. The 'Big men' of Twitter then, are those who amass the most followers, and who gains the most re-tweets. Of course, Twitter has no religious or ceremonial value, as the Kula rings does.

While Twitter certainly was not the social media most used by my informants, nor in Ghana in general, it was the social media most mentioned to me when I discussed my research. It was also the social media that lent the most enthusiasm from people, especially from the bloggers. "Oh, he is big on Twitter", or "this was retweeted and liked over 50 times" was a common way to praise someone, or to reveal the value of a statement, in particular among the bloggers.

ASL?

While discussing "high-tech nomads", Pelckmans examines how mobile technology has become a paradox of sorts as "asking *where* someone is is often part and parcel of an introduction in phone conversations" (Pelckmans, 2009: 42, my italics). Burrell also notes how digital encounters in chat rooms are still anchored to the non-digital world, by questions and conversations about *place* in particular (Burrell, 2012: 71). When joining a chat room conversation, a common way to initiate conversation is with the abbreviation *ASL?* (Burrell, 2012: 71). Whereupon you are supposed to answer with your age, sex, and location (the A, S and L). I can still the remember the thrill *I* got when I joined a chat room for the first time, at the age of about 11 or 12, and was suddenly chatting with "16/M/Australia". Many of my informants reported similar experiences as mine when they found online 'friends' from abroad for the first time, however many also talked about less positive experiences. While Niles, my Australian 'friend', was excited to hear about Norway, my informants had experienced that mentioning Ghana did not always get a similar pleasant response.

Chadwick, a young entrepreneur and video game connoisseur, had had several bad experiences online after revealing that he was Ghanaian. He was regularly asked questions such as "If you are in Africa then how can you be online? I thought there was no internet in Africa!".

This was not just in the early 2000s, but continued to this day. It was particularly common while he was playing online games via PlayStation or Xbox, where players would tell him that he was lying, either because Africans had no games and no internet, or because Africans were illiterate. Other players would oftentimes disconnect from the game the moment Chadwick said he was in Ghana, sometimes saying that they had no time for 'scammers' first. After being met with this attitude a few times, he had simply stopped saying where he was from in gaming situations, even lying, and saying he was from the UK or USA. By doing this Chadwick virtually moved himself from the 'fringes' of the global to the epicentre of the global (see Burrell, 2012 for a further analysis of this). Both Burrell (2012) and Fair, Tully, Ekdale and Asante (2009) report similar negative encounters, where simply being from Ghana has brought negative responses from Euro-Americans in online conversations.

In writing about the ins-and-outs of internet scams, where young Ghanaian men perform as women on online dating-sites in order to receive money, Cassiman mentions how one of her informants, Hawa, is particularly "skilled at (partially) hiding her Ghanaian accent", and thus often becomes involved in such frauds if the target wants to call and talk to 'his girlfriend' (Cassiman, 2018: 17). Similarly, one of the ways Chadwick kept secret, or made invisible, his Ghanaianess in online gaming was to adopt the grammar of the gaming community (often in what is known as *leet speak*. See Ross (2006) for further reading).

As I mentioned in chapter 3.5; *online, your grammar is your voice*. Which accent and language you choose to use in Ghana says a great deal about the situation and the relationship of those speaking together, both digitally and non-digitally. As mentioned in chapter 2 and 4, my informants switched between pidgin, indigenous languages (such as twi or ga) and English depending on the situation they were in. Discussing the practice of *signifyin[49]'* by African American Twitter users, Florini states that "Twitter's text-based format limits many aspects of oral performance such as pronunciation, delivery, and nonverbal cues" (2014: 232). I'd like to focus on grammar use on Twitter, which is one of the 'workarounds' to overcome these limitations[50]. On Twitter the purpose is, unlike Chadwick's situation in online gaming, to show that you understand the cultural codes and possess the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) to belong in the group that is *Ghanaian Twitter*.

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[49] Signifyin' is an oral practice that has it's roots from West and Central African oral tradition and "is often used as a catch-all term for various Black American oral traditions such as woofing, marking, playing the dozens, sounding, loud talking, and others" (Florini, 2014: 226).

[50] Other methods of overcoming these limitations include the use of emojis, images and gifs, which I do not have the opportunity to examine further here.

Writing about the participation *across different SNS* boyd writes "participation tends to follow cultural and linguistic lines (…) there is an intense division along race and age lines" (boyd, 2008: 123). I argue that the same divisions can likewise be seen *within* a particular SNS, in this case Twitter, particularly in regards of cultural and linguistic lines. This often corresponds to national borders (such as 'Scottish Twitter' for instance), while for other twitter communities there are no clear boundaries to these communities, and one can partake in more than one community at a time. They are upheld largely by the online dialect that its members use, and the shared cultural capital of the group. For instance, one of the most known groups on Twitter is *Black Twitter*, refering mainly of African American Twitter users, which often write in African American Vernacular (Brock, 2012). It is important to note, as Florini does, that using terms such as Black Twitter is a heuristic manoeuvre (2014);

> Just as there is no "Black America" or single "Black culture," there is no "Black Twitter." What does exist are millions of Black users on Twitter networking, connecting, and engaging with others who have similar concerns, experiences, tastes, and cultural practices. Black people are not a monolith (Florini, 2014: 225).

What is dubbed "Ghanaian Twitter" then, is not a closed group consisting of every Ghanaian on twitter and no non-Ghanaians. Groups and cliques develop organically on twitter, by users who have sense of belonging together. Belonging to these groups is expressed through the use of hashtags, pictures, hashtags and language. Florini, for example, shows how African Americans signal that they are a part of 'Black twitter' by engaging in "hashtag games", where Twitter users all tweet about a specific hashtag, and add a comment to it. Participation in such games "required and displayed multiple forms of Black cultural competencies" (Florini, 2014: 227)[51]. An example of such a 'hashtag game' from Ghanaian Twitter is the hashtag #IfShattaWaleWerePresident. *Shatta Wale* is a famous Ghanaian dancehall artist, and the comments following this hashtag are usually a funny idea of what he would do if he was president, as seen in figure 11.

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[51] Florini is mainly referring to African Americans when using the term "Black".

Cindy Empress
@BelieveNormanyo

Follow

#IfShattaWaleWerePresident like he will give us free data for Facebook life,and dancehall will b a course in the university

7:59 AM - 6 Jun 2018

25 Retweets 97 Likes

4   25   97

Figure 11 Hashtag games

The pictures, videos and text shared on Twitter is often in the shape of *internet memes*. The term *meme* was first used by Richard Dawkins in 1976, "to describe small units of culture that spread from person to person by copying or imitation" (Dawkin, quoted in Shifman, 2013). The use of memes in social science had by and large been dismissed, until Web 2.0 and it's users started applying it to "cultural reproduction as driven by various means of copying and imitation— practices that have become essential in contemporary digital culture"(Shifman, 2013: 4). Shifman argues that memes have become so wide-spread on the internet as "user-driven imitation and remixing are not just prevalent practices: they have become highly valued pillars of a so-called *participatory culture*" (2013: 4). Building on Dawkins, and adapting the term 'meme' for the way it is used online today, Shifman defines internet memes as:

> (a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which (b) were created with awareness of each other, and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users (2013: 41).

My informants used memes particularly on Twitter and WhatsApp, though they did sometimes pop up on Facebook as well. In this thesis figure 12, 23, 30, 31 and 32 are all examples of

various memes. By focusing now on Twitter, I want to highlight how social media facilitates the creation of/discovery of/showcasing of groups and networks. I will show how my informants used Twitter to express their belonging to various groups by using specific language, following specific people, and acting in certain ways online. To belong on Ghanaian Twitter, users deploy a grammar similar to what we saw Shuri use on Facebook in chapter 4. In the Twitter thread below (figure 12) we can see how the initial tweet, from a representative for Blogging Ghana (in green), is articulated using fairly standard grammar and formal language. However, as 'Yellow' answers, and it becomes a conversation between the two friends, there is a switch, and the tweets are increasingly written in pidgin.

BLOGGING GHANA 2015
Blogging Ghana meeting today at 15:00
Venue iSpace OSU
If u have a blog or Social Media account, you are invited

🌐 Oversett fra engelsk

💬 3   🔁 10   ♡ 4   ✉

Følger

Svar til @▨▨▨▨▨

BLOGGING GHANA What if you troll online and message boards?

🌐 Oversett fra engelsk

05.11 - 19. apr. 2015

1 liker

💬 1   🔁   ♡ 1   ✉

Tweet svaret ditt

BLOGGING GHANA 2015
Svar til @▨▨▨▨▨
😂😂😂 u are still invited

🌐 Oversett fra engelsk

💬 1   🔁   ♡ 1   ✉

· 19. apr. 2015
BLOGGING GHANA I never bore. I dey there already sef :p

🌐 Oversett fra engelsk

Figure 12 Blogging Ghana inviting to a meeting

This boy joins the trosky with his mum n opens the bible on his phone but the WhatsApp messages from 'my love' keeps popping up. Boys abr3

Oversett fra engelsk

07:02 - 3. sep. 2015

Figure 13 "Trosky" is a shared taxi-minivan, also called a 'trotro'. Boys abr3 means "boys are tired" and is a meme commonly used as a (sometimes sarcastic) version of 'life is hard'.

52

In figure 13, above, there is a typical example of Twi and English is mixed within a single statement, which approaches the traditional code switch. 'Purple' writes the entire tweet it in nearly standardised English, but at the very end he switches to Twi. This also emulates oral patterns of speech, where Twi is often used at the very end of a statement to emphasise, or make, a point. While Chadwick and Hawa are When discussing this form of code switching, one om my informants stated that "It makes me feel more Ghanaian", and that seems to be essence of it; to *be* Ghanaian, both for oneself and for others to see. The L in *ASL?,* location, remains the most important question when strangers are connecting, even on social media.

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52 Religion and ICT would be an interesting field for further research in Ghana. Nearly all my informants kept a Bible or Quran app on their phone, while many churches are active on SNS.

Football

Figure 14 Playing football

The day I arrived in Ghana was also the finals of the 2015 *Africa Cup of Nations*, the international football championship of Africa. The final match was between Ghana and the Ivory Coast, and it was an unparalleled thriller of a match. After 120 minutes the score was 0-0, and so the two teams entered a penalty shoot-out. They were head-to-head after 8 shots, but in the end the Ivory Coast won with their final penalty shot ending the mats with a score of 9-8 to the Ivory Coast. This was all going on as Osei and I were in our taxi driving through Accra. At the airport we had barely been able to see each other due to the crowds that had formed around the airport bar's TV, and every chop bar, restaurant, and café we passed that had a TV

was filled with people watching the match. Some houses had put their TV outside and collected a crowd of friends and family spilling onto sidewalks watching the finals.

Osei and I arrived at the House just as the penalty shoot-out was about to start, and the hallway outside my room-to-be was filled with eager, cheering - then frustrated, and shouting, boys watching the match on the tv. I remember that I entered the hallway, and they all looked at me slightly bewildered but then turned immediately back to the tv. Not even an exhausted white girl showing up late at night in a scruffy old hostel in Faaku could take the attention away from this match. That these boys were to become my close informants and friends did not cross my mind as I stood shocked in my room that night, completely overwhelmed by all the noise and the heat and the strangeness of everything. And that football would become an important part of my fieldwork was so unexpected that I didn't even realise it had until I came back home.

Football is a major preoccupation on very many levels in Ghana and can easily be labelled as the national past time. The national football team, the Black Stars, are high in the hierarchy of celebrities. Ghanaians have been reading about football in newspapers, heard matches on the radio or seen them on the TV for decades.

In this chapter I will examine how football and mobile phones are interconnected for my informants. Nigh on every evening there would be a football game going on in the field outside the hostel. The availability of the football field and the surrounding benches facilitated a space to hang out, which in many ways resembles what Ann Cassiman describes as *a base* (2018). The boys who regularly hung out, slept and ate there referred to each other as brothers, using a vocabulary of kinship to imply "similar interpersonal relationships and social codes of care and respect" (Cassiman 2018: 9). Most of the boys would join the evening match, and friends and acquaintances would come from other houses and places to join in. Some played in flip-flops, some played in football shoes. The game went on until a set number of goals was reached, and then the loosing team would be out and the next team in. I was often invited to come watch the game, and sat with those not currently playing on the low brick wall surrounding the field. I would sometimes be put in charge of watching their mobile phones while they played, or of fetching water for those who came back from the game.

Playing the odds

As I got to know the boys and hung out more and more with them, they asked me which football team I was rooting for. I was trying to think of an English team to mention, when one of them said "It has to be Rosenborg right? They are clearly the best team. Or is it Viking?". It took a while for my confused brain to translate the English pronunciation to Norwegian, at which point I was simultaneously shocked that he knew names of Norwegian football teams (much less which ones was the best!) and outraged that someone would accuse me of rooting for Rosenborg. The rest of my fieldwork I endured quite a bit of teasing as "my" football team, Brann, did worse and worse in their matches in 2015.

How did they possess such detailed knowledge about football teams in a faraway land? And, even more bafflingly, why? My informants claimed that they were simply super-interested in football, and while this was true, their intricate knowledge of European football (not just Norwegian football; Croatian, Bulgarian, Dutch, they could always name a favourite football team) was mostly due to the fact that the more you know about football the easier it is to make money. It turned out that the boys were betting. They would regularly spend between 10GHS and up towards 300 GHS [53]on bets, placed in one of the many betting-bars-shops-places in Faaku, and wagered on all the matches they could.

I did not figure this out until about two months later. I kept seeing these handwritten notes lying around, with what appeared to be some sort of code on them. It would look something like this:

8486	1	4
8487	X	20
9240	1	4
9244	2	20
9400	X	8

I did not really think about them, but as I saw some of the boys writing them down and comparing them on a few occasions, and only while I was supposed to be occupied in conversations with others, I eventually asked.

Betting is not illegal in Ghana, and it was no secret to be held that the boys were betting on sports, and yet I had to drag the specifics out of them. What the codes meant I had to figure

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[53] In March 2015 1 Ghana Cedi was worth 0.2611 US dollars. So, the boys would place bets ranging from about 2$ to about 80$.

out by myself (column one is the match code given by the betting agency, the 1 x 2 in column two signifies the end result, and column three is the amount of money they bet on the outcome) and still they would not let me bet on anything myself. I am not even sure they told me the truth as to how much money they spent on these games. In the end, I was promised that I could join the betting when Martin—my partner—arrived and he could approve of the money spent, but by that time I was occupied with other things in my fieldwork.

Their reluctance to admit any of this to me might have been due to the immoral reputation of betting, that they did not want to admit to having extra money to spend on such things or because it was not something they deemed it necessary for me to know. Recall my methodological challenges with which questions are ok to ask, discussed in chapter 3; further questions about betting, where the money came from and what they were used for were quickly avoided by my informants. Betting was clearly a man's game, and I did not want to keep pushing my way in, and end up being pushed put instead. Additionally, the secrecy surrounding betting for those not 'in the know' also heightened the social status of those who did know, and the boys seemed to enjoy that I did not fully grasp all the connotations of the betting. Discussing secrecy, "regimes of truth" and "the politics of display and disguise" in relation to alcohol consumption among her Mozambican informants quote Charles Piot;

> Secrecy among the Kabre of Togo seems not so much to hide the something real, or exclude access to fixed things (wealth, status), as to set in motion a process–of interpretation, ambiguity, and the quest for hierarchy – and to keep it going (Piot, 1993; in Archambault, 2017: 69).

While Archambault's informants hid or disguised their alcohol consumption in a way that still made it clear what was happening, the boys disguised their betting practices in a similar manner. The notes never mentioned actual team names or value, and those who went to place bets rarely said so, but rather said they were "going out small" or "going to Wura street"; sentences that could mean they were doing just about anything. Additionally, Archambault demonstrates that while "Indeed, control over the circulation of knowledge is also intimately linked to the reproduction of socioeconomic hierarchies(…)" it is also an important point that "concealment helps evade the objectifying gaze of others (…) when being known would put one in a position of vulnerability" (Archambault, 2017: 70). Had the boys' betting, and the amount of money they lost and gained, been wider known it would likely have put them in a position where they could not have spent their money as freely (see also Ann Cassiman, 2018 for her analysis of cyber-fraud in Ghana, and the way successful 'game-boys' and 'browsers' keep their earnings

hidden). Still, after I learned about their betting habits more people felt comfortable asking to lend my laptop to check the odds, and I could more easily tell if a bad mood was due to unlucky bets (or, of course, the opposite).

As I was pretty much kept in the dark about the intricacies of gambling and betting, it is hard for me to analyse it much further. However, I think it is worth noting that it happened. For some of my informants this was likely a valid way of making money, and thus knowledge of football translates in to an earning opportunity. This led to what we can call digital labour, where they would spend time on laptops or smartphones, accessing the internet and social media, to gain information about the players, the teams, the coaches, the weather forecast at the stadium of the match, everything that can impact the game and the end results. However, their interest in football also extended to their social media, and especially to Twitter.

Being part of the team

I have never had any great interest in football, and yet some of my best memories from my fieldwork is staying up late in the night with Bakari as he tried to explain the how's and why's of the game to me. What is offside? Why does it matter which formation the players use when they all seem to be running aimlessly around anyway ("No, it's a clear 4-4-2")? How do they keep their hair as footballers are the fashion icons to follow? Which players are benched, who have sprained their ankle, who is feeling homesick and which ones are rumoured to be bought by a new club? And most importantly, how does all of this affect this week's odds? Below, figure 15, is a screenshot of a typical night's surfing the net on my laptop.
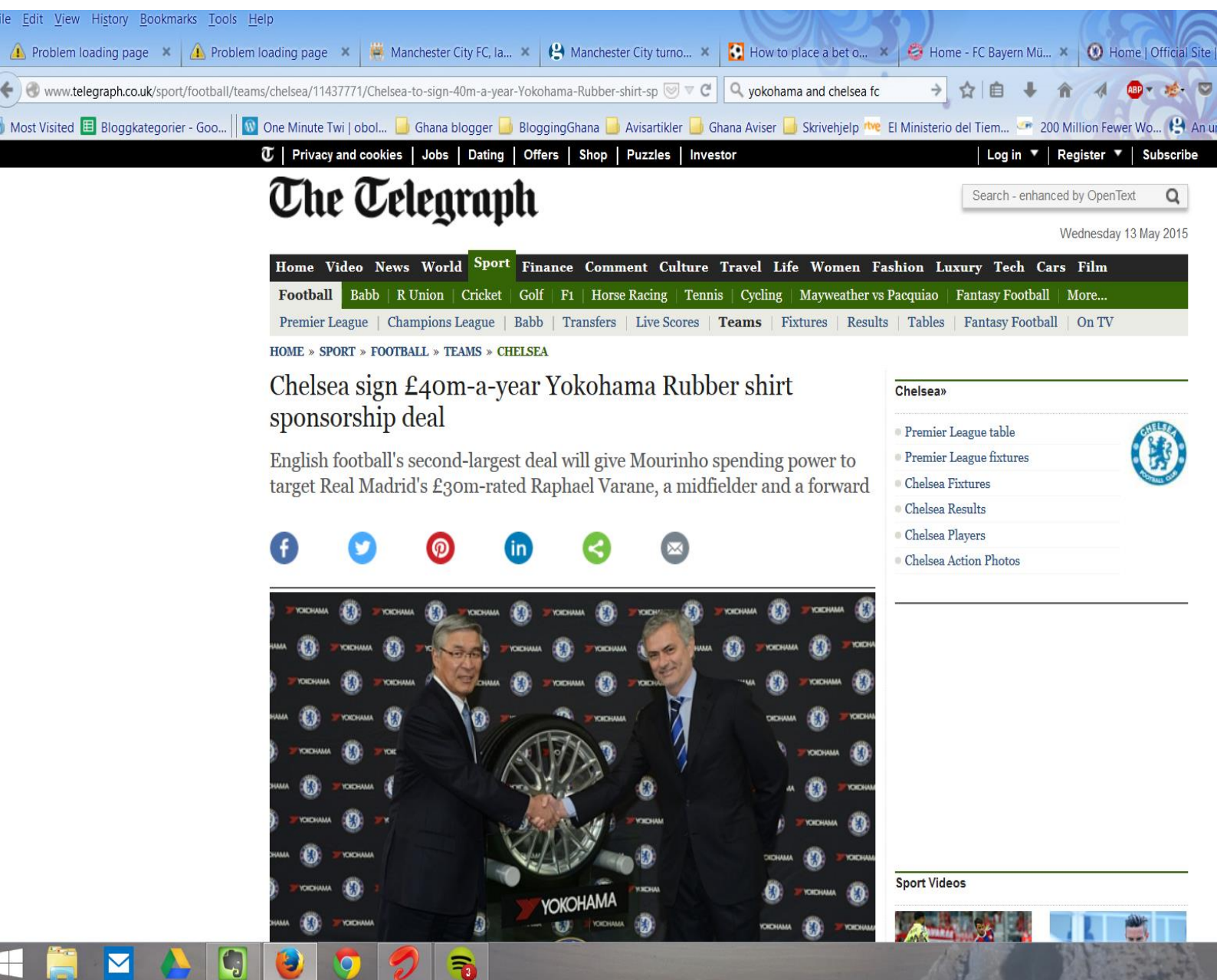
Figure 15:Screenshot of the authors browser window after a typical evening with Bakari

You can see how two of the pages have not loaded properly, likely due to timing out on my slow modem, there is one gambling site tab, two tabs dealing with Manchester City and one with FC Bayern, likely because they were playing that week, and the official homepage of Chelsea FC. The tab that is open is the Telegraph's specific Chelsea site. Other boys would also sometimes ask to borrow my laptop so they could check the odds and read the news, but Bakari was the one who really took the time to include me in the process. Teaching me about football, at great length, was probably a ploy to keep using my laptop for the time being, but it also led to interesting conversations and comparisons of daily life.

Using my laptop we would regularly sit until 1 in the morning looking up team sites, checking odds websites, and just reading about the life of these football players. It was a great chance for both of us to dream ourselves rich. While neither I nor Bakari had any chance of being a well-paid footballer, Bakari sure could dream about the money the managers made. Looking up salaries, reading about the price tags on their clothes and seeing pictures of their homes, it was clear that those involved in European football had really made it. Dreaming about what one would do if one suddenly won the lottery, or got an exceptionally well-paid job, is a fun way to get to know each other. And it turned out we would both spend our money on a new smartphone, and probably on shoes.

Of course, the freedom to travel wherever you wanted, to leave the on-off of Dumsor behind and to enjoy nice restaurants and good clubs would also be appreciated. This way of dreaming of the future is not uncommon among Ghanaian youth, and now "gets a more virtual dimension since many an imagined future is within reach in a few mouse clicks" (Cassiman, 2018: 13). This way of connecting to a fantasy-life is part of the appeal of both the World Wide Web and social media, here made clear through an interest in football. Footballers post pictures of their homes and cars as well as football, and it is easy to feel a personal connection when you see their private media in this way.

Of the students, only one person did not mention football at all on their Twitter profile. The others had all or one of the following; Profile picture and/or header set as a football player or team logo, their team mentioned in their bio or a team hashtag in the bio (e.g. #HalaMadrid, #ManU). Most of the bloggers did not mention football in such a specific way, although a few did.

Twitter also lends itself to the exciting opportunity of telling anyone exactly what you think. Just @ them in your tweet, and they will get a notification that they have been tagged in your message. Bruns et.al. Writes "For the handful of clubs which have a major worldwide following, Twitter provides a useful channel to connect with these international fans" (2014: 271). Figure 16 is an example of this, where Bakari has tagged the official Chelsea Twitter account directly, giving them some sound advice about letting some players go to make room for new ones.

Figure 16 Twitter advice to Chelsea FC

Being able to connect to this world via the internet was important for Bakari, and his smartphone lent him the opportunity to do so. Twitter was especially suited for this purpose, and Bakari got most of his news updates (and especially about football) from Twitter[54].

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[54] This is true for a lot of users of social media, and since the 2016 US elections there has been plenty of debate going about the algorithms that chooses what you see on your social networking sites and the creation of so called echo-chambers

Figure 17: Possible exciting news about Paul Pogba

In figure 17 we see a typical tweet interaction; A Twitter user (yellow) has tweeted that there is "Major news coming shortly from Italy." to which Bakari (green) has replied (via re-tweet) "Pogba????". I have censored their Twitter usernames, but they both have handles referring to football, Bakari's even mentioning Chelsea. It is thus relatively clear that they are both talking about football. Knowing the context, those reading these tweets would know that Bakari is showing his excitement that Chelsea FC might have managed to purchase the midfielder Paul Pogba from Juventus by his excessive use of question marks (they had however, not.) The yellow user is one of the major Chelsea fan accounts, and re-tweeting and interacting with other Twitter accounts in this way made Bakari a part of the worldwide fanbase of the boys in blue. Other times, as seen in figure 18, Bakari would simply tweet his thoughts without the use of hashtags or @handles, trusting that his followers understood the context.

Figure 18 A commentary on the upcoming match

Twitter creates a space where Bakari can present himself as a football-expert, and in particular a hard-core Chelsea fan. Bruns, Weller & Harrington writes that:

> Twitter and other social media have become increasingly important tools for maintaining the relationships between fans and their idols across a range of activities, from politics and the arts to celebrity and sports culture. (2014: 263)

By engaging in this, Bakari connects with others that share his interest, and thus becomes part of the worldwide phenomena that is football fandom. By exhibiting both his knowledge of football, his cultural capital, and by using grammar that marks him as Ghanaian, Bakari confirms to himself and his followers that he belongs in the Twitter networks he is in, both locally and globally.

Dumsor must stop!

Figure 19 The pricelist at a barbershop where the services are more expensive if the electricity is off and the barber must use the generator.

In the spring of 2015 the power outages known as DumSor—meaning "on and off"—hit an all-time high in Ghana. While it was annoying for me to be without power to charge my laptop or cell phone, or to have trouble sleeping in the heat without a fan, these power cuts had much more serious consequences for others. Without street lights, the streets became more dangerous after dark. Businesses who dealt in cold and frozen food, frequently small family owned places that had managed to get a hold of a freezer, were liable to lose all their food and revenue. The DumSor was most serious for hospitals. Most of them have a generator, but these were also unreliable and not always suited for the massive job it was to keep a hospital running for several days in a row. Stories about women being forced to give birth by torchlight, even surgeries taking place under a doctor's headlamp, were fairly common. Further, Ibrahim et.al have found that Ghanaian students are suffering anxiety issues due to DumSor and the uncertainty of the electrical power supply (Ibrahim, Aryeetey, Asampong, Dwomoh, & Nonvignon, 2016). They argue that DumSor affects student's anxiety levels especially, due to

how they "have become so dependent on modern technology such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and other personal computers for their routine academic activities" (2016:2).

I would argue that the dependency upon these technologies reach further than academic activities, and, as we have seen, most of my informants felt that being without a smartphone for a prolonged period of time left them isolated and stressed. Keeping one's phone at maximum charge at all time in case of DumSor was therefore a top priority for many, and there would nearly always be a phone or a laptop charging in available outlets. For months after I got home I could feel the familiar stress to find a charger if my phone battery went below 60%. Those who could afford them had extra power banks, always fully charged, for their phones in case DumSor hit unexpectedly. Some people preferred a feature phone over a smartphone for this reason. Feature phones use way less battery. One of the more popular version was the X-Tigi, which had a removable, rechargeable battery, a camera, and a torchlight, and could also access the internet via a browser, and connect to WhatsApp. It did however not look particularly modern, and it was mostly associated with men above fifty. The ongoing DumSor problem did lead to more and more of my informants considering buying one, if only to keep it as a backup phone. While none of the students did, both Uncle Stan and dr. Andy preferred the X-Tigi.

Figure 20 The X-Tigi. The bulky appearance and the practical handle dissuaded those who saw themselves as fashionable from buying it.

In this section I will explore how Twitter was used as a medium to bring people together over DumSor issues, and how these Twitter conversations eventually moved outside the digital sphere. As more and more people felt and became aware of the effect of the power outages, so also Twitter became more and more engaged. DumSor was a popular topic of conversation for both non-digital and digital spaces. Below is an example of a tweet complaining over the situation:
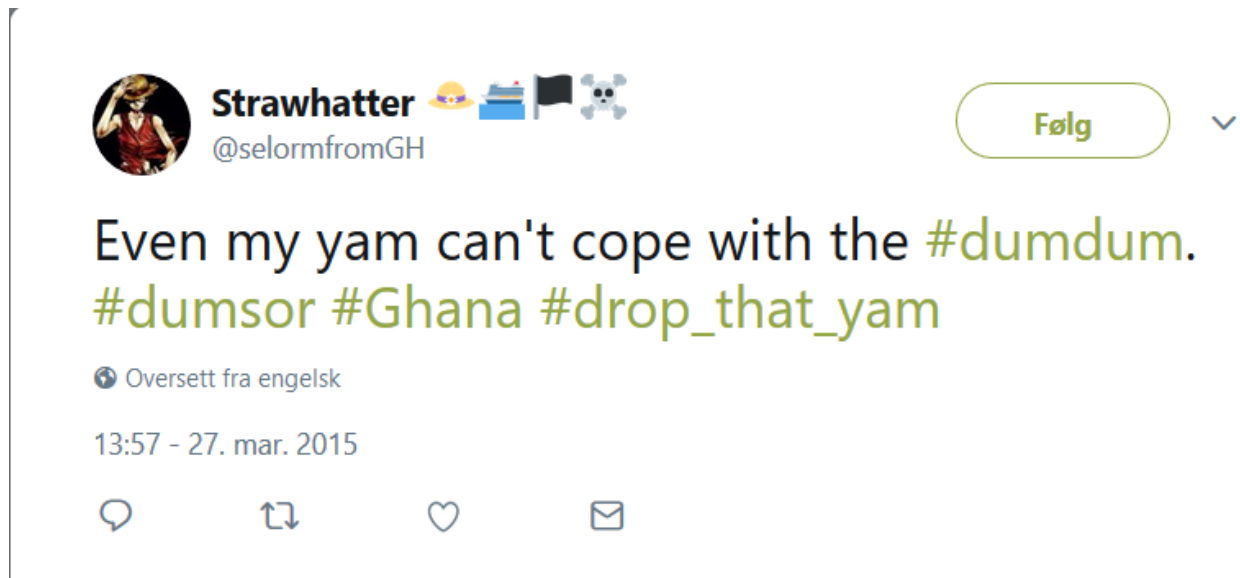

Figure 21 A twitter user complaining that even their "yam", mobile phones that use much less power than smartphones, cannot be used during DumSor

In March, BloggingGhana, via their spin-off organisation BlogCamp, hosted a 'Twitter chat' debating Dumsor. By creating the hashtag #DumsorChat BloggingGhana generated a way for a discussion to be held on Twitter. This was a fairly common way for BloggingGhana to operate, and they often discussed news related issues. They would advertise for the event in advance, by posting about it on all their social media channels. Figure 22 shows a 'digital poster' which was used to advertise the event. By setting a time and date it becomes easier for people to engage in the discussion in *real time*[55], however some people also kept using the hashtags after the initial discussion had taken place.

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[55] This is a term meaning that things are happening digitally in the same timeline as nondigitally. So, tweeters would be able to read and respond other's tweets as they were sent, and thus creating a more natural conversation than if it were several hours in between a sent tweet and a response.

Figure 22 A digital poster for the 'Dumsor Chat'

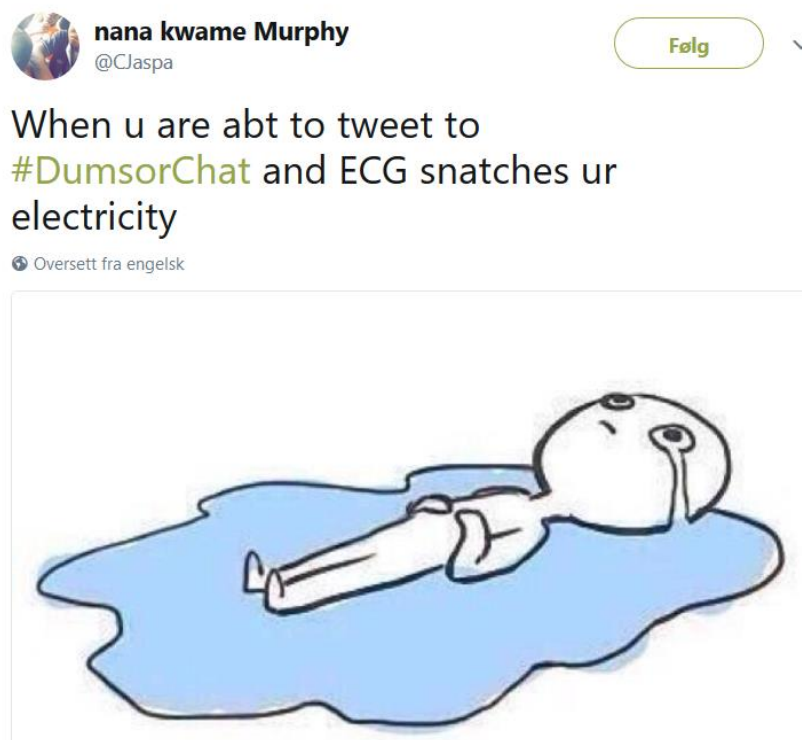Below are examples of the conversations that followed:

Figure 23 This is an example of how one can use memes to show emotions

BloggingGhana @BloggingGhana · 27. mar. 2015

What would you do differently if you were the President or the Minister for Power to resolve the current situation? #DumsorChat

Oversett fra engelsk

💬 10   🔁 7   ♡   ✉

Efo Dela 🐺🐐✔ @Amegaxi · 27. mar. 2015

The problem isn't what one Govt hasn't done but what successive Govts haven't done. Still, this one is clueless @BloggingGhana #DumsorChat

Oversett fra engelsk

💬 2   🔁 8   ♡ 2   ✉

novisi dzitrie @novisid · 27. mar. 2015

@Amegaxi to say this govt is clueless means you have clues. so on what basis do you make this claim? @BloggingGhana

Oversett fra engelsk

💬 2   🔁 2   ♡   ✉

Efo Dela 🐺🐐✔ @Amegaxi · 27. mar. 2015

Not necessarily. I dont need to know how to cook waakye for me to know when the waakye I'm eating is bad @novisid @BloggingGhana #DumsorChat

Oversett fra engelsk

💬 3   🔁 5   ♡ 2   ✉

Figure 24 BlogginGhana asks a question, and a discussion begins.

The conversation about DumSor continued, both on Twitter, other social media and nondigitally, and on the 29th of April Ghanaian movie star Yvonne Nelson tweeted the simple message *#dumsormuststop*. Soon the idea of a peaceful demonstration was born. The Dumsor Vigil, as it was named, attracted a lot of attention, especially in the days leading up to demonstration. While it was supposed to remain apolitical, many people accused Yvonne Nelson and the other demonstrators for working with the opposing party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Others, as Nana Osei Nimrod below, could not see the point of having a demonstration.

NANA OSEI NIMROD
@de__realest

Følg

So what are their ideas about how to end dumsor or these celebs are also dumb as our government. #dumsormuststop

Oversett fra engelsk

15:42 - 16. mai 2015

5 retweets

💬 2   ↻ 5   ♡   ✉

Tweet svaret ditt

Darkwa George @d_darlyn · 16. mai 2015
Svar til @de__realest

@de__realest the celebs you are calling dumb were not elected to solve national problems you asshole. Big difference btn govt n celeb.

Oversett fra engelsk

Figure 25 An example of a more heated response on twitter.

🇬🇭 **Nicholas Tetteh Nartey**
@KobbystonePB

Følg

Do people actually expert Mahama to fix dumsor cos of the vigil? Massa he said he is has dead goat syndrome YENTIE OBIA😂 #dumsormuststop

Figure 26 : A tweeter expressing disbelief that President Mahama will be able to solve the crisis.

As we see in figure 26, the tweeter mentions "dead goat syndrome" and "Yentie Obiaa". These refer to two separate incidents involving president Mahama. In a speech given to Ghanaian immigrants in Botswana in March 2015, Mahama said the now famous words;

> I have seen more demonstrations and strikes in my first two years. I don't think it can get worse. It is said that when you kill a goat and you frighten it with a knife, it doesn't fear the knife because it is dead already. [56]

While Mahama wanted to show that he has seen so many demonstrations that he no longer cares about them, the idea of the president as a "dead goat" struck a chord with many, and it became a running gag on social media. When a video recorded on a smartphone of the president and the Asantehene dancing to Daddy Lumba's hit song *Yentie Obiaa* (roughly translated; *I do what I want)* surfaced, the jokes were not difficult to come up with. Some people also made images (memes) that were circulated on social media (on Twitter and WhatsApp in particular) such as this:
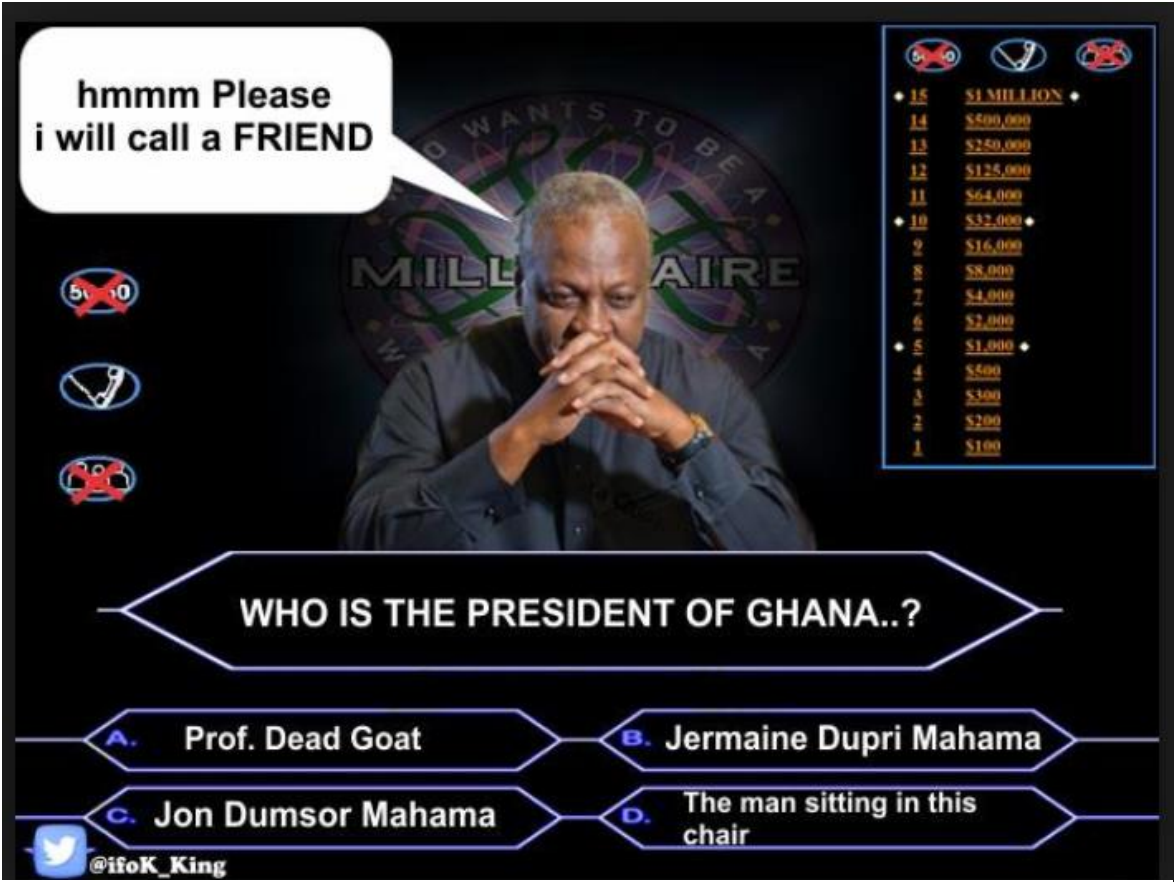

Figure 27 A photoshopped image of president Mahama as a 'who wants to be a millionaire' contestant, with humorous answer alternatives

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[56] *I have dead goat syndrome- Mahama tells Ghanaians* (11.03 2015 Myjoyonline.com)

When the Dumsor Vigil took place on May 16th it attracted thousands of people[57], most dressed in the traditional funeral colours of black and red. It gained a lot of attention in traditional forms of media, newspaper, TV, and radio—in addition to creating a general buzz among people. I had planned to attend the vigil myself, and beforehand I was often advised to not go as it could turn out violent; a massive demonstration with angry people, and the police would be there as well. After, when the vigil had turned out peaceful, and I had been unable to attend due to illness, I got a lot of comments about how unfortunate I was that I had missed it, and how important this event must be for my fieldwork. While Mahama kept on playing the "dead goat" and not much happened to Dumsor, the Dumsor Vigil still stood as an example for people of how social media can be a powerful vessel to organise and inform the masses.

Summary

In this chapter I have endeavoured to provide the reader with a sense of how Twitter created a space where my informants could signal that they belong to specific social groups and networks. I have argued that even though Twitter, and SNS in general, are global digital spaces, the users actual physical location still remained important. I showed how it in some digital spaces was a liability to be Ghanaian (such as on dating sites and online games), while on other sites, such as Twitter, a digital space that is specifically for Ghanaians has emerged. My informants therefor juggle how visible their Ghanaians is in these digital spaces, by employing tools such as grammar and exhibiting the cultural knowledge they believe will show that they belong in a certain space. In the section on Dumsor we saw how a group that first formed on Twitter got together to form a physical demonstration against electricity cuts. Belonging is another side of the connectivity that was discussed in chapter 4, and while this chapter focused on creating the feeling of belonging to an undefined group consisting mostly of strangers, in the next chapter I will examine how this appears in a known group of friends.

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[57] *Thousands attend 'Dumsor' vigil* (16.05 2015) http://citifmonline.com/2015/05/16/thousands-attend-dumsor-vigil/

Chapter 6

WhatsApp, and the adventures of the pasco police

As I mentioned in chapter 4, Florence's main concern when she had 'a yam', was that she could not access WhatsApp. Florence's decreased Facebook activity, in comparison with Shuri, was mainly due to her phone, which could not run the Facebook app. While she sometimes used my laptop to check Facebook, she eventually found that WhatsApp covered her needs better; she primarily wanted to stay in touch with her friends and family back home. WhatsApp is a messaging service (*Mobile Instant Messaging, MIM*) and is one of the most used social media in Ghana. In an interview, one of the bloggers, Duke, concluded that:

> WhatsApp has really changed the game. It got a lot of people to use smartphones - well not exactly smartphones, but at least phones that will WhatsApp. You have, uhm, people who are not too well educated or too tech savvy, when they are buying the phone the first question they ask is '*can I make it WhatsApp*'?

WhatsApp has some advantages over traditional SMS that has made it very popular in Ghana. Firstly, WhatsApp uses mobile data to send and receive messages, which costs less than regular SMS. Secondly, one can create groups. For Florence having access to WhatsApp had been her number one priority when getting a new phone "Oh, I should drop this Yam and find a WhatsApp phone" was a frequent comment from her, as she spent her credit on calling her friends one by one, and still missed out on the nuances of gossip and news from her friend group. When she finally got a new phone she hardly seemed to leave WhatsApp. Her phone was constantly buzzing, and she received countless messages a day, as did most of my informants. Thirdly, it is very easy to copy-paste and send a message received in WhatsApp. This has led to a widespread circulation of chain-messages and memes.

Most of my informants were members of 5 to 25 groups, and only one of my informants was not on WhatsApp at all. Interestingly, the groups commonly correlate with non-digital relationships, though a few were also in groups with people that they had connected to online and had not met outside a digital space. Some groups were mostly for information and to easily arrange meetings; for example, my informants had a WhatsApp group for the boys who usually played football, where those who wanted to play would name a time and place for the others to show up. Many were in WhatsApp groups with their Church congregation, and most had a family WhatsApp group. Those of my informants who attended the same college were nearly

all part of a WhatsApp group called "Big Family" where they planned which parties to go to, shared news, and gossiped about the social life in college. The name "Big Family" is again indicative of the widespread use of kinship terms to show relations in Ghana (Cassiman, 2018). In the latter part of my fieldwork, after Florence got her 'WhatsApp-phone', and after I was added to the Big Family group by Bakari, I started receiving much more messages than I had before. While Florence had hardly sent me any messages at all prior to changing her phone, I now woke up nearly every morning to a bible verse, or a joke, or a picture that she had sent me. The pictures were often a type of 'digital gift'. Figure 28 is an example of such, which I will call *WhatsApp gifts*.
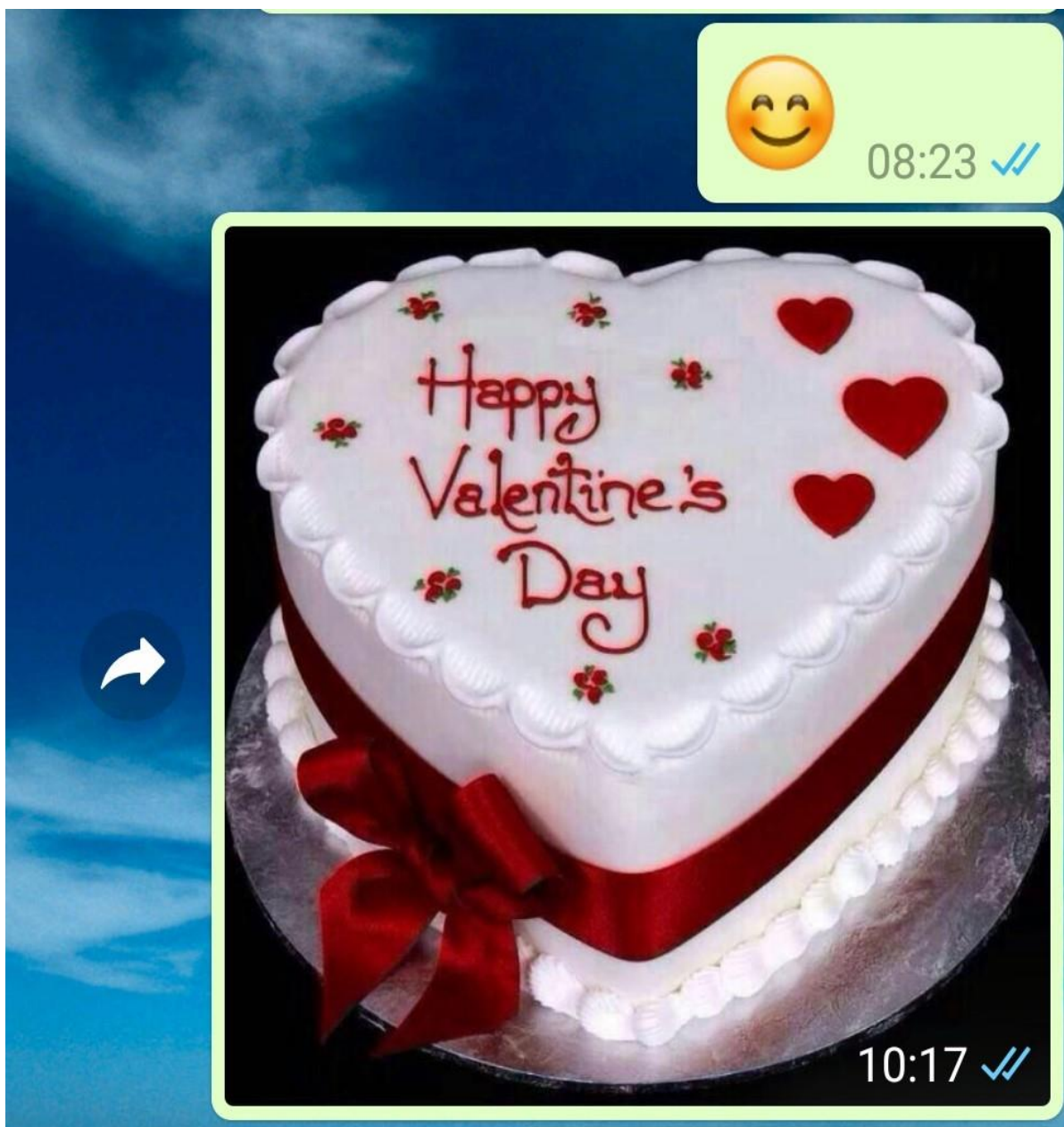

Figure 28 A WhatsApp gift for Valentine's day

These would typically be sent on a person's birthday, on mother day, Christmas and other occasions that merited attention. Like this picture, received for Valentine's Day, the object was typically a cake, some chocolates or perhaps flowers. Like non-digital gifts, this enhances the social bond between giver and receiver (Mauss, 1954 [1925]). On Valentine's day, Shuri was quite happy that she had received several such gifts. The chain-messages, which figure 29 shows an example of, were often questions to answer, usually framed in a funny way, and to be forwarded to other friends.

Both men and women sent and received such messages. This is one of the ways that WhatsApp facilitated in creating what Archambault calls "new virtual spaces of intimacy" (Archambault, 2017). Benjamin Adum-Kumi has additionally researched how WhatsApp is used as a site for sexual exploration among colleges students in Ghana, and how "Discussions, debates and conversations with friends on sexual contents on WhatsApp provide an avenue for learning about sex, relationships, trust, and modern technology itself" (Adu-Kumi, 2016: 59). Sterling explained that he perceived them as a safe way to flirt and to 'get a feel of' how a relationship to a particular girl was going, without being too obvious. For example, in the example below, if the participant answered "her lover" it would be clear that she was in a relationship already.
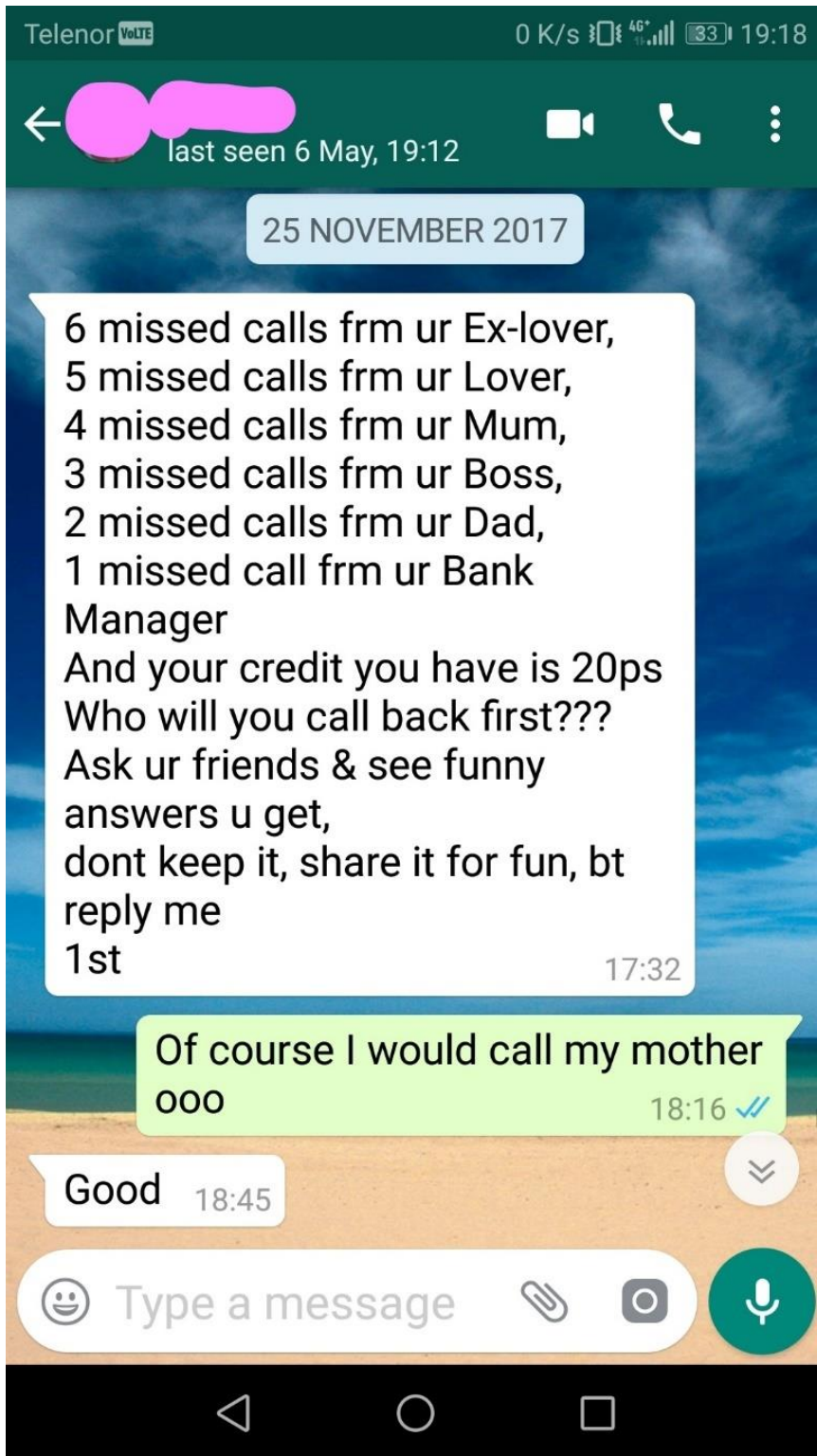
Figure 29 Who would you call? A typical example of a chain-message.

Both in terms of how my informants perceive it and in its functionality, WhatsApp is in many ways the opposite of Twitter. The groups on WhatsApp are clearly bordered (unless you are added to the group you cannot access it), and there is no public space, such as Twitter's timeline, where you can post something that everyone can see. Thus, it is not surprising that the only one of my informants that did not have WhatsApp was Kaluuya, who was a 'big man' on Twitter. When I at first was surprised to learn that he did not use WhatsApp, he blamed the frequent chain-messages he would get while he used it. His friends and family kept adding him to groups for this or that, and he thus ended up in a situation where hundreds of people could send him messages, often about stuff he cared very little about. Yet this was an annoyance nearly everyone I talked to about WhatsApp mentioned. As mentioned in chapter 5, Kaluuya was also very popular on Twitter. He had many followers, and he was frequently being retweeted. The copy-paste mechanisms of WhatsApp, however, do not attach any significance to who wrote the message first. Thus, Kaluuya had at one point received his own poem, copied from his blog, in a group chat, without any of the members recognising that he was the one who wrote it. This lack of recognition for those who create original content means that WhatsApp does not have 'the Kula potential' of Twitter.

Additionally, there is no option to see how many times a particular text has been copied and sent and no one can see how many friends or followers you have, and so there is no visible *status* to be gained within WhatsApp. Yet, WhatsApp groups are commonly used to exhibit cultural capital. This is shown by understanding the jokes and references within a group, and though it is fleeting in the app itself, being 'good' at WhatsApp (i.e. posting interesting things to the group) also makes one a more popular person outside of the digital. Among my informants it was not uncommon to hear statements such as "See here ooo! What Winston has brought to the group!". This was then followed by either a reading aloud of what Winston had posted in the WhatsApp group, or a simple forwarding to whomever present had not seen what had been posted. Thus, Winston gained a reputation as a funny person to hang around with—both offline and online.

In the conference paper *What's up with WhatsApp?* Church and Oliveira highlights that research on SMS (Short Message Service) have been the subject to numerous studies, while *Mobile Instant Messaging* (MIM) such as WhatsApp has not been as scrutinised by researchers (Church & Oliveira, 2013: 353). Additionally, they mention how this research has covered a wide range of countries, including Finland, Norway, Japan, the UK and the US (Church & Oliveira, 2013: 353). While others have written about WhatsApp, and in Ghana, since then (Mensa-Bonsu, 2015; Yeboah & Ewur, 2014), I have not seen any direct references to *Pasco*

and WhatsApp as a platform for youth to show off their cultural capital via memes, which I will examine here.

Pasco is particular Ghanaian expression, which indicated that something is 'old news'. The expression is supposedly taken from the school system and is an abbreviation for 'Past Questions', in the meaning of things you already know the answer too or things you have seen before. I am including this particular expression to illustrate the importance of 'keeping up' to belong. My informants put great value on knowing the latest news, having seen the latest films and TV-series and wearing the latest fashion.[58] Pasco is an expression that is particularly in use in WhatsApp groups, and it is used to stop the behaviour that annoyed Kaluuya so much; the ever-repeating messages that were circulated in groups. Internet memes, such as the one in figure 30, where typical 'pasco offenders'. Figure 30 is a humours picture, which I received from 2 different sources within the same 48 hours, and also saw on Twitter; it spread quickly, and quickly became pasco. In this way Pasco became nearly an on-going game, that everyone was always playing. Whenever you found a new image, a funny joke, a wise tale, you could post it in your WhatsApp group(s) and enjoy the status that came with being the first to know of something. On the other hand, nearly everyone in these groups would be ready to state that you were not first, and not only that, you did not pay enough attention not to know, by texting at 'Pasco warning' in the group.

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[58] A small example is the 2015 leak of the first four episodes of the fifth season of the HBO series *Game of Thrones*. My informants immediately got their hands on the episodes, and watching and keeping up with *Game of Thrones* became quite important for a while.

When you cheat on a Nigerian girl and their squad comes to collect your soul

Figure 30 Nigerian witches often take the shape of black cats. Here the picture indicates that if you cheat on a Nigerian girl, you will be attacked by witches.

After the few days it took for this image to be spread to 'everyone', sending it to a group chat would immediately yield the response "Pasco!", either by text or image (see figure 31 and 32). The below quote is (ironically) a chain-message warning against Pasco, which I received through the Big Family WhatsApp group:

Pascosynthesis

(all u need to know abt pasco)

Dfn: pasco refers to anything be it text, video, audio or image posted on a group page with it being an already posted item.......pasco can be far behind time,very recent or sometimes in rare cases before time...this is the reason y the phenomenon is very priceless n causes acute n sharp pain wen used on the offender.

Causes: pasco can be caused by various factors so I may want to mention buh a few

1.silliness

2.short sightedness

3.lack of vission.

4.ability to copy n paste

5.the indiscriminate taste for leaking exam question.....

6.madness

7.ignorance

8.laziness

N so many more

Prevention:

1.frequently check the group page to avoid embarrassment

2.vaccinate all propasco miscreants in the group

3.if they don't allow vaccination remove dem.

4.admins should organize refresher courses for these disabled ones.

5.get help from psychiatrists.

6.there should be someone hu will always say PASCO...to keep pple on their toes.

Effects:

1.it wastes credit because ud have to download the same thing again...

2.it waste memory

3.it disturbs the peace of the group..this is because someone will say pasco n the pasconite will fight the person

4.it draws the group bak.

Let us all join hands to fight the Pasco menace....all pasconites should learn from this...

Pasco....yenkcnkwaaaaaa💪

The 'Big Family' WhatsApp group had a particularly active "Pasco Police", but both Florence and Nancy would at times complain that their friends sent them Pasco via WhatsApp as well, especially as large files, such as images and videos, uses a lot of credit to download.

Figure 31 That Pasco is also an US town leads to some funny coincidences, such as this picture of the actual Pasco Police, which is frequently in use in Ghanaian WhatsApp groups.

Figure 32 Bowing to the Pasco King; a way of expressing that someone is a frequent re-poster.

Summary

I think it's important to note that an important aspect of internet memes, such as the Pasco memes above, are that they are humorous (Shifman, 2013: 78-81). Therefore, if you lack the cultural capital to understand why they are funny, you clearly mark yourself as non-belonging. For the average non-African, the picture of the cats in figure 30 would not make much sense, and most non-Ghanaians are unlikely to understand the term Pasco. Thus, "'Meme literacy' influences users' status in online communities and indicates membership" (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2015: 486). My informants enjoyed WhatsApp both for the chance to stay connected to their networks, but also as a space where they could increase their own social status through the display of cultural capital. Additionally, WhatsApp is a closed space, leading to more privacy, and room for intimacy than other SNS (Archambault, 2017). Through the use of language, groups, and memes, WhatsApp has become a particular Ghanaian digital space.

Chapter 7

Concluding remarks

If the phone has proven so irresistible, it is in large part owing to how it allows people to juggle, however imperfectly, the demands of intimacy (Archambault 2017: 155).

In this thesis I have we have seen some of the ways that Ghanaian urban youth engage with the digital. In the main I have focused on the way smartphones and social networking sites were appropriated by my informants. We have seen that much have been written already on ICTs impact on the world, and on Africa. However, we have also learned that there are gaps in the literature, not only due to a low (but increasingly rising) interest for the topic in academia and by ICT developers, but also, and more importantly, due to the rapid development of ICTs. Research that was relevant last year may seem to be outdated this year. While this can make it discourage to do research in this field, I would argue that it instead makes for a very exciting field of research.

By placing myself among my informants, and describing both online and offline situations, I hope to have shown the importance of physical fieldwork, also for ICT studies. As Horst and Miller writes; "No one lives an entirely digital life" (2012b: 16). I would again mention the concept of polymedia, and how this "shifts our attention from social media as discrete platforms to an understanding of media environments which users navigate to suit their communicative needs" (Madianou, 2015: 1). One final example from my fieldwork will highlight this:

During the 2015 Ghana Music Awards (The *VGMA*[59]), I was invited to watch the show with some of the boys, as they knew someone in the hostel who had a TV in their room. They had started to discuss where they could watch the show several days in advance, so when they had finally found a place, I was surprised that they all seemed to still be only interested in their phones. When I expressed this, they all laughed, and Sterling explained that the "Ghana show is happening here" while pointing to his phone, where the Twitter app was open. By following the hashtag #VGMA2015 on Twitter they could share opinions and news updates about the show, at the same time they talked to friends who watched the show from other locations on

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[59] The V stands for Vodaphone, yet another example of how mobile companies sponsor everything in Ghana

WhatsApp. Some took pictures of the TV screen and sent it to friends who did not have the opportunity to watch, to discuss clothes or performances with them. The discussions of whether Daddy Lumba was feeling well, or of the audience's response to the artists [60], were as lively in the room we were in, as they were online on various social media.

Figure 33 Watching the VGMA's, (Notice that one of the phones Is connected to the charger. The threat of Dumsor was always present).

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[60] Daddy Lumba performed exceptionally poorly (he was indeed not feeling well), and the audience remained seated and looking bored throughout all performances.

Fair, Tully, Ekdale and Asante state that "several observers have suggested that cell phones, more than the internet, allow Africans to maintain tradition [sic!] familial and social networks as mobility between urban and rural areas increases (...)" (2009: 43). Based on my own research and what I have shown in this thesis, I would suggest that the increased affordability and availability of smartphones and mobile data coverage has made these networks, and that of the diaspora and local Ghanaians, even stronger. The combination of a phone and mobile data has meant that calls and messages are much cheaper, photos can easily be taken and shared, and even digital gifts can be sent to re-affirm relationships.

While walking through the heated roads of Accra it is impossible to not notice the impact of ICTs; the billboards and road side kiosk are full of commercials for cell phone providers, street side hawkers selling mobile credit are now nearly as common as those selling water and seeing people staring intently at their phone is no longer uncommon.

In this thesis I have tried to give the reader an impression of how young Ghanaians navigate through digital spaces and social networks. In the introduction I mentioned Madianou & Miller's concept of Polymedia (Madianou, 2014; Madianou & Miller, 2012), which I hope to have demonstrated throughout the thesis. In chapter 2, I introduced my fieldwork, and my field sites, both digital and non-digital. I discussed how having my husband Martin in the field with me impacted my final month of fieldwork, and I provided a brief critique of the tendency to call social networking sites, and information and communication technologies, for 'talking drums' as soon as one discusses Africa. In addition to underestimating the ceremonial values of talking drums, this also contributes to an 'othering' or exotification of Africa that I have tried to counteract in this thesis. In chapter 3, I outlined the various ways my informants were able to 'drop their yams' and obtain a smartphone. I also provided a brief analysis of the dynamic of *Sponsors*, and discussed how an ever increasing pressure to keep up with a 'modern' lifestyle, consisting of the latest both in clothes and technology, has likely led to an increase of such transactional relationships (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003). In the last three chapters I focused on three particular social networking sites; Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. In chapter 4, on Facebook, I focused mainly on the curation of the self (Hogan, 2010), through the case of Shuri and her new Facebook account. It is particularly in this chapter that I demonstrate the dualistic relationship of technology and it's users; we saw how as Shuri started to exhibit what she feels is her true self, that exhibition was validated and she regained a confidence in who she is. Through Facebook she essentially made herself again, and Facebook became a curated space more so than a social network. However, we also saw how both Shuri and Florence used Facebook as a way to connect and strengthen their social networks; by being a space where

they could view other's exhibitions of their lives (as Florence spent most of her time on Facebook doing) or by providing a digital space where they could strengthen friendships by making them visible (Miller, 2014; Strathern, 1996). I then examined Twitter and WhatsApp and we saw these two complement each other. They both create a sense of belonging in a group or community, and, as Facebook, they act as a platform where the users can (try to) prove that they possess the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) to join in the group they desire.

However, WhatsApp creates a closed digital space, where one's social status can go up and down from moment to moment (as I examined in regard to the Ghanaian expression *Pasco* in chapter 6), while Twitter creates a digital space where one can 'collect' re-tweets and followers for all to see, and thus display a social status as a 'big man'. In chapter 5, I discussed these properties of Twitter, and suggested that Twitter can be viewed as a Kula network of sorts. I also debated the importance of physical, non-digital locations, even within global digital spaces. In the sections on Football and Dumsor I delved deeper in to the feelings of belonging that can be created via ICTs. We saw how Bakari uses his Twitter account to become a part of a global fan group of football, while the hashtag #DumsorMustStop created a digital space for people to gather around a cause, and how this translated in the non-digital world.

Lastly, in chapter 6, I examined WhatsApp use and the importance for Ghanaian youth to 'keep up' with their peers and with the world. I assessed this with a particular focus on internet memes, and by identifying the Ghanaian concept *Pasco*. With ICT, connections have been strengthened, but disconnections have also been made clearer (van Dijck, 2013). This was made especially clear when my informants lost their phones, or as in Florence's case, did not have a phone that "could WhatsApp". They became disconnected from what was going on, both in the news and among their friends. Being without a phone, they began to feel isolated and out of touch; having a phone they connected and felt a sense of belonging.

My argument is that when discussing and researching digital technologies, such as, but not limited to, smartphones and social media, we would be amiss if we do not also include their use in Africa. African countries are too often left out of the conversation when it comes to the digital; they are placed in the "divided" part of the digital divide, framed as "others" or it is assumed that Africa will merely copy the West. In this thesis I have ventured to show that Ghanaians, due to leapfrogging, innovation, and appropriation, can easily be analysed as forerunners in 'the digital revolution'. I have mentioned some topics for future research throughout this thesis, but for my final recommendations, for ICT research in general, and for digital anthropology specifically, I will keep it simple: *Look to Africa*.

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