

Quayson, Ato. 2014. *Oxford Street, Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism*. Durham, London: Duke University Press. xii + 297 pp. Pb.: \$25.95. ISBN: 9780822357476.

Ato Quayson's text is a rich ethnography of Accra, Ghana, elaborating the intersections of daily life with global influences. The book takes Oxford Street, an important shopping, and commerce area, as the starting point, but goes well beyond just this specific part of town. Oxford Street draws on historical and literary representations of the city, while also exploring specific communities that elaborate the tensions in its local-transnational streams and contacts. As such, while the book carries the street name, it is a more diverse view of the city that develops a deep understanding of the complex social-transnational dynamics that flow through Accra.

The methodology of the book is a finely balanced mix of ethnographic research, historical contextualisation, and the aforementioned theoretical elaboration. The ethnographic work entails a strong element of participant-observation, such as joining workout sessions with various gyms in the bodybuilding scene, participating in salsa parties, and of course the time spent on Oxford Street itself. In addition, the author collects and produces pictures and videos that help represent the analysis. He also conducts interviews with key collaborators to the research.

The introduction sets the tone for the book. The author uses it to give a brief literature review of leading scholars occupied with contemporary subaltern urban theory, particularly in Africa. This review allows Quayson to tease out the gaps in, and limitations to, existing contemporary research, such as a lack of historical context, or specific and clear examples. In his opinion, this has left a certain lack of complexity in much of the work. In turn, this enables him to frame his approach along these gaps. Quayson argues that this specific focus is important because '[p]ointing out the complex nature of local hierarchies does not obviate the criticisms we might make of colonialism; however, it also suggests that the problems inherent to African cities come from much more complex historical sources' (p. 8). Accordingly, he devotes a good portion of the introduction to an ethnographic stroll down Oxford Street, returning to considerations of space as he wraps up the introduction. In short, the author sets out to both challenge the approaches of existing literature on urban space, particularly within Africa, and fill in some of the gaps. Along the way, he touches on themes of transnationalism, globalisation, and universalisation, forming a meta-narrative that is constantly put into question through the perspectives offered in the book.

To achieve his objectives, Quayson breaks the book into two broad sections devoted to histories of the city, and then a series of contextualised ethnographies of specific communities in Accra. The first section, *Horizontal Archeologies*, explores different dimensions of the historical developments and their influences in Ghana. In these chapters, we encounter much more than "just" a colonial history. Rather, the author looks at the many facets of historical interactions of local and foreign communities. Through such histories as the ethnic composition of the region, the movement of inland populations to the coast (and encounters with existing coastal communities), Danish

settlers and the British colonial administration, the text examines how these influenced the development of racial politics, local elites, education, land use, and industry well into post-colonial Ghana.

This is followed by the second section and the ethnographies of Accra's public discourse via Tro-tro slogans, cell phone advertising and choruses; the lively Salsa scene; "gymming" culture; and literary representations of Accra. In these chapters, we are continually brought back to the histories elaborated in the previous section. Rather than just connect the historical narratives, however, these ethnographies also introduce more contemporary questions, such as class and social relations across Accra today. For example, the presence of racial politics in the cell phone advertisements, in which lightness of skin and types of clothing are deployed as signifiers for certain perspectives on class and transnationalism. This is particularly present in the chapters on salsa dancers, and the following one on bodybuilders, where international contact and perspectives of the dancers and weightlifters is worked out, along with their views on the practices of (particularly) bodybuilding as a career opportunity and thus the place of bodybuilding in the cultural and social landscape of Accra. It also presents notions of body types and weight as class signifiers. In these we are confronted with a nuanced analysis of how modern citizens of Ghana form identities, how "the global" manifests locally, and how transnational dynamics influence these, including in the economic and social spheres.

In conclusion, the book offers a broad range of scholars with sharp and critical reflections on contemporary space and urban theories, a dynamic and multi-layered methodological approach, and above all, a rich and engaging ethnography of modern-day Accra. The centrality of Oxford Street itself, both as a physical place and symbolic space, at times, becomes somewhat lost when the focus shifts to communities not bound by the street. While this leaves the reader with a feeling that there is more to say about the street itself, it also allows the text to follow the research, providing a sense of the wider city, and of Ghana itself.

As such the book is a significant contribution to post-colonial spatial and urban theory, contemporary examples of local communities interacting with global trends, and complex historical perspectives that push our understanding beyond colonialism as the only frame on modern-day Accra. Moreover, it provides all ethnographers with a fine and well-written example of how to narrate daily life and balance description with the historical and theoretical material.

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