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Santa Barbara

Globalizing an African City:
The Case of Mall Development in Accra, Ghana

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Sociology

by

Deborah Hobden

Committee in charge:

Professor Richard Appelbaum, Chair

Professor Howard Winant

Professor Stephan Miescher

December 2015

The dissertation of Deborah Hobden is approved.

Howard Winant

Stephan Miescher

Richard Appelbaum, Committee Chair

December 2015

Globalizing an African City:
The Case of Mall Development in Accra, Ghana

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by

Deborah Hobden

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This dissertation represents the culmination of a journey that began in 2006 when I went on a four-month undergraduate study abroad trip to Cameroon. It was my first time in Africa. I was 20 years old and thoroughly green—intimidated by pit latrines and terrified of catching malaria. Our academic director, André-Guy Soh, made it his personal mission to ensure that we were never coddled, exposing us to all that was hard and also wonderful in the many towns and regions we visited. It is not an exaggeration to say that this trip had a profound impact on me, both personally and academically, and that I would likely not have pursued a PhD on African urban development had it not been for André’s insistence that we become completely immersed in the daily activities of our Cameroonian host families.

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VITA OF DEBORAH HOBDEN
December 2015

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies, Vassar College, May 2007 (cum laude)

Master of Arts in Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara, March 2011

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology with emphasis in Global Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, December 2015 (expected)

PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

2009-2015: Teaching Assistant, Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara

Summer 2009: Research Assistant, UC Center for New Racial Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

Summer 2011: Teaching Associate, Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara

2011-2012: Research Assistant, *Nothing Like Chocolate: A Film by Kum-Kum Bhavnani*, University of California, Santa Barbara

PUBLICATIONS

“Your Mall With it All: Luxury Development in a Globalizing African City.”
Perspectives in Global Development and Technology. 13: 129-147. 2014.

“A Man, a Plan, a Mall: The Role of Globalizing Elites in the Development of Accra, Ghana.” *Global-e, a global studies journal*. August 2014.

AWARDS

Regents Central Fellowship, University of California Santa Barbara, 2008-2013

Graduate Division Dissertation Fellowship, University of California Santa Barbara, Fall 2014

UCSB Department of Sociology Research Grant, Spring 2013

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Fields: Globalization and Development, Urban Sociology, Qualitative Methods

Teaching Experience:

- Global and Transnational Sociology with Professors Fernando Lopez-Alves, William Robinson, and Mark Juergensmeyer
- Sociology of Development with Professor Kum-Kum Bhavnani
- Sociological Theory with Professor Howard Winant
- Introductory Sociology with Professors Victor Rios, Howard Winant, Avery Gordon, John Mohr and Craig Rawlings, PhD
- Sex and Gender with Kegan Allee, PhD and Heather Hurwitz, PhD
- Qualitative Methods with Alyssa Newman, MA
- Social Network Analysis with Professor Noah Friedkin
- Sociology of the Middle East with Professor Kevin Anderson
- Urban Theory (Instructor of Record)

Research Experience:

- Studies in Race and Ethnicity with Professor Howard Winant
- Studies in Migration with Professor Howard Winant
- Studies in African History with Professor Stephan Miescher
- Studies in Urban Sociology with Professor Richard Appelbaum

ABSTRACT

Globalizing an African City:
The Case of Mall Development in Accra, Ghana

by

Deborah Hobden

This is a study of globalization in an African City. Beginning in the late 1980s, geographers, sociologists, and economists began to consider the connections between changes in the global economy and the structure of cities. However, scant attention has been paid to African cities in this literature, likely because many of the measures used to determine “global city” status have focused heavily on financial indicators, such as concentrations of financial services and headquarters of multinational corporations. Furthermore, the macro and structural approach taken by Global and World Cities research has not adequately examined how changes in the global economy are experienced in urban space.

This dissertation uses ethnographic observation, interviews, historical methods, and content analysis to examine Ghana’s first “world-class” shopping mall. This mall has been credited for jumpstarting a push to reinvent Accra, Ghana’s capital, as a regional business hub for West Africa, and for ushering in a new paradigm of development in urban Ghana focused primarily on the provision of high-end, consumption-oriented

amenities. The project examines the perspectives of diverse stakeholders connected with the development of high-end real estate, especially retail, in Accra, including real estate developers, city officials, workers, business owners, and consumers, while also considering the evolution of urban development strategies in Accra since Ghana's independence from Great Britain in 1957. By examining the social and spatial consequences of economic restructuring on Accra and its environs, I argue that the globalization of Accra, which began with the imposition of structural adjustment policies in 1983, has led to a pattern of de-facto private sector-led development in the city, supported both rhetorically and financially by the Ghanaian state. The result has been a massive growth in the provision of high-end, consumption-oriented amenities and the neglect of vast swathes of the city, creating a bifurcated urban form. By placing an African city at the center of my analysis, I attempt to challenge some of the key features of previous studies of urban redevelopment in Europe and North America, most notably the nostalgia for state-led development that underlies much of the critique of entrepreneurial, private sector-led strategies.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACC: Accra City Council

AFRC: Armed Forces Revolutionary Council

AMA: Accra Metropolitan Authority

CDR: Committee for Defense of the Revolution

FDI: Foreign Direct Investment

GAMA: Greater Accra Metropolitan Area

GaWC: Global and World Cities

GIPC: Ghana Investment Promotions Center

MCI: Millennium Cities Initiative

NDC: National Democratic Congress

NLC: National Liberation Council

NPP: New Patriotic Party

NRC: National Redemption Council

PDC: People's Defense Council

PNDC: Provisional National Defense Council

SMC: Supreme Military Council

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Introduction

Toward a Theory of Globalization in Urban Africa

The Accra Mall opened its doors to the public for the first time in 2007. This was a momentous occasion for Accra and for Ghana. As the country's first fully-enclosed shopping mall, it represented a revival of modern commerce not seen in the city since Accra's large department stores, such as Kingsway and UTC, closed their doors during the long decades of political instability and economic stagnation following the forced removal of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, in 1966. According to the mall's Accra-based architect, on the first day the mall opened, the city "just froze." Traffic jams along the George W. Bush Memorial highway, an already congested motorway connecting Accra to its eastern neighbor, Tema, were the worst that residents had ever seen. Visitors crammed into the mall's spacious hallways, admiring the clean tile floors, gleaming store windows, and air conditioning.

That night, the mayor of Accra entered the mall with a group of town planners in tow. Unable to locate the mall's owner, the mayor instead confronted the manager of anchor tenant Shoprite, the South African-based grocery chain, to complain about the traffic. A heated exchange of words followed, which resulted in one of the planners threatening to close the mall down. The initiating partner of the mall, Joseph Owusu-Akyaw, was in ill health and unable to handle such a conflict, so at 10pm, Owusu-Akyaw's family called George, the mall's Ghanaian architect, pleading with him to try to manage the situation. Two days later, he attended a meeting at city hall. Present at the meeting were the motor traffic unit, a group of town planners, the mayor, and representatives from the city engineer's office. According to George, "the decision for 60,

70 percent of the time in that room was, ‘we’re closing this thing down,’” but things began to take a turn when one of the town planners spoke up. As George explained to me,

He [the planner] played on their suspicions. You know, there has always been a rumor that the president at the time had a share in the mall or owned the mall, which is totally untrue...but this is what probably saved the whole situation, because then the planner got quite worried in the sense that, if they were going to close it down, they didn’t know—they weren’t quite sure who owned it, and someone was going to lose his job. And then everybody backtracked.

Much to the relief of the mall’s investors and tenants, fear of political repercussions fueled by gossip and an inherent mistrust of the national government had saved the mall, a \$36 million project, from closure. Yet how did a project that had already received planning permission and had been under construction for 18 months come to be threatened with closure on its opening night?

The story about the mall’s opening reveals a great deal about the dynamics of development in globalizing Accra—the between city officials, developers, residents of Accra, and the national government, the deficiencies of local leadership, the enthusiastic embrace of high-end private development by the Ghanaian public and by the national state, and the infrastructural problems that continue to plague Accra despite the frenetic pace of new development in the city.

This dissertation uses the Accra Mall as a prism to examine these issues in detail, asking *what can the development of a world-class shopping mall reveal about the nature of contemporary globalization in an African city?* In answering this question, I respond to three broad research concerns:

1. The *globalization of cities and the formation of global urban networks*: How do cities become connected to the global economy?

2. The *impact of neoliberal globalization on urban form*: How is urban space transformed by processes of neoliberal globalization?
3. The *nature and impact of globalization in contemporary urban Africa*: In what ways is urban Africa becoming incorporated into the global economy, and what are the social, political, economic, and spatial ramifications of its incorporation?

Theoretical Framework

Cities in the World Economy

Since the late 1980s, urban sociology and geography have become increasingly focused on understanding the connections between cities and global capitalism. Of the research generated, the global and world city (GaWC) framework has been the most influential. Though most often associated with Saskia Sassen's seminal scholarship on New York, London, and Tokyo, (2001), GaWC research represents a wide ranging field of study, primarily concerned with defining global city systems, be they networks (see, for example, Castells 2002; Smith and Timberlake 1995) or hierarchies (Beaverstock, Smith, and Taylor 1999; Friedmann 1986; Sassen 2001). Friedmann, whose work on world cities is heavily influenced by world-systems analysis, argues that the structure of cities depends on their particular function within the world-system. Within this framework, cities in the periphery and semi-periphery, like Accra, are categorized as "secondary cities"—regional centers that specialize in particular kinds of productive functions but have little global influence. In this version of the GaWC thesis, the relationship between cities and the world capitalist system is essentially unidirectional: the structures of cities are largely determined by their respective roles in a global system.

Others, however, conceive of cities as active producers of globalization (Moulaert, Rodriguez, and Swyngedouw 2003; Sassen 2001). For many, that production consists of concentrating specialized service firms facilitating financial transactions within limited geographic areas (Beaverstock et al. 1999; Sassen 2001, 2002; Smith and Timberlake 1995). Within such framing, cities are theorized as agents capable of transcending the policies of their host countries to attract outside investment and become more influential on the world stage (Harvey 1989; Moulaert et al. 2003), or to be seen as “world class” cities. City “branding” is a central feature of this effort, with wealthy cities turning to marketing experts to increase their global profile.

According to urban sociologists, such efforts to attract outside investment have contributed to “entrepreneurialism” (Harvey 1989), “competitive restructuring” (Moulaert et al. 2003), and “urban locational” policies (Brenner 2004), which promote heavy investment in mega projects like shopping centers, stadia, and luxury residential communities (Moulaert et al. 2003; Sorkin 1992). Such projects are intended to market cities to potential investors and cater to elite consumers, often at the expense of middle and working class residents. Frequently, these projects seek to adapt what are seen as unproductive or unattractive features of the urban landscape, thereby accommodating upper income groups while marginalizing the concerns of the working class and the poor (N. Smith 1996; Zukin 1998). While some notable efforts have been made to incorporate the experiences of “second tier” cities into these studies (Amen, Archer, and Bosman 2006; Grant and Nijman 2002, 2004; Gugler 2004; McDonald and Smith 2004; Sassen 2002; Smith 2002a), scholars have tended to focus on cities in emerging economies, like India and China, with little attention paid to African cities.

In part this is because the experience of globalization across the African continent is very uneven, with many parts of Africa relatively untouched by outside investment and technology (Ferguson 1990, 2006). Contrary to accounts that see Africa as marginal, however, many have argued that African cities are becoming “global” (Jenkins and Wilkinson 2002) in ways that may challenge prevailing economic assumptions about how globalization works. Though African cities may not boast high numbers of financial service firms or headquarters of multinational corporations, there is no doubt that African cities have taken an increasingly global turn over the past few decades. Scholars have pointed to alternative modes of globalization in urban Africa, for example, cultural globalization (Murray and Myers 2007), transnational migration (De Boeck and Plissart 2014; Malaquais 2007; Piot 2010), and globalization of the imagination (Malaquais 2007; Newell 2012; Piot 2010) as evidence of the increasingly global orientation of African urbanites. In this sense, luxury malls are not just symbols of economic globalization, but also of global imaginaries.

The marginalization of African cities within global and world cities research is particularly unwarranted given the legacy of postcolonial urban planning programs in Africa. Newly independent African governments often invested heavily in urban development in order to promote their capital cities as symbols of emancipation from decades of European rule (Gugler 2004; Myers 2011; D. Smith 1996). Now, private developers have taken over this role; structural adjustment policies and the liberalization of African economies in the last thirty years have “privilege[d] the role of external actors and foreign capital in the local economy” (Grant 2009:9) and fostered more entrepreneurial urban policy in Africa (Murray and Myers 2007). This has had profound

effects on the built environment of African cities and on the daily lives of urban residents, with rising inequalities increasingly manifested in urban space.

Critiques of the Global and World City Model

Observers of global and world city scholarship have noted that global cities research has focused too narrowly on financial indicators as evidence of global city status, and therefore on cities that are command centers in the global economy. Yet Neil Smith (2002b) points out that cities should also be defined by their roles within the production of surplus value. He argues that the global nature of finance is nothing new:

“Contemporary levels of global financial interchange are only now beginning to reach again the levels of the period between the 1890s and World War I...Viewed in this historical light, the global expansion of stock and currency markets and broad financial deregulation since the 1980s may be more a response to globalization than its cause,” and that, “new globalism can be traced back to the increasingly global—or at least international—scale of economic production” (432). If production became the axis around which global cities research turned, there would be a great deal more diversity in the pool of cities researched. Cities like Mexico City and Mumbai, for example, would likely become major sites of investigation and research. Smith argues that the inclusion of such cities in global city research is absolutely essential in understanding the contemporary global economy.

Somewhat in line with arguments made by Smith about the necessity of including diverse cases within global cities research, Diane Davis (2005), a scholar of urban planning, contends that global cities research is inextricably tied to a research tradition traceable to the priorities of Cold War America. Arguing that the study of cities in a

global context arose as a result of Cold War obsession with national development, Davis traces the transition within American urban studies from the study of poor, rapidly urbanizing metropolises in the developed world (unsuccessful and troubling cases of failed development, as well as a threat to national development) to the study of economically advanced command centers in the developed world. It is because of this legacy, she argues, that global cities research remains preoccupied by national development, and therefore focused on cities within countries that remain hegemonic in the global economy. As a result, global and world cities research has not yet been able to account for whether cities in poor countries can be “global:”

...the question that arises is whether there is some implicit or unexplored assumption as to whether ‘global’ cities can only exist in economically vigorous nations, or in those in transition to such status? If so, what is the tail and what is the dog here? Do global cities generate national prosperity, or does national prosperity generate global cities? (100).

The economic assumptions present in global cities research, she argues, profoundly limit the field of inquiry, and suppress “anthropological” studies of global and world cities, privileging quantitative accounts (100).

Another far-reaching critique of global and world city research is that the state remains under-theorized. Neil Brenner is perhaps the pre-eminent critic on this issue. He argues that though global cities research has devoted significant effort to understanding the changing nature of city structure in an era of globalization, it has viewed the state as a static entity, and thus has focused on the dynamism of cities and their increased detachment from the national state: “the territorial state, is treated as a relatively static, unchanging background structure, the container of a national city system whose state-level coherence is not fundamentally altered by the globalization process” (1998:11). Yet

Brenner argues that just like cities, states are dynamic entities that adapt to changes in the global economy. He proposes “glocalization” as a framework for understanding the rescaling of the national state in an era of globalization, arguing that state power becomes reterritorialized on multiple spatial scales in an era of globalization, and that this reterritorialization, or “glocalization” must be understood as a process that unfolds alongside the “globalization” of cities. The state, he argues, not only continues to be present within the global city, but has begun to operate on multiple scales, one of which is the global city.

Others have critiqued global cities research on more technical grounds. Derudder, for example, a prominent scholar within global and world cities research and a proponent for the use of transnational and network data to analyze linkages between cities, argues that though global studies has come a long way in its operationalization of network data, it has not always made a firm conceptual case for the use of those data. For example, the use of airline data in global cities research (e.g. Smith and Timberlake 1995), “...may very well be a prime example of transnational inter-city relations, but no amount of data manipulation can prevent that such statistics have a fairly limited *conceptual* relation to world city formation” (2008:570). Thus far, he argues, global and world cities research has done a relatively poor job of considering the theoretical strength of the data sets employed in analysis.

Finally, some have argued for the need for more in-depth studies of the differences between global cities. Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez contend that the lack of place-specific analysis within the global cities literature has contributed to an inaccurate assumption that urban experiences are becoming more homogeneous. Through

their study of urban redevelopment projects throughout Europe, however, they demonstrate that:

...local institutional settings, regional configurations, national political-economic regimes (and in particular the degree and quality of welfare provision and income redistribution mechanisms), inter-state arrangements (such as the EU), and the constellation of multilevel systems of governance, produce outcomes that render each place unique and result in social and economic conditions of everyday life that make life in Dublin rather significantly different from the urban condition of, say, Naples or Copenhagen (14).

In a similar vein, Brenner and Theodore (2002) argue that studies of neoliberal urbanism and urbanization must not view neoliberalism as solely an abstract, homogenizing force, but must instead do on-the-ground research to understand the impacts of “actually existing neoliberalism.”

Economic Globalization and African Cities

Globalization literature has been remarkably inattentive to Africa. This dearth of scholarship has led to a situation in which the entire continent has come to be seen as “an object *apart from the world*, or as a failed and incomplete example of something else” (Mbembé and Nuttall 2004:348). Thus in a literature that often documents the growing sameness of the world (Friedman 2007; Ritzer 2012) and the increasing connections between here and there, Africa occupies a position unlike that of any other place in its supposed incommensurability with other places. It is this very absence, this otherness, that has led Africa to become an object of intense fascination. In his work on precolonial East African consumerism, Jeremy Prestholdt challenges the perception of Africa as an isolated continent, arguing that many of our assumptions about Africa’s isolation emerge from our stubborn insistence that globalization is solely a 20th and 21st century

phenomenon, and from the tendency to understand globalization as a “single process” that “spreads from the West to ‘the rest.’” He contends that, “Like any genealogical tree, where we choose to begin and end tracing our lineages determines the line of import and the overall image we produce” (2008:174-175). Jennifer Robinson (2006) argues that the erasure of African cities in global and world cities research also ignores the ongoing economic relationships between African cities and the rest of the world. About Lusaka, Zambia, she writes:

Despite the lack of foreign currency (and sometimes because of it) all sorts of links and connections to the global economy persist. From the World Bank, to aid agencies, international political organisations and trade in second-hand clothing and other goods and services, Lusaka is still constituted and reproduced through its relation with other parts of the country, other cities and other parts of the region and globe...It is one thing...to agree that global links are changing and that power relations, inequalities, and poverty shape the quality of those links. It is quite another to suggest that poor cities and countries are irrelevant to the global economy (101).

Development literature has long been interested in the position of Africa within the world-system. W.W. Rostow, in his famous Cold War-era treatise, *The Stages of Economic Growth, a Non-Communist Manifesto* claimed that newly independent African states were exhibiting the “pre-conditions to take-off,” which, if all subsequent stages of growth proceeded properly, would eventually lead to the ultimate stage of economic growth, “the age of mass consumption” (1960). This perspective was later critiqued for its overly structural and universalistic assumptions. Dependency theory emerged as a corrective to modernization theory, arguing that lack of development in the Third World was in fact a consequence of its status within the world economy (Prebisch 1970; Prebisch and Cabañas 1949; Singer 1950), an example of the “development of underdevelopment” (Gunder Frank 1967). World-systems analysis contended that

Africa's position in the international division of labor as exporter of raw materials was at the root of its peripheral status (Wallerstein 1975), while postcolonial theorists posited that colonialism was to blame for Africa's underdevelopment (e.g. Rodney 1981). In his study of rural development in Lesotho, Ferguson (1990), characterizes the development "apparatus" as an "anti-politics machine" that "depoliticizes everything it touches" while simultaneously expanding state power. Despite influential post-structuralist critiques of development studies that have since emerged that question the very notion of "development" (e.g. Escobar 2011), it remains the case that popular understandings of Africa still view the continent largely as underdeveloped and marginal, and that popular representations of Africa in the developed world tend to portray Africa as traditional, unchanging, and backwards. Mbembe and Nuttall argue that underlying development studies, "[is] still the unconscious belief that particular modes of describing reality are appropriate to 'modern' societies, on the one hand, and to nonliterate, underdeveloped, and 'residual' worlds, on the other hand" (2004: 350). This unwillingness or inability to see Africa as modern represents a significant limitation to the production of knowledge about Africa's place in the world.

The same biases and prejudices mark scholarship on African cities. If Africa is to be understood solely in terms of its unchanging traditions, its inability to "keep up," then Africa cannot by definition be an "urban" continent. After all, cities are the birthplace of modernity- places of order, rationality, and blasé attitudes. Our ideas about Africa seem incommensurate with such understandings. And yet, Africa is urbanizing rapidly. Contrary to everything we know about how cities work, however, it is happening in a disorganized manner, without planning and often without the requisite resources to

provide for new urban populations (Davis 2006). Urbanization is, arguably, one indication of the globalization of Africa—a consequence of its position within the global system. Yet, there is no prescribed way to account for the globalization of Africa. As Ferguson (2006) argues, “The global, as seen from Africa, is not a seamless, shiny, round, and all-encompassing totality; ... nor is it a higher level of planetary unity, interconnection, and communication” (48). Rather, globalization in Africa is uneven, or as Ferguson calls it “jagged.” African cities are places of great hardship, of profound inequality, and often of disorder; yet this is not necessarily a symbol of their marginalization, their “otherness,” or their backwardness; it is a sign of their modernity (Robinson 2006). How, then, do we account for this in contemporary models of what globalization “does” to places?

The trend toward luxury development in Africa, and indeed, the developing world in general, has been understudied. African urban research has tended to focus on the role of globalization in generating slums and informal settlements. Davis (2006), for example, attributes the proliferation of slums to the forces of economic globalization, which were initiated in much of the Third World by the forced adoption of IMF and World Bank-sponsored structural adjustment programs. In addition to generating slums, many have pointed out that economic globalization has contributed to a severe spatial bifurcation in African cities, with urban elites increasingly segregated in gated communities and luxury developments, away from the majority of urban residents (Alsayyad and Roy 2006; Asiedu and Arku 2009; Grant and Nijman 2002; Murray and Malan 2006; Murray and Myers 2007; Obeng-Odoom 2011, 2012, 2013; Zeleza 1999). Ethnographic studies of slum dwellers (for example Bayat 2010; Ndjio 2006; Pellow 2008; Simone 2004)

constitute much of the urban research conducted in Africa. These studies describe the increasingly dire conditions faced by urban populations and the everyday ingenuity of African urban dwellers in creating the “city yet to come” (Simone 2004) in an era of globalization (Simone 2004; Tostensen, Tvedten, and Vaa 2001).

This focus in African urban scholarship on the slum and on slum dwellers is warranted given the extreme inequalities that characterize urban life in 21st century Africa, but it sometimes leads to a relatively shallow examination of the forces of neoliberal globalization. Though many ethnographers of Third World cities point to externally-imposed economic reforms, such as structural adjustment programs, as catalysts for urban informality and are cognizant of the ways in which economic and political structures demarcate possible modes of action and resistance, neoliberal globalization is often cast as an omnipresent and undifferentiated reality, rather than a set of policies, enacted in spatially-specific ways. The specifics, however, are important. As Garth Myers contends: “Mere comparability should not mask the reality that neoliberalism is not the same across Africa’s cities, nor is it informalization, governance reform, impacts of violence, or cosmopolitanism” (2011:197). This dissertation represents an effort to uncover the complex and often messy ways in which neoliberal reforms are reflected in the built environment of an African city, and how various groups, including developers, residents, local government officials, national politicians, workers, and business owners profit from and struggle with these reforms.

The Accra Mall

Construction on the Accra Mall began in 2005, but the story of the mall dates back to the late 1960s, when Joseph Owusu-Akyaw, a Ghanaian banker who attended university in

the UK, purchased a large piece of land on the northeastern outskirts of Accra at Tetteh Quarshie Circle, a major intersection near Kotoka International Airport. Sensing that land near the airport would gain value over the coming decades, he began to consider building a high-end hotel on the site but a series of military coups and decades of political instability put his plans on hold. By the late 1980s, following the imposition of particularly aggressive IMF and World Bank-led structural adjustment programs, Owusu-Akyaw once again turned his attention to the piece of land at Tetteh Quarshie, imagining other possibilities for the property as trade liberalization began to open up the country to new investment from abroad. In 1992, Ghana held its first open elections since the late 1970s, and in January 1993 the military government of Jerry Rawlings became a civilian government. The promise of political stability brought with it a renewed interest in Ghana as a target for international investment. Owusu-Akyaw went back to work on the property.

It was at this point that the idea for the mall first began to crystallize. Owusu-Akyaw began traveling to South Africa, where malls had taken off in a big way. South African investors, however, were not particularly interested in funding a mall in Accra, a city that at that time had only about a million residents and a tiny middle class. Owusu-Akyaw began courting large South African retailers, believing that signing on anchor tenants would improve his chances of finding funding. He was right. By the end of the 1990s, South African-based Shoprite, a grocery store, and Game, a general merchandiser selling everything from clothing to electronics, sporting equipment, and household goods, had signed on as anchor tenants, and Owusu-Akyaw went to work, conducting market studies, environmental impact assessments, and traffic impact studies. As a result of this research, in the early 2000s he managed to find an investor in Actis, a privately held UK-

based development bank and spin-off of the Commonwealth Development Corporation (formerly the Colonial Development Corporation), which provides development funding for projects in Britain's former colonies in Africa and South and Southeast Asia.

Plans for the mall were drawn up via a joint venture between South Africa-based Bentel Associates and a local Ghanaian architecture and engineering firm. The project was fast-tracked through the planning approval process with the help of the Ghana Investment Promotions Centre (GIPC), a government entity responsible for fostering international investment in Ghana. Within 24 months of the groundbreaking, the project had been completed. Fully air-conditioned, with 20,000 square meters of lettable space, over 65 shops, a grocery store, food court, movie theater, banks, a medical and dental clinic, and parking for more than 900 cars, the “mall with it all” was, in 2007, the largest formal retail center to be ever built in the country.

The success of the Accra Mall opened a floodgate. Since 2007, four new malls have opened in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA), with another, Achimota Retail Centre, to open in the coming months and one, the Meridian Mall in Tema, Accra's eastern neighbor, poised to begin construction in 2016. Of these seven malls, five—West Hills, Achimota Retail Centre, The Junction, Accra Mall (Actis sold its majority shares to South Africa-based Atterbury in 2012), and the Meridian Mall—are either wholly or partially owned by South African property developers, making South Africa the most active international player in retail development in Ghana. But this is not just a story about South African “sub-imperialism” on the African continent (Bond 2013). The Accra Mall alone contains brands from all over the world, including Southeast Asia,

Africa, Europe, and North America. Developers and businesses cite Ghana's "business friendly" investment laws, stable political environment, and growing population of middle class consumers as the primary motivations behind their decisions to develop and rent new retail space in Accra.

Construction of these malls has coincided with a boom in luxury real estate development in Accra, especially in the northeastern quadrant of the city, home to Kotoka International Airport and several of Accra's most expensive neighborhoods. New condominium complexes, business centers, and hotels have sprung up in the wake of the success of the Accra Mall. To the mall's east, Airport City, a neighborhood geared toward international business travelers, is being built on land leased from the national aviation authority. This area now boasts its own, slightly higher-end mall, which includes some of the same luxury brands that could be found on London's Oxford Street or New York's Fifth Avenue. Malls have become the most widely accessible manifestation of this real estate boom. While gated communities and exclusive office complexes are off limits to much of the population, malls, provided that visitors follow prescribed codes of conduct, are open to all and have come to be used as sites for recreation and leisure. They have become parks in a city where public parks are few and far between.

Why a Mall?

Malls may not seem like the most appropriate entry points for understanding the development of 21st century African cities. After all, malls are ubiquitous and fairly universal in form, with anchor stores, line shops, and food courts. There is nothing particularly "African" about a mall. Yet I argue that shopping malls have become the preeminent symbols of globalization across the African continent. In cities that in other

ways seem divorced from circuits of global capital, shopping malls, with foreign brands and exotic amenities like food courts and movie theaters, become symbols of cosmopolitanism, connecting African urbanites to global consumption chains. They have become a veritable trend throughout urban Africa, providing new quasi-public spaces where none existed before, new opportunities for leisure, and access to a range of consumer goods that were previously available only to those with the ability to travel abroad. They are also, however, sites of contestation and controversy, as evidenced by the violent siege conducted by Al Shabaab on the Israeli-owned Westgate Mall in Nairobi in 2013, in which an unknown number of assailants killed 67 shoppers and wounded 125, purportedly in retribution for the Kenyan military intervention in Somalia. For some, malls represent a welcome move toward modernization and development, for others they are a sign of greed, moral degeneration, and the imposition of western-style consumerism.

Malls are also visible illustrations of the power of private developers and foreign capital to transform urban space in radical ways. In Ghana, structural adjustment policies enacted in the mid-1980s relaxed regulations on international investment and paved the way for private developers to make their mark on Accra's urban landscape. In the face of the inability of national and local governments to deliver solutions to some of urban Africa's biggest problems, particularly, in the case of Ghana, housing, infrastructure, and sanitation, malls have become evidence of effective development; with their own private generators, roads, air conditioning, and constantly running water, malls impress on the population the possibility of better living conditions. Yet this model of urban development is a private sector-led, consumption-driven model, rather than a model of urban development that attempts to mitigate inequalities across space (Brenner 2004).

Malls are symbols of gross inequalities projected onto urban space. They stand in vivid contrast to the degenerating conditions of the cities around them. As Franklin Obeng-Odoom so eloquently sums it up, they represent a larger urban development strategy focused on “regeneration for some” and “degeneration for others” (2013). The construction of African urban malls resembles efforts worldwide to promote entrepreneurial, “trickle-down” forms of economic development in the absence of more redistributive approaches to tackling poverty (Harvey 1989). The consequences of this model of development in Europe and North America are clear: hyper-segregation along class and racial lines, gentrification, displacement, and the slow chipping away of the social safety net. In Africa, the results are less clear, and the consequences in terms of inequalities potentially more severe. As national governments focus their efforts on promoting malls, new luxury housing developments, and business parks, conditions in Accra’s poorest and least serviced neighborhoods come ever closer to approaching “bare life” (Agamben 1998).

Why then, is there not more resistance to the seemingly interminable construction of malls in Accra? An underlying argument of this dissertation is that malls are not one thing, and that private sector-led development is not monolithic. The specificities of place, its particular political, social, and economic dynamics, play a significant role in how malls are seen, received, and experienced. Malls embody the complex dynamics of their national and local settings. Despite their ubiquity, they mean different things in different places. Plans to build a mall in Istanbul’s Taksim Gezi Park, for example, prompted months of protest, while the opening of the West Hills Mall in Ghana’s northwestern suburbs in fall 2014, despite previous plans to develop new housing on the site (a far

more pragmatic project given the dismal supply of housing in Accra), prompted massive celebrations, with school children in Shoprite visors lining up for free samples of toothpaste and chocolate milk. Location, not just in terms of place, but also in terms of position within the world-system, matters. Malls allow urban Africans to make claims of global membership in a capitalist world-system that has largely considered their whole continent as either irrelevant, hopeless, or simply a reservoir for the exploitation of natural resources. Though malls may reflect the interests and desires of elites, their symbolic power transcends these class divides, rendering all who enter through their doors “global citizens.”

Why Accra?

Figure 1: Location of Ghana and Accra



Accra provides a fascinating laboratory for understanding the globalization of African cities. Since the mid-1980s, when structural adjustment programs were first introduced in the country, and especially since the early 2000s, following the end of the Rawlings administration, the Ghanaian national government has aggressively pursued an economic growth strategy dependent on heightened international investment, and Accra has been the centerpiece of these efforts. The decision in the early 2003 to promote Accra as a

“gateway city,” a regional business hub for West Africa (Bob-Milliar and Obeng-Odoom 2011; Grant 2009), has led to significant increases of foreign direct investment into the service sector, and a corresponding growth in building and construction. The discovery of oil off the Ghanaian coast has also contributed to a real estate boom in the city, as foreign and domestic oil companies establish national headquarters in Accra and oil executives create demand for new high-end housing. Much of the new real estate in the city is being developed by foreign companies, or by joint ventures between Ghanaian and overseas developers. Table 1 ranks the most active countries involved in construction in Ghana in 2004, though in the 11 years since these data were generated, the rankings have likely changed considerably. South Africa, for example, has in the last decade become one of the biggest players in commercial real estate development in Ghana.

High-end commercial and residential real estate development has driven up land prices, especially in the northeast quadrant of the city where most of the new development has taken place. The past decade has seen the development of several major new real estate projects in the Greater Accra region such as Appolonia, a “new town,” Airport City, a high-end business park, and numerous residential developments, including the particularly eye-catching “Villagio Vista,” a massive luxury condominium development adjacent to the Accra Mall (complete with rooftop infinity pool). Developers cite the growth of Ghana’s middle class and the country’s political stability as key motivators for investing in the real estate sector. Recent evidence, however, questions the sustainability of middle class growth in Africa, citing increasing inequality across the continent (Blas 2014).

The counterpart of much of this luxury development is the growth of slums. Most residents of Accra live in informal housing and work in the informal economy. Privatization programs enacted under structural adjustment rendered thousands unemployed, and growth in private sector jobs has not been sufficient to accommodate all those needing employment (Yeboah 2000). Lack of effective local and national leadership on urban development issues has also led to severe infrastructural neglect and decline. This is typical of many African cities, writes Edgar Pieterse, who argues that urban and political elites tend to “focus on providing services only to middle-class and elite areas, and to support pockets of commercial activity, in order to link them to information and communication technologies and key transportation hubs” (2014:210). Contending that these investments are often supported by a belief in trickle-down economics, he argues that “economic imperatives tend to take preference over other, less financially sustainable infrastructure investments, because, it is argued, a growing economy is the surest way of producing the tax revenue needed to undertake more redistributive or loss-making investments in the infrastructure” (210). Despite these arguments, it tends to be the case that promised tax surpluses seem never to arrive. In the case of Ghana, generous tax breaks assure that real estate developers receive moratoriums on property taxes, a practice that ultimately discredits this trickle-down logic.

It is not just finance capital that has contributed to Accra’s increasingly global orientation, however. Other networks, including telecommunications infrastructure (3G, 4G, and cellular networks), diasporic networks, and religious networks are equally important indicators of Accra’s globality. Social media has connected young people in Accra with networks extending beyond the country and the continent. The Ghanaian

diaspora has also been incredibly influential in this regard. Not only do diasporic Ghanaians return with social capital through their extensive international networks, they are also the biggest group of real estate investors in the city. Developers in Accra estimate that approximately 80 percent of all their housing units sold are purchased by Ghanaians living abroad. A 2002 *New York Times* article documents this phenomenon, describing Ghana Homes, a thriving business in the Bronx that assists Ghanaians living in New York with new home purchases in Ghana. According to one Ghanaian interviewed for the story: “ ‘You can own a home here, but no one's going to know about it, so you have to own a home in Ghana...Then everyone who matters to you can see you've made it in America’ ” (Berger 2002). A new cultural acceptance for conspicuous consumption has emerged in Ghana with the growth of charismatic Christianity, which has connected middle class and aspiring middle class Ghanaians with global Pentecostal networks, especially US-based “prosperity preaching,” which uses biblical rationalizations to encourage the acquisition of material goods as signs of “godliness” (Gifford 2004).

Given these indicators, it is undeniable that Accra is a globalized city, or at the very least a globalizing one (Grant 2009). It is not, however, an exceptional city in the African context. With slightly under four million residents, it is not a “mega-city” like Lagos, with close to 20 million residents, nor does it have disproportional influence in its region, as in the case of Nairobi. Ghana’s population is not exceptionally wealthy, nor is it exceptionally poor (See Table 2), and Accra suffers from many of the same problems as other African cities—a lack of spatial planning and development control, problems with sanitation and infrastructure, and growing class segregation and spatial inequality. In this sense, it is very much an “ordinary city” (Robinson 2006) in the Sub-Saharan African

context and therefore a good representation of what globalization looks like in any number of African cities. That said, this study is not intended to, nor should it be interpreted as an effort to generalize about all African cities. It is instead an attempt to zoom in on just one in order to better understand the micro-dynamics of globalization in a particular location. The realities of development in 21st century Accra are a product of Ghana's history as a British colony and as Sub-Saharan Africa's first nation to achieve independence from colonial rule. Its urban form also contains echoes of the years of instability following the coup that ousted Kwame Nkrumah in 1966. In this new era of accelerated globalization, Accra's changing spatial formations are a consequence of the business-friendly hilt of its national elites.

Table 1: The top 12 most active countries in building construction and real estate development in Ghana in 2004 (does not include multilateral companies (n=27))

Ranking 2004	Country	Companies
1	Lebanon	13
2	Italy	13
3	UK	12
4	China	10
5	Germany	9
6	India	7
7	USA	7
8	Switzerland	6
9	Canada	4
10	Netherlands	3
11	South Korea	3
12	South Africa	2

Source: Grant 2009

Table 2: Gross national income per capita in US dollars for 12 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (in constant dollars)

Country	1996-2000	2001-2005	2006-2010	2011-2015
DRC	310	350	370	380
Malawi	370	320	280	250
Togo	460	490	520	570
Rwanda	590	640	670	700
Kenya	1040	1090	1180	1290
Côte d'Ivoire	1150	1260	1360	1460
Cameroon	1210	1230	1290	1360
Ghana	1410	1570	1750	1600
Angola	3690	4150	4730	4850
Namibia	4970	5450	5750	5680
Botswana	6510	7180	7500	7240
South Africa	7050	7640	7410	6800

Source: World Bank

Methodology

Heeding the advice of Jennifer Robinson (2011) to consider diverse units of scale in generating urban theory, this dissertation focuses on a single but influential project, using the Accra Mall as a prism to explore how globalization is “made” and experienced in 21st century Accra. In studying the Accra Mall, I attempt to answer the following question:

What can the development of a world-class shopping mall reveal about the nature of contemporary globalization in an African city?

To investigate the social, political, economic, and spatial manifestations of “actually existing neoliberalism” in Accra (Brenner and Theodore 2002), research design was focused on three key concerns:

1. **Meanings:** What are the everyday understandings of the effects of globally oriented development on urban form and urban life?
2. **Mechanisms:** How is foreign and domestic capital channeled toward consumption-oriented real estate development like the Accra Mall? What are the concrete steps an African city must take to “globalize?” and,

3. **Context:** How is the Accra Mall historically situated? How have development priorities in Accra changed in an era of globalization?

I conducted two research trips to Accra—one in March and April of 2013 and a follow-up trip in October and November of 2014. The year and a half gap between these trips allowed me to track the progress of various new real estate developments. When I left Accra in spring 2013, there were three malls in the city. By the time I returned in 2014, there were five, with one more (Achimota Retail Center) well on its way to completion. The rate of mall construction in the city has been astronomical and stands in stark contrast to public sector-led development, which has been slow at best, and in some cases has almost seemed to go backwards, leading to disasters such as the service station fire that claimed 200 lives in the summer of 2015 following devastating floods, an event I discuss in further detail in the final chapter of this dissertation.

My research methods were informed by Michael Burawoy's conception of "global ethnography" (Burawoy et al. 2000). Contrary to ethnography that limits its scope of understanding to the particular research sites examined, global ethnography attempts to study issues in local settings while remaining attentive to the global dimensions of those issues. Conversely, global ethnography can be thought of as an effort to understand globalization in its local dimensions. My approach to studying the mall was also influenced by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Grounded theory is an inductive method of research whereby the researcher generates theory from data. In the spirit of grounded theory, my research questions are deliberately broad and open-ended. Grounded theory was conceived as a corrective to studies that leaned too heavily on inherited theories, thereby obscuring or ignoring compelling new theoretical directions.

Given the degree to which global and world city research has influenced understandings of the relationship between cities and globalization, the use of an inductive approach in my largely ethnographic study seemed particularly appropriate.

My primary research methods consisted of:

1. Semi-structured interviews (n=33) with:
 - Local and national government representatives (n=5)
 - Urban planners (n=4)
 - Mall tenants (n=6)
 - Developers (n=3)
 - Planning and architecture consultants (n=2)
 - Mall management (n=2)
 - Mall employees (n=11)
2. Observations at the Accra Mall and at other malls in Accra
3. Content analysis of real estate developer marketing materials and international coverage of Accra's development
4. Content analysis of public planning documents
5. Archival research on the history of development in Accra

I conducted interviews with key stakeholders affiliated with the mall and with the development of Accra more generally, including developers and public officials. I envisioned these interviews as primarily informational in nature, though respondents often freely offered their personal perspectives on Accra's development. Interviews were loosely structured around a set of questions but often branched off in unexpected and

fruitful directions. Inspired by Burgess (1984), I conceived of these interviews as “conversations with a purpose.”

My methods of recruitment were diverse and often depended on the circumstances and accessibility of respondents. Successful research in Ghana is heavily dependent on the ability to forge personal connections. I was fortunate to establish connections with three key academic figures—Richard Grant at the University of Miami and Akosua Adomaka Ampofo and George Owusu at the University of Ghana, Legon—who respectively referred me to the head of a real estate developers’ association, one of the principle architects for the Accra Mall, and a key figure in national urban policy at the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. At the Accra Metropolitan Assembly, I used snowball sampling to recruit respondents, beginning with a personal meeting with the Director of Development Planning. I contacted developers directly, either by email or phone, using the contact information on their websites. This was also how I got in touch with the Ghana Institute of Planners. I recruited mall tenants in a variety of ways. In some cases, mall employees personally introduced me to the owners of stores or were willing to pass along the owners’ contact information. I also used snowball sampling to recruit business owners and managers, as many of the tenants at the mall were acquainted with other store owners. I often found, however, that the easiest way to get interviews was to simply visit people at their workplaces, especially given the constraints of frequent power outages and outdated contact information on websites. This is how I conducted most of my interviews with mall employees, who were generally more than willing to discuss their work with me, though these conversations tended to be informal, and were not generally recorded. I also had some serendipitous encounters with

national government figures while visiting various ministries, which led to valuable interviews.

While in Accra in spring 2013 and fall 2014, I conducted observations at the Accra Mall three to four days per week, deliberately visiting on different days of the week and at varied times in order to capture the diversity of mall patrons. Because the mall does not have a great number of inconspicuous locations from which to observe, I either sat on the benches that line the mall's corridors or at the food court, or I simply walked around. On one occasion, I even took notes at a screening of an American action movie. I took fieldnotes on my cellphone rather than in a notebook, as this allowed me to blend in better with those seated around me, who were often also glued to their electronic devices. In addition to conducting observations at the Accra Mall, I visited each of the other malls in Accra, where I took fieldnotes and pictures. I was fortunate to be in Accra in October 2014 when the luxurious new West Hills Mall first opened, and thus was able to observe the excitement of the opening festivities. In addition to fieldnotes from the mall, I also logged daily fieldnotes describing interviews, interactions, experiences, and my movements around the city.

I gathered real estate developer promotional materials from a variety of sources, including the Ghana Real Estate Developers' Association (GREDA), developer websites, newspapers and other periodicals, and from developers themselves. International media coverage of Accra often came up in the course of researching Accra's major new developments. In examining these sources upon my return from Ghana, I focused on the use of both text and images in order to understand how globalization and "Africanness" were used to sell high-end real estate and to promote Accra outside of the country.

I obtained public planning documents, including the 1958 and 1992 master plans for Accra, medium-term development plans, environmental impact assessments for various high-end real estate projects, and national urban policy guidelines from the Accra Metropolitan Assembly, the Ghana Environmental Protection Agency, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, the National Development Planning Commission, and the website of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, which contained a wealth of online resources related to Accra's development. In these documents, I searched for references to globalization, Ghana's economic recovery program, privatization and the promotion of public-private partnerships, and any other indicators of shifting development priorities.

Research for the historical portion of this dissertation was conducted at Ghana's national archives, formally, the Ghana Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD). It was in the archives that I discovered records from the Ministry of Local Development, the Accra-Tema Development Corporation, and the Accra Replanning Committee during the Nkrumah era. Historical research on the period following Nkrumah's removal from office in 1966 was more difficult. Here, I turned to newspapers, especially the *Daily Echo* and *Daily Graphic*, selected years of which are available on microfilm via the Center for Research Libraries. In reviewing newspaper coverage from 1978 to 1989, I identified and logged any articles, op-eds, or letters to the editor that discussed Accra's development. For the early 1970s, I turned to the weekly periodical *West Africa*, which is available in the UCSB library.

Between 2012, when I first proposed this project, through the writing of this dissertation, I continued to track events in Accra by consulting online newspapers and

magazines, YouTube videos (which proved instrumental to my understanding of events such as the demolition of Old Fadama and the incident at the mall described in the second chapter of this dissertation), and blogs, especially *Urban Africa*, an online publication of the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town, and NextCity.org's *Informal City Dialogues*, a year-long project focused on urban informality in six cities in the Global South, including Accra.

Limitations

A number of challenges confront researchers trying to understand the dynamics of African cities, the most notable of which is the difficulty in finding adequate records of events, such as historical documents, policy documents, and statistics. This is why Africanists have traditionally relied on alternative sources of information, particularly oral histories. Once in Ghana I found that I had to adjust my expectations of what data would be available, which sometimes meant turning to non-traditional sources.¹ While my primary methods were interviews, observation, and content analysis, I also had numerous informal discussions about events in Accra with taxi drivers (an endless source of rumors), friends, and neighbors; and I took lots of pictures. As mentioned above, in attempting to track Accra's development between independence and globalization, I had to turn to newspapers, as I was not able to locate any planning documents between the removal of Kwame Nkrumah from office in 1966 and 1992, when Accra's most recent master plan was published. These forays into less traditional data sources were often fascinating, and sometimes led to unexpected revelations. Going through years of

¹ Richard Grant's remarkable work on the globalization of Accra (2009) is a wonderful model for how to think creatively about data collection.

newspaper coverage during the Rawlings administration, for example, revealed a great deal about how structural adjustment programs were publically rationalized by an overtly anti-capitalist administration.

Because of requirements pertaining to the protection of human subjects, I use pseudonyms throughout this dissertation and avoid including information about respondents that might allow them to be identified (for example, their specific job titles or places of work). Wherever possible, I make efforts to situate respondents, albeit sometimes in vague terms, so that their particular positionalities, such as their class status, line of work, age, national origin, and gender, are properly represented.

Another significant limitation of the project is that it does not delve into the perspectives of ordinary residents of Accra on mall development. This would have necessitated far more resources, including translators and research assistants, as well as a longer amount of time in the field, luxuries I unfortunately did not have. It would have involved interviewing mall patrons as well as people who do not visit malls, thus making it particularly difficult to obtain representative samples. Observations and focus group data provided by mall management did give me some insight into the perspectives of mall shoppers, though the questions asked of respondents in the focus group were driven by market research concerns rather than academic ones.

Finally, perhaps the most significant limitation of this dissertation is the exclusion of voices of resistance and of civil society groups. Though I made efforts to contact organizations such as People's Dialogue, a community-based NGO that works with Accra's slum dwellers and is affiliated with multinational organizations such as Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), I was not, in the end, despite making a

personal connection, able to connect with these groups, thus my focus in this dissertation is largely on top-down, private sector-led development. Though this leaves out important work being done within Accra's aggrieved communities, I do believe that much is to be gained from an on-the-ground analysis of private sector development in Ghana, as this form of development is so well-resourced and supported at both a national and local level.

By the end, this project had evolved into a thoroughly multi-disciplinary and mixed-methods endeavor, requiring a more interpretive approach than I imagined it would when I first entered the field. This represents both a limitation and an advantage: by turning to non-traditional sources, I was better able to understand the *culture* of neoliberal development in Accra, but my methods necessitated a less positivist stance than many sociologists would be comfortable with. My hope is that this project sheds some light on both the materiality and the culture of globalization in an African city, and that it might broaden the field of Global and World Cities literature to include more interpretive, less economic analysis, bringing African cities more firmly into the fold.

Chapter overview

This dissertation is comprised of three substantive chapters. The first presents the Accra Mall, the central case study of this project, as a lived experience. Drawing on ethnographic observations and study of the mall's environment as well as conversations with business owners, workers, mall management, and individuals involved in the mall's development, I discuss the development and daily life of the mall and the diverse perspectives of business owners, mall employees, and members of the mall's management team. The second half of the chapter attempts to place the mall within the broader context of neoliberal Accra, considering issues of class and status; the rise of

entrepreneurialism, conspicuous consumption, and their religious counterparts in charismatic Christianity; how the mall functions as a laboratory, a test case for new “modern” modes of commerce in Ghana, and a means by which to educate everyday Ghanaians about modern consumption; and finally, how the mall allows Ghanaians to claim membership in a globalizing world. The second chapter traces the history of development planning in Accra from Ghana’s independence from Great Britain in 1957 through successive military and civilian governments in the late 1960s and 1970s, the economic reforms of the 1980s, and the era of globalization. Focusing on the development “visions” of key actors in Accra, the chapter considers how Ghana’s shifting position within the world-system has impacted Accra’s urban form. Chapter three focuses on the bifurcation of contemporary Accra into zones of privilege and zones of exclusion. Analyzing the activities of the national government, private developers, and local government, I consider how meanings about globalization are generated and circulated and how these meanings are reflected in urban space, creating new, unprecedented levels of inequality. I conclude by considering how examining Accra’s entry into the global economy might contribute to ongoing scholarship on the effects of neoliberal reforms, globalization, and private sector-led development on cities and regions in Africa and around the world.

Chapter 1

Everybody finds whatever they want here in this mall, and that's the beauty of it: Modern Dreams, Global Ambitions, and the Daily Life of an African Mall

Introduction

On February 24th, 2014, a curious incident took place at the Accra Mall. Three college-aged women accused of shoplifting underwear from South African-based clothing store Mr. Price, were given an ultimatum by security guards to crawl out of the mall on their hands and knees or be turned over to police. The women chose the former, and proceeded to crawl the 200 meters from Mr. Price to the entrance of the mall, accompanied by hecklers and jeering crowds, many of whom recorded the incident on their smartphones. In one of these videos, two security guards can be seen giving each other high fives after the women complete their punishment (Anon 2014). These videos quickly went viral, eliciting mixed reactions in the Ghanaian populace, with some proclaiming that the women got their just desserts and others expressing outrage that such a punishment should be allowed in a modern country like Ghana. A number of NGOs and governmental organizations, including the Centre for Development and Social Change, the Human Rights Advocacy Centre, and the Ghana Police Service were quick to decry the punishment as “barbaric,” a violation of human rights, and an act of unnecessary humiliation (Ansah 2014). A statement signed by Director-General of Public Affairs of the Ghana Police Service, Rev. David Nenyi Ampah-Bennin urged members of the public to “be mindful of their rights and responsibilities, with regard to arrest, under the law and desist from meting out ‘instant justice’ to persons they suspect to have committed offences” (Ansah 2014). Following a public outcry about the treatment of the alleged thieves, the police arrested six security guards, charging them with abuse. Even Jerry

Rawlings, former president of Ghana, waded into the controversy, proclaiming that, “such dehumanizing treatment of our people is backward, primitive and defeats our efforts at restoring the moral fibre of society” (Takyi-Boadu 2014).

It is no secret that confidence in the Ghanaian police force is low, and that vigilante justice, or as Tankebe (2009) calls it, “self-help” policing, and brazen disregard for the rule of law, is common in Ghana, and indeed throughout much of Sub-Saharan Africa (see, for example, Kirsch and Grätz 2010). So why was there such a public outcry over this particular incident? Certainly, the prevalence of smartphones and the visibility of the incident played a role, but I would like to propose that it also has something to do with the position of the mall in the popular Ghanaian imaginary as a beacon of order and modernity in an otherwise unpredictable and often chaotic urban landscape. Undoubtedly, similar incidents occur on a daily basis in Accra’s residential neighborhoods and crowded marketplaces, but for it to happen in the mall is a national embarrassment, requiring a swift PR response from the upper-most echelons of Ghanaian society.

This incident is indicative of some of the central contradictions embodied by the mall, a symbol of the growing globality of Accra. The mall exists in a liminal zone, both physically and psychically. Perched on what were once the fringes of Accra, it has yet to be fully incorporated into the fabric of the city, despite recently celebrating its five-year anniversary. Unfinished pedestrian bridges, confusing interchanges, and disorganized taxi stations surround this otherwise formal establishment. Informal vendors cluster outside, ready to sell to passersby and mall visitors as they walk back and forth from the *trotro*²

² Trotros are privately owned passenger vans that accommodate up to 20 people and constitute Accra’s main form of mass transit, transporting an estimated 70 percent of Accra’s population on a daily basis (World Bank 2010).

station. Inside the mall, gleaming tile floors, air conditioning, and modern restrooms belie the confusion that confronts everyday Ghanaians as they enter this space for the first time. Codes of conduct are constantly being challenged and redefined, as attested to by signs in the women's restrooms, informing visitors of the need to refrain from washing kitchen items, buying or selling, brushing teeth, or squatting on toilet bowls while using the facilities (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figures 2 and 3: Accra Mall women's bathroom rules and sign inside bathroom stall door showing proper usage of flush toilet



While it is tempting to see the development of the mall as a symbol *par excellence* of neoliberal globalization, or “spatial fix” (Harvey 2001), embodying, as it does, the desires of indigenous and foreign developers to create new consumers, tap into an as-yet untapped market, and pour money into enacting a neoliberal, consumerist vision

of urban citizenship, this would not do justice to the multifaceted ways in which the mall is understood and experienced by local residents—business owners, employees, and visitors—for whom the mall embodies complex and often contradictory meanings. This chapter represents an attempt to understand the Accra Mall as a lived experience and in doing so, to challenge totalizing narratives of the impacts of neoliberal development, instead placing the Accra Mall in local context to address a number of puzzling questions, such as:

1. Why is there not more resistance to projects like the mall, given the extreme challenges confronting the average urban Ghanaian?
2. How does the mall generate informality as it tries to impose a formal model of consumption upon the population?
3. How do the global and the local interweave at the Accra Mall, and how does this complex interplay alter our understanding of what neoliberalism “does” to places?

By situating the mall firmly within the politics of urban development in a globalizing Accra, it becomes clear that the mall is not just a profit-generating enterprise, it is also a claim-making device, allowing diverse segments of Ghana’s population to assert their belongingness in both a local and a global context—their “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1968) and also their “right to the global.”

When I first went to Accra in April 2013, Dennis, one of the most successful business owners in the mall, and, in his words, an, “unapologetic capitalist,” told me, when I asked him about the class status of Ghanaians who come to the mall, “It’s for everybody, because everybody finds whatever they want here in this mall, and that’s the

beauty of it.” Though initially skeptical of his claim, I later began reflecting on the deeper significance of it, especially after spending time at the mall, observing the interactions of visitors and speaking with business owners, managers, and employees. Though perhaps not his intended meaning, the mall embodies the desires of everyone who enters through its doors, be they low-wage workers at the South African grocery chain Shoprite, expatriate business owners hoping to exploit new markets, or even the so-called “idlers,” those who show up not to buy but merely for the experience. The mall is not just the dream of a developer and a group of foreign financiers, it is a reservoir of aspirations, a symbol of globality and development that stands in stark contrast to the often-messy realities of everyday life in Accra.

In this chapter, I intend to ask some uncomfortable questions: How do we account for the enthusiastic embrace of malls in the highly unequal environments of urban Africa? Can we, or should we, disregard the pride associated with the building of a mall—the fact that a mall makes those otherwise excluded from the spoils of globalization feel modern and “global?” In his work on post-Cold War West Africa, Charles Piot (2010) points out that claims of global citizenship are always political, whether those claims are expressed through participation in the US “visa lottery,” the dismantling of traditional systems of authority, or the embrace of transnational forms of evangelical Pentecostalism. Of Togo, Ghana’s francophone neighbor, he writes, “...there seems a recognition that remaining incarcerated by tradition and the local, by Togolese-ness or African-ness, leads away from rather than toward global inclusion and a better life. Is there not here a nascent post-national, even global, conception of citizenship?” (169). This becomes all the more significant when considering Africa’s continued

peripheral status within the world-system as provider of raw materials and its marginalization within the global imaginary. Numerous critiques could, and perhaps should, be launched against the mall, but those are not the subjects of this chapter. Instead, I intend to simply show how the mall operates on a daily basis—how business is conducted, both in and outside of formal retail spaces; how visitors use and navigate the social space of the mall; and how management attempts to control the mall’s environment. Most importantly, I will discuss some the meanings the mall holds for its architects, tenants, employees, and visitors, an exploration that I hope will shed some light on the complicated nature of Accra’s incorporation into the global economy.

This chapter is based on two and a half months of fieldwork conducted in Accra in Spring 2013 and Fall 2014, which included numerous observations of the mall as well as formal and informal interviews with key stakeholders associated with the mall, including business owners, mall management and shareholders, the mall’s architect, and employees of various businesses. The chapter is divided into two sections, the first empirical and the second analytical. I begin with a basic overview of the mall, situating it within the city and describing its physical layout. I then discuss the key stakeholders in the mall—business owners, workers, and visitors—in order to give a sense of the how the mall functions as a lived space. In the second part of the chapter, I focus on meanings, considering how class divisions are marked and enacted within the space of the mall, how the mall functions as a symbol of the rationalization of economic life in Ghana, how the formal and the informal intertwine at the mall, and how the mall allows rich and poor alike to claim membership in a globalizing world. I begin and conclude with descriptions of journeys I took to and from the mall while conducting my fieldwork—first to the mall

in a taxi, and then home in a trotro. These journeys represent vastly different experiences, which I hope will serve to illustrate two key points: first, the complex relationship between formality and informality in 21st century Accra, and second, the ways in which class differences alter one's experience of the mall and its environs.

(Dis)orientation

Figure 4: Location of Accra Mall



The Accra Mall is located at Tetteh Quarshie Circle, a major interchange in the northeastern quadrant of Accra, directly south of the University of Ghana at Legon, the crown jewel of the University of Ghana system, and just north of Kotoka International Airport (See Figure 4). Land prices in the area surrounding the mall are some of the highest in Accra; the residential areas within a five mile radius of the mall—East Legon, Airport Residential Area, Ridge, and Cantonments—are among the most affluent. Yet, like much of the other luxury development occurring, the mall is not well integrated into the urban fabric of Accra and for the first-time visitor, a trip there can feel quite disorienting. An excerpt from my fieldnotes describing my daily journey to the mall may shed some light on this feeling:

It is hard to overstate the contrast between the mall and its environs and the state of much of the rest of the city. My trip to the Accra Mall begins on Kusia Street, at Auntie's³ house, where I stay during my time in Accra. Kusia Street is in Kokomlemle, a neighborhood built mainly during the 1940s and '50s for the black middle classes. It is a product of British colonial planning, which relied on a strict system of racial segregation (Quayson 2014). At that time, Kokomlemle sat on the outskirts of the city, but given Accra's phenomenal growth since then, Kokomlemle now occupies a fairly central position in the city, just north of Ring Road and within walking distance of Kwame Nkrumah Circle, a major transit hub and informal market in the city, known locally simply as "Circle." Kusia Street is lined with large homes, many of which have fallen into various states of disrepair or have been divided into apartments. Across the street from Auntie's house is a pair of two-story homes with upstairs balconies supported by columns. You can imagine that several decades ago, these were comfortable, even luxurious homes. Now they are a bit tattered, with falling gutters and flaky, worn-out paint (See Figure 5). The house directly across from us has lots of broken windows, some of which are boarded up. Next-door to it is an almost identical house in a similar state of disrepair, although the downstairs, which is presumably a separate apartment, is painted a beautiful, vivid shade of cobalt blue and decorated with plants. It's quite striking in this environment, where most houses are a demure white or off-white color. The street is lined on both sides by an open gutter. A number of small kiosk shops have been set up in front of the houses around us selling cellphone credit, basic groceries, and liquor.

³ "Auntie" is a common term used throughout Ghana as an affectionate but respectful means of addressing women older than oneself.

Figure 5: View of Cottonwood Ave., across from Kusia Street, Kokomlemle, Accra



The day begins around 5:00 am on Kusia Street, when impassioned street preachers or vans outfitted with megaphones, selling anything from pest control products to herbal medicines, start to appear in the early morning light to deliver their messages. At around 9am, I walk out of Auntie’s house, locking the door behind me. I wait for a while in front of the gate for a cab to come by. Taxis are plentiful in Accra. Almost all are a bit rickety—used cars shipped over from Europe, Asia, and the US. Many of Accra’s roads are not yet paved and potholes are common, even on paved roads, so taxis undergo a lot of wear and tear. During my five-week visit to Accra in October 2014, I end up in two taxis that break down halfway through our journey.

Prices for taxis are negotiable and the process of negotiating a fair price can be a bit intimidating for an outsider. Drivers generally have an idea of what a journey is worth to them, and if you can’t give them the price they want, they will leave. You also have that option, so you need to have a price in mind when you pull one over. In addition, there’s a taxi hierarchy. Drivers with “estates,” or as they are known in the US, station

wagons, charge a little more for their services, the justification being that their cars are more comfortable and in better condition than the average taxi.

After some negotiations, I get in a taxi and we drive up the road across from Auntie's house toward Nima. Nima is a neighborhood largely occupied by Hausa-speaking Muslims from the north, though it now has a significant Christian population. The Accra Metropolitan Authority, as well as a number of local and international NGOs, classify Nima as a slum. It is an unplanned community with few access roads. Houses and compounds are built close together, generally without planning permission. It is also one of the two neighborhoods slated for a number of "micro-interventions"—small-scale development projects—to be implemented via the Millennium City Initiative, a project of Jeffrey Sach's Earth Institute at Columbia University (GSAPP 2014). The street we drive down to get to Nima Road is lined with businesses, including small kiosk shops built out of scrap wood or old shipping containers, hair salons, barber shops, and tailors. The road is paved but in very poor shape. Cars have to drive slowly so as to not bottom out in the many potholes encountered along the way. This engenders some level of interaction between the people on the street and the people driving through. As we drive down this road, I catch kids pointing at me and laughing. Sometimes they shout "Obruni!" (white person) as we pass by. Other times, passing taxi drivers call out to my taxi driver, joking in Twi⁴ about the white woman sitting by his side. I am well aware that to ride solo in a taxi is a luxury most Accra residents cannot afford on a regular basis.

This road is always bustling with activity. Some people run small businesses along the street while others shop or visit friends and family members. Business owners

⁴ An Akan language, and the most widely spoken in Accra.

nap on the floors of their shops. Women wash clothes in large basins along the edge of the road and dump the soiled water into the gutters.

After navigating the pot-holed road, we turn onto Nima Road, a commercial thoroughfare with several two-story office and retail buildings lining the street. One is a tax office. Another is a church. On my left is a bakery with a patio. There are almost always a handful of Muslim men sitting here, conversing. We pass a large concrete estuary- essentially an open sewer full of trash and dirty water. Along this open sewer, businesses line up in an informal marketplace. Soon we reach a roundabout, where we turn right toward a gas station and a school compound, the walls of which are decorated with a large mural, a project of the NMA- a non-profit arts collective in Nima.

We turn left past the Collins Gate Hotel and a large housing compound built for members of the Nima Police force and their families, with small bungalows behind a chain link fence. Laundry hangs from lines and outdoor kitchens—pots sitting on top of wood piles—are dotted around on the dirt ground that surrounds the bungalows. There are a few residents out, cooking, hanging laundry to dry, or just sitting. From here we merge onto the Kanda overpass.

The overpass is a major artery that cuts through the city and over Ring Road, eventually emptying into Adabraka, a vibrant residential and commercial area. We drive the opposite direction, away from the city center. To our right, although you can't see much of it, is Kanda. This is an affluent neighborhood with pleasant residential compounds. To our left is Nima. All I see when I look to the left are miles of corrugated roofs with little to no separation in between. I imagine the labyrinthine alleys that wind around this neighborhood. Shipping container businesses line the Nima side of the Kanda

Highway and people appear from the narrow alleyways behind them to walk up the main road. A few goats, tied up for sale, occupy a dusty lot.

The Kanda Highway is full of billboards. During the time I spend in Accra, almost all of them advertise new high-tech products. Surfline, which offers the first 4G LTE network in Ghana, has flags along the length of the highway and billboards in the median advertise new Samsung phones and tablets. A particularly striking billboard advertises a Porsche dealership. It's impossible to ignore the contrast between the luxury items advertised on our right and the haphazard landscape of Nima to our left.

On the Kanda side of the highway, we pass another mural. Entitled "Imagine Accra," it contains a large portrait of Kwame Nkrumah, independent Ghana's first president, along with depictions of kiosk shops, Independence Arch (constructed by Nkrumah in preparation for a visit from Queen Elizabeth in 1961), a trotro, and trains on train tracks—a uniquely African celebration of postcoloniality and modernity (See Figure 6). Shortly after the mural stands a bicycle shop, with dozens of used bicycles lined up on the street. I wonder what happens to these bicycles at night and marvel at the work that must be involved in transporting them all to a safe space. We pass a school compound and Accra's massive new mosque, which looms slightly back from the main road. It's an impressive structure, modeled on the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, and is complete except for one minaret still surrounded by scaffolding.

Figure 6: Portion of “Imagine Accra” mural on the Kanda Highway, Accra



We reach a roundabout- the intersection with Achimota Road, a major east-west thoroughfare. At this intersection stand at least a dozen hawkers, walking up and down rows of traffic selling cell phone credit, water, snacks, oranges, gum, candy, and newspapers. Women sit off to the side of the road preparing the items to be sold to passing motorists. After competing with other motorists to make our through the intersection, a process that includes complicated codes of honking and gestures, we end up on Patrice Lumumba Road in Airport Residential Area, a lush neighborhood known to house some of Ghana’s richest and most powerful families as well as several embassies and the Alliance Française. On our left are luxury apartment complexes. On our right, Gold House, the headquarters of Ghana’s gold industry, and several large, well appointed single-family homes. Rumor has it that one of these homes has recently been purchased by the brother of current president, John Mahama.

Generally speaking, the houses in Airport Residential Area sit behind tall walls and security fences and aren’t visible from a taxi. The only people we see during this part of our drive are visiting Koala, a longstanding high-end Lebanese-owned grocery store, and its adjoining coffee shop, the café ci gusta, the patio of which is generally occupied by white expatriates. Eventually the road turns to the right and the informal economy

comes back into view as we approach another major intersection: Liberation Road. A busy kenkey⁵ stand occupies a prime position at a small intersection just before the main junction, and a makeshift shop just down from the kenkey stand attempts to attract passers-by with its display of wall clocks, brooms, and buckets.

Once we reach Liberation Road, hawkers once again begin to infiltrate the traffic, selling water, candy, and cell phone credit- the Ghanaian equivalent of a drive-thru. We turn left, past a shiny modern office building. It's at this point that I catch my first glimpse of the Villagio Vista, the ultra-modern, luxurious, colorful skyscraper condos designed by Trasacco, the Italian development company responsible for Trasacco Village in East Legon, the most expensive gated housing estate in Ghana. In their red, yellow, and green, the Villagio Vista towers loom over the city. They look shockingly European and chic in this dusty landscape, despite the developer's insistence that the design is based on traditional Ghanaian kente cloth. We take a right and head toward the mall, navigating a small roundabout jammed with cars, taxis, and trotros. This roundabout was built to ease traffic around the mall, though traffic is still an issue. A pedestrian bridge sits on its side in the middle of the roundabout. Eventually this bridge will make it easier for pedestrians to get from Liberation Road to the mall, but for now they must traverse several major roads, dodging cars, motorcycles, and buses along the way. Orange cones block off the entrance to Spintex Road, which runs along the back of the mall. Trotros and cars converge chaotically, narrowly avoiding one another, to gain position in the line of traffic leading to the mall.

⁵ A popular dish in southern Ghana—a sourdough dumpling made from fermented cornmeal generally served with a stew or soup.

The mall sits to our right as we approach the main entrance. Despite the chaos of the roundabout, the traffic has actually improved somewhat from the first time I came to Accra in April 2013. Taxis are not allowed to drive to the front of the mall, and must drive along the last row of parking, toward the designated taxi area. During my time in Accra, the taxis I ride are generally barred entrance to shopping centers or the ministries I visit—a way, I suspect, of preventing the encroachment of the informal economy into formal sites, and also of drawing distinctions between those with private vehicles and those who must rely on public transit. I ask the taxi driver to pull over before we reach the taxi area, and then walk into the entrance closest to Shoprite, the supermarket on the right of the building. Unlike many modern malls, the Accra Mall lacks a grand entrance. There's no fountain or outdoor landscaping, and the mall itself is fairly unremarkable and utilitarian in its design. Signs advertising businesses inside the mall have been placed on the outside of the building; otherwise, passersby would have little idea what is inside.

Stepping into the mall, with its clean tile floors and air conditioning, is a welcome relief from the heat and dust outside. The mall is roughly u-shaped, with indoor shops framing a central outdoor courtyard that contains the food court. A single story, except for the cinema and arcade, the mall is easy to navigate. Its two anchor tenants— Shoprite, the South African grocery chain, and Game, an “everything” store, akin to WalMart or Kmart—sit on either side of the shopping center, and are the mall's biggest attractions. A few benches and revolving tenants occupying booths occupy the middle of the corridors. These tenants change daily or weekly and advertise, to name just a few of the many products I encountered while in Accra, Cusson's Imperial Leather soap, Surfline 4G

phones, new high-end apartment complexes, Hyundais, and luxury hotels (See Figure 7). Security guards in military-style jumpsuits and black leather boots patrol the mall quietly. Shops advertise their wares in the windows. In contrast to what might be seen on the street, where shoes or clothing are hung from hooks or spread out on the ground to highlight the quantity of goods available, the focus in the mall is on quality: Birkenstocks in a variety of colors placed in pure white display cases, fabric for dressmaking arranged by color and type, folded neatly on dark wood table with mannequins in the windows displaying possible combinations and styles.

Figure 7: Mall Entrance with crowded Airtel (cell phone provider) promotional kiosk



The founder of the mall project, Joseph Owusu-Akyaw, envisioned a two-story structure with approximately 120 tenants, but the project was scaled down significantly by the mall's investors, who doubted Ghana capable of supporting such a large number of formal businesses. As such, the mall is fairly modest with 68 tenants, all on one level except for the Silverbird Cinema and its affiliated businesses; a bookstore, cocktail bar,

and arcade; which are located on the second story. As Kevin, a business owner in his thirties, and the son of Owusu-Akyaw explained to me:

...Those who bought into my dad's argument still thought Ghana wasn't ready for an \$80 million mall 20 years ago, 10 years ago. It was ready for a mall this size. Hindsight, we regret it. It was more of a cost and ability to return on investment. At some point it really felt like, let's crawl before we can walk. We don't really believe that Ghana can take a mall with 120 shops, so let's do 65. So, when we finished 65, it's all gone, then you have 200 more shops waiting. Did we goof up? Yeah, I mean, my dad believed in it that it could be rented, but those who were throwing in the money were like, let's be careful.

The businesses in the mall are broken down by category in Table 3, with apparel constituting the largest percentage, though the mall's anchors, Shoprite and Game, the food court, and the movie theater generate the largest amount of foot traffic.

Table 3: Categories of businesses at the Accra Mall, November 2014

Category	Number of tenants
Apparel	17
Restaurants and eateries	9
Electronics and telecommunications	8
Health and beauty	7
Jewelry and accessories	5
Shoes	4
Banks	4
Entertainment	4
Gifts and confectionaries	3
Home goods and décor	2
Grocery and general merchandise	2
Books	1
Liquor stores	1
Travel	1

The mall contains a mixture of Ghanaian and international brands, but according to estimates by mall management, more than 50 percent of the Ghana-headquartered brands are owned by non-native Ghanaians and expatriates, particularly Lebanese,

Syrians, and Indians.⁶ Investors from outside the African continent have also established businesses in the mall. The Azadea Group, for example, a multi-brand franchise operator with headquarters in Lebanon and offices across the Middle East, owns the Payless shoe store, which has headquarters in the US, and Mango women's clothing store, with headquarters in Spain, managing these franchises from their offices in the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon. Without a complete list of business owners and their national origins, it is difficult to unravel the complex ownership arrangements behind each shop. What is clear, however, is that the mall represents the globalization and transnationalization of commerce in Accra. Investors in the Middle East draw upon ties with Lebanese and Syrian-Ghanaians to identify new business opportunities. Meanwhile, Ghanaian entrepreneurs, many of whom have spent time abroad, lure global brands previously unavailable in Ghana, such as Apple and Puma, to the Ghanaian market with the promise of formal retail spaces and a new consumer class with money to spend.

Though many of the brands represented at the mall are known internationally, there are also several shops that have strong local orientations. Kiki Clothing, for example, sells ready-to-wear garments made in Accra. Woodin and Vlisco, though Dutch-owned, are iconic brands in West Africa, selling high-end fabrics and a few ready-to-wear items. Nallem is a Ghanaian company with multiple locations throughout Accra and the rest of Ghana, which makes and sells traditional garments inspired by designs from Ghana's northern region. Whiteleys of Africa, a gift shop, sells African goods, including items like beads and jewelry, batik accessories, carvings, and drums, at prices

⁶ Lebanese and Syrian communities in Ghana have a long history of involvement in trade, with the earliest immigrants from Syria and Lebanon arriving at the end of the 19th century, establishing roles as middlemen traders and entrepreneurs (Akyeampong 2006).

considerably higher than would be found in the market. These businesses undoubtedly appeal to non-Ghanaians and Ghanaians living abroad, as prices tend to be quite high. In fact, a Ghanaian friend reported to me that she has overheard on multiple occasions groups of young women gazing through the windows of Kiki Clothing and Woodin, discussing how to describe designs featured in window displays to their own seamstresses.

The majority of stores have their headquarters in Ghana, but there is a significant representation of global brands at the mall—11 from Europe, two from the United States, and three from East Asia (See Table 4). Of the Ghanaian-headquartered brands, many of the items sold are imported from overseas. South African and Nigerian-based brands play a particularly important role as anchor tenants, in the case of Game and Shoprite, and entertainment hubs, in the case of the Silverbird Cinema and its affiliated businesses, the Silver Lounge, Silverbird Lifestyle bookstore, and the arcade (for a detailed list of all of the businesses in the mall and their national origins, see Appendix A). Though scholars of globalization have pointed to a deterritorialization of corporate activity, arguing that national headquarters have little meaning in a globalized economy (Robinson 2004), knowing the national origins of the brands represented at the mall gives an indication of just how international Accra is becoming. Many of the brands represented at the mall—for example, Apple, Puma, and Levis, have not had retail stores in the city before.

Table 4: Location of headquarters of brands represented at the Accra Mall, November 2014

Location of Headquarters	Number of Stores	Percentage of Stores
Ghana	35	54
South Africa	11	16
Nigeria	4	6
Spain	3	4
USA	3	4
Netherlands	2	3
Switzerland	2	3
United Kingdom	2	3
Germany	2	3
Japan	2	3
South Korea	1	1
Togo	1	1
Australia	1	1

Who visits the mall?

The Accra Mall has become a destination for more than just Accra’s middle and upper classes. Foot count data generated by mall management shows a total of 6.1 million visitors in 2011 and almost 6.3 million visitors in 2012, while the population of Accra in 2010 (the year of the last census) was just over 4 million (Ghana Statistical Service 2012). Of those 6.3 million visitors in 2012, approximately 2.5 million visited Game and 3.7 million visited Shoprite. 6.3 million visitors is a comparatively high number for a 215,000 square foot mall. Consider, for example, Westfield Town Center in Tukwila, a suburb of Seattle, Washington, which, according to *Travel and Leisure* magazine is the 28th most visited mall in the US, with 9.9 million annual visitors in 2011 and 1.7 million square feet of retail space (2011).

Of course, a lot of visitors to the Accra Mall are regular customers, undoubtedly contributing to the high foot count, but not everyone who visits the mall is there to spend money. “Idlers,” as business owners describe them, are a common sight. Compared to a typical American mall, there are few spaces in the Accra Mall in which people can

congregate without spending money—there’s no fountain, no balcony, and all restaurants in the food court use wait staff who take orders from tables, ensuring that occupants are there to spend. Occasionally, when the food court is not too busy, visitors get away with breaking open Shoprite bags to consume the Coca Cola and bread they have purchased, a way to avoid the high mark-up of such snacks at food court restaurants. On more than one occasion, however, I observed such groups being approached by mall security and asked to vacate, hence walking around, window shopping, and people-watching from the six benches in the mall’s corridors have become some of the most popular ways to enjoy the mall without having to spend money. This is particularly true for the young. As Beatrice, an employee at a high-end shoe store told me, describing the university students who flood the mall at the end of the week. “Oh yeah, window shopping. They do that a lot...They come and look. They don’t buy. We just ask and they tell you, ‘Thank you! I’ll come back later!’”

The socio-demographic profile of mall visitors is highly variable depending on the day of the week and the time of day. Unsurprisingly, weekdays tend to be much quieter than weekends, with most visitors coming to run errands, such as picking up a few groceries at Shoprite or meeting a friend or colleague for a coffee in the food court. On weekdays, especially early in the day, typical mall visitors include white collar workers from nearby office complexes (identifiable by the security tags hanging around their necks) foreign families on vacation, mothers and children, and, frequently, newly arrived expatriates from the Europe, the US, and east Asia, touring the mall with local Ghanaian guides. On weekday evenings, much of the activity shifts to the food court, with groups of young people meeting one another for drinks and food, and families

sitting at tables while their children play in the play area. On weekends during the daytime, the mall is filled with families, both native Ghanaians and a large number of Syrian and Lebanese-Ghanaians, most of whom visit Game or Shoprite to stock up on essentials. One unique feature of the Accra Mall is that shopping carts can be taken all over the mall, thus families will often buy groceries at Shoprite and then linger to window shop, wheeling their carts around with them. Often, families dress up to come to the mall, as though it were a special occasion. On Saturday nights, the mall gets packed with young people in their twenties and thirties, who come to meet friends at the food court or to see movies at the Silverbird cinema. Couples walk around the mall holding hands and have their pictures taken at the Fotostore.

The mall also attracts visitors from much further afield. According to mall management, traders from countries such as Togo and Burkina Faso purchase large quantities of goods at the mall, indicating that it has become an important regional source for goods that would otherwise have to be purchased in Europe or North America at a much higher cost to sellers, not to mention the inconvenience of acquiring visas and getting goods through customs. An article from the *Africa Report* corroborates this, recounting that “Retailers, particularly from Togo and Nigeria, regularly visit the country” and quotes Olympio Agbodza, the current Accra Mall manager as saying, ““People use Accra Mall as a shopping hub, where they come and shop in huge quantities to go and stock their shops in Lomé or Lama-Kara or wherever”” (Adwoa McTernan 2014). Organized tour buses also bring upper-middle class shoppers from Togo to the Accra Mall on a fairly regular basis, thus the mall serves a customer base well beyond the Greater Accra region, functioning as a regional warehouse for goods to be resold outside

of Ghana and as a tourist destination for those with the means to buy who lack “the modern shopping experience” in their own countries.

Doing Business at the Mall

Getting retail space in the mall is not easy. As Eunice, the owner of a shoe store, recounted, “[In 2012], getting space in the Accra Mall was asking God to come to earth.” When the mall first opened, business owners clamored to get a spot, with well over 200 on the waiting list. This surprised the mall’s foreign investors, who had initially considered the rents too high to attract a large number of prospective tenants. Initially, retail space in the mall rented at about \$25 per square foot—approximately twice as high as elsewhere in Accra, including Oxford Street, Accra’s most well known shopping district. Since then, rents have almost doubled to about \$45 per square foot. Though this rent hike pushed out some of the smaller businesses, others, especially large multinationals, have quickly filled their place. In deciding which businesses should get retail space, management considers a number of factors, the most important of which is retail mix—the diversity of businesses in the mall. A member of the management team revealed to me, for example, that they turned down an application by Gucci because the applicant insisted on selling both men’s and women’s clothing, while mall management wanted to open a store focused exclusively on men’s apparel to help balance the overrepresentation of women’s apparel at the mall.

I interviewed four owners and two managers of businesses at the Accra Mall, thus the data I present here are largely anecdotal and cannot be said to represent the general perspective of business owners at the mall. This relatively small sample size was not by design, but in attempting to recruit business owners to participate in my research I

quickly discovered that they are largely absent from their brick and mortar stores, and are often reluctant to be interviewed. Most have multiple branches in Accra or operate other businesses. The owner of the Birkenstock store in the Accra Mall, for example, also owns the Adidas store in the West Hills Mall, while the franchise owner for Bata shoes owns stores in five different locations around the city and runs the business from a remote office. However, the six managers and owners I spoke with do represent a diverse range of enterprises: from franchisees of large multinationals to sellers of locally made goods, healthcare providers to travel agents. Respondents also took divergent routes in establishing their businesses. Some had personal connections with Joseph Owusu-Akyaw, the mall’s founder, while others applied to be part of the project when it was initiated. Some lingered on the waitlist once the mall had already opened. A brief profile of the business owners I interviewed is provided in Table 5.

Table 5: Profile of mall business owners and managers interviewed, November 2014

Name	Owner/Manager	Business type	Years business has been in mall	How business was established
Eunice	Owner	Shoe store (franchise)	2	Application approved from waiting list
Nana	Manager	Dutch-owned fabric store	7	Application approved prior to mall opening
Dennis	Owner	Healthcare provider	7	Signed on to project pre-mall construction. Personal connection with mall’s founding partner.
Emma	Owner	Locally made women’s apparel	7	Application approved prior to mall opening
Kevin	Co-owner	Food court restaurant	7	Signed on to project pre-mall construction. Personal connection with mall’s founding partner.
Priscilla	Manager	Travel	7	Application approved prior to mall opening

Business owners in the mall are a highly cosmopolitan group: Approximately 55 percent of businesses in the mall are owned by expatriates and non-native Ghanaians, many of whom run stores in other locations in the city. Starlite, an electronics store, is owned by an Indian-Lebanese family and has its flagship location on Oxford Street, the most prestigious retail location in downtown Accra. Kumesh, a Panasonic retailer, is owned by an Indian family. The original (and largest) location is in the city's industrial district, near Kaneshie. Eunice, who runs a shoe franchise with several locations throughout the city, moved from Kenya to Ghana and brings her extensive experience of the more developed formal retail sector in Kenya to bear on running her franchise operation. Of the native Ghanaians who own and manage businesses in the mall, most have spent significant time overseas, especially in Europe, North America, and South Africa, and have used their knowledge of formal retail elsewhere to inform their business practices at the mall. Emma, a woman in her 40s who owns a locally-made women's apparel business, for example, went to university in the United Kingdom and the United States, and lived in the US for several years, working in the fashion industry before returning to Ghana to start her business. Her time learning the ins and outs of retail abroad is evident in the way she characterizes the aesthetics of her store: "a clean, contemporary look, yet with an Afrocentric vibe. White walls, laminate wood floors, chrome bars with hand made African dolls and animals for the visual merchandising." Dennis, the owner of a healthcare business, who is in his 60s, worked in the US and in South Africa for decades and returned to Ghana specifically to open a clinic in the mall. Kevin graduated from a university in the northeastern United States, and uses his knowledge of malls in the US and in South Africa to inform his business practices. Like many of Accra's property

developers, these business owners view themselves as pioneers in Ghana's retail scene, bringing international aesthetics, business practices, services, and merchandise into the Ghanaian market for the first time since the political unrest and economic decline that began in the late 1960s and contributed to the demise of the formal retail sector, driving longstanding department stores, such as Kingsway, out of business.⁷ Many believe that Ghanaians are inherently cosmopolitan, globally conscious consumers, who have been denied access to the global brands they so deeply desire. Dennis speaks to the cosmopolitanism of Ghanaians, contrasting it with the backwardness of the Ghanaian government:

I mean, we've been president of the world before—we've had Kofi Annan as president of the world—de facto president of the world before. We have footballers who are making money in Europe. We have professors in America. We have more Ghanaian doctors in New York than in Ghana itself. We have people in South Africa. Everywhere! And the reason that we went out is that we did not have these things in our country! The economy, the individuals had developed more than the government. The people and their mindsets have developed better than the government. That way, if you talk to the average Ghanaian professional entrepreneur, his mindset, what he envisages for Ghana, is totally different from what the politicians are envisaging. So, as a people, we have developed faster than our politicians can keep up, with the pace of national development. So we're there. But our politicians and our government is [sic] not there. You know how I'm saying? If you talk to any of my girls selling perfumes, they can give you the history of Bulgari or Paco Rabane or whatever. They have never been to Paris. They have never been outside Ghana but they know it. They've learnt it.

⁷ For an excellent history of Kingsway department store and its role in creating a new consumer class in postcolonial Ghana, see Murillo (2012).

Thus for business owners, the mall stands as a symbol of cosmopolitanism and of progress, as well as an example of what the private sector can do if left to its own devices.⁸

Generally speaking, the business owners I interviewed were happy to be associated with the Accra Mall. In contrast to other locations throughout the city, one of the biggest benefits in running a business in the mall is that management reliably provides the services— electricity, water, air conditioning, and pest control—needed to run a business, something that cannot be taken for granted in a city like Accra. Additionally, having the mall as a location provides business owners with a certain status. With the possible exception of the new, more glamorous West Hills Mall, the Accra Mall is still the most prestigious retail address in the city and attracts a huge number of visitors, especially those from Ghana’s middle and upper classes, who might be reluctant to shop on Accra’s city streets or at the market. Locating in the mall has been especially beneficial to small businesses, even if the rent is comparatively high to what they might find elsewhere in the city. Emma, for example, is able to attract far more customers at the mall than at her original location in Osu due to the sheer number of people who pass by her store. The cosmopolitan clientele is a boon to the mall’s businesses: with its location close to the airport and to some of Accra’s highest-income neighborhoods, the mall

⁸ It is worth noting that Dennis, and many of the developers I spoke with, neglected to mention the role played by the Ghanaian government in sponsoring developments like the mall. Local planning permission for the Accra Mall, for example, was fast-tracked by the Ghana National Promotions Council (GNPC), a government body tasked with increasing foreign investment in Ghana. The West Hills Mall is jointly owned by Atterbury, the South African property development firm, and the Ghanaian government’s Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT). Airport City, the site of the Marina Mall, Nestle and Stanbic Headquarters, and a number of high-end hotels and office towers, was built on land leased from the national aviation authority.

attracts a significant number of expatriates and foreign visitors, many of whom have disposable income and are attracted to the clean and cool environment. Another significant perk for business owners is that they are required to only put down six month's rent at the beginning of their contract, unlike in other locations around the city where landlords commonly ask for an amount equivalent to one or two years of rent upfront, a condition small business owners often find hard to meet.⁹ Finally, mall management also markets businesses in a number of ways—through social media, radio and newspaper ads, and monthly “sidewalk sales,” during which tenants are provided with tables and other materials to display their wares in the mall's corridor to attract potential customers who might otherwise be too intimidated to step inside the stores.

There are, however, some drawbacks to doing business in the mall, and these drawbacks also tend to impact locally owned businesses the most. Monthly rents are high compared to elsewhere in the city (around \$45 per square foot for line stores), and they continue to rise. Furthermore, rent is charged in dollars, not Ghana cedis, thus when Ghana's economy takes a slide, as it has done in the past year, business owners struggle to pay rent and are often forced to raise prices. One business owner told me that her biggest challenge in operating at the mall is the “dollarization of all rent and all big services.”¹⁰ Another serious point of contention between business owners and management is the requirement, stipulated in tenants' contracts, that business owners

⁹ Upfront payments of a full year's rent have also become increasingly common in Accra's competitive housing market, contributing significantly to the housing crisis currently taking place in Accra.

¹⁰ Though illegal, the dollarization of rent and services is widely practiced in Accra due to the instability of the cedi. This has a disproportionate impact on Ghanaian business owners, whose profits are in cedis, and who often cannot risk raising the prices of goods and alienating potential customers.

provide mall management with monthly turnover figures for their stores. Although some tenants have done so, many are unwilling, fearing eviction if their numbers are not high enough. Mall management maintains that this requirement merely exists to assist tenants in increasing their profits. Tenants' concerns may be legitimate, however, given the fact that the majority stake in the mall now belongs to a South African property development firm which needs to show strong returns to its shareholders.

Because tenants are generally unwilling to share sales figures with mall management, it is difficult to find data on the profitability of mall businesses, though some information can be conjectured simply by knowing which tenants renew their contracts. In the 18 months between spring 2013, when I first visited the mall and fall 2014, when I returned to Accra, approximately five businesses had left the mall—most of which were small, locally-owned enterprises, such as boutique clothing and accessory shops. One business, Casa Trasacco, a high end modern furniture and home design store run by the Italian property developer responsible for the Villagio Vista condominium complex mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, relocated to a larger and more modern facility on Spintex Road, an area of burgeoning high-end development adjacent to the Accra Mall. It is undoubtedly the case, however, that some businesses are highly profitable. Game and Shoprite, for example, regularly report high sales figures—results that have led the companies to establish additional branches in the city. Dennis, the owner of the healthcare business, proudly claims sales figures in the range of half a million dollars per month, and has recently opened a second branch of his business. Eunice reports average sales of about 45,000 cedis (in November 2014, approximately \$15,000), or 600 pairs of shoes, per week. Since opening her store at the Accra Mall, she has

opened branches in four other locations around the city, though the Accra Mall remains her most profitable.

High Prestige, Low Pay: Labor at the Mall

For workers at the mall, pecuniary rewards are less assured. In 2013, the mall employed approximately 800 people, up from 275 when it first opened in 2009 (Oteng-Ababio and Arthur 2015). These workers include members of the mall management team, business owners and managers, shop assistants and wait staff, security guards, and janitors. Jobs in the formal sector are hard to come by in urban Ghana. A 2014 report issued by the Ghana Statistical Service indicates that 61.5 percent of the employed urban population works in the informal sector, while only 9.8 percent works in the formal private sector. Another 18.7 percent works in agribusiness, which includes small scale farming enterprises. The unemployment rate in Greater Accra is 7.2 percent, the third highest in the country. This statistic does not include the underemployed—those who would like to work more hours but are unable to find enough work. Like much of Sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana's population is young and unemployment among urban 15-24 year olds is particularly high, at 16.3 percent (Ghana Statistical Service 2014), so finding a job at the mall comes with a lot of prestige given the challenges young people face in finding employment in Accra.

During my time in the Accra Mall, I spoke with eleven employees of six different types of businesses—apparel, shoes, electronics, health, gifts, and travel. These conversations were informal and open-ended, held while employees were on the clock. Of these conversations, just three were with men. This reflects the overall demographic profile of those working in retail establishments within the mall, who are

overwhelmingly young and female.¹¹ While 30 percent of Ghana's urban population works in retail and trade, 43 percent of urban women in Ghana work in this sector (Ghana Statistical Service 2014). Traditionally, market vendors are almost exclusively female. In this respect the mall mirrors the broader gender dynamics of retail in Accra. That said, employees at the mall tend to be young in comparison to market women. Few of the employees I spoke with were over 30, and most viewed their jobs as temporary stepping-stones to other, more lucrative careers. It is also important to bear in mind that market women and other women who work in informal retail and trade tend to be entrepreneurs who have a great deal more control over their working lives than those who work for an hourly wage in formal retail environments like shopping malls.

Wages at the mall's retail establishments vary tremendously, with salaries for sales assistants ranging from 500 to 600 Ghana cedis (in fall 2014, approximately \$150 to \$175) to 200 Ghana cedis per month (approximately \$60 per month).¹² In interviews, most employees were unhappy with their wages but had little possibility of negotiating higher pay due to the massive reserve army of unemployed youth looking for work. One particularly striking illustration of the dearth of employment opportunities for young Ghanaians can be seen on the Facebook page of the West Hills Mall, which at the end of

¹¹ Shops selling goods catering primarily to men—including electronics and men's clothing, tended to have all, or majority, male employees. The two Dutch-owned fabric stores deliberately hired an equal number of male and female employees, as both men and women patronized these stores roughly equally. Shoprite, perhaps because of its low wages, had significantly higher numbers of female than male employees.

¹² To put this in perspective, a trotro ride across the city, depending on the distance, may cost anywhere from 1.20 cedis to 2.20 cedis (this is for a single ride, and does not include transfers). Spending 2 cedis each way, workers commuting six days per week will spend approximately 100 cedis per month on transportation to and from work. Those who have to transfer may spend considerably more.

September 2014 began posting countdowns to its grand opening. A large proportion of those posting inquiries in response to the countdown announcements were interested not in the goods available at the mall, but in acquiring a position at one of the mall's businesses. Many posted their phone numbers. As Akosua, a saleswoman in her late 20s at a high-end women's clothing store put it, "The problem in Africa is there's a lot of cheap labor." This was true even for those who considered their work at the mall to be a career rather than simply a job. Thomas, for example, a 40 year-old assistant manager at an electronics store and a father of two had had only one raise in eight years of working for the same company. "You don't grow," he told me, "You're always at the same level...It's very painful. But in Ghana it's hard to get a job."

According to a number of respondents, Shoprite's wages are among the lowest in the mall—less than 200 cedis (in fall 2014, approximately \$60) per month, which, my respondents estimated would be enough to cover the cost of transportation to and from work but little else. While I was in Ghana in fall 2014, the value of the cedi had dropped precipitously, partially in response to the dictates of the IMF, which had recently issued a large loan to the government. This devaluation had driven up the prices of goods and services to unprecedented levels without a corresponding rise in salaries, making it very difficult for low-wage workers to get by.

Because of the relatively low pay and scant opportunity for advancement, sales associates at the mall tend to be young. Most are in their late teens or early twenties. Of the respondents I interviewed, the vast majority lived with their parents and few intended to remain in their positions for longer than one or two years. This is often tacitly understood and even encouraged by employers, and serves as justification for low wages.

The electronics store where Thomas works, for example, hires many of its employees through the National Service program, which requires college graduates to work for a year as a way of “giving back” to the country while also gaining professional experience. Here, sales associates make about 350 cedis (in November 2014, approximately \$115) per month. At one of the Dutch-owned fabric stores, those working the shop floor are all under the age of 20. Management actively seeks candidates taking a “gap year” between high school and university, and expects that they will only stay for a year. Salaries are low but there is some opportunity for bonuses, which are based on sales figures.

Employees also reported other ways of supplementing their salaries. In addition to commission, tips were quite common. Beatrice, a woman in her early 20s who sells expensive European shoes well beyond the reach of most middle class Ghanaians, regularly receives tips from customers, which she often uses to buy lunch or dinner. At one of the other shoe shops in the mall, employees pool their tips and share them equally. Their boss, the owner of the business, also pays extra when the sales staff exceeds monthly sales targets. These kinds of incentives are by no means universal. Christine and Akosua, for example, who work at the same high-end clothing and accessories shop, do not receive commission or bonuses, and thus feel little pressure to try and increase sales, despite the pleas of their boss. Their boss does, however, pay for their lunch at the food court, which they would otherwise be unable to afford on their modest salaries.

Hiring procedures vary from store to store. The larger chain stores in the mall have highly formalized hiring procedures. Some, such as the Dutch-owned fabric stores, even include online application systems and several weeks of off-site training. Employees

working for smaller, locally owned businesses, however, tend to get their jobs through personal contacts. For example, Beatrice, the shoe store employee, is a neighbor of the shop owners, a Ghanaian woman and her Lebanese husband, who are close friends of her parents. Perhaps because of this personal connection, her wages are among the highest among sales associates at the mall—approximately 500 Ghana cedis (in fall 2014, approximately \$150) per month, which she considers a good wage for someone of her age and education level. Maryam, a Lebanese-Ghanaian in her early 20s who works at a gift and confectionary shop in the mall, also found her position through a personal contact. Because she speaks Arabic and can communicate with the shop owner, a Lebanese woman, she earns higher wages than her Ghanaian coworkers. Christine, the supervisor at the same high-end women’s clothing shop where Akosua works, became familiar with her boss while working for several years at Woolworth’s, a South African-based clothing shop. Business owners are rarely physically present at their shops. Most run multiple businesses around the city, making the ability to trust their employees—many of whom sell items that would take months, or in some cases, years, for them to afford—a crucial element in selecting employees. Personal referrals are therefore often considered better bets than open advertisement of positions.

In rare cases, business owners even recruit employees from abroad. Gina, for example, is a Filipina in her 40s who works as a specialty healthcare provider at a business owned by a Ghanaian man and his Liberian wife. The couple has three branches in Accra—one at Marina Mall in Airport City, and another on Oxford Street in Osu. These are arguably the most prestigious retail addresses in Accra. When looking for healthcare providers, the couple hired an agency in the Philippines to place ads in local

newspapers for English-speaking, female employees. Gina, who had been practicing in the Philippines since 1992, responded to the ad and was eventually hired. When I spoke with her, she had been working in Ghana for just over nine years. I asked her if she knew why the owners had chosen to advertise the position in the Philippines and she responded that they had heard that, “Filipinos are hard-working people who speak English.”

Unfortunately, I was unable to speak with the business owners about their decision to hire a Filipina, but nonetheless the choice is intriguing given that this particular type of healthcare specialty is widely practiced in Ghana. Gina reported that her salary in Ghana is better than it would be in the Philippines, and that her bosses allow her to return to the Philippines for three weeks every two years, though she would like to visit more often.

There are undoubtedly perks that come with working at the mall—not having to work in the hot sun, for example, and working in a clean and organized environment—yet many of the workers I interviewed shared similar grievances. While working in a formal environment comes with a certain level of prestige, wages are stagnant and employees are often bored. Because prices in so many of the shops are beyond the reach of most middle-class Ghanaians, stores are often empty and employees must find ways to pass the time.

Most of the employees I interviewed saw their jobs as temporary, and wanted to eventually become “entrepreneurs,” a catch-all term that is widely used in Ghana to describe any form of self-employment. Christine and Akosua, for example, both wanted to open their own hair salons, while Thomas dreamed of buying, selling, and fixing mechanical items, saying, “I hope to not work for anybody else.” Thomas’s situation is an example of how high unemployment rates beget exploitation. When I spoke with him,

he reported that he gets just one day a week off the electronics store, no annual leave, and has taken only one sick day in eight years. At the time of our interview, he lived in North Kaneshie, a neighborhood in western Accra, and had to travel at least an hour to and from work, leaving him very little time to spend with his family. Furthermore, he routinely faced verbal abuse from his employers. During our interview, he told me that, “The way [the owners of the business] talk to you is very rude.” Once, when he made a mistake while doing inventory, his boss, the son of the company’s founder, called him a “stupid idiot” and accused him of being a drunkard. Given Ghana’s unemployment crisis, employees are easily replaceable, and therefore exploitation and abusive treatment are not uncommon.

Though mall developers tout their projects as major generators of employment in the region, studies have found that overall, Ghanaians prefer the idea of being self-employed in the informal economy over working for private firms or other small enterprises (Ghana Statistical Service 2014). The ideas of entrepreneurialism and of self-help are undoubtedly appealing to a nation of people who have been unable to rely on government or the private sector to provide adequate employment opportunities for the population. This preference for self-employment could also be seen as one expression of neoliberalism, which, following the imposition of structural adjustment in the 1980s, has encouraged self-reliance over state intervention in the economy. In discussing the centrality of informal employment to African urban life, Murray and Myers (2007) link informality to structural adjustment, arguing that,

... urban informality is frequently miscast as a peripheral, exceptional, or dysfunctional kind of desperate socioeconomic activity, subordinated to survivalist logic and relegated to the spatial margins of the city. Yet instead of treating it as a euphemism for urban marginality, or as an

expression of 'failed' modernity or truncated development, informality is properly understood as a central feature of contemporary cities in Africa, a place-making process that actively creates a different kind of urban dynamism (16).

Yet "self-help" practices and entrepreneurialism have a long legacy in Ghana, where years of political unrest following the 1966 coup against Kwame Nkrumah necessitated such self-reliance. In fact, self-help was actively promoted in the 1970s and early 1980s with, for example, the formation of Peoples' Defense Committees, organized groups of community volunteers, under the socialist government of President Jerry Rawlings. Yet a key difference between this earlier version of self-help and the version promoted under neoliberalism is that such earlier forms of "self-help" promoted supposedly collectivist and communitarian goals, while the neoliberal version of "self-help" is oriented toward individual success. Dreams of entrepreneurialism in modern Ghana reflect not only the economic realities of the current era but also an ethos that promotes individual prosperity, one that has found spiritual foundations in the growth of evangelical churches and "prosperity preaching" throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. Piot (2010) writes of the rise of charismatic Christianity and prosperity preaching in Ghana, that,

Immanent globality...manifests in a merging of the Holy Spirit and commodity form. In that worldly success is taken as a sign of the divine, charismatics celebrate and offer church testimonials not only to healings and the defeat of spiritual adversaries but also to the acquisition of things material (cell phones, televisions, cars, money). Such testimonials of the coming into commodities offer proof positive of the proximity between believer and the Holy Spirit (69).

In Accra, the changes wrought by structural adjustment and globalization have become evident in the embrace of a culture that values individual over collective accomplishments, entrepreneurialism over state-led development, and "trickle-down" economic policies. International and domestic magazines, newspapers, and blogs laud

real estate developers and entrepreneurs as national heroes. Ghanaian popular media and international coverage of Accra is rife with Horatio Alger-like stories of individual entrepreneurs, self-made men and women, determined to bring change to Ghana through their entrepreneurial efforts. Consider, for example, the opening paragraph of a profile written for the news website *Modern Ghana*, of Roland Agambire, the CEO of Ghana-based RLG Communications, an IT company:¹³

Roaming the streets of Sirigu, picking coins dropped by pito drinkers and selling petty items are not easy tasks for a boy as young as six years, but that is exactly what little Roland Agambire did for survival. In his quest to make it in the economically hostile extremities of the Savannah region of Ghana, the Upper East Region to be precise, strong willed, determined and resilient Roland Agambire, current CEO of rlg Communications, was poised for success (Apadu 2013).

Implicit in such stories is an argument that development has become the job of determined individual actors with big dreams, and that hard work and innovation are panaceas for many of Ghana's biggest problems.

Dreams of acquiring material goods are a hallmark of what John and Jean Comaroff (2001) characterize as “millennial capitalism,” arguing that “lifestyle choices” offered by a global marketplace of consumer goods have replaced the civil society of a bygone era. They call consumption the “invisible hand, or the Gucci-gloved fist, that animates the political impulses, the material imperatives, and the social forms of the Second Coming of Capitalism—of capitalism in its neoliberal, global manifestation” (2001:4). In describing the tenets of charismatic Christianity, as exemplified by mega-churches such as “Winner’s Church” in central Accra, Paul Gifford notes that keywords

¹³ Since this article was written, Agambire has come under fire for his allegedly corrupt business practices, including, most notably, his failure to properly carry out a government-funded program run by rlg to plant trees in the northern Savannah region (Ghanaian Chronicle 2014).

for charismatics include “progress, prosperity, breakthrough, success, achievement, destiny, favour, dominion, blessing, excellence, elevation, promotion, open doors, triumph, finances, overflow, abundance, newness, [and] fulfillment...” (2004:46). Yet for most residents of Accra, dreams of entrepreneurialism are not about the acquisition of Gucci gloves, but about basic dignity and survival. While working at Ghana’s first modern mall comes with a certain degree of prestige, it does not guarantee economic stability, thus working for oneself, despite the risks associated with this course of action, is generally considered to be a more promising path toward economic success.

“Idling” and the Politics of Class

Those involved in the planning and management of the mall have been surprised by both the number and the diversity of mall visitors. Though mall management is focused on capturing the upper-middle class female market, those who might have relied on trips abroad visiting relatives in the UK or US to stock up on goods, it is also aware that the mall has become far more than just a retail space. The mall’s Ghanaian architect explained to me that this is because, “there’s a placeness about the Accra Mall. It’s a place...There’s this feel like it’s your terrace. You go there and it becomes part of your space. That’s how [visitors] feel about it.” Business owners and mall management had mixed feelings about this. While some echoed the sentiments of Dennis, the business owner quoted at the beginning of the chapter, that the mall is for “everybody,” others expressed some fear that too many idlers would drive potential customers away. Joseph, a member of the mall’s management staff, for example, described to me a “terrible experience” on the 26th of December, 2012:

The students were on vacation and they flooded the Accra Mall. They were just standing in the walkway, chatting, no spending. A lot of the tenants were forced to lock their doors because they were scared that people might just enter and steal stuff, and so yes, once in a while we experience, especially when the kids are on vacation, this is their destination. They come, hang around, not spending, just chatting, meeting friends. At best they will go watch a movie, get a drink from the food court, but most of the time they are just hanging around, and it's been some of the complaints from the tenants that now we are getting too many of the young ones.

One tenant, in discussing the transition from shopping in markets to shopping in malls, told me that many families will come to the mall at Christmas time, lured by the low-end prices at places like Mr. Price and come out with, “Coke and bread... I see them, just coke and bread!” Yet despite the protestations of some business owners unhappy with their turnover, management does little to discourage idlers from spending time at the mall, and as such, the mall maintains a diverse clientele, well beyond its target market. While most business owners worried about how this diversity would affect their bottom lines, one touted this diversity as evidence of the lack of a class divide in Ghana, telling me, “There is nothing like classification in Ghana. It’s not about the middle class—it’s about Ghanaians. And if you go around our suburbs and our residential areas, you see mansions next to shacks. We don’t divide people; we just live, mixed up.”¹⁴ He happens to also run one of the most successful businesses in the mall, claiming to make \$500,000 each month, ten percent of which, he told me, ends up in his pocket. Unlike some of the other tenants, he does not have as much to worry about in terms of being able to afford the rent.

Complaints about “idling” are generally directed toward young people and those without money, but idling in the mall is not limited to just the lower classes. The food court, for example, has become an important place for Accra’s upper and middle classes

¹⁴ For an excellent discussion of class in Ghana and its relationship to the Ghanaian diaspora, see Arthur (2014).

to conduct business meetings. It is not unusual for those without office space to use the food court as an informal office. Complaints about idling, then, take on a highly class-based character, such that idling by elites is considered a perfectly legitimate use of the mall space, while idling by the lower classes constitutes a violation of the mall's intended purpose. Consider this account from Kwame, an employee of one of the most successful businesses in the mall, a young man in his late twenties, who described to me how he and his friend struck business deals at the mall before they could afford their own office space:

Now one day I was just sitting [in the mall's coffee shop]. I mean, it was my day-to-day business, I was trying to get on my feet and start a business...with a friend of mine... We provided custom business solutions for all companies. So we'd usually close up at four, and we'd just come to the mall and set up at Enda [the coffee shop]. Now this provided a great basis for meetings because when we first started we didn't have office space, so we scheduled all our meetings to be in the mall, midday, you know, so we could have coffee. We'd tell our customers "Oh, we're just walking out of the office. Why don't we meet at the mall, or Rhapsodies for lunch?" So it facilitated business for us. And Kevin's junior brother, that's the son of the owner of the, the man that had the idea's [Joseph Owusu-Akyaw's] son, John, went to the same college that I did.... John went to university in Kumasi... John would just see us here, and at the time, he managed Enda [the coffee shop and Chinese restaurant], and we would just say, catch up with old times, college, hang out. And Doc [Kwame's current boss] would pass by everyday...He would pass by everyday at 5, and he would see us sitting there. He would say hi to John, say hi to all of us. So one day he asked us what we do for a living, and we elaborated on it for him. At the time we were trying to pass on a unique banking solution to any of the banks, and he suggested a bank for us. We did business for a while, things weren't going so well, so we sat down with him one day, and then, he said something that frustrated him about Ghana—over beer, we were just sitting down having a drink. He bought us all drinks—he said something that frustrated him here was, he's been trying to get the same quality of materials for the dental practice that he had access to when he was in South Africa, he was in the United States, when he worked in the United Kingdom. And it bothered him, I mean, we are so much, Egyptian-quality, Lebanese-quality, and some of the stuff was not exactly good. He couldn't vouch for the stuff, but there were standard products all over the world, like KaVo. KaVo's like the Mercedes of dental supply equipment.

Um, Fuji. There were materials he was so fond of that he couldn't get on the day-to-day here. So, my friend and I, at the time, one of the things that we did, another subsidiary, was also we wrote business plans for a lot of companies, a lot of young start-ups, our friends, we did business plans for them. So I said, "Why don't you just open a business that sells these materials, so that you have access to them all the time, plus you can make money off it. You sell them yourself." And he thought about it. Two, three days later he called us up, he said, "Write me a business plan and I'll pay you for it." And he said, "What would you charge for the business plan?" and I said, "I'd rather not charge because it's not yet a successful business, and it was really our idea. Now, I don't really know how much money it's going to make in the future, so essentially it's difficult for me to put a charge to it. So, why don't you give me ten percent of, a ten percent stake in the business in exchange for my services?" and he said, "That's great. As part of that, will you manage the business when it starts for me?" So I said, "Fantastic, I have a lot of time on my hands, I mean, I work for myself." And that's how we started.

His account demonstrates the important role that class, social capital, and status play in determining who is an acceptable “idler.” “Networking,” as long as it occurs in the sanctioned environment of the food court, is considered perfectly acceptable. While informal trading is forbidden in the mall’s lavatories, “high-end” informal business deals are made on a daily basis in the food court or in Rhapsody’s, the mall’s most expensive restaurant and nightclub. Ghana’s middle class is very small, and business deals often come about through personal connections. Thus spaces like the mall’s food court become generators of social capital, giving middle class and well-to-do Ghanaians opportunities to profit from “weak ties,” as Kwame was able to do in developing his business relationship with Doc.

While in Accra I spent a lot of time in the mall’s food court observing patrons. On any given weekday, at least a quarter of those sitting in the food court were there to conduct business, whether meeting with clients or discussing business opportunities with a friend. Meeting potential clients at the Accra Mall has a certain cachet, which is

perhaps hard to understand from an American perspective, where traditional malls have fallen by the wayside in favor of new types of retail development. The owner of a women's clothing shop in the mall told me, "There is a familiar saying now in Ghana. We find ourselves saying every once in awhile, 'Before Accra Mall, where did we go? Where did we buy our groceries or watch a movie? It was so boring.'" The journalist Eve Fairbanks (2013) attempts to demystify the centrality of malls to African urbanites in her coverage of the 2013 Al Shabaab attack on the Westgate mall in Nairobi:

When I first moved to Africa, I was confused by the place of malls in modern African life. In America, for city dwellers, malls are deeply uncool. In Johannesburg, South Africa, though, malls were hot. Everyone wanted to meet me at Sandton City Mall, a sprawling complex half the size of some New York neighborhoods with a cobblestoned village square at the center—even artists and intellectuals, the kind of people who wouldn't get close to a mall back home. A friend of mine, Yedit Fessehaie, travels all over the continent as a development economist. In many of the capital cities she's visited, she told me, malls have become "practically the only place where people socialize." In Lusaka, Zambia, "people dress up the same way you dress up for an event" to go on Saturdays to the Manda Hill Mall, which boasts eleven electronics stores alone.

Materiality and aesthetics also play a strong role in demarcating class divisions. In interviews with mall business owners and employees, tile floors and air conditioning were mentioned over and over as the single most important amenity in attracting visitors to the mall. Like most new buildings, the mall has several back-up generators, ensuring that it does not suffer from the day-long power outages that cripple the rest of the city. This is not to be discounted, and is in fact, central to the success of malls in the city: Accra experiences high temperatures and high humidity year-round and air conditioning is rare except in high income residential areas and office buildings, thus air conditioning is an important draw for potential customers, especially those in the upper and middle classes. The city's open-air marketplaces, such as Makola and Kaneshie, have dirt floors

and can get quite muddy, especially during the rainy season, so tile floors have a big appeal. Beyond simply practical concerns, the appeal of tile floors also speaks to the importance of personal aesthetics and respectability politics in contemporary Ghana. Unless you work in a dirty job, for example, as the “mate” for a trotro or in construction, it is expected that your feet, shoes, clothing, and general appearance should be clean and well-kept. Potholes, muddy marketplaces, and dusty dirt roads represent near constant challenges to this aesthetic, and therefore cleanliness becomes a signifier of class and respectability.

In interviews, tile floors and air conditioning acted as a sort of proxy for the class status of mall patrons. As Samuel, a senior member of the management staff described when asked what brings people to the mall: “Cool environment. Organized environment. And, you know, you meet people of your, of your type, you know.” Such coded language was common among interviews with business owners and mall management, and underlines the idea that the mall is largely a middle class milieu, and therefore an acceptable place for the well-to-do to spend their time.

“Modern” Retail: Formal, Informal, and the Rationalization of Economic Life

In the Accra Mall, formality and informality constantly collide. Despite the efforts of developers to control the informal economy—mall management, for example, prohibits hawkers from operating in the parking lot or selling inside the building—formal retail developments like the Accra Mall afford informal entrepreneurs new opportunities to market and sell their products to passers-by. In part, this is due to the lack of development control in the city, a common complaint of many of Accra’s developers and architects,

who bemoan the fact that their projects are so often encroached upon by unsanctioned informal development.

With anywhere from 7,000 to 26,000 visitors per day, according to mall footcount data, the Accra Mall represents a unique opportunity for informal vendors to reach a large market of potential customers. The majority of visitors arrive by public transit and make their way to the mall on foot, passing by numerous sellers proffering selections of lightly-worn shoes and clothing, costume jewelry, cell phones and accessories, peanuts, and grilled plantains at prices far below those found in the mall. Private car owners are exposed to this informal marketplace while they sit in traffic, waiting to enter the parking lot; the traffic allows vendors selling light bulbs, chewing gum, cellphone credit, car air fresheners, umbrellas, and extension cords to walk up and down rows of cars with relative ease. This informal activity lends an ironic twist to the efforts of real estate developers to remake the city in a more organized fashion—by creating new “modern” and highly organized retail spaces, developers unwittingly also facilitate new opportunities for the informal economy to thrive. In this way, the mall has become a wellspring of entrepreneurialism within both the formal and informal sectors.

A common argument within urban studies, and especially within studies of gentrification, is that the growth of high-end commerce in urban areas jeopardizes the ability of “mom and pop” businesses to stay afloat. In fact, one question that I had when beginning my research was whether traditional markets would be threatened by the growth of malls. Eventually this may occur, but given the relatively small size of the Ghanaian middle class, it remains the case that most Ghanaians cannot afford to shop in malls, and mall construction has actually proved a boon to informal traders. Oteng-

Ababio and Arthur (2015), for example, find that the economic success of malls in Accra is actually heavily dependent *on* the informal economy, and that the Accra Mall generates a great deal of revenue from its relationships with middlemen traders and informal sellers throughout the city. They quote one cloth seller who operates at night selling goods obtained on credit from the mall, who tells them that, “ ‘The Mall has helped in exposing us to customers from various parts of the city who cannot visit the Mall in the day... We now do not only retail goods; others also buy in bulk from us. Today, many of us get goods on credit from the Mall once you are seen as trustworthy. Indeed, we sell most of their imports for them in the night, and my family lives off what I make here’ ” (164). Oteng-Ababio and Arthur also point out that the mall’s low-paid workforce of approximately 800 has opened up new markets for informal vendors, describing for example, how, “a nearby ‘bubbling and bustling’ 24-h lorry station (courtesy of the Mall) has designated stands for food vendors” who, “constantly strive to offer meal combinations at affordable prices.” They go on to quote a food vendor, who boasts, “ ‘Even though my initial target market was the trotro drivers, workers of the Mall now represent a sizeable proportion. They patronize my food because it is customer-friendly and very affordable. We also provide a one-stop food joint for the many young guys who visit the Mall especially on public holidays and this is how I survive’ ” (164).

Evidence of informality is also rife within the confines of the mall. Here I wish to broaden the definition of informality, so that it does not simply apply to the informal economy, but also to practices that might not be considered in keeping with formal modes of commerce expected in the Global North. I mentioned in the opening to this chapter the addition of signs in the mall lavatories, educating visitors about proper public

restroom decorum. These signs remind visitors that buying or selling in the restrooms is not permissible—evidence, perhaps, of the infringement of informal sellers into the mall's less surveilled nooks and crannies. More importantly, however, they point to some of the creative uses of the mall that fall outside the visions of the mall's founders.

For example, the mall has become an important source of sellable goods for informal vendors in and outside of Ghana. Though prices are generally higher than elsewhere in town, there are a few ways in which it makes financial sense for vendors to purchase goods at the mall rather than from wholesalers. The grocery store Shoprite, for example, is reportedly popular with informal sellers around the city, who use it as a source of cheap goods to resell at a profit (Murillo 2012:388). Though Shoprite attempts to curb such behavior, believing that resale of its goods eats into its profits, it has become commonplace. This represents a challenge to the formal model of retail that the mall tries to enforce, although it may actually benefit Shoprite's bottom line. After all, most residents of Accra will not come to the mall to do their day-to-day grocery shopping. Thus informal vendors purchasing large quantities of goods at the mall constitute an important customer base for the grocery chain.

Levels of formality in the mall also vary quite widely with respect to customer service. While some shops such as Woodin, a Dutch-owned fabric and ready-made clothing chain, put employees through rigorous customer service training programs, other shop owners are far more hands-off in their approach to management, relying on the children of family friends or neighbors to run their businesses. Because of this it is not uncommon to walk into a store in which the employees, generally young women in their late teens or early twenties, sit around chatting with visiting friends, paying little to no

attention to customers. Shop owners are generally absent from their businesses—many run multiple operations around town and work from remote offices—thus there is little day-to-day oversight of employees. This often makes it difficult to distinguish actual employees from the many friends who come to visit them during the day.

This is in part attributable to the structure of the mall economy. Unlike in a market, there is little incentive for employees to aggressively try to make sales unless they are paid on commission. Because of this, many employees instead occupy themselves with enjoying their downtime as much as they can. In the eyeglass shop, the saleswomen flip through magazines. In a shoe store, employees listen to music when traffic is slow. In many ways, the presence of friends and family members in mall businesses mirrors the cooperative nature of the informal sector, where family members and neighbors rely on one another to take care of each other's businesses. In her study of market women in Kumasi, Ghana, for example, Gracia Clark notes that “neighborly relations” are essential to the functioning of the market: “Traders maintain the smooth flow of business through the help of neighbors who mind their stalls, relay messages, and share advice and information” (1995:281).

Yet there are also key differences between the way shops are tended in the mall and the marketplace. Though a few employees mentioned that they had relationships with employees at other shops, these tended to be fairly superficial in nature. Gina, a health care worker in the mall, for example, told me that she sometimes says hello to the women working at Caliente and Zig-Zag, two jewelry stores located near the food court, but she does not have close friendships with other salespeople in the mall. Most respondents knew only one or two mall employees outside of the businesses they worked in- a stark

contrast to the highly complex and differentiated social networks present within the traditional marketplace (Clark 1995). Because of this and the low foot traffic in many of the mall's businesses, employees often felt isolated. Christine and Akosua, the two women I interviewed at a high-end women's clothing store, told me that the worst part of their job was the boredom. Making only a few sales each week, they had to develop inventive ways of passing the time- rearranging clothing on racks or jewelry in cases and making plans for future employment. Both eventually wanted to return to the informal sector and become "entrepreneurs" by opening hair salons, a risky enterprise but one likely to yield higher rewards than the 500 cedis (at the time of our interview, approximately \$125) per month they currently make.

Despite the shiny new products available for purchase at the mall, small-scale informality also creeps into many of the transactions that take place. The Samsung store, for example, is an open-air retail space that occupies a prominent position at the center of the mall, next to the iStore, which sells Apple products, the food court, and the stairs leading to the movie theater. It sells high-end smartphones and tablets, which are displayed in a minimalist fashion on stark white tables. Yet the store lacks a cash register. Instead, employees pull change from a plastic grocery bag stashed underneath the front desk. Receipts are handwritten in a carbon paper receipt book rather than printed.

Economists speak of technological "leapfrogging" in Sub-Saharan Africa, wherein advanced technologies come to be initiated before their predecessors even existed. Cellular phones arriving before landlines is a classic example. While such leapfrogging is certainly evident in places like the mall, so is the use of dated technologies, such as all-cash transactions and handwritten receipts. In other words,

“leapfrogging” technologies do not necessarily replace old technologies, but rather exist parallel to them, often in the very same business or sector. This could be said for the city as a whole, and even for the Third World city in general—a phenomenon akin to what AlSayyad and Roy have characterized as “medieval modernity” (2006).

Predictability and Control: The Rationalization of Economic Life

Despite such instances of informality, one thing that firmly distinguishes malls from other types of retail spaces in the city is their predictability (some might even say their sterility), which stands in contrast to the spontaneous and sometimes chaotic nature of commerce elsewhere in the city. In his book on Oxford Street, the main shopping street in central Accra, Ato Quayson describes the “improvisational” nature of a visit:

On entering Oxford Street from the north end, one is struck by how crowded it looks, with both vehicles and people, many large buildings, and a proliferation of large-sized billboards advertising everything from cell phone company products (MTN: “Everywhere You Go”; Tigo: “Express Yourself”) to the services of the United Emirates Airlines; from Nescafe to sanitary pads; and from the Nigerian Ovation magazine to DStv with the face of Jennifer Lopez staring coyly from the billboard. To enter the street is also to be confronted by a range of features that are recognizable from high streets elsewhere in the world and yet are marked here by a mix of decidedly local characteristics. Your regular banks sit cheek by jowl alongside vendors of soccer paraphernalia, which proliferate exponentially during the year in which Ghana participates in international soccer tournaments... Papaye, the local fast-food giant, has to contend with the vendor right across the street from it, with the added enticement of a ghetto blaster with full-on Bob Marley music to accompany your food, while Woodin (retailer of beautiful print cloths) contends with ‘already-made’ (i.e. pre-sewn) variants of dresses and shorts made from the same print cloths but available for much cheaper off the street vendors (2014:12).

Despite efforts by the Accra Metropolitan Authority to regulate street trading, most commerce in Accra follows such a pattern. Opportunistic informal vendors compete alongside formal businesses and are able to alter the type of merchandise they offer

depending on what is selling best (for example, soccer paraphernalia during the Africa Cup). The mall, in contrast, is a highly regulated space in which one always knows what to expect. Products come with guarantees and set prices, and merchandise is often returnable if customers are not completely satisfied. Business owners are only allowed to sell what is outlined in their contracts, which sometimes leads to conflict between tenants and management. Samuel, who manages the mall, told me that one of the biggest problems Broll, the property management company, has in working with businesses used to selling in the informal sector is, “Here the tenant is limited to what you've been, what the lease defines as your trading, as your merchandise. Alright. Uh, some of them, once in a while you find them adding onto, when the lease doesn't allow it... so it's strictly, you do men's clothes, let's say, for example, Armadio. And you pass by there and there's perfumes there. Obviously that is a breach of your contract.” Entrepreneurs in the informal sector do not have to deal with these kinds of formal contracts, so although there is a great deal of uncertainty involved in selling in the informal sector there is also level of freedom to adjust to market forces that does not exist in Accra's malls.

The most notable contrast between the mall and the street, despite the mall's relatively high footcount, is how uncongested the mall often is, especially inside the shops themselves. It is not uncommon to walk through on a weekday and see only a handful of people actually entering the stores. The tile floors and air conditioning contribute to the feeling of relative calm that can be found walking into the mall. In addition to providing the middle class with new spaces to socialize and network, the mall also provides its patrons with a highly predictable and organized shopping and leisure experience. Development control is a tricky business in a city like Accra. While

the Accra Metropolitan Authority has few resources to devote to regulating the informal sector, mall management is able to exert a great deal of control over how things are sold within the mall, even if they cannot stop informal vendors from selling outside the mall's boundaries. One example of this control is in the design of mall businesses, which must be approved by mall management. Management sees its role as educating business owners about the proper ways of conducting business in a formal context. When I asked what the management does to assist tenants with increasing foot traffic, I was told by Joseph, the marketing manager, that,

Sometimes it's very little stuff. Sometimes it's the way their displays are. And see, the concept of shopping malls is that they're supposed to leave their doors open so people are able to freely enter without any intimidation. Because already people perceive in their mind that Accra Mall, stuff here is expensive, and so even when they come here, especially when they come and the doors are closed, you know, so, when they come and the doors are shut then they find it a little difficult to enter. And so it's very little things. How do you display your stuff? Look at your pricing, the customer service, because this is what tells people to come in and come in again. So we do very little but just giving them advice, just telling them how to display their shop front and get people coming in.

Thus there are fairly rigid and standardized expectations of how vendors should sell their wares in a mall setting. When I asked management where they look for inspiration of how the mall should look, I was told that they look to other examples in Africa, particularly South Africa and Mauritius. This standard is high given the vastly different socioeconomic conditions of South Africa and Ghana.

This effort to achieve a certain aesthetic standard as well as a standard of service reveals the degree to which developments like the mall aspire to be thought of as “world-class,” despite their fledgling and experimental nature. I use the term “aspirational development” to characterize this impulse. Though malls in Accra do not represent

“development” in any holistic sense of the term, for example, in the widespread improvement of living conditions, they represent the aspirations of an African globalizing elite to project their vision of the ideal city onto the urban population as a whole, such that the mall is framed by its architects and boosters as an opportunity to impress upon the larger population a set of ideas about what urban development “should” look like. Cleanliness and order, security, the radical transformation of urban space and aesthetics, and elite consumption as the preeminent symbol of development are the hallmark of these aspirations. Much like the modernization rhetoric surrounding urban planning of the 1960s, developers aspire toward a rationalization of economic life, arguing that informal commerce does not belong in a modern city.

Mall as Student, Mall as Teacher: Accra Mall as Retail “Pioneer”

Joseph Owusu-Akyaw, the founder of the mall, and the people who knew him considered him a pioneer. A student of malls elsewhere, his dream, according to the speech he gave at the mall’s official opening, was to bring a “world-class” mall and entertainment complex to his home country (Owusu-Akyaw n.d.). As the first mall in the country, the Accra Mall, its developers, and its management are all, in a sense, students, attempting to learn about how to properly operate a mall in the Ghanaian context. The Accra Mall, which was designed by a South African firm, is inspired by South African malls but on a much smaller scale. In South Africa, malls have taken on many of the functions previously provided in urban centers, moving services from the public to the private sphere—in many ways a continuation of apartheid policies, though formally based on principles of class rather than race-based exclusion, and justified by the ever-present fear of urban crime (Marks and Bezzoli 2001). Unlike malls in the US, South African malls

commonly contain grocery stores, medical and dental clinics, banks, and even post offices, and thus function not simply as shopping complexes, but as cities in and of themselves. The Century City Mall in Cape Town, for example, contains new high-end residential enclaves, office towers, a “jungle-themed” adventure park, shops, restaurants, and a variety of other services, all accessible from a main motorway, effectively eclipsing the need for a traditional central business district (Marks and Bezzoli 2001).

The Accra Mall, in its efforts to be a “one-stop shop,” is one component of a similar, though perhaps less orchestrated, effort on the part of developers in Accra to suburbanize development, with an eventual plan to develop a new central business district on the outskirts of the city. Airport City, for example, the new office park that contains the Ghana headquarters of Nestle along with other big multinationals, was built in the wake of the success of the Accra Mall, as were several of the new residential developments that have appeared on Spintex Road, just behind the mall, and along Liberation Road, one of the city’s most well-known and prestigious thoroughfares. Still, these developments are piecemeal and are not yet well connected. Cars must make labyrinthine trips to get between them despite their close physical proximity, a phenomenon a property developer I interviewed complained about bitterly when describing the challenges associated with upgrading Accra’s urban fabric, as well as evidence of the inability of the public sector to keep up with rampant development in Accra’s most desirable neighborhoods.

Developers and management see the Accra Mall as a test subject—just the beginning of what is to come in Ghana. In numerous interviews, respondents stressed the notion that the mall represents a learning opportunity, both for how to manage mall-based

retail in Ghana, and also for the construction of future malls. Dennis, the owner of one of the most successful businesses in the mall and a close friend of the mall's founder, Joseph Owusu-Akyaw, likened the process of developing the mall to being a deep sea diver: "Any pioneer will tell you, you know, it's like, trying to find the sea water, you know, the content in Antarctica—going down the ice to see what is in the darkness there—it's difficult." Kevin, who, in addition to being a tenant is a board member of the mall, described how the management is learning from the experience of running the country's first international-style shopping mall:

We're trying to go to the second step—how profitable are the malls? How can we add on? What are people looking for after five years, what are they asking about? So we've moved to a second phase of, okay, we know a mall can work in Ghana. How do we make it better? We know it can work. We've seen the numbers. We've seen most of these shops have stayed for five years and they're renewed. Most of the multinationals are growing in this country. So when we move to the next step, let's say a bigger Accra Mall. A more friendly Accra Mall to navigate. More options, more parking for people. So we're trying to go the next step now.

Mall management has made changes in response to some early plans that proved unprofitable, and it is planning more. When the mall first opened, for example, the open area encircled by the food court was used as a concert venue, but according to the mall's architect, concerts were not well attended and mall management was under pressure from investors to increase revenue:

...They were under pressure to show a better payback, because we had gone into the project with too little rents because there was all this skepticism. Basically, the analysts went into the market and said, "Oh, you want to charge \$23 but the highest rent in this city is \$12. How are you gonna make this happen?" And so on, and so, there was all this skepticism. So the rents were lower. We tried to make them understand that this is a different project and therefore it certainly would work. You might have some challenges in the beginning, but once it kicks off it's gonna work. They didn't. They said, "No, forget it." So the rents shouldn't have come in at that. So by the time they were ready and they were going, they were

realizing they were not making that much money from the rents because the rents were low... So they started looking for all sorts of places to [make money], so they came to me and said, "Let's design a playground for the heart there." I did a scheme but I said, "You know, you probably have to do this thing— you've got to test it. You know. Find some operator who's probably got some playground equipment and let's test it and see whether it's gonna work and let's see what the troubles and problems are. Then, if it's gonna work you might want to get a better, you know..." So they started slowly with little things here and there and it started to work very well. Then, they expanded the equipment. And everything is sort of ad-hock. The playground, it hasn't been planned—throw in this, throw in that. Today I went there and I saw something that wasn't very good and I'm going to have to go and make a comment. But in the end it looks like you can't imagine the place without it. It's an afterthought. It was tacked on.

Since my initial interview with the mall's architect in spring 2013, this space has once again been transformed. Though the children's play area still operates several days a week, the mall also rents out the space for exhibits and promotional events, presumably to raise more revenue.

The mall's current owners, Atterbury, who purchased a majority share in the complex in 2012, now plan to expand. They have acquired another large piece of land behind the current structure and are designing a massive addition to be connected to the original mall via an escalator. Eventually, this addition will double the mall's square footage. There are, however, a number of issues that will need to be resolved, most notably traffic and parking, which almost caused the mall to be shut down by the Accra Metropolitan Assembly in its first few days of operation.

Mall management has also begun to rethink the aesthetics of the mall. The new West Hills Mall, which opened in October 2014 is a far more impressive edifice, with a grand entrance replete with fountains and a outdoor food court (See Figure 8). The Accra Mall's owners, Atterbury, who also own the West Hills Mall, hope to replicate this

design at the Accra Mall by opening up the front of the mall and creating a central entranceway that feeds into the mall’s food court. Now that competition exists between Accra’s six malls, aesthetics are a central concern of developers.

Figure 8: Comparison of mall facades: Accra Mall vs. West Hills



Such aesthetic concerns are also a hallmark of neoliberal urban design, where branding and packaging, or as Wolfgang Haug (1987) puts it, “semblance,” themselves become commodities. In modern Accra, malls are becoming not simply sites of consumption, but objects to consume. Various scholars have compared modern shopping malls to sites of worship. George Ritzer, for example, calls malls, casinos, and cruise ships “cathedrals of consumption” (2010). The trend toward creating more opulent, impressive malls, then, is one sign of Accra’s tendency toward neoliberal development and the cultivation of a new consumer class. It is no coincidence that along with this tendency, some middle class Ghanaians have, since the neoliberal reform of the 1980s and early 1990s, been increasingly drawn toward “prosperity preaching” and conspicuous displays of financial success as evidence of God’s grace (Gifford 2004).

As the country’s first self-enclosed modern shopping mall built to international standards, the Accra Mall is perceived by its management and by business owners to also serve a number of didactic purposes—educating visitors, and the city as a whole, about

what it means to be a modern consumer. The mall is viewed by its promoters as a symbol of where Accra is going and what “could be” if such development is allowed to continue. This is evident not only from interviews, but also through observation of the mall environment, for example, in the list of rules posted in the mall’s lavatories. This is just one example of the way that the mall attempts to discipline bodies into abiding by new codes of conduct, which are often vastly different from those of the marketplace.

Consider the way that goods are displayed in malls versus in open markets. In explaining how mall management selects tenants, a member of the management team told me, “A lot of Ghanaians are still trying to understand the whole idea of shopping malls. They think that they can replicate their standalone shop at Osu Oxford Street and bring it here. But here we need to maintain a certain standard. And so your look has to be to the international, so we don't just allow any concept for your shop. Even if you are selling clothes, in terms of how the shop and everything looks like it must be to a specific standard and once you don't meet that unfortunately we will not allow that to happen here.” These standards are determined by management, and are based on expectations of orderliness, cleanliness, and, perhaps harder to define, a cosmopolitan aesthetic that speaks to the “international” standards to which the mall attempts to hold itself. In his inaugural speech, Joseph Owusu-Akyaw, the mall’s initiating partner, stated, “The mall provides a totally new lifestyle of a one-stop shopping and entertainment complex as seen in the United States, Europe and other parts of the world. As a result of its existence new retailers have been introduced to Ghana thereby widening choice and availability of consumer goods and leisure to Ghanaians.” The Ghanaian architect responsible for overseeing the completion of the mall rejected designs drawn up by the South African

architects that he deemed too “African,” such as the inclusion of fruit and vegetable stands in the mall’s parking lot, saying, “I threw out all those things, you know, because I knew the hearts of people. They wanted to be international in outlook. If they wanted to go to the market they would go to the market.”

In addition to working with tenants to build their understanding of proper mall decorum, business owners and mall management focus their marketing efforts on helping the Ghanaian public understand what it means to be a modern consumer. Within the mall’s food court, there is a coffee shop and bakery. Coffee shops are rare in the rest of Accra, and tend to be concentrated in its most cosmopolitan neighborhoods, catering primarily to expatriates and wealthy, well-traveled Ghanaians. Enda, the coffee shop in the mall, has made an effort to introduce the concept of specialty coffee drinks to the Ghanaian public through its décor: one of the walls is adorned with definitions of various coffee drinks, as well as descriptions of how coffee is consumed throughout the world (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Coffee education at Enda



The same kind of educational architecture can be seen in Shoprite in the West Hills Mall, whose deli counter is decorated with overhead signs explaining the difference between “salami” and “salumi” and providing ideas for how to use beetroot (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Deli counter education at Shoprite, West Hills Mall



First-time visitors to the mall are often characterized by business owners and mall management as students needing to be coached in the ways of modern consumerism. Kevin described to me in detail the experience the average Ghanaian might have of visiting the mall for the first time:

Some people walking in, they think you have to pay to enter a mall. When we tell them you don't have to, they're like, "Wow, I don't have to pay to walk through an air-conditioned environment? I'm gonna walk through," and when they walk through, maybe they'll buy food. Next time they'll try to buy something from Shoprite or Game. Something. But the draw, I think the first draw is, "What is this?" If I don't need to pay to walk through, let me walk through. What do I find? If I ask the prices, maybe when I come next time, at Christmas when I have money to spend, I'm going to buy something at the Accra Mall, just to say I bought something here."

Here, Kevin draws on the symbolic significance of buying from the mall versus buying from the market. He points out that malls are not only more comfortable shopping environments, but also that they also offer visitors a type of cultural capital that was previously unavailable to them. Hence, people will come “just to say [they] bought something here.”

Eunice compares the development of shopping malls in Ghana to her experience in Kenya, describing how malls will inevitably come to overtake markets, at least for the middle class:

Shopping malls in Kenya moved people from buying in informal markets, you know, the kiosks, because what they did, these big retailers were able to bring in the same at a more air-conditioned [sic] and get very low prices from the suppliers, and then the customers came in. They're getting it, not in direct sun. You're getting fresh, nice vegetables at a lower cost than your local guy's doing it for you. And so it changed shopping habits. So Kenyans just shop in malls and that's why it's very easy to get—we were able to get hit by terrorists a while back last year. But in Accra, I think the same will happen, you know? What will happen is that shops like Mr. Price with their, that kind of low-end prices will drive the people who go to Makola over Christmas, and instead of going to shop in that heat, they will come and shop in the air-conditioned mall.

Yet, Ghanaians are also characterized by business owners and developers as not sophisticated enough to understand how to properly navigate malls. Joseph, the marketing manager, told me that Marina Mall, a newer, multi-story mall located in Airport City, is unlikely to attract many Ghanaians because, “I hear a lot of Ghanaians are scared of escalators. So most people get there and they will not go up because they are scared of the escalators. It's funny but I'm sure with time they will get used to it.”

In addition to teaching Ghanaians about how to be modern consumers, mall management and business owners also expect that the success of malls will inspire traditional markets to modernize. Though all agree that malls have a long way to go

before being able to compete with markets in terms of revenue and customer base, they also think that markets will eventually have to respond to the popularity of malls in some way, perhaps by transforming the way they do business. Kwame, the employee who began the supply arm of the mall's medical and dental clinic, took a more nuanced view toward the future of commerce in Accra, comparing Ghana to the more developed economy of South Africa:

What will naturally happen is, those markets are going to have to improve. They're going to have to get cleaner. They're going to have to have—instead of walking, sandy stores, they're going to be paved. Maybe that's what I think will happen in ten years, yeah. But, how those markets work, it's not going to change because I've been to—and let me compare this remotely with what's happened in South Africa. I've been to South Africa a couple of times. And first I got there and I lived in Sandton, and it's so awesome. I mean, I saw so many skyscrapers. The buildings are incredibly beautiful. The train from the airport to the center of town, it's like eight minutes. It's a wonderful place. Then I went to Soweto. I was like, "Whoooooaaa, shoot." It's nothing like Sandton. I mean, I've been to the Nelson Mandela shopping mall. It's like 50 times bigger than this. It's awesome. And I went to Soweto, and I saw people still selling sneakers in stores—some of the sneakers were on the floor—and people were still interested in buying the sneakers from there. And I really, you can't really ever take out the culture. You can't really ever do that. Yeah. It's the most likely scenario to happen here. But, it was cleaner there. Where the guys were selling the sneakers on the street, the streets were cleaner. And they were paved, or they had bricks and everything, so you weren't walking, there was no, there wasn't a lot of dirt. Yeah. So that's what's going to happen here over a period of time.

Though all of the respondents expected that informal commerce and traditional markets would continue to thrive alongside malls, they also felt that the growing popularity of malls would force markets to compete, at the very least by better protecting customers from the dirt and the sun. Markets, however, fall under the jurisdiction of the public sector, and thus change is likely to be far more incremental and subtle.

What it Means to be “Global:” Claims of Belongingness and the Mall

Scholars interested in transnational capital have long pointed to the deterritorialization of corporate activity under contemporary global capitalism. Consider, for example, Coca Cola, which, while associated with the US, has become a global product with consumption rates outside the US far exceeding those within, and production scattered throughout the world. While there is certainly merit to this argument, I still find it useful to highlight the “global” aspects of the mall—its cosmopolitan aesthetic, its foreign brands, and the way it imposes a new model for retail—as these associations with elsewhere, particularly with Europe and North America, are deeply meaningful to those attempting to claim membership in a globalized world. As Kevin told me excitedly:

We’re getting a lot of interest from foreign nationals— McDonalds, KFC. I mean, we didn’t hear of KFC five years ago trying to come, but KFC, it wants a space here. KFC desperately needs a space...So we’re looking at an expansion [of the mall], and the expansion, most of the interest is coming from multinational corporations... Tommy Hilfiger, the British company MANGO [MANGO is actually a Spanish company], which is similar to H&M. I have Zara—that’s beginning. In the next two months I’m actually going to have Spain’s second biggest designer, called Alfonso Dominguez... So it’s changed. Now major players are coming in. I mean, we have Apple. That came in two years after we built Accra Mall. We didn’t even think Apple was going to show up. We have Samsung. That’s a major world player now. With Apple, Samsung, and we have LG here, and now with WalMart owning a majority stake in Game, who knows?

The enthusiasm with which he listed off all the international brands interested in locating at the mall goes beyond simply the “McDonaldization” thesis of global homogenization (Ritzer 2012). The presence of multinationals at the Accra Mall, and now at the many malls that have been built in its wake, does not just constitute cultural imperialism (though this is certainly part of it), or, as many might argue, the imposition of neoliberal capitalism. It also represents a response to the very real material inequalities of which

Africans are acutely aware. Africans live in a globalized world and yet most are largely excluded from the spoils of globalization. As James Ferguson forcefully argues in response to those who bemoan the loss of “authentic” African tradition in an era of globalization, “Most Africans can hardly feel that they are being dominated by being forced to take on the goods and forms of a homogenizing global culture when those goods and forms are, in fact, largely unavailable to them” (Ferguson 2006:21). Simply the availability of these brands, the fact that they are willing to come to Ghana *at all* is meaningful for those who feel themselves to be far removed from the world of global consumer culture while also being constantly reminded, via films, internet, and television, of its existence.

Moreover, embracing the products of “cultural imperialism” may well be seen as a form of resistance to the political-economic circumstances in which Africans, especially African youth, find themselves. In his work on the consumer culture of young urban Ivoirians, Sasha Newell argues that “bluffing,” the practice of wearing authentic foreign, especially American, brands, even if their acquisition requires significant financial sacrifice on the part of their wearers, imbues subjects with a symbolic currency and supports their claims of modernity, regardless of their true economic circumstances (Newell 2012). A Ghanaian example of this sort of “bluffing” is the La Tante Royale DC 10 restaurant, or as it is known locally, the “Green Plane,” a restaurant located in a decommissioned Ghana Airways DC 10 airplane, just next to Marina Mall in Airport City. The plane has been retrofitted to seat 118 diners and serves traditional Ghanaian food while maintaining original details, like airplane seats. Servers dress as flight attendants. A public-private partnership between state-owned, now defunct Ghana

Airways and a local restaurateur, the plane was initially intended to attract tourists. It nevertheless also allows middle class Ghanaians the opportunity to experience what it is like to travel by air, even if they never actually leave the ground.

In many ways, the mall accomplishes the same thing—allowing working and middle class Ghanaians the opportunity to experience the kinds of consumption experiences previously only available in the First World. As the mall’s architect told me when describing the reactions of visitors to the opening of Accra’s newest mall, West Hills, which opened in October 2014, “Oh, you know, but it was, it was something. I kind of like what I saw because, I mean, it brings some excitement to [people’s] lives, and if you listen to their comments as you walk in the corridors, you hear things like, ‘Oh, this feels like I’m in Europe or something.’ That sort of thing. It brings some, some, uh, some quality to their lives. They feel worthwhile, should I say.” The association of being in Europe with feeling “worthwhile” is undoubtedly troubling, especially to those interested in positioning African cities as representing alternative modernities, rather than as failed cities (e.g. Koolhaas 2000; Robinson 2006; Simone 2004), but as a number of African urban ethnographies have pointed out, migration and the aspiration to live elsewhere are central to the African urban experience. Filip De Boeck, for example, characterizes contemporary Kinshasa as a “huge machine of evacuation” (2014:45) while Charles Piot describes participation in the US visa lottery as a hugely popular pastime in Lomé as well as an incubator for new kinds of entrepreneurial activity (2010). Dominique Malaquais writes of the global imaginaries of small business owners in Douala, Cameroon, who decorate their kiosks with depictions of American cities and celebrities (2007).

It is also important to note, however, the ways in which mall management and tenants have had to modify the way they do business in order to conform to local cultural norms and expectations. Eunice described to me, for example, the ways that she has worked to accommodate the tastes and customs of her Ghanaian patrons:

There's always learning in every...shipment. There's some shoes that can be finished within two days. There's some that will take a month, three months. You start wondering why—is it the pricing? What is it? Is it something about—you'll find people don't like snake here because of Christian and also traditional belief about the snake. They don't buy things that look snakey. Nobody will touch them. See, the snake is Lucifer. So you have to also, you have to study the country. You have to understand the culture.

She also describes an encounter with a customer who needed to breastfeed her baby while in the store: “The customer was there and she had a baby and the baby was crying and the baby wanted to be breastfed and she asked, ‘Is it okay?’ I said, ‘Of course. I mean, you can suckle him the whole day if you wish!’”

A common sentiment expressed by business owners and developers is that they are performing a public service by building retail spaces that make visitors feel that they are “worth” something, allowing them to become tourists in their own country, even if they cannot afford to spend money in shopping malls. It would be easy to critique this point of view as patronizing and paternalistic, especially coming from those for whom globalization has brought windfall profits and unprecedented business opportunities, yet to dismiss entirely the symbolic significance of these sites to the general population would be misguided. In an era in which people have lost all confidence in the ability of state and local governments to provide basic necessities like water and electricity, an era in which even the poorest urban residents of Ghana are aware, via new media and technology, of what “modernity” looks like elsewhere, having the ability to step into a

gleaming, air-conditioned shopping mall for the first time reinforces what many people already believe—that private entrepreneurialism can produce meaningful, even life-changing results where government fails.¹⁵

Consumerism, and the malls that peddle it, might be the new opiate of the masses, but to dismiss them *only* as this does not do justice to the powerful experiences of ordinary Ghanaians for whom malls represent a radical break from their daily experiences of frustration and deprivation. Consider, for example, that while I was in Accra in October-November 2014, electricity rationing meant 12 hour, or sometimes longer, power cuts every day, and that even those with the luxury of running water in their homes could expect water for only an hour or two each day. For the less fortunate, a lack of basic sanitation in some of Accra’s poorest neighborhoods had contributed to a massive cholera outbreak, with 20,500 cases reported between June 2014 and February 2015 (CitiFM 2015). Given these Dickensian conditions, it is perhaps not surprising that the Accra Mall has become a symbol of development that works, with its clean toilets, running water, and lights that never go off.

I attended the opening of the West Hills Mall on the northwestern edge of Accra in October 2014. Though owned by Atterbury, the same South African company that owns the Accra Mall, West Hills is far more glamorous, with marble floors, skylights, and most significantly, an escalator. By the time I reached the mall around 10am, dozens of people were lined up to take the escalator up to the second floor. I joined the line and

¹⁵ Charles Piot (2010) writes extensively of the rise of evangelical Pentacostalism among the middle class in Ghana, and especially, the practice of prosperity preaching, the belief that “God wants you to be rich.” Given the high degree of religiosity in Ghana, it is impossible to ignore the connections between belief in private entrepreneurialism and faith in God.

rode up, following behind grinning families smiling for pictures. Once I got upstairs, a young girl in a school uniform, perhaps 11 or 12 years old, asked me how it felt “in my soul” to ride the escalator. When I told her that escalators are quite common where I come from, I could sense her disappointment. For her, the experience of riding the escalator was not just fun, but transcendent. For a brief moment, she told me, she forgot she was in Ghana.

Conclusion

Reorientation: Returning Home from the Mall

While I was in Accra in 2014, an Australian woman working for a development organization informed me of several alerts she had received from the embassy about young white women being violently robbed in taxis leaving the Accra Mall. This news put me on edge, but it also gave me a good reason to begin taking the trotro home to Kokomlemle. Riding the trotro is an altogether different experience from taking a taxi or a private car to the mall, and is also more indicative of the way most residents get around the city. What follows are field notes that represent a compilation of several different journeys I took home from the mall:

Getting to the trotro station from the mall is fairly convoluted, especially if you are traveling south to central Accra. To get to the trotro station, you must walk out of the exit closest to Shoprite and take a left, past the taxi area, and down the steps to the banks, which are on the far side of the mall. You must then cross busy Spintex Road. Parked across the street from the mall are a huge number of taxis, and sitting and standing on the sidewalk are groups of hawkers and people begging for money. One woman I see here frequently during my time in Accra is a light-skinned, Fulani mother wearing a

headscarf. She sits on the sidewalk and directs her three young children to ask strangers for money. Their strategy, especially the little ones, is to grab passersby by the hand or the arm. I and the other pedestrians attempt to evade their clutches as they pass by, but they are quite persistent, sometimes even running out in the road to pursue people—a move that makes my stomach churn each time I see them. I feel a strange mixture of sympathy and anger when I see them, knowing that they should be in school, upset at their mother for putting them in this position, but also knowing that lots of children don't go to school here, that putting children to work is hardly an anomaly.

There's always a stream of people walking this way, to and from the trotro stations on the road to Legon and its northern neighbor, Madina. Most are young, in their twenties and thirties. Some are well dressed in suits and business clothes, while others are dressed more casually but stylishly—perhaps coming to the mall to socialize.

The next task is to cross the feeder road to the mall. There's a median where I usually have to stand for a few moments as cars go by, and then I run to a grassy mound that stands between Liberation Road and the mall. This hill has become a small marketplace, with vendors lined up on either side of the dirt path. There are people selling shoes, sunglasses, cell phone accessories, bananas, cooked plantains, costume jewelry, and used clothes. Most people simply pass by but a few stop to browse the selection of goods. I make my way down the narrow dusty path toward Liberation Road, ending up across the street from where I need to be. Liberation Road, which by this point has essentially become a motorway, is extremely busy and there is no designated pedestrian crossing. I must first cross the side of the road going toward Madina and the university, stop at the median, and then cross to my trotro station. There's no cross walk

and the cars do not slow down for pedestrians. Generally, pedestrians here seem to take a “strength in numbers” approach to crossing the road. A few people start to trickle across and then the rest of us stampede. Generally cars will stop or slow down if they see a big group. Otherwise, you could wait forever, as cars do not, as a rule, stop for pedestrians here.

Once at the trotro station, passengers board buses headed to Accra Central or to Circle. The trotros are privately run, and therefore all in competition with one another for passengers. The mate, who assists the driver and collects fares, hops out of the vehicle, trying to attract riders, shouting the name of the destination, for example, “Circle, Circle!” and spinning his hand around in a circular gesture. Every stop has a different gesture.

Most trotros are repurposed cargo vans, fitted out with four rows of seats, including ones that fold down at the end of each row. Some are nicer than others. All have their own particular character, with sayings pasted across the back window—many of them proverbial in nature: life lessons, or perhaps something from the Bible or the Quran. There are two people responsible for the trotro, the driver and the mate. The driver doesn’t have much to do with the passengers, he simply drives from stop to stop, stopping when the mate tells him to, although passengers are allowed in the front row with the driver, and often try to engage him in conversation. The mate, on the other hand, tries to attract customers and get them on and off the trotro, he collects fares, and he communicates with the driver about where to stop. Fares depend on the destination. It costs 1 cedi and 20 pesewas to get to the Paloma Hotel—my stop. This is about one tenth the cost of a private taxi.

There's not usually a lot of conversation inside. Drivers play music or talk-radio, passengers sit looking straight ahead, play with their cellphones, or dance a bit to the music. The mate turns from passenger to passenger, asking for their destinations, collecting fares, and giving change, usually from a dirty wad of money that he pulls out of his pocket. Small bills are always grimy and thin from overuse and from all of the dust that flies up from the roads. I am always cognizant of how clean Ghanaians manage to stay, despite walking in dirt day after day. Clothes are always pristine and ironed and faces are never sweaty or shiny despite the heat and humidity. Most people carry around a cloth or handkerchief to wipe their faces periodically. In contrast, I cannot seem to avoid looking dirty, sweaty, and shiny.

The trotro heads down Liberation Road. It passes Airport Residential Area and the Golden Tulip, a high-end hotel; the small market near 37 military hospital; Max Mart, a department store; and Flagstaff House, the presidential palace, eventually turning onto a side street past the TV station, to get onto Ring Road. Eventually the trotro reaches Nima, passes the German Swiss International School, and then gets to my stop. As with many of the trotro stops, there are a few vendors here selling food, water, and snacks.

I get off and walk up Ring Road toward Royal Castle Road, which leads to the Accra Training and Technical College, just around the corner from Auntie's house. I am hot and the walk is not straightforward or pedestrian-friendly. I have to go up the embankment on the side of the road, through a parking lot in front of an electronics store, past a couple of kiosks, along a dirt path, and then turn, while stepping over a large open gutter, to continue up Royal Castle Road. There's no sidewalk so instead I stick to the side of the road, having to occasionally change my path to avoid an obstacle in the way—

a parked car, a kiosk, or a street vendor. The road goes uphill, past several makeshift kiosks and shipping container stores selling prepared foods and general provisions.

I take a right onto Sapele Loop, which winds around to Kusia Street. It's a pleasant, paved residential road, with a few small kiosks and businesses, including Calabash, a bar and chop shop (neighborhood restaurant), which seems to only ever be occupied by a handful of neighbors, neither eating nor drinking. I turn onto Kusia Street, praying for "lights on" so I will be able to turn on the fan once I get into the house. In all, the walk from the bus stop takes about 15 minutes, but in the heat, it feels much longer. Living without a generator or a private car, as the vast majority of residents in Accra do, means being accustomed to being hot most of the time. Taking a taxi to the mall decreases the commute time by half. I think about the employees I have spoken with at the mall, many of whom commute for more than two hours per day to make the equivalent of about \$70 per month. Then I remember that these are coveted jobs—that for many, the alternative is unemployment, or selling outside in the hot sun.

I opened this chapter by describing the some of the central contradictions embodied by the mall. It is a formal space, though deeply intertwined with and dependent on the informal economy. It is designed with high-income earners and tourists in mind, yet its appeal far transcends these groups. It is a reservoir of aspirations, providing employees, visitors, and business owners, a glimpse of the "new Ghana," despite economic stagnation and the stubborn persistence of poor living conditions throughout the city. It has also been tremendously influential beyond its boundaries. Since the official opening of the mall in 2009, five other malls—Marina, Oxford Street, West Hills, The Junction, and Achimota Retail Center—have been constructed, and plans exist to

build at least two others in the Greater Accra area. This mall contagion does not seem to make sense in a city in which 68 percent of the population earns less than nine dollars per day, with 21 percent subsisting on less than two dollars per day (World Bank 2010).

What, then, accounts for the proliferation and popularity of malls in a city like Accra? Though the malls are projects of indigenous and foreign real estate developers, physical manifestations of their visions for creating a modern urban landscape, they are also, for the masses, examples of development that works, in the most literal way. The biggest problems faced by residents in a city like Accra are those of infrastructure—roads, electricity, water, and sanitation. While city officials decry the conditions of Accra’s neighborhoods and blame the poor for the squalid conditions in which so many of them live, private developers are able to give residents a glimpse of what it might be like to live in a city where the problems of poor sanitation and lack of basic services simply do not exist, where first world amenities are available to them, even if they are just tourists.

It is undoubtedly troubling that such amenities do not come in the form of better housing stock, more well-provisioned schools, parks, or other public spaces for leisure. Malls, after all, are a neoliberal, sanitized, and commercialized version of leisure. The Harvard Project on the City has even gone so far as to characterize shopping as “the last remaining form of public activity” (Cha et al. 2000:125). Yet while it is true that shopping malls have become the predominant form of development in Accra, it is important to also recognize the continuities between the construction of shopping malls in Accra and the long history of trade and commerce that preceded it, and that continues today. While it is easy to criticize this form of development for being overly focused on consumption, consumption has been a driving force in African urbanization for decades,

not to mention a means by which urban residents have achieved some modicum of upward mobility and independence in the face of government failure and the marginalization of their basic needs. After decades of corrupt leadership and failed promises of new national housing schemes and improved sanitation, it is perhaps not surprising that residents look to these new palaces of consumption as sources of pride.

Chapter 2

From Independent Capital to Globalizing City: Development Dreams and Urban Realities, 1957-2015

I would like to take this opportunity of stressing the moral as well as the physical importance of clean, well-designed and efficiently maintained towns, and to ask all our citizens to remember that our daily environment means a very great deal to us. In this age of material well-being, motor-cars and advertisements we are inclined to overlook spiritual and aesthetic factors and I ask every citizen in Ghana to consider the need for beauty in his town or village, and to be insistent that everything in that town from the largest building to the smallest road sign or advertisement is designed in good taste in order that the result will be towns and villages worthy of our State and one of which posterity can be proud.

-A.E. Inkumsah, Minister of Housing under Kwame Nkrumah in the Introduction to *Accra: A Plan for the Town* (Ghana Town and Country Planning Division 1958)

We need to identify the pressing needs of our people, and for that matter, the nation, and set out to prepare projects that will not only be attractive to investors but, above all, be beneficial to the country. Ghana has some of the best investment promotion laws and incentives to attract investors, yet we have failed to attract what we believe we deserve...

The Accra Mall, one of only two in West Africa and arguably the largest, will provide urban Ghanaians with their first taste of local modern shopping experience. With over 20,000 square meters lettable spaces it has 65 outlets including seven restaurants, a five screen cinema and parking for over 1,000 cars. And significantly the majority of shops are Ghanaian owned or managed. As a pioneering development, the mall is already seen as a major tourist destination and this should substantially help boost further investments in retail development in Ghana. The mall provides a totally new lifestyle of a one-stop shopping and entertainment complex as seen in the United States, Europe and other parts of the world. As a result of its existence new retailers have been introduced to Ghana thereby widening choice and availability of consumer goods and leisure to Ghanaians.

-Joseph Owusu-Akyaw, Initiating Partner, in his inaugural speech at the official opening of the Accra Mall, July 4th, 2008 (Owusu-Akyaw n.d.)

Introduction

When the Accra Mall first opened its doors in 2008, it was celebrated as a national triumph. The inaugurating partner, Joseph Owusu-Akyaw, received an Order of the Volta award from president John Agyekum Kufuor for outstanding service to the country and the project garnered a number of awards, including one from Ghana's Ministry of

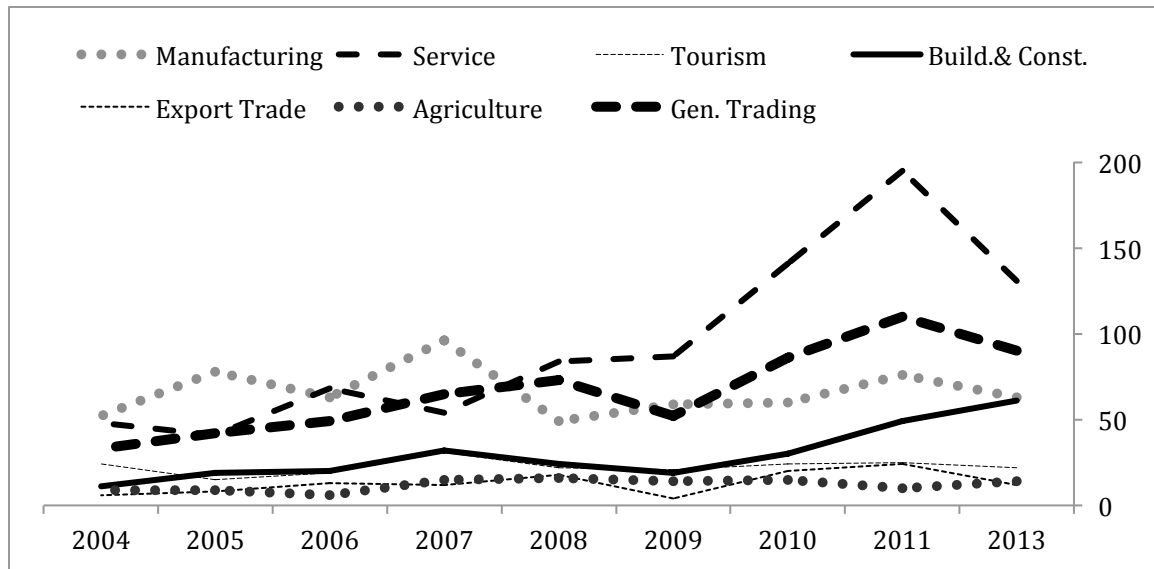
Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration for its contribution to the promotion of tourism in the country (Business and Financial Times 2012). Promoters of the project and local media represented the mall as an unprecedented step toward Accra's modernization and incorporation into the global economy.

Developments like the mall, and the five others that have opened in its wake, represent a new era in Ghana, one in which foreign investment has begun to have a significant impact on Accra's urban form. Majority funds for the Accra Mall came from a UK-based development bank. South African property developer, Atterbury, now owns three malls in Accra. Funding for the Marina Mall came from Lebanese investors based in Burkina Faso, and the Oxford Street Mall was funded by a partnership of the Ghanaian government and the Libyan Arab African Investment Company. The Junction Mall, Accra's newest, is owned by RMB Westport, which has offices in South Africa, Nigeria, and Mauritius. Chart 1 shows the degree to which foreign direct investment (FDI) in Ghana is increasingly concentrated in the service sector, with a concurrent growth in building and construction beginning around 2009. This trend toward a service-based economy follows a similar pattern to many industrialized countries, although manufacturing and industry have never been highly developed in Ghana.¹⁶ Though the Ghana Investment Promotions Centre, the government agency responsible for collecting information on FDI has not yet published the data, it is widely known that 2012 represented the high watermark of FDI into Ghana, as well as its highest rate of GDP per

¹⁶ IMF structural adjustment programs instituted in 1983 led to massive cuts in public sector jobs, the logic being that liberalization of the economy would encourage the growth of jobs in manufacturing and industry, therefore absorbing the "redeployed" from the civil service. Unfortunately, this growth in manufacturing and industry never materialized, leading "redeployees" to seek opportunities in the informal sector (Brydon 1999; Brydon and Legge 1996).

capita growth, at approximately 12 percent. Since then the economy has taken a slide, with government deficits increasing each year (Rice 2013). In summer 2014, the central government accepted an IMF loan, contingent on the devaluation of Ghana’s currency, the cedi, which had a damaging effect on local entrepreneurship. Foreign investment, however, remains robust, and despite recent economic setbacks, Accra has become a “globalizing city” (Grant 2009); FDI is growing, high-cost gated housing estates are popping up all over the city¹⁷, diasporic Ghanaians, through remittances and investments in the housing market, are contributing to a housing boom, and more multinationals and foreign companies are establishing a presence in the city.

Chart 1: Ghana foreign direct investment by sector 2004-2013 in US constant dollars (millions) (excluding 2012)



Source: Ghana Investment Promotions Centre

It is important, however, to note that “global” forces have, since well before Ghana’s independence from Great Britain, played a significant role in shaping Accra’s

¹⁷ A 2009 study counted over 50 gated housing estates in Ghana’s peri-urban area (Asiedu and Arku 2009).

development. Though this chapter focuses primarily on the period beginning with Ghanaian independence in 1957, Accra's contact with the outside world began centuries before, when the Portuguese first established a fort on the eastern Gold Coast in the mid-sixteenth century (Parker 2000: 9). Though destroyed by the native Ga population in 1576, permanent European settlements eventually came to Accra in the seventeenth century, beginning with Fort Crèvecoeur, established by the Dutch West India Company in 1649, then subsequently with the construction of the Danish Fort Christianborg in Osu (until recently the seat of the Ghanaian government) and James Fort, built by the English in 1672 (Parker 2000:9–10). Eventually, the English were to consolidate their power in the Gold Coast, moving the colonial capital from Cape Coast, in the western region, to Accra, in 1877. In his work on Accra's "Oxford Street," Ato Quayson underscores the salience of hybridity in Accra's history, and also in contemporary Accra, documenting the ways in which residents of Danish and Afro-Brazilian¹⁸ descent understand and commemorate their lineage (2014).

It is undoubtedly the case that Accra's urban form has been shaped by Ghana's position within the world system. Decades of global and world city research have pointed to the fact that urban development is closely connected with cities' roles within global economic networks (Chase-Dunn 1981; Friedmann 1986; Sassen 2001; Smith and Timberlake 1995; Beaverstock et al. 1999; Taylor 2001). While much of the work on global and world cities has focused on the political economy of networks of linked cities and on identifying global urban hierarchies, this chapter attempts to focus in on

¹⁸ Afro-Brazilian ex-slaves, or Tabons, are thought to have arrived in Accra in the 1830s from Bahia, Brazil, with several becoming successful entrepreneurs (Parker 2000:15).

something a bit less quantifiable, namely, how the development “visions” of key stakeholders in Accra have evolved along with Ghana’s changing position within the world system—from British colony to independent nation, through the Cold War and the economic decline of the 1970s and early 1980s, and into the era of neoliberal globalization. By outlining the qualitative dimensions of urban change and their relationship to the goings-on of the global economy, I hope to bring Accra, and more broadly, African cities, into the fold of global and world city research, a field which has focused most of its attention on the financial centers of Europe and North America, and more recently, on the so-called “emerging economies” of Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East (Gugler 2004; Sassen 2002).¹⁹ Though economic stagnation and a lack of significant foreign investment, especially during the 1970s (Brydon 1999), has certainly been part of Ghana’s story, Ghana has always been embedded within the world system. By studying how politicians, civil servants, developers, and residents have envisioned Accra, as well as documenting their plans and concrete actions since independence, I will demonstrate how many of the impulses of key urban stakeholders are and have been responses to shifting global dynamics. In doing so, I hope to challenge the prevailing wisdom that African cities are “objects apart from the world” (Mbembé and Nuttall 2004: 348) to be studied through the lens of “developmentalism” rather than considered as rich sources of urban theory (Robinson 2006). I also hope to set the Accra Mall in proper historical context by considering how Cold War politics, the decline of African socialism following the CIA-supported removal of Nrumah from office, and Ghana’s subsequent

¹⁹ One notable exception to this is David Smith’s research on Third World cities (1996).

economic woes eventually paved the way for capitalist private sector-led development and heightened investment in high-end real estate.

Accra in the World Economy

Ghana, or as it was known under British colonialism, the Gold Coast, was to eventually become Britain's "model colony," a shining example of colonial enlightenment and modernization. An earthquake in 1939 destroyed much of Accra, necessitating the development of a new master plan, which was initiated by architects Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew in 1944 and later completed by B.A.W. Trevallion and Alan G. Hood. In the postwar era, recognizing its increasingly tenuous hold on the colonies, the British colonial government invested significant resources in what Mark Crinson (2003) has described as a "welfare state model of...publically-funded architecture" (137), funding the construction of schools and universities, libraries, community centers, and museums throughout the country. Government housing schemes were developed, providing lodging for civil servants and laborers alike. The colonial government, alongside then-Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah's Gold Coast government, viewed the development of educational institutions as both practically and symbolically central to the Ghana's transition into democratic governance, and, eventually, its status as an independent nation. The architecture of the time, though characterized as "tropical architecture" by figures such as Fry and Drew, was international and modernist in style, projecting an outward image of the Gold Coast as a modern African nation, a concern that continued into Nkrumah's presidency following independence. Newspaper coverage of infrastructural projects built in the period leading up to independence highlighted middle class enthusiasm over the "modernization" of the capital. According to Nate Plageman (2010):

[Daily] Graphic articles about Accra's physical environment were more than exposés of urban order. They were a means to articulate a distinct understanding of modernity that had both temporal and ideological components. By detailing the ways in which Accra's "eyesores" had begun to give way to state-of-the-art structures, writers hoped to demonstrate that the colony had finally "come of age." They offered new buildings as "markers of progress," concrete pieces of evidence that readers could access, appreciate, and experience. In the process they argued that independence was essentially an urban phenomenon and that the city, rather than the countryside, could make the nation "more important in world affairs" (148).

After Ghana gained its independence in 1957, Nkrumah continued to invest in grand architectural projects, such as a Parliament House, a sports stadium, and a national theater, which, while not necessarily focused on the provision of social goods, were highly symbolic, projecting a powerful image of Sub-Saharan Africa's first independent nation, as well as promoting pan-Africanism. British civil servants from the colonial administration continued to play a role in planning a modern Accra in the early years of Nkrumah's administration. However, Nkrumah also imported expert teams of architects and planners from Germany, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Israel to update Accra's infrastructure and to provide planning advice and infrastructural support to Accra's industrial neighbor, Tema. Modernization became a central concern, with Tema, Ghana's newest and busiest port, becoming the locus of industrial modernization. Nkrumah invested large sums of money toward iconic architecture in Accra, symbolically positioning Ghana as a proud, prosperous, and modern nation.

Middle class consumption played a central role in this projection of modernity and affluence; department stores such as UTC and Kingsway provided clothing and other goods similar to what could be found in London or Paris. Nkrumah's projection of Ghanaian affluence and modernity even extended to his sartorial choices; according to

historian Bianca Murillo (2012), “Nkrumah’s papers reveal that he shopped avidly at UAC stores and ran up huge tabs on items ranging from fine suits to socks” (376).

Following the CIA-supported coup against Nkrumah in 1966, however, things began to change. The esthetic inclinations of military governments along with the economic slump of the 1970s and 1980s meant less investment in public architecture. Private sources of revenue, both domestic and international, were not readily available. Many educated, well-off Ghanaians emigrated to Nigeria, Europe, and North America in search of better opportunities. This diaspora would eventually come to play a key role in Accra’s development following democratization in the early 1990s.

After its 1981 coup against the democratically elected Hilla Limann, the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) under Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings embarked on a number of ambitious attempts to promote self-help and volunteer-based community development in Accra and throughout the country. Rawlings’ populist rhetoric, along with his attacks, both verbal and literal, on market women accused of *kalabule*, or price gouging, changed the tenor in Accra. With the establishment of local PDCs, People’s Defense Councils, the Rawlings administration attempted to clean up Accra, a project that also involved the destruction of a number of formal and informal markets and slum communities. Rawlings channeled populist anger by criticizing the excesses of the middle and upper classes and championed new national housing policies, many of which never came to fruition.

In 1983, Ghana began its structural adjustment program, or as it was known in the country, the economic recovery program (ERP). This was arguably the first moment of neoliberal globalization in Ghana. The government, though professedly socialist, began

to privatize national industries, imports grew, and a new cadre of international experts started to filter into Accra. Economic restructuring continued into the 1990s, as did the decentralization of the Ghanaian government, a move that aligned with the goal of weakening the central government and empowering local authorities. In 1992, a new master plan for Accra, the first in over 30 years, was released by the Accra Metropolitan Authority (AMA) in partnership with the United Nations (Accra Planning and Development Programme 1992). With the formation of entities like the Ghana Investment Promotions Centre (GIPC), the national government began to aggressively court international investors, offering various incentives in an effort to become one of the most “business friendly” countries on the continent. The private sector was encouraged to take on the task of developing Accra, with members of the Ghanaian diaspora playing a central role in the growth of new gated housing developments, luxury shopping centers, and the development other “first world” amenities in the capital. Public-private partnerships became increasingly popular, among them a number of white elephants that, though widely promoted by the Ghanaian government, eventually fizzled.

Despite these seemingly distinct phases in Accra’s development, a number of common challenges and concerns emerge in the historical transition from independence to neoliberalism. Though national and local governments have had divergent approaches in their responses to these challenges, ongoing concerns about the state of Accra reflect deeply held convictions about what constitutes “desirable” development and how the capital city of Ghana should look and function. These convictions include an ongoing obsession with sanitation, cleanliness, and development control, which are closely linked to fears of Accra becoming one large slum. Socialist or capitalist, governments and

middle class Ghanaians writing op-eds and articles in Ghana's newspapers have tended to locate the blame for these problems squarely on the backs of Accra's poor, urging slum dwellers to take better responsibility for their surroundings. The front page of the Accra Metropolitan Authority's latest medium term development plan urges residents to "Get involved," "Stop; think before you act," and to "do the right thing" (Accra Metropolitan Assembly 2010), a message that seems at odds with the duties of an organization tasked with providing essential services to its residents. Though many of the concerns about cleanliness revolve around health and the fear of disease, they are also aesthetic. Slums, poor sanitation, and unplanned development are seen to be marring the landscape of the capital city, the preeminent symbol of a prosperous, independent West African state. The informal economy continues to be treated in a similar way—as an embarrassment to the outside world, a source of disorder, and, notably, an aesthetic problem rather than a structural one. This chapter explores these ongoing themes, as well as some of the key transitions in Accra's development, and is concerned with addressing the following questions:

- 1) What has been the role of the Ghanaian state in the development of Accra?
- 2) How have official (i.e. state) articulations of development visions changed over time? And, do these visions represent what is happening on the ground?
- 3) Which stakeholders' voices are represented in these development visions?

Only two master plans for Accra have been published since independence: one in 1958 and the other in 1992. The 1958 plan is essentially the plan produced in the 1940s by the British colonial administration, though with some updates and edits to reflect changing realities. In order to better understand what was happening in Accra during the Nkrumah

administration, I turned to Ghana's national archives, examining minutes from meetings held by the Ministry of Local Government, the Accra Replanning Committee, and the Accra-Tema Development Corporation, as well as personal correspondence between expert planning advisors and government ministers.

Obviously, a great deal happened in Accra between 1958, one year after independence, and the Fourth Republic, which was established in January 1993, following Ghana's first democratic elections since the election of Hilla Limann in 1979. Political instability and economic decline in the 1970s and 1980s had a profound impact on any efforts to develop Accra. Little historical evidence exists of a master plan during these two decades. What I present in this chapter is largely drawn from newspaper articles and op-eds, primarily from the *Daily Graphic*, a government sponsored newspaper, the *Daily Echo*, and *West Africa*, a weekly news magazine published in London. Relying on the *Daily Graphic*, or as it was renamed during the Rawlings socialist administration, the *People's Daily Graphic*, has its benefits and also a number of drawbacks. As the mouthpiece of the administration, any information about happenings in Accra must be understood as part fact, part propaganda. However, in covering issues of concern to the Rawlings administration, articles from the *Graphic* also reveal a great deal about the priorities of the Ghanaian government during this time period. Jennifer Hasty's research on state and private press in Ghana (2005), reveals the degree to which the *Graphic* was used as a vehicle to promote the development agenda of the Rawlings administration during the 1980s. It is also important to note that only literate Ghanaians had access to these publications, both as readers and as contributors, thus they largely

reflect the concerns of Accra's educated middle and upper classes, and not necessarily those of the general population.

For the period following the publication of the 1992 master plan, I rely primarily on interviews with public officials in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and private developers, as well as a number of documents published by the AMA and its development partners, including the World Bank, UN-Habitat, and the Earth Institute of Columbia University. I also refer to international media coverage of Accra, which has increased significantly with the announcement of several major new developments in the region.

“A bold and imaginative plan for Accra:” Development Visions During the Nkrumah Years

The Trevallion and Hood Plan (1958)

In 1958, the Town and Country Planning division of the Ministry of Housing unveiled the first post-independence master plan for Accra, entitled “Accra: A Plan for the Town.” An impressive tome containing sections on, to name just a few—industry, open space, population and housing, commerce, markets, educational facilities, and health services—along with 27 diagrams, extensive appendices, charts, tables, and graphs, dozens of photographs and three full sized maps, the plan represents the culmination of years of research and writing beginning in the early years of World War II under the British colonial administration. Yet its release in 1958, shortly after independence, necessitated a number of updates to the colonial plan, as well as its endorsement by key Ghanaian political figures.

The foreword is written by Kwame Nkrumah and is worth quoting in its entirety, as it foreshadows some of the ambivalence and apathy that would come to characterize national and local administrators' responses to the plan:

Ghana became independent on the 6th of March, 1957 and from that day our efforts to improve the standard of living for all who live and work in Ghana have been intensified. Great strides have been made and there is everywhere a spirit of dedication and endeavour. It is fitting that we should improve our main towns alongside our rural and industrial development and that our capital city should offer improved amenities and standards of living. I therefore have the great pleasure in taking this opportunity to offer a word of encouragement to all those who in the future will have in their hands the task of moulding the shape of our cities, towns and villages throughout Ghana (Ghana Town and Country Planning Division 1958).

It is hard to imagine that Nkrumah studied the plan in any depth before submitting this foreword, and the vagueness and lack of enthusiasm in his response to the publication of the master plan becomes even more puzzling when considering the extent of Nkrumah's influence on Accra's landscape during the nine years of his administration, a period of time that saw the construction of several new monumental buildings and landmarks. In the preface to the plan W.H. Barrett, the town planning advisor in 1958 and a holdover from the colonial administration, it is possible to glean some hints about the controversies that may have surrounded its release:

The temptation to take advantage of the present political buoyancy and enthusiasm of the public and to draw up a New Capital for the New State of Ghana and to forget that even new states have their financial problems has been resisted. The City already has the basic physical form of a good town, and no one can deny the appeal of palm trees, colourful vegetation, white sand, and the roar of the Atlantic surf (Ghana Town and Country Planning Division 1958).

In language both pragmatic and patronizing, Barrett extolls the virtues of the plan, cautioning central and local government administrations against any moves to redesign

what has already been extensively researched and prepared. Yet it becomes clear when reading the plan in some detail that many of its elements are most decidedly *not* pragmatic given the existing social organization of Accra. Furthermore, though revised to reflect the changing realities of the postcolonial era, echoes of British colonial planning policies can be found throughout the plan. Reminders of European residential and recreational segregation, such as “cordons sanitaires” and European-only golf clubs are rhetorically repackaged as “green belts” and “recreational space,” depoliticizing some of the deep racial divides that dictated Accra’s evolution during the colonial period, and the city’s resulting spatial form (Quayson 2014).

The plan is expansive, encompassing both the built environment and social practices. It is sketchy on implementation, however, for example calling for the demolition of buildings along High Street, a main thoroughfare that runs along the Atlantic coastline, but giving little thought to the political and economic feasibility of such a plan. In this sense, it is highly idealistic. Despite Barrett’s insistence that the plan does not dramatically reshape the capital, with its “basic physical form of a good town,” there are numerous references to a desire to create something fresh and new for this newly independent capital. Two key projects—the revitalization of High Street and the upgrading of the city center are particularly illustrative of this impulse.

Accra’s High Street runs parallel to the Atlantic coast and is presently the site of some of the city’s most well known buildings and monuments, including Independence Square and Black Star Gate (built in preparation for the Queen’s visit in 1962), Ghana’s Supreme Court, the Bank of Ghana, and Ussher Fort. It is a busy and congested thoroughfare, near the ocean but not directly alongside it. The plan calls to redevelop the

High Street through the “clearance of commercial properties between High Street and the coast,” arguing that, “A stranger walking along High Street would hardly realize that the sea was only a few hundred feet away” (Ghana Town and Country Planning Division 1958:92). Diagrams in the plan superimpose proposed new buildings over the present built form, replacing congested commercial complexes with new amenities like a large restaurant, a swimming pool, and open gardens.²⁰ In justifying the proposal, the authors conclude:

One can well imagine how attractive this area could become with well designed buildings looking out over the widened tree lined High Street to the landscaped open space along the coast. The coastline itself would be tidied up and additional pathways to the beach provided. There are suitable sites for swimming pools at the waters edge...and the rocky shoreline offers great opportunities for imaginative treatment (93).

There is little indication as to how such a project would be financed, how business owners would be compensated for the loss of their buildings and livelihoods, or exactly whom this project is intended for. Given the socioeconomic conditions of average residents at the time of the plan, it seems reasonable to conclude that the authors have in mind middle and upper-class leisure seekers, or perhaps tourists, as the primary beneficiaries of such a development.

²⁰ Eventually a hotel, Riviera Beach, was constructed on the waterfront near Independence Square. With an Olympic-sized salt-water swimming pool, which only worked for a short while and then sat empty, it became a popular destination for Accra’s expatriate community. The hotel has since fallen into disrepair and is now closed, though the building still stands. Dream Realty, a property developer, has since released plans to convert the site into a new luxury hotel and apartment complex, though it has not yet broken ground on the project. According to their website, the complex will eventually include, “two separate blocks of 17 storey buildings made up of a selection of 4 and 5 bedroom apartments, all completed to European finish” and in between..., another block making up an 80 room, 5 star hotel facility and flanked on each side by 12 serviced bungalows” (Dream Realty 2015).

This particular proposal reflects the priorities of the planners involved to create aesthetically pleasing recreational spaces. This concern for aesthetics carries into many of the other proposals and is understandable given the impulse to project a new image of the African city to the outside world, yet by glossing over the livelihoods of actual residents, presenting the project as merely an aesthetic problem to be solved, the authors neglect to consider the complex mechanisms of the city as a lived environment. Fishermen, for example, are not mentioned in the plan, despite the fact that at the time, and indeed, to this day, fishing constituted the most important economic activity on Accra's coast. As AbdouMaliq Simone points out in his ethnographies of African cities, urban structures "are the products of specific spatial practices and complex interactions of variously located actors that reflect maneuvers on the part of city residents to continuously resituate themselves in broader fields of action" (2004:9). Any effort to re-envision urban space must take into consideration such "spatial practices" in order to not seem hopelessly utopian.

This concern for projecting a more attractive image of Accra continues into the discussion of how to redevelop the city center:

The plan envisions a redeveloped central area spaciouly laid out with well designed buildings, adequate car and lorry parks, good roads, open spaces in the form of public squares, gardens and boulevards, features such as fountains, ornamental pools and statues together with an overall pattern distinguishing the various functions of the town and giving it an attractive character. It is recommended that this character should essentially be one of spaciousness, grace, and lightness combined with dignity. The rather monotonous, overbuilt and often depressing form of development such as one sees in some of the cities of Europe and North America would be out of keeping with the climactic conditions and with the spirit of a "new" and rapidly developing nation (89).

The desire to create something new and in contrast to the “monotonous” and “depressing” cities of Europe and North America speaks to the influence of tropical architecture, as espoused by architects such as Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew on planning practices at the end of the colonial period (Crimson 2003), but also to a modernistic impulse toward rebirth, a wiping clean of the urban palimpsest with its layers of European colonial design projected onto indigenous urban practices. This impulse would become more pronounced in the years following the publication of the master plan as Nkrumah began to commission projects that allowed him to put his stamp on the capital.

That said, it is difficult to ignore the echoes of the English garden city movement in the passage above, and throughout the plan. In the introduction to his treatise on the garden city, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, English planner Ebenezer Howard writes, “Town and country *must be married* and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilization” (1902:9). The Garden City movement arose at the turn of the century, the height of Britain’s imperial ambitions, and was intended to quell the flood of people migrating from rural areas to England’s already crowded cities and towns by creating towns that married countryside and city. Beyond the more obvious influences of garden city ideology—the plans for specific acreages of parks and open land to be provided to each community of over 1000 persons, for example (25), Hood and Trevallion’s master plan shows an almost-obsessive concern with development control in order to preserve green space and maintain low-density neighborhoods. They warn that the “tendency to ‘nibble away’ open space must be strongly resisted,” as “once land is ‘lost’ to development, it cannot be replaced” (26). Concerns about overcrowding are allayed through the suggestion that those living in poor conditions in Accra may be given

the opportunity to move to the new planned town of Tema in order to “enjoy regular employment and better housing” (4), exhibiting an optimism about the future of Tema that in retrospect seems somewhat naïve. The plan, then, while a vision of what Accra, the capital city of the first independent nation in Africa, could be, also speaks to a lingering colonial vision. The public squares, gardens, and wide boulevards described by the authors seem much more suited to the English countryside than the grasslands and dusty plains of Ghana’s southern coast.

Nkrumah’s Accra

Documents from the national archives show that Nkrumah was deeply concerned about the state of Ghana’s capital city following independence. The haphazard development of Accra’s suburbs and the overcrowded conditions in neighborhoods such as Nima²¹ and James Town²² were an affront to Nkrumah’s efforts to showcase Accra as a modern African city and a proud symbol of the newly independent nation-state. Nkrumah called a meeting with local and national government figures on August 20th, 1958,²³ to address what he saw as some of the most important issues facing Accra—his top two being the lack of street construction in the growing suburbs and the presence of slums, especially James Town and Ussher Town, which were in central Accra and therefore highly visible (Ministry of Local Government 1958:58). Queen Elizabeth was expected to visit Accra in

²¹ An informal neighborhood on what were then the northern outskirts of the city, which housed large numbers of Hausa-speaking migrants from the north.

²² A waterfront neighborhood inhabited by Accra’s indigenous Ga population, and home to Accra’s fishing industry.

²³ Notes are from a meeting held at Government House to discuss the construction of streets in suburban areas and the clearance of slums.

the coming years, and Nkrumah was anxious to give the city a facelift in preparation for her arrival.

In attendance at the meeting were the Minister of Local Government, A.E.A. Offori-Atta, the Minister of Housing, A.E. Inkumsah, and the Minister of Works, E.K. Bensah, as well as several expatriates, including the Chairman of Ghana's Development Commission, Sir Robert Jackson, an Australian consultant hired by Nkrumah; A.F. Greenwood, a British planner and the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Local Government; B.A.W. Trevallion, the Acting Town Planning Advisor (and co-author of the 1958 master plan), and J.D.E. Barnard, the Acting Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Housing. Also present were several local officials, among them the Chairman of the Accra Municipal Council, the Accra Town Clerk, and the Town Engineer. Of the British expatriates, only one, A.F. Greenwood, was to remain in service to the Ghanaian government for a significant period of time following independence, acting as a crucial advisor to the Minister of Local Government and the Interior.

Nkrumah expressed a desire that street construction in the suburbs precede all other development in order to incentivize residents to complete their projects quickly by providing easy access to building sites. This would represent a reversal of the normal pattern of development, whereby individuals constructed properties on undeveloped land, with or without the presence of roads, a phenomenon that had in the past contributed to haphazard development of the sort found in Nima, and had encouraged the ubiquitous presence of unfinished buildings around the city.

Nkrumah also offered a suggestion of building wide boulevards through James Town and Ussher Town as part of a slum clearance effort. According to notes from the

meeting, B.A.W. Trevallion, the co-author of the 1958 master plan, released just two months before, interjected at this point to remind the committee that plans were already in place for such a project and that consideration was being given to possible areas to resettle the displaced (Ministry of Local Government 1958:59). In fact, according to the notes, the meeting ended with Trevallion reminding the committee that “plans already existed for the layout of the whole of the Accra Municipality and that about 30 percent of the area available for new development had been earmarked for the provision of schools, shopping centers and the like and that the remainder had been earmarked for residential buildings” (Ministry of Local Government 1958). The fact that those in attendance seemed largely unaware of this speaks to the lukewarm reception of the plan amongst national and local officials. Later efforts to develop a new plan under the guidance of Doxiadis Associates, the Greek planning firm, show that that officials, town planners, and Nkrumah himself had their own ideas about how Accra should best be developed. In meetings to discuss Accra’s redevelopment at the Ministry of Local Government after 1958, Trevallion’s name no longer appears among the roster of attendees, and there is little more discussion of the 1958 plan.

The only British civil servant who remained present throughout the Accra redevelopment discussions was A.F. Greenwood, the Principal Secretary at the Ministry of the Interior and Local Government, and a trusted advisor to both the Minister and Nkrumah. Greenwood eventually acquired the title “Special Commissioner, Local Government” and led many of the meetings concerning Accra’s redevelopment. Documents from the Ministry of Local Government indicate that Greenwood was instrumental to the process of reimagining Accra, providing expert knowledge about

different modes of urban administration (Ministry of Local Government 1962b:101-103)²⁴ and successful redevelopment schemes from around the world (Ministry of Local Government 1962a:78)²⁵ as well as concrete and pragmatic advice as to the implementation of new planning schemes.

In 1962, Nkrumah proposed the idea of developing Accra into zones and appointing “Special Committees” to be responsible for the development of these zones. Each zone was to employ the voluntary labor of residents to achieve its development plans, which were to be consistent with the overall plan for Accra (Office of the President 1962:69). In response, Greenwood wrote a memo outlining the logistical concerns associated with the plan—who, for example, would be appointed to the special committees and to whom would they be answerable? What exactly would these “zones” consist of—schools, community centers, markets? How would the communal voluntary labor be organized, and what would they be expected to do? And how did this plan fit in with the overall master plan for Accra? (Ministry of Local Government 1962c:71).

The zone proposal was just the beginning of what later morphed into efforts on the part of Nkrumah and his Minister of Local Government and the Interior to develop an entirely new plan for Accra: “a bold and imaginative plan for Accra with wide streets, squares, and a focal point as a city centre” (Ministry of Local Government 1962a:77). Taking cues from modernist architecture and the International style popularized by the design of cities like Brasilia and Islamabad, Nkrumah and his cabinet attempted to

²⁴ These were outlined in a three-page memo entitled “Administration of Accra,” signed by “AFG,” presumably written to the Minister of Local Government and the Interior.

²⁵ These were outlined in a memo written for the Minister of Local Government and the Interior, entitled “Accra Development Sector Scheme.”

“replace technicians and planners bound to the country’s colonial and ‘transitional’ phases—such as Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew” (d’Auria 2010:41–42), and to create something suited to the image of Accra as the center of pan-Africanism. Greenwood encouraged the Minister to study the example of Moscow, “which has the reputation of being one of the best, if not the best, planned City in the World” due to the “state ownership of all the land,” the “national ownership of all industry and other resources,” and “firm control over all building operations in the city” (Ministry of Local Government 1962a:78). Nkrumah began inviting new international experts to participate in reimagining Accra, purposely recruiting consultants from countries without ties to the country’s colonial past. Notes from meetings at the time show the presence of unnamed “Yugoslav architects” along with Doxiadis Associates, the Greek firm contracted to design the new town of Tema. Doxiadis Associates, which had been responsible for planning Islamabad, Baghdad, and several other new cities in the developing world, had coined the new practice of “Ekistics”—a purportedly “scientific” approach to planning which, “provided the tools for tackling development universally without obliterating context-specific considerations” (d’Auria 2010:50). The central concerns of Nkrumah and his cabinet were slum abatement, sanitation, and on achieving a clean and modern appearance. Firms like Doxiadis Associates²⁶ were considered uniquely capable of achieving such goals through their heavily researched approach to design.

Despite efforts to form a committee to draw up a new master plan, progress was stunted by a number of logistical and bureaucratic setbacks. Minutes from meetings and memos show confusion about who was to be responsible for the development of a new

²⁶ Doxiadis Associates also designed the master plan for Akosombo Township, a model city built at the foot of the Akosombo Dam (Miescher 2012).

plan—was it to be the Accra town planners or a committee of local and national administrators? Did local planners have sufficient resources and know-how to prepare such a plan? Here we get a feel for the practical limitations of these development visions and for what it must have been like to attempt to execute bold new plans in an era in which the roles of various government offices were not yet completely defined. Though a new master plan was not published, a number of developments did take place.

Nkrumah eventually became frustrated with the slow pace of development in Accra, and in 1963 announced plans to create a joint Accra-Tema Development Corporation. According to minutes from meetings held at Flagstaff House, “[Nkrumah] had been concerned for some time about the unsatisfactory manner in which Accra was developing: slums remained uncleared, sanitation was poor and control of development by the city council was ineffective” (Ministry of Local Government n.d.:1). It was proposed that among the members of the corporation would be a number of “Yugoslav architects” who had been contracted to “draw up plans for Accra development” (ibid) and Doxiadis Associates. This decision essentially amounted to a no-confidence vote for the Accra City Council, as well as a belief that Tema’s development model could somehow be replicated in Accra. Nkrumah also “intimated” in this meeting that he would be chairman of the corporation, showing the degree to which he was personally invested in speeding up Accra’s development.²⁷

It is unclear whether the Accra-Tema Development Corporation ever came into existence, although Doxiadis Associates did in 1960 produce a master plan for the entire

²⁷ It was not uncommon for Nkrumah to appoint himself chairman of projects about which he was especially passionate. He also appointed himself chairman of the Volta River Authority, the agency that built the Akasombo Dam (Stephan Miescher, personal communication).

Accra-Tema region, which envisioned a “dynametropolis” with not two but three “dynamic centers” (one of which was in between Accra and Tema), which would all expand in a northerly direction (Doxiadēs 1968:477), but this effort to develop a new development corporation shows Nkrumah’s investment in modernist modes of development and in large-scale urban revitalization. Yet Accra and Tema were vastly different projects. While Tema was to be a completely new “planned town,” Accra had a long history, and efforts to create something entirely new out of something that had existed for centuries with its own patterns and logics of organization would prove to be politically and practically unfeasible.

Still, during his time in office Nkrumah was able to commission a number of major projects in Accra including the Organization of African Unity building, the renovation of Christiansborg Castle, the construction of the State House, and the Ambassador Hotel, which upon its opening was enthusiastically embraced in articles in Ghana’s *Daily Graphic* newspaper as “our hotel” (Plageman 2010:152), a symbol of Ghana’s modernization. Contrary to British colonial planning priorities, these projects “reflected a distinctive ‘imagining’ of modernism, a vision which allied the heroicized vision of Nkrumah with a culturally homogeneous notion of the ‘nation.’” (Hess 2000:53). Yet despite Nkrumah’s socialist leanings, little progress was made during this time on the provision of social goods, with Nkrumah focusing instead on what Crinson (2003) characterizes as the “architecture of bureaucracy” (156), including new ministries, monuments, and other symbols of state power. These tendencies would later be criticized by figures like Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968) as “key symptoms of the stagnation of a new national bourgeoisie securing its own position whilst turning its

back on actual events and the inheritance of underdevelopment” (Crimson 2003:156). Yet these monuments to Nkrumah’s influence on the city remain, symbols of both the promise and pitfalls of a newly independent nation turning outward to the rest of the world. Following Nkrumah’s forced removal from office, many of his efforts to develop the capital would be criticized. Kofi Abrefa Busia, the Prime Minister of the Second Republic (1969-1972), banned the construction of new monuments in Accra as part of an austerity program, proclaiming Nkrumah’s projects to be symbols of excess and instead turning its attention to rural development (Hess 2000:54). Accra would soon fall into a global shadow.

Crisis Management: Accra After the Coup

Most of the proposals contained in the 1958 master plan as well as subsequent plans for Accra and Tema in 1961 were never enacted, although significant changes had been made to Accra’s urban landscape by the time the National Liberation Council under Joseph Arthur Ankrah took power in 1966. If the 1960s represented the heyday of central planning in Accra, the 1970s and 1980s were characterized by neglect. Successive military regimes, political and economic instability, and the mass exodus of Nkrumahites and educated middle class professionals to Europe and North America contributed to what amounted to a suspension of development in Ghana’s capital. Economic austerity, the expulsion of thousands of foreign merchants and traders, and a determination to develop Ghana’s rural areas led to a marked deterioration in the quality of life for most residents in Accra. Also gone were the cadre of international architects and planners employed by Nkrumah. Accra ceased to be a cosmopolitan city in the making, and instead turned inward.

Austerity and Alien Exclusion Under the NLC and Busia

When the National Liberation Council seized power in 1966, they immediately set about to reverse many of the policies of the Nkrumah administration, particularly his stance on foreign relations. Turning away from eastern Europe and the socialist bloc, Ankrah, Akwasi Afrifa, and eventually, Busia, would attempt to align themselves with the capitalist west, instituting austerity measures and embracing the notion that the private sector, rather than the state, should dominate the economy (Gocking 2005:155). Ghana was undergoing severe financial problems due in part to massive foreign debts accrued during the Nkrumah administration, which Busia, who came to power via elections in 1969, sought to pay down, making numerous trips abroad to negotiate with borrowers.

This focus on macro-economic issues along with a strong anti-Nkrumahist current among national government figures and pockets of the Ghanaian public, ensured that the development of Accra would become a low priority for the NLC and the Busia administration. According to Roger Gocking, Busia, “canceled work on prestige projects like the Accra-Tema motorway and the projected Nkrumah Tower, which was to be the centerpiece of the planned Trade Fair site in Accra” (2005:148). Centerpieces of Nkrumah’s efforts to develop the waterfront, including the Accra Community Centre and Black Star Square were neglected and abandoned (Hess 2000:54). Busia instead focused his efforts on rural development and on cultivating relationships with neighboring African countries (Gocking 2005).

Though the NLC and Busia devoted little attention to Accra’s development, the passage of a number of laws at the national level had a profound impact on Accra in the early 1970s. Perhaps the most significant of these was the Ghanaian Businesses

(Promotions) Act, which prohibited any foreign resident of Ghana from owning a “wholesale or retail business with an annual turnover of 500,000 cedis [approximately \$500,000] or less” (West Africa 1970:7). This law most directly affected long-standing Syrian, Lebanese, and Indian businesses, which were to be handed over to Ghanaian ownership.²⁸ Upon its passage, hundreds of expatriate business owners left Ghana, following behind other foreign traders, including thousands of West Africans who were expelled from Makola Market earlier in the year for trading without the requisite permits.

These attempts to “Ghanaianize” the economy, which included Busia’s 1970 Aliens Compliance Order, had little impact on improving the quality of life for Accra residents. Along with the exodus of foreign traders, Ghana’s educated middle classes began to leave Ghana, attracted by offers of employment elsewhere on the continent, especially Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire (Anarfi et al. 2003). This trend would continue into early 1980s, when unskilled and semi-skilled workers flocked to neighboring countries, especially Nigeria (Anarfi et al. 2003), contributing in no small measure to Accra’s decline. Busia’s neglect of Accra began to manifest itself in articles and editorials about Accra’s “filth,” which became commonplace in the *Graphic*. With the exodus of well-to-do residents and complaints by the city council that the central government was neglecting to transfer adequate funds to keep the city clean, conditions in Accra continued to go downhill. In large part, this was due to the fiscal problems inherited by the Busia administration, which included high overseas debt, inflation, and unemployment, the seeds of which were planted during the last years of the Nkrumah

²⁸ According to Claire Robertson (1983), the Businesses Promotions Act led to the enrichment of the most successful market women, who purchased businesses from foreign owners forced to sell. These women were later scapegoated by the national government, who accused them of enriching themselves at the expense of the masses.

administration (Apter 1972). Some have attributed the ineptitude of the civil service, including local bodies such as the Accra City Council, to Nkrumah's overreliance on foreign experts like Doxiadis Associates (Apter 1972:406).

“Operation Feed Yourself:” Self-help Socialism Under Acheampong

In 1972, Busia was overthrown in a coup d'état by Colonel Ignatius Kutu Acheampong and the National Redemption Council. Reversing many of the policies of his predecessor, Acheampong nationalized a number of industries and made other gestures toward adopting a socialist and nationalist agenda, including imposing price controls on consumer goods and attempting to cut down on imported foods (Gocking 2005:167).

Though professedly socialist, the state continued to play a minimal role in the country's development, instead encouraging self-reliance through a number of programs, including “Operation Feed Yourself,” which encouraged Ghanaians to grow their own food.

Though subsistence farming was still very common in rural areas, this was not the case among urban professionals in Accra, who were used to buying their goods at the market or the supermarket. These policies, along with his mishandling of the economy, corruption, and high inflation prompted many more middle class urban Ghanaians to leave the country for better opportunities elsewhere. There were, however, some attempts to clean up Accra. New lorry parks were built to relieve congestion, shade trees were planted, and the Accra City Council embarked on a “cleansing” program, which included the purchase of several new cesspool emptiers and other sanitation vehicles (Daily Echo 1977:4)

It is during this time that the term *kalabule* came into popular use in Ghana. *Kalabule* refers to any form of economic trickery, but was specifically used to refer to the

practices of market women accused of hoarding food and other goods in order to sell at prices far above those dictated by price controls. Claire Robertson describes the demonization of market women as a highly gendered exercise, a classic “witchhunt” against women perceived to have economic power (1983:472). The demonization of market women would continue into the Rawlings era and would be used to justify serious human rights violations.

In 1975, Acheampong dismissed all civilian members of the National Redemption Council and founded the Supreme Council. According to Bianca Murillo (forthcoming), it was at this point that Acheampong empowered the military to control the distribution of commodities, a practice that lent itself to corruption. It was also at this point that soldiers began aggressively patrolling marketplaces and seizing goods, a practice that led many market women to withhold goods altogether (Murillo forthcoming), and which disproportionately hurt poorer market women who could not afford to pay bribes (Robertson 1983:474). As Claire Robertson points out, it was not the “evil practices” of market women that led to food shortages and high prices of basic goods; it was the policies and practices of the Busia administration and the NRC/SMC—things like corruption, a lack of agricultural productivity, and the imposition of price controls, which provided a strong incentive for selling on the black market (1983). Economic mismanagement and a lack of foreign aid (due to Acheampong’s unwillingness to pay down foreign debt), led to the devaluation of the currency, inflation, shortages, and the immiseration of many in Accra and around the country. In 1978 Acheampong was forced to resign and General Fred Akuffo took over. He quickly turned to the IMF, which advised him to devalue the cedi by 50 percent, which had a particularly grave impact on

the rural poor and urban working classes. The IMF also recommended other measures, such as reducing public expenditures, relaxing price controls, and liberalizing the economy (Yeebo 1991:22).

These measures quickly turned large segments of the population against the regime. On June 4th 1979, Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings and his Armed Forces Revolutionary Council seized power in a coup d'état, vowing to “clean house” and purge the military of corruption. Under political pressure, however, Rawlings allowed democratic elections shortly thereafter, which led to the election of Hilla Limann and the beginning of the short-lived Third Republic, which lasted until Rawlings’s second coup in December 1981.

A turning outward: The Rawlings Revolution and the Implementation of Structural Adjustment

After two years of democratic leadership under Hilla Limann, Jerry Rawlings seized power for the second time on December 31, 1981 in what he deemed a popular revolution. His military regime, the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC), would remain in power until democratic elections in 1992. Though Ghana was a part of the non-aligned movement, the Rawlings government was avowedly anti-capitalist, even going so far as to rename the *Daily Graphic* the *People’s Daily Graphic* and to emblazon the front page of the newspaper with the image of a fist (this despite its blatantly pro-government stance). Political instability had taken a toll on Accra and development had gone on with little regulation or oversight, leading to poor sanitation, overcrowding in many neighborhoods, and the growth of slums. Bad economic conditions had forced many of Accra’s residents into the informal economy, a trend that would become even more

pronounced following the introduction of structural adjustment programs in 1983. Unlike Nkrumah, it is not clear that Rawlings had an explicit vision for Accra, but the self-help policies he promoted around the country were also promoted, sometimes with coercion, on residents of Accra by civilian arms of the central government, including People's Defense Councils (PDCs) and Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs). After the adoption of structural adjustment programs, Accra's position within the global economy began to shift, eventually resulting in the publication of a new master plan that emboldened the private sector to take over the work of development.

The Accra City Council and the Politics of Self-Help

Rawlings' version of socialism differed significantly from Nkrumah's. Given Ghana's economic constraints and its inability to attract significant amounts of foreign aid, Rawlings worked to institutionalize the idea of self-help development. In the first several years of his administration, the *People's Daily Graphic* frequently featured front-page stories about rural communities constructing schools or building roads and housing "in defense of the revolution." Meanwhile, Accra was suffering from neglect. Unlike in rural communities, it was difficult to organize self-help projects in the large and heterogeneous neighborhoods of Accra. Even when communities did execute their own development projects, there was a great deal of shaming of those who did not fully participate. For example, following the successful construction of a bridge in the Asylum Down neighborhood, the chairman of the local PDC, Wiseborn Agbo, reportedly, "asked the PNDC to re-define which citizen should be entitled to be called a PDC member," as according to Agbo, "only a few hands of the 18,500 residents of Asylum Down actively participate in development programmes drawn by the people, although many of them

profess to support the ongoing revolutionary process” (*People’s Daily Graphic* March 28, 1983). This passage gives some insight into the complicated dynamics of the relationship between the Accra City Council, the central government, and the residents of Accra. Articles, editorials, and letters to the editor about the filthy conditions of the city were common, but there was disagreement as to who was to blame.

Throughout the Rawlings era, complaints arose about the deplorable state of sanitation in the city—particularly when it came to issues of solid and liquid waste. Drainage was an ongoing problem; open gutters became dumping grounds for garbage and “night soil.” During the rainy season, flooding often occurred. Reports of deaths, property destruction, and outbreaks of cholera and other water-borne diseases were common. Many residents of Accra attributed these problems to an apathetic population, while others placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the central government and the Accra City Council, offering a more structural analysis of the underlying causes of Accra’s sanitation issues. An editorial appearing in the *People’s Daily Graphic* on October 23, 1985 argued that,

It is saddening to note that the spirit of self-help in the rural areas is completely absent among urban dwellers who still rely on the central government for their developmental needs. The deplorable state of roads, particularly in the regional capitals, choked gutters and the mounting heap of refuse dumps in most urban areas show the apathetic attitude of the urban dweller to his surroundings because there is the Central Government whose responsibility it is to see for these things...The *Graphic* appeals to all urban dwellers to wake up from this long slumber, get on the bandwagon, and get involved in self-help activities to better their living conditions (*People’s Daily Graphic* 1985).

This strangely Thatcher-esque characterization of urban residents dependent on government welfare seems at odds with the professedly socialist agenda of the Rawlings

government,²⁹ but despite its self-help policies, the PNDC did recognize that government held some of the blame for Accra's deteriorating conditions. According to an article in the May 11, 1985 issue of the *Graphic*, the Regional Secretary for Greater Accra held a meeting with the ACC in which he chastised them for their woeful performance and urged them to "improve upon its services to the district if it [was] to win the support and sympathy of those from whom it collects revenue to work" (Quaynor 1985).

Despite the poor performance of the ACC, middle class readers of the *Graphic* often blamed the poor for their own squalid living conditions, attributing problems of sanitation to a combination of apathy and ignorance. In a letter to the editor published on August 7, 1986, entitled "Teach them hygiene," Gerald Okoe, a resident of Accra, wrote that,

People in Accra and its suburbs have no knowledge about environmental hygiene, throw rubbish about, and even choke our public drains with refuse without any inhibition. Every morning, I see a number of children between ages of 4 and 6 easing themselves into a small gutter which runs from "Akoto Lante" public bathroom to the main drain along the street. It seems as if this is a normal thing for children in the area. The surroundings of Korle-Bu parks have been another place of convenience for many of the inhabitants of that area (1986).

Others considered the structural underpinnings of the issue, questioning why the Accra City Council seemed incapable of providing even basic services. In this spirit, one resident pointed out in an August 28, 1986 letter to the *Graphic* that,

It is a common practice by the ACC cleaners to desilt and sweep the gutters and thereafter spill the litter and discharge on the side of the gutter, leaving the rubbish to dry, and blown again into the same gutter. One finds

²⁹ Though still socialist in rhetoric, by 1985 the government, under Secretary of Finance Kwesi Botchwey, had announced a second round of reforms (ERP II), which were even more far-reaching, leading, for example, to the "redeployment" of 40,000 workers from the civil service and state divestment from agriculture and industry (Shillington 1992:117).

it difficult to appreciate any wisdom in such a practice which is the result of sheer laziness...It is a pity that in the city of Accra, we live, stay, walk and drive in the filth of the gutters at the risk of our health due to lack of proper waste disposal and waste management practices...The ACC management must accept the view that most residents of Accra are ever willing to lead hygienic lives but for the inadequate provision of toilets, urinals and rubbish dumping sites (Danu 1986).

Mocking the hypocritical efforts of urban service providers to educate the public about proper behavior despite their pitiful service records, Yao Senoo, a resident of Madina wrote on June 17, 1986 that,

Quite recently, the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation distributed some beautifully illustrated and educative handouts to its customers with the above inscription: "Use Water Wisely; Water is Precious" and spelt out its new domestic and commercial water tariffs...Much as we appreciate the new educative handouts, we would want to remind the Corporation that since the consumer is going to be charged a minimum fee of 200 cedis [in 1986, approximately \$2.50] whether he consumes the minimum of 1,000 gallons or not every month, he would now want to be assured that he gets his regular supply of precious potable water and that the era when he had to depend on any kind of water whether safe or unsafe would become events of the forgotten past (1986).

Rawlings' efforts to encourage "self-help" development were bolstered by his populist appeal. In an era in which even the middle classes were struggling to make ends meet, Rawlings was able to stir popular anger and attract people to his platform by singling out residents who were seen to have profited unfairly from present economic hardships, or from government largesse. In 1983, the same year that the first structural adjustment program was introduced, the PNDC established a "One-Man-One-House Committee," which was tasked with ensuring that no resident owned more than one house built by a government entity (Evan 1983). Though justified as a step toward providing housing for all, the mission of the committee also fit nicely with other efforts to roll back some of the privileges once enjoyed by civil servants. That same year, the

government seized a mansion built on what they argued was public land in Airport Residential Area and began to renovate it, purportedly to provide a new hotel for pilots and passengers (Deletsa 1983). This was part of a larger operation to seize private properties that were deemed to be infringing on public lands.

But things were changing in Ghana. The government had accepted the first of several IMF loans as part of the economic recovery program and new reform efforts threatened to undermine the socialist credentials of the Rawlings government. Rawlings was able to maintain his mass appeal, however, through a heavy PR campaign, much of which was channeled through the *People's Daily Graphic*. After 1983, and particularly from 1985, when the second round of reforms were introduced, socialist rhetoric began to be mixed with justifications for neoliberal economic reforms. In a 1983 interview, for example, Kwesi Botchway, the Finance and Economic Planning Secretary, told the *Graphic* that there was “no incompatibility between the economic and social goals of the PNDC economic recovery programme and the mere fact of the country’s membership of the International Monetary Fund” and that “it is necessary for Ghanaians to get away from the IMF xenophobia,” because, “there are communist countries which are still part of the fund” (Yankah 1983).

Market Mammies, Market Queens: Kalabuleism and the Demonization of Market Women

An ongoing target of the Rawlings administration were market women, or as they were often called in editorials and blatantly biased news stories, “market queens” or “market mammies.” Before the onset of structural adjustment, and in an effort to quell the anger of ordinary Ghanaians, Rawlings enacted nation-wide price controls on staple food items.

Market women once again began to be accused of *kalabule*—creating artificial scarcity by hoarding goods and selling them at inflated prices—and were often blamed for counteracting the aims of the revolution. On August 18th, 1979, just two months after Rawlings’s first coup, armed soldiers and police were ordered by Rawlings to demolish Makola Number One Market and “bring out hoarded goods” to “stamp out once and for all the evil practice of selling above the control price.” Explosives were used to finish the job, and all the goods seized in the operation were taken to the Trade Fair site near Labadi to be sold by the government (The Echo 1979).

In response, the market women began to sell their goods across from the demolished market, much to the consternation of many of Accra’s residents. The destruction of Makola Market was widely celebrated by residents of Accra, who by this time were barely able to access basic food staples. Cecilia Adofowaa, a resident of Nima, complained in a letter to the editor of *The Echo* a few months after the destruction of the market, after Limann’s election, that, “As a miserable hungry worker, I submit that the government should enact a law forbidding the congregation of these ‘kalabule’ women...It is unfortunate that there is no law on the statute books which empowers the government to forcibly dragoon such idle women to state farms to cultivate food and cash crops” (1980). In response to the “evil practices” of market women, following the December 31st revolution, the PNDC tasked local PDCs to set up “People’s Shops” throughout the country in the early 1980s, though these, like other retail establishments throughout the country, were plagued by shortages of basic goods.

Once structural adjustment programs were introduced, a marked shift occurred in the rhetoric surrounding the unfair business practices of market women. Instead of

criticizing market women for selling goods at exorbitant prices, they were accused of “interfering in the free-flow of goods and produce in the region” by preventing farmers from selling their produce directly to customers. In other words, their profit-making schemes, once harshly criticized for not following government price control regulations, were now being criticized on the grounds that they were anti-capitalist, interfering with what should be a free market system that encourages competition.

Attacks on Informality

As structural adjustment began to take hold, the Accra City Council showed a new concern for maintaining order in the metropolis. In 1984 they embarked on a “facelift” project, recognizing, perhaps, that a lack of aesthetic appeal might deter potential investors and tourists from visiting the city. Along with making some cosmetic updates to public areas, the ACC embarked on an aggressive PR campaign to remind residents of their legal obligations to keep up their properties, taking out ads in the *Graphic* to explicate city ordinances related to the duties of property holders.

On September 2nd, 1986, an article in the *Graphic* entitled “Accra: the City in the Sun” lamented that, “the state of Accra’s developmental neglect since independence is worrying most Ghanaians. They compare it to Lome, Dakar and Abidjan and feel sorry.” The cinema, the article goes on to argue, “must be informed that, to show films depicting wealth and beauty in such squalor constitutes great abuse to those unfortunate patrons” (Guy-Fitz 1986).

Adding a distinct sense of urgency to this cause was the announcement that a tourism conference was to take place at the Trade Fair site in November, 1986. For the first time in decades, Accra was to be on display to the rest of the world. Advisors from

the World Bank and IMF had identified tourism as a potential source of new revenue for the country, and the central government was eager for Accra to put its best foot forward. To this end, a number of measures were carried out to enhance Accra's aesthetic appeal. In October, the ACC banned hawking in unauthorized areas, a move that the *Graphic* heralded as a "bold attempt to create order in Accra" (People's Daily Graphic 1986a). In the central business district, the Makola Mosque was destroyed, despite the protestations of Accra's Muslim population, in order to make room for a redevelopment project that included an "ultra modern" parking lot. Property owners were ordered by the ACC to white wash or repaint their buildings, and letters to the editor in the *Graphic* urged the ACC to take further measures, such as "check[ing] beggars and lunatics" who target tourists and "pose a big threat to future visitors to the country" (Bandoh 1986). During the conference, the ACC arrested 28 people for defecating on Labadi beach, a short distance from the Trade Fair site. The incident was described with some relish in the *Graphic*:

Militiamen and members of the ACC laid ambush at dawn and pounced on the culprits as and when they arrived at the beach and undressed to ease themselves. In the process of attending to nature's call, the culprits were ordered to dress up and march to the waiting trucks. The arrests attracted a lot of fury as the onlookers in indignation and outbursts, complained that there was no justification to arrest people going to defecate at the beach whilst "wee-smokers are left on their own."... It would be recalled that at the official opening of the International Tourism Exhibition...last Saturday, Chairman Rawlings condemned those who found delight in defecating at the beaches and called for a halt to this unhygienic practice (People's Daily Graphic 1986b).

Once again, the blame for these "unhygienic practices" was placed on the perpetrators; the article contains no explanation as to why residents would "ease themselves" at the beach. Yet the cost of structural adjustment to Accra's population had been

extraordinarily high. Tens of thousands were unemployed and pushed into the informal sector, with no guarantee of basic income, healthcare, or savings for retirement (Brydon 1999). The 1992 master plan, which was co-authored by the UN, would later document the severe shortage of public toilets in the city, identifying this as one of the underlying causes of open defecation and poor hygiene practices. For now, however, it was politically expedient to blame a few bad apples, and certainly easier than providing the requisite infrastructure to prevent such practices.

Welcoming the World: The Economic Recovery Program and Sowing the Seeds for Private Development

These efforts to “clean up” the capital continued into the late 1980s, a period that saw a new influx of foreign aid and investment thanks in part to the passage of the Investment Code in 1985, which relaxed regulations on foreign investors. The ACC shut down unlicensed garages and workshops and destroyed kiosks and other unauthorized buildings. Attacks on hawkers and other informal traders continued, and were often violent. There were reports in 1984 of ACC guards seizing goods from used clothing dealers and assaulting them before sending them to jail. The ACC began to destroy any unauthorized buildings that were deemed to be on public land.

Meanwhile, foreign aid and investment began to trickle in to the country as barriers to entry were lowered. A Spanish firm came to investigate the possibility of renovating the Ambassador, Continental, and Star hotels in Accra, the Volta Hotel at Akosombo, the Atlantic at Takoradi, and City Hotel in Kumasi and to finally complete the long-planned Labadi Beach project (Asamoah 1985). American and Italian developers committed to 60,000 units and \$55 million, respectively, to develop housing

in the country (Bonsu 1985). The Canadian government was to help with road repairs (Quaicoe 1985). A West German-backed finance institution and consulting firm GOPA committed nine million Deutsche Marks to finance a project which was to connect public toilets to the city's sewer system, and GOPA was also contracted to help devise a more effective waste disposal strategy for the city (Deletsa 1985). Chinese experts were brought in to build the National Theatre (Aziz 1985) and unidentified Italian developers made several trips to the country to discuss the possibility of renovating Kotoka International Airport and developing the surrounding land. The most controversial of these efforts, however, was the Ghanaian government's agreement with Novotel, the French hotel chain, to renovate some state hotels. Rumors began to spread that the government was selling off the state hotels, a claim that the Secretary of Tourism, Mohammed Ben Abdullah, vigorously denied (People's Daily Graphic 1986c). For many Ghanaians, the possibility that state hotels would be sold was a sign that the era of state-sponsored development was officially over. The Ambassador in Accra, Ghana's first hotel built to "international" standards, opened in the heady years just prior to Ghana's independence and had once been a source of pride for middle class Ghanaians, a sign that "we could do it too" (Plageman 2010). By the 1980s, however, the hotel had suffered from years of neglect and the government could not fund its renovation without outside help.³⁰ For many, this was a sign of regression rather than of progress.

By the late 1980s, the government had embarked on several privatization measures and "restructured" many state enterprises. In 1986, the *Graphic* printed a series

³⁰ The Ambassador was eventually demolished and replaced by the five-star Mövenpick Ambassador Hotel, which opened in 2011.

of justifications for this restructuring program. On July 30th, *Graphic* columnist K. Abaka Quansah argued that state enterprises had become breeding grounds for corruption:

If workers will bastardize the aim for operating a business just because a particular business venture is state owned, then the government is more than justified to move in and clear the stables before more harm is done to state property. Certainly the time for reviewing the ownership structure of a good number of state enterprises has come. The avuncular stance of the state vis-à-vis state enterprises is glaringly unproductive (1986).

These ideas were still highly controversial. Privatization of state enterprises seemed to many to be in opposition to the ideals of the revolution. In a response to Quansah's column, entitled "Privatization for Who?" Kojo Yankah, another *Graphic* writer, argued on August 14th that privatization was a form of corruption and that the debate over privatization, "falls in line with an orchestrated design to lift the revolutionary intentions bag and baggage into the comfortable dust bins of the capitalist world" (1986).

Despite such debates, privatization continued. In 1987, the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) announced plans to sell its blocks of flats to private employers, a move that upset many tenants who had come to rely on government-provided housing (Abissath 1987). The Accra City Council also began contracting private companies to provide city services. After reports surfaced that the ACC was dumping truckloads of "night soil" on the beach near several local public schools, the ACC announced that it would require landlords to contract with private companies for the removal of night soil from pan latrines, a move that E.T. Mensah, the chairman of the ACC, justified as a step toward ending the pan latrine system, despite the fact that no plans were being made to provide more public toilets or to assist residents with building pit latrines on their properties (Mensah 1987).

The 1992 Master Plan

Calls for a new master plan for Accra began in the late 1980s, as the ACC faced the increasingly difficult task of controlling the city's development. The population of Accra had grown significantly since independence, and the master plan, with its provisions for generous greenbelts and parks was no longer relevant now that unplanned development had eaten up much of the open land in the city. In 1992 a new master plan was published. Co-authored by the Accra Planning and Development Programme, the UN Development Programme, and UN Centre for Human Settlements (UN Habitat), the plan was a radical departure from its predecessor. 644 pages long and lacking in the beautifully detailed maps and plans contained in the 1958 plan, it was designed to be a "strategic plan," focused primarily not on land use and physical planning, but on development planning. While the 1958 plan opened with a foreword highlighting Accra's its sandy beaches and "colourful vegetation," the 1992 plan begins with a warning: "If the current uncoordinated system of development and the delivery of services are allowed to continue unchanged, then the city will continue to rapidly deteriorate, making it uneconomical to do business in" (Accra Planning and Development Programme 1992a:3). This emphasis on economic development and on fostering business is evident throughout; the final volume of the plan is an "investment prospectus," which outlines incentives for foreign investors to locate their businesses in Accra.

The plan is based on three years of research conducted by the Planning and Development Programme in partnership with the UN. Though structural adjustment had somewhat improved the macro-economy of the country, Accra itself was in a difficult phase. Government restructuring exercises had put huge numbers of civil servants out of

work and neoliberal reforms had increased the gap between rich and poor. Uncontrolled development, especially in residential areas, had led to new slums, and city services were grossly insufficient for the population. Decentralization programs instituted in the late 1980s, though putting more control in local authorities, had led to weak central control of development and a lack of any clear national urban strategy. Partnering with the UN allowed the Accra Planning and Development Programme to draw on its research capacities and technical expertise.

This was the beginning of a long relationship between Accra city authorities and various foreign non-profit and intergovernmental entities. In addition to attracting more foreign aid and investment into the country, structural adjustment programs had also opened the door to new offers of technical assistance. In many cases, these organizations, though purportedly working in partnership with local administrators, were the primary authors of many of the reports produced during the period of the early 1990s.

The 1992 plan is divided into five volumes. The first provides background research on the conditions in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA); the second focuses on long-term strategies for development; the third is a five-year development plan outlining specific objectives to be undertaken between 1993 and 1997; the fourth is an annual action plan; and the fifth is the “investment prospectus.” Following publication of the master plan, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly began preparing annual action plans and medium-term (three year) development plans—a requirement of a 1988 national planning law passed during the Rawlings administration as part of the decentralization program.

The plan calls for “urgent measures” to create more “efficient and effective management systems” in order to accommodate Accra’s rapidly expanding population (Accra Planning and Development Programme 1992b:1). In 1992, Accra’s population had risen to approximately 1.7 million from approximately 388,000 in 1960 (Accra Planning and Development Programme 1992a) and by 2010 was projected to reach four million. Recognizing the weakness of local government and its inability to provide the necessary resources to accommodate such a large population, the plan focuses extensively on wealth generation through private sector development.

The plan rests on three key assumptions; first, that structural adjustment policies, including the restructuring of government enterprises, privatization measures, and the liberalization of trade and investment will continue; second, that the private sector will play a major role in implementing the plan, but that “business confidence needs to be restored;” and third, that the government will be playing a “less leading role” in Accra’s development. Some of the core strategies listed to restore business confidence are the creation of “sub-regional business centers,” redevelopment of the central business district, and infrastructure upgrading programs. The plan calls for development of Accra’s outer regions, suggesting that the city expand in a northeasterly direction and develop new business centers in the suburbs, which will eventually become self-sustaining. Additionally, the plan outlines steps to attract more international investment, including providing more high-end hotels, beach developments, and transportation facilities. Recognizing the centrality of aesthetics to attracting foreign business, the plan laments the current state of the central business district (CBD), saying,

This is the heart of the National Capital... It is intended to be the highest order commercial, entertainment, and tourist centre in the metropolitan

area...This is the area where greater intensity and height of buildings will be encouraged and the highest standards of urban design will apply to create a visual and symbolic impact (Accra Planning and Development Programme 1992b:25).

In many ways this language resonates with that of the 1958 plan, which also called for a redesigned CBD. Yet the motivations of the two plans are very different. While the 1958 plan called for a more organized and aesthetically appealing CBD for Accra's residents and also to project an outward image of Ghana as a modern nation, the 1992 plan is designed to attract private, and especially foreign, investment. The plan also calls for new facilities for Accra "to accommodate its role as an international city," including more hotel beds, a new convention center, and a new airport (1992b:15).

Recognizing the centrality of infrastructure to creating a "favourable climate for investment" (1992b:6), the plan calls for the "rehabilitation of existing hard and soft infrastructure to support sustained economic development" (1992b:6). The provision of infrastructure, including water, electricity, roads, and sewage, has remained a major obstacle to development in Accra, so much so that in Accra today private developers have begun building the infrastructure themselves, leading to a number of conflicts over who is responsible for its upkeep.

Another major obstacle the authors of the plan identify in attracting private investment is Ghana's hard to navigate bureaucracy. The plan calls for the creation of an agency dedicated to attract "investment in industry, commerce, finance, and tourism," a "one-stop investment centre" (8). Eventually this was realized through the creation of the Ghana Investment Promotions Centre (GIPC), an entity that promotes business opportunities to foreign investors, collects data on foreign direct investment, and supports investors interested in entering the Ghanaian market. The GIPC was instrumental in the

development of the Accra Mall, helping to fast track its approval by the planning department. The Ghana Real Estate Developers Association (GREDA), a private entity that provides advice and technical assistance to developers, particularly in housing, has also played a significant role in facilitating investment in the country.

Like the 1958 plan, the 1992 plan depoliticizes many of the major issues facing the city. Though innovative in its call to accommodate and recognize the contributions of the informal sector, a position vastly different from that of the Rawlings administration and the ACC, it euphemistically refers to residents working in the informal sector as “redeployees from the public sector redeployment and divestiture programmes,” (1992b:8), effectively erasing the plight of those who found themselves flung into the informal sector after years of stable employment in the civil service. Using a human capital-infused rhetoric, the plan calls for a number of reforms to allow informal workers to maximize their “production and employment potential,” including regulation, monitoring, and assistance; providing workers with security of tenure; linking informal and formal sectors; and providing unspecified “fiscal incentives” to informal workers. Though certainly a more progressive approach to handling the informal economy than that taken by the ACC in the late 1980s, where eviction, seizures of goods, and abuse were common, such measures also pave the way for what Ananya Roy has called “poverty capitalism”—the idea that the poor are just budding entrepreneurs who, given the right support, for example through the provision of small loans, will be able to lift themselves out of poverty, thus erasing the need for significant structural economic change (Roy 2010). Such policies promote the notion that poverty is a technical issue, a puzzle to be solved by capitalist intervention, rather than a problem created by it.

The language of human capital continues into the plan's strategy for housing and the improvement of living conditions. Recognizing that poor sanitation and a shortage of adequate accommodation remain two of Accra's most serious issues, the plan makes a number of suggestions to improve Accra's housing stock. The first is to promote the upgrading of slums and the formalization of illegal settlements, as had been done with some success in countries like Brazil. The underlying belief behind formalization is that it encourages residents to upgrade their homes because they will no longer fear eviction and thus will be more likely to build on their investment. Mike Davis argues that this form of "self-help" housing is one that has become popular with intergovernmental organizations such as the World Bank and IMF because, though seemingly progressive in nature, it also exempts the state from the task of providing adequate shelter to its citizens (Davis 2006).

The plan recognizes the severe shortage of housing in Accra and throughout the country, but argues that given the government's limited resources, it should allow the private sector to take on the task of building more housing:

Government policy has shifted away from national mass housing projects to an infrastructure-supporting role by providing funds, land, services, and expertise to the housing industry. Some of the existing housing stock will be divested because of the very high maintenance costs and poor economic returns created by rent control and high subsidies (Accra Planning and Development Programme 1992b:44).

The plan calls for empowering the real estate industry to build more of the city's housing stock, arguing that this will create investment and employment. At the time the plan was written, approximately 66 percent of the city's housing stock was built by individuals rather than large-scale property developers. The plan argues, however, that in order for the city to achieve a desired mix of housing types, corporate bodies and the real estate sector will need to take provide the majority of new housing, predicting that this will be

facilitated by a “flow of capital from foreign investors” (Accra Planning and Development Programme 1992b:48). Finally, the housing strategy calls for the removal of rent control laws to “encourage private investors back into the rental market” (49). The plan does not address the issue of housing affordability directly. There is an underlying assumption that more housing stock will lower housing costs. Yet in hindsight it is clear that this has not been the case in Accra. High-end developments, including gated estates and luxury condominium complexes, account for almost all of the new housing provided by the private sector. Instead of lowering the cost of housing, this has brought high-income diasporic Ghanaians back into the housing market. Nana, an employee of Mobus Property Development, which has built several condominium complexes in Accra, estimated that about 80 percent of the housing units sold by her company are purchased by Ghanaians living abroad (personal interview, November 2014).

Overall, the plan envisions a far more restricted role for local government than in the past. Taking into consideration the limited funds available to local government, the authors call for development to be left to the central government and to the corporate and private sectors, and for the local government to simply “facilitate.” Public-private partnerships are promoted throughout the plan as practical solutions to government’s limited funds and abilities. Poverty is dealt with as a technical rather than a structural problem, the belief being that if the government offers formal recognition to workers in the informal economy and to informal settlements, many of the problems caused by poverty will be alleviated through “self-help” development. The plan also empowers non-profit and community organizations, such as churches and mosques, to get more involved in development, especially in the provision of welfare. Voluntary organizations are

promoted as the most capable of providing a social safety net to Accra's economically and socially vulnerable residents.

While the language of neoliberalism is certainly strong in the plan, there are some progressive and pro-poor elements. Most notably, the plan offers a strong indictment of the Accra Metropolitan Authority³¹, arguing that problems with sanitation, including outbreaks of infectious and water-borne diseases are not attributable to individual behavior but rather to an inadequate supply of public toilets, clean water, and solid waste collection. However, the plan's proposals for solving these problems generally rely on privatization programs. The plan suggests, for example, that private companies should begin to provide water services for those without piped water in their homes. What this has meant in practice is a highly regressive system of water delivery, where those with piped water (who tend to live in wealthier and better provisioned neighborhoods) pay less than one cent per bucket of water, but those without buy their water for between 15 and 25 cents per bucket (UN-HABITAT 2009:12).

While the 1958 plan spoke of building a new Accra, the 1992 plan calls for reform. In many ways, its goals are far more modest than those of the 1958 plan. Its suggestions, however, even if not fully implemented, have led to radical changes in regard to the role of the private sector. The plan paved the way for private companies to step in to do the work of development, often with very little regulation or oversight on a national or local level. Ghanaian government in the 21st century, particularly national government, has become beholden to the desires of private developers. It provides generous incentives to those coming into the country, even if their projects do little to

³¹ The Accra City Council became the Accra Metropolitan Authority following decentralization legislation passed in 1988/89.

improve the overall quality of life for the majority of Accra's residents. Since the early 1990s, and particularly into the 2000s, government has become one of the principle facilitators for private-sector led growth, a phenomenon that has contributed to the bifurcated nature of development in Accra today, where wealthy residents have access to an ever-increasing pool of new amenities while the poorest remain mired in crisis.

Accra in a Global Era: Private Sector Planning

The UN's involvement in Accra's development would continue into the 2000s, and soon, other international institutions would come to play important roles in documenting conditions in Accra and implementing strategies to improve living conditions. In 2009, UN Habitat authored an "urban profile" for Accra, which listed major areas of concern and made suggestions for "capacity development" and "capital investment" projects. In 2010, the World Bank got involved, publishing the first ever "Consultative Citizens' Report Card" for Accra, which reported survey results from a representative sample of 4,000 Accra residents, intended to be a jumping-off point for the AMA to address the most pressing needs of people in the city. The plan was prepared primarily by researchers from the World Bank, Urban Institute, and a number of consulting firms (World Bank 2010:3). In 2011, the Millennium Cities Initiative, a project of Jeffrey Sachs' Earth Institute at Columbia University, created a "toolkit" intended to provide innovative technical solutions to a number of issues in two of Accra's poorest neighborhoods, Nima and Ga Mashie. If neoliberalism paved the way for private companies and corporations to do the work of development, it also created new opportunities for non-profits, NGOs, and intergovernmental organizations to assume the role of expert.

Unable to raise enough funds to implement its own development projects, the AMA now relies heavily on partnerships with international non-profits and NGOs and with private, often foreign, companies. As part of the “Millennium City” Initiative (MCI), its partnership with Columbia University, the AMA has built several new schools and has plans to build more. Plans are also in the works to relocate the AMA to a new building, courtesy of funds from the MCI. It is common to see representatives from multinationals waiting in the hallways of the AMA building to meet with the mayor and other senior personnel. In April 2013 while I was in Accra, these included Microsoft salespeople pitching a new computer system for the AMA offices and an American construction and engineering company contracted to assist with guttering, drainage, and the dredging of the Korle Lagoon, a project funded in part by the US Embassy.

Such partnerships between the AMA and international entities are still just a drop in the bucket, however, compared to the activities of the private sector, which has arguably had the biggest impact on Accra’s urban landscape in the 21st century. Since the end of the Rawlings administration, successive governments have gone out of their way to attract foreign capital to Accra to build new landmark projects—new residential and business communities such as Airport City, Hope City, and Appolonia, malls, gated housing estates, hotels, and luxury condominiums. What this imbalance between public and private sector development has amounted to is a de facto takeover of urban development by the private sector, and specifically, by property developers.³²

³² As Stephan Miescher points out, this also reflects a new consensus across the political spectrum. While the New Patriotic Party (NPP) the party of President John Kufuor, bills itself as slightly right of center, pro-business, and pro-private property rights, the National Democratic Council (NDC), the party of Jerry Rawlings, John Atta Mills, and

This development is subsidized and supported in numerous ways by the national state, be it through the investment of state funds into new malls, the leasing of state lands to private property developers, offers of generous tax breaks, or outright corruption and bribery. Ghanaian and international media is full of stories about new real estate development, documenting each ribbon or sod cutting ceremony for a new mall, office park, or hotel in vivid detail. Invariably, the president is present at each major event to make a statement about how the project will contribute to the growth and modernization of the country. Often, however, the projects are never completed. The most famous of these white elephants was a 2009 agreement between the government of Ghana and a South Korean company, STX, to build 200,000 housing units in the country at a cost of \$10 billion. After three years of negotiation, the Ghanaian government backed out of the deal, citing bureaucratic holdups. John Atta Mills, then-president of Ghana, apologized in a public statement, declaring that he was “eating a humble pie” and that the government would seek out alternatives (Reuters 2012). The projects that are completed tend to be targeted toward Ghana’s upper and middle-income groups, including Ghanaians living abroad, visitors to the country, expatriates, and business travelers. The next chapter examines the impact of these projects and the perspectives of private developers in more depth.

Though the 1992 plan is still considered by planning officials to be the authoritative guide to urban development in Accra, most development, including formally sanctioned projects such as the construction of new shopping centers and gated housing estates, does not adhere to its guidelines. Though much of this has to do with the failure

current President John Mahama, claims the mantle of Nkrumahism, positioning itself as social-democratic and is a member of the Progressive Alliance and Socialist International.

of local government to properly execute the plan and to control development, it is also due in large part to the political pressures placed on local planners. It is widely known in urban planning circles that failure to approve a project that is strongly supported by the national government may result in demotion, removal from one's post, or reassignment to a new, less desirable location. It is often politically expedient, then, to approve a project, even if its execution results in undesirable outcomes.

In other ways, however, the 1992 plan has achieved many of its goals. Private development has taken off, public-private partnerships have become the predominant mechanism for local government to achieve its development goals, and international investment has given the city a facelift. Yet the benefits of private development are not widespread and many of the same problems— slum growth, poor sanitation, and overcrowding—continue into the present day, resulting in a city where extreme wealth and extreme poverty exist side by side.

Conclusion

Scholars writing on the impact of neoliberal development on urban spaces have long pointed to the transition from a Keynesian welfare model of urban governance to a consumption-oriented model focused on the provision of high-end amenities and trickle-down economics (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Harvey 1989, 2001; Moulaert et al. 2003; Sorkin 1992; Zukin 1998) Smith 1996, 2002). Yet the example of Accra challenges these accounts, as they presume the presence of a generous welfare state prior to neoliberal restructuring, something that Ghana has been unable to achieve since its independence. Furthermore, by positioning neoliberal restructuring and the privileging of elites in urban

governance as a *neoliberal* project, these accounts tend to brush over the historical continuities between urban governance in the 1960s and '70s and today.

Though it is undoubtedly the case that neoliberal urban strategies have widened the gulf between rich and poor in Accra, creating new opportunities for the privileged while shrinking opportunities for the poor (Obeng-Odoom 2011, 2012, 2013), it is also true that in African cities like Accra, people have long been accustomed to accepting that the state will not be able to guarantee them a decent standard of living, thus self-help development, like providing one's own shelter in the absence of other options, and entrepreneurialism, in the form of participation in the informal economy, have long been features of African cities. Furthermore, as is clear from Nkrumah's efforts to develop Accra in the 1960s, even an avowedly socialist government often privileged aesthetic over social concerns in its urban development strategy. Middle and upper class consumption and encouraging top-down development was to a certain degree a focus of Nkrumah's administration, just as it has been in Ghana under the Kufuor, Mills, and Mahama administrations of the 2000s.

Of course, there are some key differences: while Nkrumah's administration actively courted and exercised a great deal of control over the activities of the private sector, contemporary governments in Ghana have largely allowed the private sector to dictate its own priorities, and have endorsed and even subsidized projects that stood little chance of enhancing the living conditions of Ghana's population. Yet, in examining the transition from socialism, to military government, structural adjustment, and contemporary neoliberal globalization, it becomes clear that the visions of those tasked with developing Accra were frequently reiterations from the past, and that despite radical

changes in the past ten years, many of the concerns of urban planners, developers, and policy makers today echo those of their predecessors.

Chapter 3

A Tale of Two Cities: Private and Public Sector in Neoliberal Accra

Introduction

In 21st century Accra, the contradictions of neoliberal capitalism are on bold display—street vendors selling cheap plastics from China set up shop outside the walls and security kiosks of lush gated residential communities, while sweeping views from tall glass and concrete skyscrapers reveal a convoluted network of formerly grand, deteriorating middle class residences, aging modernist apartment blocks, and ad-hoc corrugated metal-roofed shacks that house most of Accra’s population (See Figure 11). Twenty-first century Accra has become a city of elite islands in a vast sea of crumbling infrastructure, where promises of trickle-down development have not yet materialized despite seemingly unending investment in new real estate development. Accra is the epitome of a “growth machine” (Molotch 1976), with landowners seeking to maximize returns on their investments through the construction of high-end business, tourism, and consumption-oriented amenities, aided and abetted, in the case of Ghana, by the national state.

This chapter is concerned with understanding the bifurcation of contemporary Accra, which I argue is largely attributable to the unprecedented opportunities given to private real estate developers in Ghana today. The public-private partnerships vaunted by multilateral institutions like UN HABITAT, the World Bank, and the IMF, have given way to a de facto form of private sector-led development, a phenomenon that is supported at both a national and local level. Companies and associations of real estate developers are not just builders—they are also visionaries, interested in creating model projects intended not just to provide a set of amenities but also to establish new standards for

development. In this sense malls and gated communities cannot be seen as isolated projects; they are blueprints for the future, examples of what developers would like Accra look like in ten or twenty years. Consider this excerpt from an environmental impact assessment for a “Modern Africa Theatre and Entertainment Complex” to be built in Airport City, a business park built on land leased from Ghana’s Civil Aviation Authority³³:

Compared to other West African cities, Accra...has the unique opportunity of developing into the international business hub of the sub-region...There is therefore the urgent need to upgrade Accra to a level that will provide Ghana with equal opportunities in investment attraction and growth generation in comparison with other cities such as Abidjan, Kuala Lumpur, Nairobi, Addis Ababa and Sun City in South Africa...Due to the rapid increase in commercial tourism and expansion of trade and private industrial activity there is the need for the provision of more first class hotels, Cineplex, shopping malls, office complexes, executive boardrooms, conference centres and high class meeting places, spaces for fairs and exhibitions, recreational and entertainment facilities to serve the needs of international and local business executives (PVI Ghana Limited 2003).

Comparing Accra to other African cities (with the somewhat odd exception of Kuala Lumpur, the Malaysian megacity which in 2007 had 66 malls (Ming 2007))³⁴, PVI, the developers of the project, envision an Accra focused around the provision of high-end amenities for business travelers. Global and world cities literature has for a long time

³³ This environmental impact assessment was submitted in 2003. In fall 2014, during my second period of field research in Accra, the building, though standing, had yet to be completed. This is the case for many of the new developments in the city, which often lie vacant and unfinished for extended periods of time when funds for construction dry up. Though guidelines for the Airport City business park require construction to be completed within three years of a project’s inception or to face hefty fines, it is not clear whether such fines have actually been levied against developers unable to complete their projects.

³⁴ Another somewhat bizarre example used here is Sun City in South Africa, which is not actually a city but a massive tourist resort consisting of four mega hotels and casinos, built during apartheid in the late 1970s.

posited that global cities produce what Michele Acuto (2011) has called “dual cities”— with urban governments focusing so heavily on providing amenities for new global elites that the needs of those who do not work in the service of global financial capital (which in a western context, means primarily the working class and people of color, and in an African context, the poor) are largely ignored, leading to disinvestment, deteriorating living conditions, poverty, and working class migration away from urban centers. In African cities undergoing processes of globalization, this phenomenon is even more extreme given the precarious conditions under which the majority of urban dwellers live.

Critical geographers have examined the spatial logics of neoliberal capitalism and the tendency for capital to seek out new markets in order to quell crises of overaccumulation (Brenner 2004; Harvey 2001), a phenomenon David Harvey calls “spatial fix.” As the last frontier for global capitalist accumulation, Africa offers an untapped reservoir of consumers. High GDP growth and a change in middle class consumption patterns have fueled investment on the continent, and Ghana has been at the forefront of these trends. Boasting years of high economic growth paired with political stability, it has become one of the more attractive destinations for the flow of international capital to the African continent.³⁵ While critical geography and world-systems analysis has dug into the structural dimensions of the spread of neoliberal capitalism, much less is known about how neoliberalism is enacted “on the ground.” But understanding the lived experience of “actually existing” neoliberalism (Brenner and

³⁵ However, recent economic troubles, including the precipitous decline in the value of the cedi and an official devaluation as a condition of an IMF loan issued to the Mahama government in summer 2014 have led many to question how sustainable these changes will be.

Theodore 2002) is crucial to broadening our knowledge of how the expansion of neoliberal capitalism into previously peripheral areas of the globe changes the dynamics of everyday life. After all, neoliberalism is incapable of “doing” anything; it is people in particular configurations, acting on behalf of particular interests, who are responsible for enacting various kinds of neoliberal projects.

This chapter, then, represents an effort to engage in the ethnography of political economy,³⁶ examining how the language of globalization is employed by two groups of urban stakeholders in Accra—the “globalizers,” those actively seeking to make connections with the global economy, and the “globalized,” those who play a less active role in this effort but are, for better or worse, incorporated into various kinds of global networks. Often, but not always, the divide between these groups is synonymous with the divide between civil servants and private real estate developers. Drawing on content analysis of real estate developer promotional material and public planning documents and interview data, this chapter will examine these two perspectives in depth, exploring how public officials and private developers marshal the language of globalization to serve their particular development needs and priorities. In comparison to studies that examine global urban networks and hierarchies, I focus on globalization as it is lived and experienced.³⁷ In this way, public texts can be seen as reflections of understanding and

³⁶ I am indebted to Howard Winant for this phrase, which has proved so useful to my understanding of my own work.

³⁷ I am by no means alone in this effort. Many anthropologists working in Africa today focus on the linkages between the local and the global, considering how everyday practices in Africa are informed by a growing sense of global interconnectedness and the impacts of neoliberal reform (see, for example Chalfin 2010; Ferguson 2006; Piot 2010; Simone 2001).

instruments for promoting certain kinds of meanings about globalization. The key research questions guiding this chapter are:

1. How do stakeholders with vastly different, even clashing, sets of interests envision the future of the city and their roles in creating that future?
2. How are meanings about globalization generated and circulated?
3. How do public texts reflect changes in Accra's ability to link up with global networks, be they networks of NGOs, diasporic Ghanaians, international business elites, or global financial capital?
4. How do real estate developers harness the language of globalization to sell their projects to potential funders and clients?
5. To what degree does globalization rhetoric infuse state-generated urban policy?

The chapter begins with a discussion of the “globalizers” and their perspectives on Accra’s development. I examine the developers themselves—their origins, orientations, backgrounds, and motivations as well as the process of real estate development (including the role of the local and national state). I also consider several paradigmatic examples of influential new commercial and residential real estate developments and the way these projects are branded and marketed by the developers themselves and by national and international media outlets. I then turn to the “globalized”—civil servants and everyday residents of Accra, considering the status of local government in Accra today; the efforts made by local government to rebrand Accra in order to attract outside investment; the push to introduce new national guidelines for urban development; and the impact of neoliberal restructuring on the residents of Accra, particularly the poor and

vulnerable. I conclude by considering the overlaps between the two groups, both in terms of strategy and outlook.

Figure 11: Deteriorating government-built apartment block for the presidential guard during the Nkrumah era provides advertising space for “Bentley Oak,” a new luxury condominium development



Methodology

Data for this chapter were drawn from a variety of sources. Interviews with private real estate developers and other professionals involved in urban development, including contractors, business owners, and consultants, allowed me to better understand the logistics involved in developing new real estate projects in Accra, the backgrounds, perspectives, and aspirations of developers, and how developers envision the future of Accra. Content analysis of real estate promotional materials, including websites, advertisements, and brochures, provided important insight into the tactics developers use

to market their projects to potential customers and investors. National and international media coverage of new real estate developments in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA) allowed me to better understand how meanings about Accra's global aspirations are generated and disseminated.

Interviews with civil servants revealed many of the challenges to development encountered by local government as well as some of the efforts being made to attract international capital and technical assistance to Accra. Analysis of public planning documents, most notably the AMA's medium term development plans, investment guides, and Millennium City initiatives revealed the priorities of the AMA, their efficacy in carrying out development projects, their vision for the city, and their efforts to rebrand Accra. Analysis of national urban planning documents—the *National Urban Policy Framework* and *National Urban Policy Action Plan*—both produced by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, were useful in understanding the national response to decentralization policies enacted in Ghana in the late 1980s. Finally, media coverage of Accra, including blog entries, YouTube videos, news stories, and reports published by online journals such as Next City's Informal City Dialogues allowed me to assess to what degree interview and planning documents correspond with events on the ground.

The Globalizers

“Afropreneurs”

When the Accra Mall was completed at a cost of \$36 million, it represented one of the most ambitious and expensive real estate projects to be completed in Accra in decades. Many developers cite the mall as the project that paved the way for other large-scale

property development in the city. According to Nana, a graduate of Oxford University and a senior employee of Mobus Property Development, the company building the Meridian Mall in Tema, the Accra Mall “gave us some comfort because at the end of the day you’ve seen that it’s been successful.” Much has been made in recent years of Africa’s entrepreneurs, or, as Nigerian-born Idris Bello, co-founder of the “Wenovation Hub,” a think-tank for budding entrepreneurs in Lagos, calls them “Afropreneurs” (Kermellotis 2012). In August 2014, *Vanity Fair* published an article on the Harambe Entrepreneur Alliance, a group of African entrepreneurs from across the continent with Ivy-league credentials who work to foster start-ups throughout Africa (Beinner 2014). *Forbes Africa* recently published a list of Africa’s “30 under 30” most influential entrepreneurs (Dolan 2015). Reading these articles, you get the impression that decades of African development woes could be solved by throngs of 20 and 30-somethings with start-ups—that perhaps in a few decades, cities like Lagos, Harare, and Addis Ababa could look more like Silicon Valley. What these articles do not address, however, is the political-economic history that has led to the embrace of such initiatives across the continent, including, most significantly, the retreat of the state from the work of development and the subsequent takeover of development by the private sector.

Those involved in real estate development in Accra are a bit less sanguine about the future of the city, citing the numerous barriers they face in creating a better organized and more aesthetically pleasing urban landscape, yet these “Afropreneurs” are also the most active in promoting that vision, which involves a dramatic reimagining of urban space—the conversion of a postcolonial African city to a clean, modern, and global one. Several of the biggest real estate projects developed since the Accra mall have been

products of outside investment, though most are developed via joint ventures with Ghanaian companies. Of the Ghanaian property developers working on major projects, all are products of the Ghanaian diaspora or have spent significant time abroad. Richard Jonah, for example, the recently-deceased CEO of Mobus Property Development, which has developed several high-end residential condominium complexes and is in the process of developing the Meridian Mall in Tema, was the son of Sam Jonah, a prominent Ghanaian businessman with a private equity firm, Jonah Capital, based in Johannesburg. For several years Sam Jonah was the President of Ashanti Goldfields (now AngloGold Ashanti). He now serves on the boards of several mining companies and is the Chancellor of the University of Cape Coast. Richard, his son, was educated at Haverford College in Pennsylvania and the University of Pretoria in South Africa, and spent several years working for Goldman Sachs in New York and N.M. Rothschild in London before returning to Africa to join the family business (Essel 2014) and start Mobus Property Holdings. Joseph Owusu-Akyaw, the initiating partner of the Accra Mall, completed university in Great Britain and spent a lot of time in South Africa. The head of the Ghana Real Estate Developers Association, Emmanuel Asamoah, attended college in the United States and subsequently worked for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac for several years, experiences he used to develop the mortgage banking system in Ghana. Derek Owusu-Akyaw, the son of Joseph Owusu-Akyaw, who is developing a mall in Kumasi, Ghana's second-largest city, attended college in the US, as did most of his siblings. Roland Agambire, the CEO of Agams Holdings and Ghana-based RLG Communications, the company behind the much-publicized "Hope City" project, splits his time between Accra and Dubai (which is now the headquarters for his company). Most of these developers

come from highly privileged backgrounds and many are able to invest their own funds into the projects they are developing. Mobus Property Development, for example, owes much of its success to the fact that the Jonah family owns a significant amount of land in the Accra/Tema Metropolitan Area and has its own source of source of equity thanks to Jonah Capital. The Accra Mall was developed on land owned by the Owusu-Akyaw family.

Outside funding for these new high-end projects comes from a variety of domestic and international sources. Though the Accra Mall was funded by a UK development bank, South Africa has since become the most significant source of foreign capital for real estate development in Ghana, purchasing majority shares in the Accra Mall in 2012 and subsequently investing in two new malls: West Hills and the Achimota Retail Centre.

Table 6 documents the sources of funding for Accra’s malls in more detail.

Table 6: Funding sources for GAMA’s shopping centers (arranged in order of construction)

Shopping Center	Funding Source(s)
A&C Square- East Legon	Asamoah family (Ghana) and the IFC (a division of the World Bank)
Accra Mall- Tetteh Quarshie Circle	Owusu-Akyaw family (Ghana) and Actis (UK-based development bank). Majority shares now owned by Atterbury (South Africa)
Marina Mall- Airport City	Marina Group (Burkina Faso, Niger, and Ghana) and the IFC
Oxford Street Mall- Osu	Ghana Libyan Arab Holding Company (partnership between the Government of Ghana and the Libyan Arab African Investment Company)
West Hills Mall- Dunkonah, New Weija	Atterbury (South Africa) and the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (Government of Ghana)
The Junction Shopping Centre- Nungua	RMB Westport (South Africa)
Achimota Retail Centre- Achimota	Atterbury (South Africa)
Meridian Mall- Tema	Mobus Property Development (Ghana). Stanlib Africa Direct Property Fund (a division of Standard Bank- South Africa)

Though each new mall is hailed as a promising step toward the economic development of the country, the amount of capital invested by South African companies belies this promise. In addition to owning many of the malls, South African brands also predominate within the malls, especially as anchor tenants. With the exception of Marina Mall and A&C Square, which have a MaxMart (Ghanaian-owned), and Marina Market (owned by the Marina Group based in Burkina Faso), there is a Shoprite in every mall in Accra. This near-monopoly ensures that most of the profits from these malls flow back to South Africa, and it is not at all clear to what degree they contribute to the local economy.³⁸

Developers draw on their experiences abroad as a source of inspiration for their projects. Malls in Ghana generally follow a similar model to those in South Africa. In addition to line shops, every mall in Accra has a supermarket and many have banks and medical clinics, effectively supplanting the need to travel into town to run errands. South African retailers themselves may have something to do with this, as the anchor stores in most of Accra's malls are South Africa-based multinationals. These anchors are often heavily involved in the planning process, signing on to the projects long before the final architectural plans have been drawn up. Influences for the projects go beyond the African continent, however. For example, friends and colleagues of Joseph Owusu-Akyaw point to Brent Cross Shopping Centre in North London as a project that inspired Owusu-Akyaw to begin thinking about building a mall in his home country. Brent Cross was one of the first examples of the use of a shopping center as a catalyst for urban revitalization. At the time Owusu-Akyaw was in London, Ghana was still under military government

³⁸ There are, however, multiplier effects of mall construction, such as the provision of new service and construction jobs and subsequent growth in household income, as well as increased demand for goods from local suppliers, and, as documented in chapter 1, new markets for the informal economy.

and conditions in Accra were chaotic. Underfunded and inefficient city officials were in crisis management mode and hardly any new development was taking place. Accra was not exactly Brent Cross, but it was badly in need of revitalization. It was not until democratization in 1992, however, that Owusu-Akyaw began his long effort to acquire funding for the mall. Still, most retail developers look to African examples for inspiration, particularly South Africa, Mauritius, and Nigeria, citing their similarity to Ghana, despite the fact that the Ghanaian market is much smaller than South Africa and Nigeria's in terms of both GDP and population, and the economy of Mauritius is based heavily on tourism.

The influence of the US on Accra's urban form is also hard to deny. Accra as a whole has followed an American sunbelt model of urban growth. With plenty of undeveloped land available on the city's outskirts, Accra has sprawled in the past two decades. Houses in new high-end residential developments like Trasacco Valley resemble the McMansions found in many American suburbs. Homes are large and ostentatious, with columns, sprawling lawns, and garages (though also with distinctly Ghanaian touches, such as servants' quarters). This is perhaps not surprising given that so many of the funds used to build these homes are supplied by remittances from Ghanaians living abroad, particularly from the U.S.³⁹ Standing in some of the wealthy suburbs and gated communities, it can feel more like you are in Atlanta than Accra. With housing models named "The Duke," "The Aspen," and "The Windsor," the developers of Trasacco Valley are well attuned to the cosmopolitan tastes of Accra's new global elite and their

³⁹ I am grateful to Harvey Molotch for supplying the phrase "the architecture of remittances," which helped to inform my understanding of why these neighborhoods look the way they do.

demand for American-style square footage: “The Duke” boasts almost 6,000. In 2004, prices for single family homes in Trasacco Valley ranged from \$240,000 to \$460,000, figures hardly imaginable to the more than two-thirds of Accra residents earning less than ten dollars a day and the one-fifth earning less than two (World Bank 2010)

Aesthetics are a central concern of Accra’s private real estate developers.

Concluding that Accra has become a mess because of the lack of development control exercised by local authorities, private developers express a desire to do development properly. This rarely results in attempts to upgrade existing structures, but rather to build new model projects, often outside central Accra, which they hope will inspire others to follow their lead. Most developers believe that it is only by developing new projects that work that any progress will be made to control development in the rest of the city.

Consider this quote from George, the Ghana-based architect who participated in the development of the Accra mall and has consulted on several large-scale retail and residential projects:

What really happens is that people come to see through single examples here and there the proper ways to do things, and then they abandon the old ways, which they’ve already invested in, and go to do things properly. That’s how our development control works because it will never come from the city. There’s no urban management. So what’s going to happen is perhaps people will see gated communities springing up. They will go in there, they will see, yeah, there’s some management here, some control, and there’s some open spaces here, there’s some security. Perhaps it’s the only way you can do it because you can’t expect the city to ever give you all that. So people are going to buy into that.

Citing gated communities as models of successful development, he believes that other developers will begin to follow suit, and that eventually, the look of the city may change, although he also admits that, “Things are going to get messy in certain parts, and then things are doing to get better in certain parts...then gradually we’re going to have a mix,

a good mix of the two.” Others are more optimistic about what private development can accomplish in terms of improving Accra through aesthetic enhancement. A consultant for real estate developers in the country and one of the founders of Ghana’s mortgage industry told me, “Instead of seeing the old buildings all the time [new high end development] has brought in new kinds of property development in the area, and there are a lot of high rises.” When I asked him to expand on what new high rises can do for a city, he went on to explain, “If you go to a city, you look at the buildings, and the buildings make the city look either beautiful or ugly. So all these kinds of developments coming up make the city more enhanced... they enhance the image of the city and make the city more appealing [to outsiders].” Making the city more appealing to visitors and potential investors is critical for developers, who rely on the patronage of diasporic Ghanaians, business travelers, expatriates, and tourists to make their projects viable. Yet this emphasis on aesthetics and “enhancing” the city is rarely directed toward Accra’s residents themselves, apart from the upper echelon. Although some developers express a desire to build housing for everyday Ghanaians, they argue that this will not be feasible without support from the government.

Like many cities with global aspirations, most of Accra’s development has focused on the provision of consumption-oriented amenities. Even Tema, which was built to house new industrial activity, has now begun to focus instead on attracting new malls, hotels, and casinos for visitors who come to work at its port. Urban planning strategies in the GAMA have shifted from “managerial” approaches to “entrepreneurial” approaches, which according to David Harvey, privilege,

Gentrification, cultural innovation, and physical up-grading of the urban environment (including the turn to postmodernist styles of architecture and

urban design), consumer attractions (sports stadia, convention and shopping centres, marinas, exotic eating places) and entertainment (the organisation of urban spectacles on a temporary or permanent basis) (1989:9).

In Accra, spectacle has become an ever more important concern for developers competing for customers. The West Hills Mall, Ghana's newest and largest, features a grand entrance adorned with fountains. George, the architect quoted earlier in this chapter described the sense of belonging Ghanaians get when visiting a mall.

Even if most [Ghanaians] can't buy anything [at the mall], it strikes something in their heart to say that their life has, the environment has improved. They may be living in a shack somewhere, but they can go to the Shoprite. They can save and buy a pair of jeans after a year and breathe the air in that context. They think that, well, I can never get a visa to go to the US, but I can walk into this mall and buy whatever is there that probably came from there.

Stephan Miescher and Peter Bloom argue in their introduction to *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa* that commodity fetishism has replaced modernization as the driving force behind development in Africa:

Instead of modernization functioning as the financial mechanism that would enable a program of national sovereignty and social rights for all citizens, a globalized system [has] emerged through the fetishization of consumption, production, and accumulation. In the afterglow of modernization, consumer-based development has become the new frontier of humanitarian entrepreneurship (2014:4–5).

This becomes evident when reading developer promotional materials, which attempt to highlight the humanitarian aspects of their projects. Actis, for example, the original investor in the Accra Mall, states on its website that, “the money we invest matters because the companies in which we invest light cities, power factories, build properties, serve consumers and create better ways to bank, study, learn, shop and live.

We believe this capital is transformative and for that reason we call it the positive power

of capital” (Actis n.d.). Here, banking, shopping, and serving consumers are positioned as being as central to development as studying, learning, and living. As citizenship and development become more narrowly defined as consumption-driven activities, funding for private development focuses ever more on new consumption-oriented and profit-driven projects, rather than on provisioning for the public good through investment in basic infrastructure. The results on the ground are clear: while impressive new condominium complexes protect residents from the daily hazards of African urban life—crime, poor sanitation, flooding, power cuts, and loss of livelihood and property—the poor are increasingly left alone to deal with these hazards.

Remaking Accra

Despite a recent economic downturn, new real estate development in Accra continues at a feverish pace. Mall construction, though vigorous, is just one aspect of this. Several major projects in various stages of completion attempt not only to provide new amenities, but to reshape the GAMA in dramatic ways, providing a blueprint for future development. Three large-scale projects—Airport City, Appolonia, and Hope City—are particularly illustrative of this.

Airport City

The Airport City development is part of a strategy by the national government to promote Accra as a “gateway city,” “a West African hub for import, export, storage, assembly, distribution, and transshipment of goods, services, and passengers” (Grant 2009:23). Geared toward business travelers and corporate clients, Airport City is being built on 33 acres of land adjacent to Kotoka International Airport, leased from Ghana’s Civil Aviation Authority. It contains several office buildings in various states of completion,

hotels (including Ghana's first Holiday Inn), conference centers, a mall, car showrooms, and, if all goes as planned, Ghana's first revolving restaurant. Most of the buildings, with the exception of the SSNIT Emporium, are owned by private developers. The Consortium, a private land-use consulting firm based in Accra, drew up plans for the development beginning with exploratory studies in the mid 1990s. Investors wishing to develop properties at Airport City receive a 45 year renewable lease from the national government, with an upfront payment of 220 million cedis for each 100'x100' plot, or 880 million cedis per acre.⁴⁰

Prior to the development of Airport City, the land was not formally occupied, but it was used for informal farming and as an "area of convenience." Despite the area's rapid transformation over the past decade, evidence still exists of what Airport City looked like before. It is a study in contrasts: shiny new steel and glass skyscrapers pop up next to empty fields. Small kiosks set up shop next to construction zones to provide food and drinks to workers. Red dirt covers newly paved roads (See Figures 12-14). Driving into Airport City is a convoluted process. The buildings are decidedly modern, but the roads are not. It is hard to access and designed primarily for private cars. What is most striking about Airport City, however, is how little it resembles the rest of Accra. Because of its inaccessibility, it has the feel of an elite city within a city. Unlike the Accra Mall, it does not offer many services that cater to the general population. The few kiosks that

⁴⁰ In the early 2000s, when the Airport City project began, the value of the cedi was highly variable, ranging from approximately 3500 cedis per dollar to almost 9000 cedis per dollar, thus making the dollar value of land in Airport City extremely difficult to determine. In 2000, 220 million cedis per 100'x100' plot was equivalent to about \$62,000; in 2003, it was approximately \$25,000.

have been set up along some of the less developed stretches of the development will likely disappear once construction ceases, leaving Airport City an isolated business park.

Figures 12-14: Images of Airport City, November 2014



Figure 12: View of the Holiday Inn and One Airport Square from yet-to-be developed grassland, showing evidence of prior informal use.



Figure 3: Construction in progress



Figure 4: Airport City streetscape showing unfinished revolving restaurant, advertisement for Atlantic Tower, and informal kiosks

Appolonia

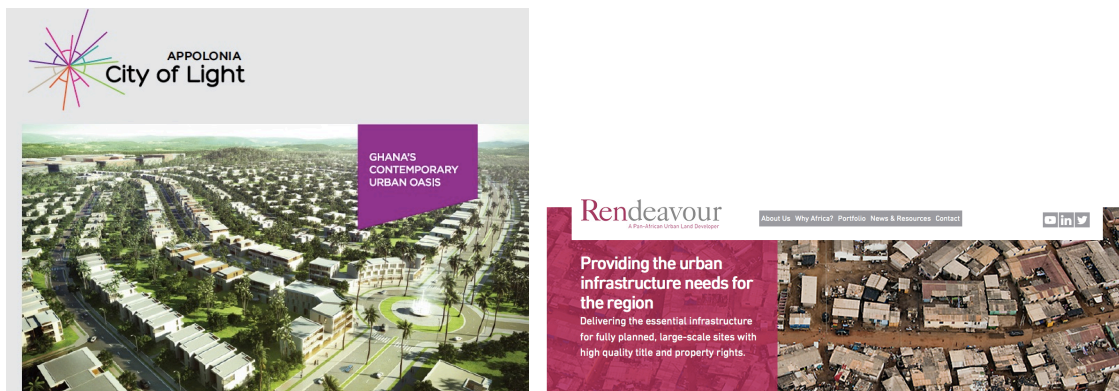
Appolonia, “City of Light,” is a new planned mixed-use, mixed-income community to be built approximately 30 kilometers northeast of central Accra on stool land.⁴¹ Designed entirely by a private company, Rendeavour, a spin-off of Russian investment bank Renaissance Capital, Appolonia represents an attempt to build a new town from the ground up in order to correct what its CEO, Steven Jennings, perceives as the failure of the public sector in Africa to properly enforce planning regulations. In an interview, one of Rendeavour’s employees compared Tema unfavorably with Appolonia to make the case that the private sector should be empowered to exercise planning control in the face of public sector failure.

Rendeavour has ongoing projects throughout Africa—in Takoradi, western Ghana; Nigeria; Zambia; Kenya; and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Its website features satellite images of haphazard development, contrasting these with Appolonia’s highly organized spatial plan (see Figure 15). Initially, Rendeavour’s plan was to build the entire community, but due to corporate restructuring and difficulties with funding, the company has had to scale down its ambitions. Rendeavour no longer likes to call Appolonia a “new town,” preferring instead to call it an “urban land development.” It now plans to procure the bulk infrastructure (electricity, gas, and water) and sell the site wholesale to developers. In recent months, Rendeavour announced Appolonia’s two first residential communities: “Nova Ridge,” a gated “buy and build” community with 68 plots available for individual purchase and development, and “The Oxford,” a joint venture between Appolonia and Imperial Holdings, consisting of 2-3 bedroom homes on

⁴¹ Stool land is land held by Ghana’s traditional authorities.

20 hectares of land, with prices ranging from \$75,000 to \$100,000 (Rendeavour 2015a). Though these prices are considerably lower than in some of Accra’s gated residential communities, they are still well beyond the reach of average Ghanaians. Plans for Appolonia estimate that the project will be rolled out in successive phases over 10-15 years, with gated communities coming first, and will eventually include mixed income housing, commercial activity, light industry, schools, and healthcare, effectively becoming a self-sustaining community rather than a satellite suburb of Accra. Plans even include facilities for the informal economy, though informal sector activity will be strictly monitored, as Rendeavour insists that it is “not going anywhere.”

Figure 15: Appolonia rendering and satellite image of unplanned development from Rendeavour’s website



Sources: Appolonia investor brochure and Rendeavour website

Hope City

Finally, Hope City, the most ambitious and improbable project to be announced in recent years, is a \$10 billion ICT park to be developed by Roland Agambire’s Ghana-based RLG Communications on the western outskirts of the GAMA. Designed by an Italian architecture firm and touted to include the “tallest building in Africa,” plans for Hope City center around six massive beehive-like structures (see Figures 16-17). The project

has been covered extensively in international media outlets such as the BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera. Initial plans for the development included an IT University, electronics assembly plant, hospital, and housing for between 25,000 and 65,000 residents (Kermellotis 2013; Vourlias 2015). Developers estimated that the project would create approximately 50,000 jobs. Though it now looks as though Hope City was more of a PR stunt than a feasible project, George, the architect of the Accra Mall told me, “Maybe there’s an advantage to that. Let’s tell [the international media] all these lies and get the investors coming in, right?” The project was officially inaugurated in March 2013 by President John Mahama as part of a massive event that included a concert by American R&B star Chris Brown in the national stadium. Since then, however, no progress has been made on the project.

Figures 16 and 17: Hope City conceptual renderings



Source: OBR Associated Architects

All three projects have enjoyed the support of the national state. According to representatives from Appolonia, the state has been “instrumental” in granting approvals for the development. Hope City was endorsed by President John Mahama, who proclaimed at its inauguration that, "Government has led growth since independence with

all the major investments... The time has come for the private sector to take over” (BBC 2013). Airport City was built on 33 acres of land leased from the national government, and is being overseen by the Ghana Airports Company Limited, a private company that is an offshoot of the Ghana Civil Aviation Authority. Rumors abound when it comes to corruption. When the West Hills Mall was being built, many Accra residents claimed that President John Mahama’s brother, Ibrahim, had a personal stake in the mall. Many also suspect that John Agyekum Kufuor, the former president, owned shares in the Accra Mall. President Mahama is rumored to be very close with Roland Agambire, the head of RLG Communications (they are both from northern Ghana and Mahama has given a number of government contracts to RLG and Agaams Holdings). These rumors are impossible to verify, but they are powerful, and it is perhaps because of them that despite the government’s support of private development, many of the developers and business owners I spoke with had extremely negative views of the state, arguing that it was more of a hindrance than a help in fostering development. The real estate development consultant I interviewed complained to me that the government does nothing to foster equitable development in the form of subsidies for the private sector to provide affordable housing and infrastructure because, “They are dumb. They don’t want to listen to any advice from people outside their own political enclave, you know, and most of these guys in the government don’t know anything... Some of them just left the university and just came in. They have no experience, nothing, but they won’t listen to any advice.” Dennis, the owner of the healthcare business in the mall, when I asked what the government can do to help foster development, told me,

Ghana government just has to sleep. We are not interested in them interfering in anything, because whatever they do, they don’t do it well,

and they'd rather make our lives very difficult...They are inefficient, and they are corrupt, and they should allow private enterprise to be the thing that drives this country. They've been paying lip service to it since 1957 when we got independence—government-private partnerships, government-private partnerships, but they don't do it! They'd rather retard your progress!

Yet research has borne out the fact that the national state, especially the right-leaning New Patriotic Party (NPP), has been largely responsible for bringing about “Ghana’s Golden Age of Business” by providing the necessary support and conditions for the private sector to thrive (Arthur 2006).

Marketing Accra: the Role of International Media

New urban development projects across the African continent coupled with high GDP growth has led to an international media frenzy about Africa’s hopeful future. Following years of “Afro-pessimism,” with publications such as *The Economist* featuring cover stories proclaiming Africa “The Hopeless Continent” (May 2000), the past five years have seen an upswing in positive stories. In December 2011, the cover of *The Economist* featured an image of a young African boy flying a kite in the shape of the African continent, with the headline “Africa Rising.” *Time* published a cover story with the same title the following year. Then, in February 2013, *The Economist* featured another cover story about the rise of Africa entitled “Aspiring Africa,” this one with the silhouette of a giraffe on the cover. Of particular interest to the international media are stories about ambitious new real estate projects, as these seem to defy popular understandings of Africa as a site of violence, poverty, and disease. A 2007 article in *Shopping Centers Today*, the trade magazine of the international mall industry, proclaimed that “Retail development is helping to transform economies and lives in a continent scarred by war

and poverty” (Hazlett 2007). The Africa section of CNN.com is rife with stories about new urban development projects on the continent, including extensive coverage of new towns such as Appolonia and King City in Ghana.

Profiles of Accra in the international media tend to emphasize the up-market nature of Accra’s transformation. In January 2013, the online edition of the *New York Times* ranked Accra number 4 in its list of “46 Places to Go in 2013,” citing its fast-growing economy, new, high-end hotels, such as the Mövenpick and Marriott Accra, casinos, restaurants, and its relative safety compared to other African travel destinations. A 2013 article in *The Guardian* profiled Accra’s “Republic” restaurant as evidence of a “foodie revolution cooking in West Africa.” These kinds of articles often reference Ghana’s growing middle class, its new sophistication, and its cosmopolitanism. The *Guardian* article, for example, mentions the growing popularity of wine bars in Accra due to the higher availability of imported wines from Europe and South Africa. Articles promoting Accra as a travel destination tend to highlight the consumptive aspects of travel—the hotels, casinos, restaurants, and shopping destinations. This overselling of African prosperity shields consumers from the realities of life for most of Accra’s residents. Such articles appear in the same publications that document the desperate conditions of Accra’s poor—overcrowding in informal settlements, outbreaks of disease, and poor health caused by participation in Accra’s growing e-waste industry⁴², for

⁴² In April 2014, the *Guardian Online* published a series of photographs documenting conditions in Agbogbloshie, a slum community and e-waste dump in Accra. A caption of one photograph reads, “When old computers first began arriving in West Africa, Ghanaians thought they were sent to help bridge the digital divide as exporters exploited loopholes by labelling junk computers ‘donations’. But slowly tonnes of e-waste piled up on this once green area, and transformed it into a global graveyard for electronic equipment” (Adjei 2014).

example—yet rarely do the authors of these articles connect the plight of the urban poor to the rise of the rich, the result being that poverty is seen as isolated from the countervailing trend of luxury development in the rest of the city, rather than as an outcome of a deliberate policy measures that privilege the rich at the expense of the poor.

Promoting a Mall

Just as international media outlets play up the growth of the middle class in Ghana, so do developers themselves. When marketing their projects to prospective investors and consumers, developers rely on a set of tropes that emphasize the growing globality of Accra, the potential for growth in the market, the challenges to development they seek to overcome, and the appropriateness of their project to the Ghanaian context.

Marketing materials exude a sense of “Afro-optimism” in their assessments of the Ghanaian market. In marketing Appolonia, for example, Rendeavour’s publications devote numerous pages to charts and graphs documenting Ghana’s promising investment indicators, citing its 14 percent GDP growth in 2011, its rapidly urbanizing population, its overly congested cities, and its “stable political terrain” and “investor-friendly environment.” In a brochure entitled “Why Africa?” Rendeavour documents the growth of consumption across the continent, citing statistics about the continent’s youthful population and its growing middle class with discretionary income (which they claim has more than doubled in the past ten years) (Rendeavour 2014). The brochure for Meridian Mall in Tema cites research conducted by Douglas Parker and Associates, a South African consulting firm, indicating that growth in the catchment area for the mall has been at 7 percent per annum since 2000 and is expected to continue. In an advertisement in *Shopping SA*, a publication of the South African Council of Shopping Centres, an

advertisement by Broll Ghana (the company that manages West Hills Mall and the Accra Mall) quotes Atterbury's manager of property developments, James Ehler, who calls Ghana an "increasingly sophisticated consumer market." Reflecting a sense of optimism about the country's future, Ehlers remarks that the area around West Hills Mall, "is a rapidly developing middle class residential node in a city with a growing population of over 3 million people. It reflects the growth in urbanisation and consumerism in this politically and economically stable oil-rich country" (Broll Ghana 2013). This sense of optimism about the increased sophistication of middle-class Ghanaians does not necessarily square with the facts. GDP growth has slowed significantly in the past two years in Ghana and middle class consumers are finding it harder to make ends meet. A recent article in the *Financial Times* questioned the assumption that the middle class in Africa will continue to grow, arguing instead that rising inequality across the continent may lead to instability and threaten the growth of African economies (Blas 2014).

Despite the optimistic tone of many of the marketing campaigns, developers also portray Accra as a city faced with a huge number of challenges, arguing that their projects seek to remedy the problems of contemporary urban life in Ghana. The marketing brochure for Meridian Mall points out that Sub-Saharan Africa is "experiencing a shortage of modern buildings, with demand for high quality retail, office, and residential properties far outstripping demand" (Mobus Property Developments n.d.). Rendeavour markets Appolonia as a solution to Ghana's "densely packed cities" and uses the promise of a "reliable supply of water, the provision of electricity, ultra-fast internet service...[and] clean land titles" as its biggest selling points. Its marketing brochure

dedicates an entire page to discussing the sophistication of its infrastructure (see Figure 18), a tacit acknowledgement of Accra’s biggest development failures.

Figure 18: Description of amenities from Appolonia marketing brochure



Source: <http://www.appolonia.com.gh>

Developers employ tropes of relaxation, cleanliness, and order to sell their projects, positioning malls and new residential communities as bulwarks against the chaos of African urban life. Rendeavour markets Appolonia as a “new urban oasis,” an “enchanted destination” and emphasizes the “serene ambience,” which can be found in Appolonia’s “public open spaces and conservation areas that provide relief from the hustle and bustle of city life” (Rendeavour 2015b). Mobus advertises that the design of the Meridian Mall will contain “Open air components [which will] take advantage of the lovely local climate and give the mall a light and airy feel” and that, “Trees and water features in the central piazza [will] add natural visual elements and sounds, and will also assist in the passive cooling of this central space” (Mobus Property Developments n.d.). An advertisement for Villagio Vista, the brightly colored condominium complex adjacent to the Accra Mall notes that, “The experience of cooling off in an infinity edged pool on

top of the highest building in Ghana is truly spectacular” (Trasacco 2012). These references to the sensual and aesthetic appeal of new real estate projects and their calming effects stand in stark contrast to newspaper articles and development reports decrying the appalling conditions of infrastructure and sanitation in Accra’s residential and commercial neighborhoods.

Despite attempts to market these new developments as radical departures from the chaotic development of the rest of the city, developers also make deliberate efforts to incorporate “indigenous” cultural forms into their design. While the marketing of new projects takes place on a global scale, with developers looking to Europe, North America, and South Africa for funding, there is also an effort to highlight the “embeddedness” of these projects in the Ghanaian context. Indigeneity thus becomes a selling point, even while the projects themselves are often based on a rejection of tradition and an embrace of the “modern.” The logo for the Meridian Mall, for example, is designed to hearken back to traditional bead making, which is still an important industry in Ghana (See Figure 19). In dissecting the meaning behind the logo, the brochure explains:

Bead making is an ancient tradition in Ghana and for much of the country’s history, beads were closely tied to important rituals (such as weddings and the coming-of-age ritual for young girls) and social status (chiefs always wore beads). For most of the country’s history, beads have played a significant part in Ghana’s culture, society, and economy. The Meridian Mall logo draws inspiration from this tradition. The multi-dotted logo symbolizes people gathering at a social hub such as the mall. People activate a social space and give it function and meaning, just like the beads of Ghana are strung together to create beautiful and meaningful artifacts (Mobus Property Developments n.d.).

According to the website of Trasacco, the Italian developer behind Trasacco Valley and the Villagio Vista, the Villagio Vista towers were designed to mimic the colors and textures of the traditional kente cloth produced in Ghana: “Villagio Vista consists of three

magnificent residential structures overlooking a central garden each wrapped in a distinctive Kente inspired ‘skin’” (Trasacco n.d.) (See Figure 20). Perhaps the most audacious claims of indigeneity come from the Hope City project, the design of which an architect I spoke with characterized as “martian,” or alternatively, as “salt and pepper shakers.” Numerous articles and press releases, including from the Italian architect responsible for the design of the buildings, report that the inspiration for the concept came from the traditional compound house of Northern Ghana (See Figure 21). An article from CNN.com explains this in more detail:

OBR co-founder Paolo Brescia says the project's goal is to create a living place of discovery and exploration that reflects the tradition and culture of local people in a contemporary urban setting. To achieve this, the architects designed Hope City with Ghana's traditional compound houses in mind. Originally made of mud brick walls and thatched roofs, compound structures have been a prevalent form of housing in the country for centuries, built to promote communal life and mutual assistance. “We wanted to recreate, at a different scale, the same feeling of the compound house in a way that it could work as a compound cluster,” explains Brescia (Kermellotis 2013).

It is noteworthy that the projects that draw most heavily on indigeneity as a trope are also the ones that are designed by architects outside of Africa, or those being most actively marketed outside Ghana. Meridian Mall designed its brochure to attract international investors, and Hope City has earned global notoriety through extensive press coverage. Even Nana, the senior employee at Mobus, acknowledged that the bead concept behind the Meridian Mall logo was not something Mobus itself came up with, telling me, “Look, I can’t really say it, but I think it’s on the first page of [the marketing brochure]...I mean...” (she then quoted the brochure), “‘The inspiration of the Meridian Mall logo was drawn from tradition.’ That one was beads. I really, it’s never occurred to me why this design.” As the architect of the Accra Mall pointed out to me, Ghanaians are not

necessarily interested in tradition or indigeneity when it comes to new development. They would rather “be international in outlook,” and are more interested in having access to the kinds of amenities available in the developed world, such as clean and reliable running water, electricity, and good roads, than they are in occupying apartments that mimic indigenous compound houses.

Figure 19: Meridian Mall logo and traditional Ghanaian beads



Source: Mobus Property Development

Figure 20: Villagio Vista complex and traditional Kente cloth



Source: Trasacco

Figure 21: Hope City architectural rendering and traditional compound house from northern Ghana



Source: OBR Associated Architects

The Globalized

The Ineffective and Beleaguered Civil Service

Decentralization policies enacted in the late 1980s were designed to give more power to local governments and to democratize local development efforts through the formation of district assemblies, which were to be accountable to local constituents. However, in a number of ways decentralization has not been fully implemented, nor has it been effective in accelerating urban development in the country. Mayors are appointed by the national government, rather than elected, as are a significant portion of district assembly members, and as a result democratization has not been fully realized. Moreover, decentralization policies, which were enacted in the midst of the economic restructuring programs of the 1980s and early 1990s, coincided with a reduction in government spending. Though several different types of federal funds—common funds, district development funds, and urban development grants—are made available to local governments, they are either set up to fund specific projects, in the case of the common fund and urban development grants, or are performance-based, in the case of the district

development funds (which are a World Bank initiative). This means that local governments like the AMA are dependent on property taxes and fees, but most significantly, on outside sources of funding, particularly from international NGOs and intergovernmental organizations such as UN HABITAT. The result is that urban development in Accra tends to be piecemeal, project-based, and highly uncertain, as it depends on revenue from international sources, which may decide to discontinue funding the AMA if it does not meet their expectations.

In the early 1990s, municipalities began to be required to produce medium-term development plans and annual action plans. These plans assess the progress made in previous years and outline goals for the future. The medium term development plans for Accra since 1996 reveal a pattern of inefficacy, with only a tiny fraction of planned development schemes actually implemented. In reviewing the 2002-2005 plan, the authors of the 2006-2009 plan acknowledge the overly optimistic nature of the 2002 document and stress that, “The lessons learnt in the review exercise on the past plan have been fed back into this document to ensure a more pragmatic and realistic interventions [sic]” (Accra Metropolitan Assembly 2007:3). Yet the 2010-2013 plan finds similar results: of the 13 sub-metros under the Accra Metropolitan Assembly, the highest percentage of planned projects completed was eight. In most sub-metros, fewer than two percent of projects planned were completed, and these projects tended to be small-scale—the provision of a few public lights, guttering on a single street, giving Legos to a local school (Accra Metropolitan Assembly 2010).

This inability to deliver on its plans has led to numerous efforts to involve the private and non-profit sector in the work of development. Public-private partnerships are

considered essential to the work of the AMA, and privatization is emphasized in every medium term development plan. In discussing the annual budget with Linda, one of the budget directors in the AMA, I was told that, “these days we try to spend a minimum of twenty percent of our budget on capital items so that, at least, people will see these structures coming up and the community will really feel that we are working for them, which previously was [not the case]” but she admits that these capital items “are things that we should partner investors in and do together,” acknowledging that the AMA lacks the resources to do these things on its own. These comments also speak to another concern mentioned throughout AMA development plans: good governance. The AMA acknowledges that it has struggled to earn the trust of Accra’s residents, spending the vast majority of its funds on internal expenses such as staff compensation and little on actual development work. Performance-based grants such as those provided by the World Bank and the federal government are meant to promote “good governance” and accountability. Some critics argue, however, that the international community’s promotion of good governance in Africa has led to the creation of even more exclusionary models of urban governance cloaked in a rhetoric of inclusion, as they have fostered increased privatization and squelched popular dissent, drawing strict parameters around which groups have the legitimate right to petition the government (see Abrahamsen 2000).

There is evidence in Accra to support this critique. Despite the fact that the AMA touts its record of transparency, its reputation among city residents remains dismal. In June 2015, for example, the AMA conducted a widely criticized slum demolition exercise at Old Fadama, popularly referred to as Sodom and Gomorrah, the largest slum in Accra. Old Fadama sits on the banks of the Odaw River and is largely composed of Muslim

migrants from the north working in the informal economy. Following severe flooding, which Accra Mayor Alfred Oko Vanderpuije blamed on the activities of Old Fadama residents (though many dispute this claim), AMA workers were ordered to tear down structures believed to be involved in contributing to the blockage of the river. According to some estimates, this exercise left 50,000 residents without shelter. Some voluntarily returned to Tamale in the north, while others were left to seek shelter elsewhere in the city. According to residents, the AMA did not properly inform them of their plans, nor did they arrange for alternative accommodations for the displaced. Despite the AMA's mission statement to "Raise the living standard of the people of the City, especially the poor, vulnerable, and excluded," such acts are common in Accra. National urban policy documents recommend the upgrading of slums in lieu of slum demolition, but the AMA has not followed through on these recommendations. A report by UN HABITAT found that the AMA had "no policy, law or regulation to protect slum dwellers" and no policy to protect the poor from eviction. It also found that the city-authority frequently threatens slum communities with eviction, purposely discourages the provision of social facilities in slums, and has no plan in place to promote self-help slum upgrading—a practice popularly promoted by international organizations such as the World Bank beginning in the mid-2000s (2009:15).⁴³ In response to criticism over the demolition at Old Fadama, the mayor defended the exercise, refusing to apologize to the displaced. The conflict over Old Fadama is ongoing, with residents rebuilding their shelters and the AMA responding in kind with yet more demolition.

⁴³ In the book *Planet of Slums*, Mike Davis argues that self-help slum upgrading programs arose as a neoliberal response to slum growth and gained in popularity because they exempted the state from having to provide facilities to poor communities, thus placing the responsibility for poor living conditions on the backs of the urban poor (2006:179).

Branding the Millennium City

Performance-based funding and privatization measures have forced the AMA to seek outside funding for major urban development projects. This has encouraged an increasingly entrepreneurial stance in local government, whereby the AMA must market the city to outside investors. In 2013, the AMA introduced a \$595 million “Accra Sanitary Sewer and Stormwater Drainage Alleviation Project” to be funded via a loan from the Export-Import Bank of the United States. The AMA held a ceremony to mark the occasion, and the mayor’s office began discussions with private contractors from the US and China. According to reporter Yepoka Yeebo, however, the AMA never actually completed the loan application program, and the project was eventually dropped with no public announcement (2015). In June 2015, massive flooding once again struck the city, leading to a major fire at an Accra service station, which killed more than 200 people. Waste collection has also been privatized via the formation of public-private partnerships with several contractors, Ghana-based Zoomlion being the largest. Yet the city has struggled to compensate these contractors, leading to major interruptions in service. Moreover, waste management in residential areas is now conducted via a “fee and performance-based” system, whereby private residents are expected to pay for trash collection, with high-income neighborhoods receiving private refuse containers and low-income residents charged for communal trash collection. Despite these changes, the city still owes millions to private waste contractors, many of whom have stopped work, demanding that they be paid before service is rendered. Though there have also been a few successes—the construction of new schools via the Millennium City initiative, for example—it is undeniable that privatization measures and public-private partnerships

have engendered mixed, and more frequently, negative, results.

This increased emphasis on privatizing city services via public-private partnerships has been endorsed by entities such as the World Bank and UN HABITAT, the popular conceit being that offering services through the private sector is better than offering no services at all. Yet the burdens of privatization fall disproportionately on the poor, as they are more likely to live in under-resourced communities. Still, privatization as a policy is not up for debate. As Linda, the budget director at the AMA asserted, “I’m a fan of privatization...There is no way in the world that development has taken place without the private sector. And therefore, although people say they leach, I think we in the public sector will have to provide the necessary environment for them to perform.”

In 2010, Accra became involved in the “Millennium City Initiative,” a project of Jeffrey Sachs’s Earth Institute at Columbia University. The goal of the Millennium City Initiative is to partner with under-resourced cities in Sub-Saharan Africa to implement projects that will help them achieve the millennium development goals. The MCI conducts research and recommends targeted development projects, while also attempting to connect urban governments with various international and domestic NGOs and private development partners. Participation in the MCI, then, is a tacit acknowledgement of the ongoing failure of the local and national government to provide the basic services needed by Accra’s population.

The AMA, however, has attempted to transform this negative identifier into a positive one, branding itself the “Millennium City” in order to attract outside capital into the city. Following the example of private developers, the AMA has generated marketing materials intended to highlight the opportunities available to investors to provide services

and infrastructure to befit a “Millennium City.” This attempt on the part of the AMA to establish its brand is by no means unique. After all, the neoliberal city revolves around the consumption of semblance (Haug 1987). Cities competing in a global marketplace must learn to appeal to the desires of potential investors—whether they are tourists, residents, or corporations. The practice of branding, then, becomes absolutely essential to a city’s abilities to sell itself as a commodity. Though Accra can hardly claim the same global notoriety as the “Big Apple,” the “Windy City,” or the “Emerald City,” it must still find a way to make itself attractive to investors in order to generate the capital it needs to develop. On a national level, the government of Ghana has been very active in this effort, taking out multi-page advertisements in publications like *Time* and *Forbes*. The efforts of the AMA are a bit less polished, but nonetheless creative.

In April 2011, the AMA published a document entitled, “Accra, Millennium City,” which lists opportunities for investors to get involved in development initiatives across a number of sectors. The 2010-2013 Medium Term Development Plan includes an investment prospectus with detailed descriptions of programs for which outside investment is needed. Unable to offer the kinds of perks Appolonia or Hope City might be able to give its investors, the AMA nonetheless strikes an optimistic tone, presenting development challenges as business opportunities, as in the following excerpt:

Sewerage, as at now, is virtually in the initial stages of development. Hence, has a huge potential for all the necessary inputs to make it really modern. Investors can take advantage of this to provide for the Millennium City a modern day sewerage system. A master plan to include the whole of Accra will include studies to come out with the real constructional cost of expansion of the sewerage network to all areas within the Metropolis so as to provide vivid potential investment opportunities. Acquisition and development including protection of new sites for treatment plants, pumping stations and ‘right of way’ for sewer lines to make room for expansion works are the urgent focus of the

Metropolis in providing a modern sewer system to benefit the status of a Millennium City (Accra Metropolitan Assembly 2010:78).

The AMA presents such business opportunities as “win-win,” benefiting both the investor and the city as a whole:

The Waste-to-Energy project will transform the waste generated in the City into electrical energy. This electric power will be connected to the national grid. The Assembly estimates that about 60,000 tonnes of solid waste will generate 50mw of electricity. AMA will generate substantial revenue from the sale of electricity power to be generated. There will also be job opportunities for youth. Investors are needed to collaborate with the Assembly in a Win-Win scenario to erase filth out of the Millennium City (Accra Metropolitan Assembly 2010:80).

Despite these optimistic projections, neither of these projects was ever completed. In fact, there is little evidence to-date of a truly successful public-private partnership in Accra, at least at the scale of the projects outlined above. The city faces formidable challenges in developing the necessary infrastructure to support Accra’s growing population, and small-scale initiatives, though impactful for the populations targeted, will not solve Accra’s biggest development woes. Perhaps the biggest PR problem the AMA faces, however, is its relationship with city residents. Officials at the AMA attribute this to the failure of their marketing strategies. The budget director, Linda, complained that, “We are there and then, when people say things, we react to what they say. But we should be able to put in, to put a lot of things out there on what we do. Because I’ve even realized that a lot of people don’t know what we do. And we will be doing a lot of good things that people are not aware of.” Yet incidents like the June fire and the subsequent demolition exercise at Old Fadama are far more enduring in the public memory than the provision of a new street lamp or the appearance of new billboards along a stretch of road.

The Pitfalls of Decentralization and the Push for a National Urban Strategy

The demolition of Old Fadama demonstrates the limits to decentralization. Though the decentralization program was initially intended to quell what was seen as the overreach of the national state, it has generated a number of problems. Without adequate oversight by the central government, urban growth in Ghana's two biggest cities—Accra and Kumasi—has become unmanageable, prompting overly aggressive efforts to contain urban growth, such as slum demolition and attacks on informal sector workers.

Additionally, while weakening the national government's control over urban development, decentralization has simultaneously empowered local entities to dictate their own policies, allowing them excessive latitude. It has also contributed to inefficiencies in the delivery of services, with multiple agencies embarking on overlapping projects without the necessary coordination. Finally, it has not delivered on its promises to democratize urban development processes, as it was intended to do. Given these problems, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development in 2009 began developing national guidelines for urban policy in an attempt to better manage urban growth in the country.

Several years of research by government and private consultants resulted in the publication of a National Urban Policy Framework and a National Urban Policy Action Plan in 2012. These documents identified twelve key policy objectives, some of which are quite progressive and in stark contrast to the approach taken by the AMA. The documents, for example, acknowledge the need to recognize and accommodate the informal sector, both in housing and in employment. According to Arthur, a senior urban planner who works for the Urban Development Unit of the Ministry of Local

Government,

...we don't want a situation whereby we see slums as something that we don't want. But how do we integrate them into the fabric of urban society? Because we are talking about inclusive urban development, so we are talking about in-situ upgrading of the slums, instead of saying that, "Oh, let's move these people from this place because they don't deserve to be here." And the issue, the question, is where are you sending them? So other places say also, "Not in my backyard," so we need to actually integrate them into the urban development issue.

In a similar fashion, the documents outline the need to better accommodate the informal sector through spatial planning, by providing informal workers with sanctioned spaces to trade. There is a recognition throughout the documents of the need to acknowledge informal sector activity as a central, structural feature of 21st century Ghanaian cities, rather than as a nuisance or a personal choice.

Central in the documents is a call for more spatial planning and for better, more thorough collection of data. The lack of both is a key contributor to the disorganized and uncontrolled manner in which Ghanaian cities have developed. What is lacking in the documents, however, is a mechanism for enforcement. Though the documents have been disseminated to all local government entities, governments are not obliged to follow the guidelines, and as the example of Old Fadama demonstrates, many do not. Still, these documents represent a slight pushback against some of the neoliberal, laissez-faire approaches to urban governance that have contributed to Ghana's biggest urban problems. This is not to say, however, that the documents are in any way a wholesale refutation of current policies that privilege the private sector. There is an overarching argument that development must be private sector-led and government-facilitated. For example, in the sphere of housing, the document argues for a private sector-led program for affordable housing, identifying government as the biggest barrier to the construction of low-income

housing in the country. While it is tempting to blame upper and middle-class demand for the lack of affordable housing in the country, it is indeed the case that the government has, on numerous occasions, failed to deliver on promises to develop affordable housing in partnership with the private sector. This criticism of government bureaucracy seems odd coming from a national ministry, but it stands as a subtle indictment of the Kufuor (NPP), Atta-Mills (NDC), and Mahama (NDC) administrations' inability to deliver on providing decent shelter and basic services to Ghana's population, indicating, perhaps, a rift between the lower ranks of the civil service and the upper echelons of state power.

Subsidies for the Rich, Self-Help for the Poor

Neoliberal restructuring in Ghana contributed to government deregulation of the economy, privatization of state enterprises, and trade liberalization, leading to the empowerment of the private sector. State interventions on behalf of the poor were actively discouraged under the belief that the dissolution of state-owned enterprises, artificial price controls, and other initiatives of the developmental state would allow the economy to flourish, creating new opportunities for individual entrepreneurship. Yet this version of "pure" neoliberalism has never really taken hold in Ghana. Though a number of scholars of globalization point to the weakening of the national state as a key indicator of growing globality (e.g. Robinson 2004; Sassen 2001; Sklair 2001), recent administrations in Ghana have, through personal connections, nepotism, and corruption, facilitated the activities of the private sector, often in ways that have been wasteful or even destructive. The site of West Hills Mall, for example, was originally zoned for a large housing development as part of an effort to improve the quality and quantity of housing stock in the GAMA.

When it comes to local development, national administrations have subsidized the construction of islands of privilege, leaving local administrators with the task of dealing with the needs of the vast majority of the population. In many ways, the central government has even hindered the ability of local governments to do their jobs properly. As a senior member of the Ghana Institute of Planners put it bluntly in an interview, “power pressures” often prevent city administrators from making decisions that are in the public good. Rumored connections between developers and top-level government officials, whether true or not, lead local planners to approve splashy new projects despite serious concerns over their impacts, appropriateness, or accordance with zoning laws and regulations.

It is important to note that globalization does not just affect the rich. The poor are also “globalized” in the sense that changes in government policy brought on by neoliberal capitalist globalization have had profound impacts on their ability to access necessary social goods, such as employment, housing, clean water, and healthcare. This abandonment by the local and national state has meant that the poor have largely been left to their own devices. While this has led to highly creative adaptations and inventive modes of making life possible (Koolhaas 2000; Simone 2001, 2004), it has also meant an increasingly tenuous existence.

Self-help policies are not new to Ghana—they were a feature of the early socialist government under Rawlings, for example, and even Nkrumah envisioned teams of community volunteers working on urban development projects. The neoliberal version of self-help, however, is focused more on individual than communitarian goals. “Entrepreneurialism” has replaced “self-help” in the popular lexicon, with rags-to-riches

stories and prosperity preaching gaining popularity as ordinary residents attempt to lift themselves up by their bootstraps in the face of marginalization and exclusion. Even the AMA, the entity tasked with providing basic services for population, instructs Accra's residents to "Stop," "Think," and "Do the right thing" on the cover of its medium-term development plan (See Figure 22). Structural problems are thus individualized. For example, in the face of a large-scale cholera epidemic and the impending threat of Ebola, a public service campaign was launched in Accra to teach residents how to wash their hands properly, with no mention made of how someone with no access to clean water might be able to keep their hands clean. Even within the halls of academia, poverty is often celebrated as being "innovative," with scholars like Rem Koolhaas declaring upon studying informal sector activity in Lagos that, "Lagos is not catching up with us. Rather, we may be catching up with Lagos" (2000:653). This scholarship has been roundly criticized for the way it depoliticizes urban poverty. Matthew Gandy, for example, argues in response to Koolhaas's celebration of informality that, "The informal economy of poverty celebrated by [Koolhaas and his] team is the result of a specific set of policies pursued by Nigeria's military dictatorships over the last decades under IMF and World Bank guidance, which decimated the metropolitan economy" (2005:42). The same could be said of Accra, but the ideological apparatus of structural adjustment and a widespread belief in personal responsibility and faith in trickle-down prosperity from private sector investment have silenced dissent. It is no longer fashionable nor acceptable to blame colonialism, neocolonialism, or neoliberalism for Africa's development woes, as evidenced by the proliferation of arguments that Africans must wean themselves off their "dependency" on foreign aid and begin to develop themselves (see, for example, Easterly

2002; Moyo 2009).

Figure 22: Cover image from AMA 2010-2013 medium term development plan



Source: Accra Metropolitan Assembly

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to understand the culture underlying the bifurcation of 21st century Accra into zones of inclusion and privilege and zones of exclusion and marginalization. Globalization in the form of structural adjustment and unprecedented access to foreign capital has facilitated the construction of new urban amenities on par with those in wealthy countries, yet this development has done little to change the conditions of vast swathes of the population, who must depend on a weak and ineffective public sector to provide them with basic services. Though clear spatial and aesthetic divisions exist between elite enclaves and the rest of the city, a common faith in private sector-led development unites these disparate groups. The failures of national and local government to provide for ordinary residents, and the conspicuous displays of affluence, good infrastructure, and management evidenced by private sector development have led to a wholesale renunciation of public sector-led development, well beyond the segments

of the population that benefit from new malls and gated communities. Seeing the success of private developers in attracting foreign capital, local government has begun to mimic their strategies, encouraging outside investors to take over the work of development. These efforts, however, have not resulted in significant improvement in the living conditions of the vast majority of Accra's population. Failed infrastructural improvement projects, flooding, fires, and disease remain intractable problems throughout Accra's poor and middle class neighborhoods, despite infusions of capital from multilateral organizations, NGOs, and development banks.

Global cities literature has long pointed to the weakening of the national state and the rise of sub-national entities in an era of globalization. Consider, for example, this passage from Saskia Sassen's work on global cities:

With the partial unbundling or at least weakening of the national as a spatial unit due to privatization and deregulation and the associated strengthening of globalization, come conditions for the ascendance of other spatial units or scales. Among these are the sub-national, notably cities and regions; cross-border regions encompassing two or more sub-national entities; and supranational entities, i.e. global digitalized markets and free trade blocs. The dynamics and processes that get territorialized at these diverse scales can in principle be regional, national, or global (2001:xviii–xix).

Yet Accra provides examples to the contrary. While the city has certainly become more prominent on the global stage, this has largely been a result of national government sponsorship of high-end development designed to attract international tourists, investors, and business travelers. Airport City, for example, provides material evidence of the degree to which the national state has focused its development efforts on the GAMA. In the words of Neil Brenner, Accra has become a “new state space,” a product of “...post-Keynesian spatial policies intended to reconcentrate productive capacities and specialized,

high performance infrastructural investments into the most globally competitive city-regions within their territories” (Brenner 2004:2). Despite rhetoric encouraging investment in second-tier cities in order to quell overpopulation in Accra, the national government has committed itself wholeheartedly to investment in the “new Accra,” enthusiastically endorsing projects like Hope City and Appolonia, and providing land and investment capital for new malls and business parks. This not only enhances the power of the state, as Brenner argues, but in the case of Ghana, it also personally enriches prominent politicians, who, despite neoliberal reforms promoting “good governance,” continue to be among the wealthiest people in the country. The local state, meanwhile, remains ineffective and poorly funded, unable to control the activities of the private sector, even when these activities fundamentally diminish opportunities to promote more equitable forms of development.

Conclusion

In attempting to understand the impacts of neoliberal restructuring “on the ground,” I designed my study of the Accra Mall to address meanings, mechanisms, and context. I wanted to understand how private sector-led, consumption-oriented development is experienced by Accra’s residents, how consumption-oriented projects are funded, supported, and managed, and finally, how changes in Accra’s relationship with the global economy have influenced the priorities and direction of urban development. In studying urban restructuring in an African city, I hoped to contribute new insights into how globalization impacts cities around the world, not just rich cities or major players in global financial networks, but “ordinary cities” (Robinson 2006) like Accra. Below, I attempt to answer the overarching question introduced at the beginning of this dissertation: *what can the development of a world-class shopping mall reveal about the nature of contemporary globalization in an African city?*

Neoliberalism and Consumption

Studies of urban restructuring and redevelopment in an era of financial globalization have focused heavily on the role of consumption in the remaking of urban spaces, arguing that deindustrialization in the 1970s and the globalization of financial networks has led to new, neoliberal approaches to urban development that promote “trickle-down” strategies of urban growth (Brenner 2004; Brenner and Theodore 2002; Harvey 1989, 2001; Sassen 2001). Researchers contrast this approach to urban development with previous strategies that prioritized the mitigation of inequalities through the provision of social goods such as housing.

Yet this model does not easily accommodate the experiences of African cities. Though the national government in Accra has prioritized “trickle-down” logics of development, subsidizing malls, business parks, and gated communities, it is not the case that the state focused heavily on mitigating urban inequalities or providing effective urban management prior to these developments. Vast swathes of the population had to simply make do, devising means of survival in the absence of a social safety net.

Studies of neoliberalism have focused heavily on the centrality of consumption to the neoliberal agenda; the fact that the rights of citizenship are increasingly defined by financial accumulation and the ability to spend, thereby prioritizing the rich at the expense of the poor. This result is the marginalization of the poor. There is no question that this is happening in Accra, where new development is justified by claims of an emergent consumer class. Yet there are some key differences between the way this has unfolded in Accra and the way it has been discussed within critical Marxist geography and studies of neoliberal globalization.

For one, consumption has played a central role in African urban life for decades—long before the imposition of structural adjustment programs. The buying and selling of goods has long been a central feature of African cities, where opportunities for formal employment (itself a colonial construct) have never kept up with the pace of population growth. Entry into the informal economy, especially petty trading, has represented a survival mechanism and a way to achieve a modicum of economic mobility in the face of government failure, economic instability, and the lack of a social safety net. Traders’ abilities to be flexible and to respond to economic and political constraints have ensured their survival through extraordinarily difficult times (Clark 1995; Robertson 1990).

Culturally speaking, the marketplace has for centuries played a central role in daily life in urban Africa. In the opening to her study of women traders at the Kumasi Central Market, Gracia Clark describes the marketplace as the economic center of the city:

As travelers to Kumasi, Ghana, reach the heart of the city, they pass or enter the central Kejetia traffic circle and truck parking lot, and the congestion and excitement of Kumasi Central Market swings into view. Its commanding visual presence announces both the dynamism and unruliness of the economy of the city, Ghana's second largest. It spreads a living carpet of energetic, even desperate commercial initiative down a broad wedge of valley land, overflowing the original rows of stalls, built inside a sharp bend in the railway line, into adjacent stores and open areas...Its size and complexity make Kumasi Central Market an appropriate symbol of the power of the city and of the market women identified with it. The importance of its traders' economic relations only confirms its impressive appearance. Most interregional trade for local consumption in imports, manufactures, and local foodstuffs passes through its wholesale yards (1995:1).

Additionally, formal consumption and the provision of luxury goods have been features of place making in African cities since long before the neoliberal "turn." For example, under the Nkrumah administration, the presence of high-end department store Kingsway allowed Ghana to shed its image as a "colonial dependency" and to "assert a sense of global membership" (Murillo 2012:376). The provision of formal consumption at this time had a more ideological than profit-making agenda: it became a way for Accra to demonstrate its modernity, its middle class sensibilities, and its commonalities with the "developed" west. As Murillo points out, the management of the United Africa Company, the owner of Kingsway, was concerned about the profitability of a large department store in Accra, but was under political pressure to build the store as a sign of goodwill and to publicize its support for an independent Ghana (2012:373). Like the Accra Mall, Kingsway thus became a symbol of global belongingness, a device for making claims to

modernity in the face of global perceptions of Africa as backward, poor, and primitive.

The Centrality of the Informal Sector

One of the most widely discussed elements of global and world city theory is the polarization thesis, popularized by Saskia Sassen in her work on global cities (2001). The thesis asserts that within global and world cities, there is a trend toward an expansion of high wage, professional jobs and low-wage, low-security, and low-skilled service sector jobs, which corresponds with the loss of middle-income, secure, skilled jobs, such as those found in manufacturing. Friedmann (1986) argues that polarization in world cities is the result of several factors: “huge income gaps between transnational elites and low-skilled workers, large-scale immigration from rural areas or from abroad, and structural trends in the evolution of jobs” (76). Even outside “world cities,” like New York, London, and Tokyo, scholars point to the growth of urban inequalities in cities throughout the world as white-collar professionals profit from the provision of new urban amenities targeted toward the rich. Neil Smith, for example, argues that gentrification has become a “global urban strategy” (2002b).

While it is the case that inequality in Ghana is growing, as evidenced by a rising Gini coefficient, as well as a popular belief that inequality is a “major challenge,” (Pew Research Center 2014)⁴⁴, high-end formal retail development has not, as many might expect, significantly damaged the informal economy. Rather, it has in many ways facilitated new opportunities for the informal sector. This has a great deal to do with a highly specific constellation of economic, political, and social factors in Accra. The

⁴⁴ According to a cross-national survey conducted by Pew Research Center, 76 percent of Ghanaians in 2014 believed that “the gap between the rich and poor is a very big problem,” as compared to just 46 percent in the United States.

provision of high-end retail coupled with a lack of development control on the part of local authorities has created new markets for informal vendors—for example, employees from the mall who cannot afford to eat in the food court. Vehicular and foot traffic to and from the mall has created new sites for the buying and selling of goods, as well as a critical mass of consumers. Thus despite developers' best efforts to impose more formal, organized, and western-style models of development on the population, local political and economic realities have ensured that the informal sector will continue to flourish, and in fact to sometimes profit from these new developments.⁴⁵ These kinds of unexpected outcomes and nuances are not visible in macro-structural analyses of global city formation, and they demonstrate the importance of staying attuned to the dynamics of place.

Globalization and the State

Discussions of neoliberal development in cities in the west often have an undertone of nostalgia for the state-led development of the post-war era, arguing, for example, that neoliberalism has created new, unprecedented levels of inequality and patterns of development that privilege the rich at the expense of the working class and other vulnerable populations. Decrying the loss of the social safety net and the transition from a production-based economy to a service-based economy, critics of neoliberalism argue that private sector-led development and deregulation have enriched the few at the expense of the many, threatening the stability of the middle class that characterized the post-war era, buoyed, as it was in the U.S., by generous state policies such as the GI bill.

⁴⁵ I do not wish to overstate the economic potential of high-end retail for informal vendors, who still operate in highly precarious circumstances with no guarantee of economic security.

It is undoubtedly the case that neoliberal globalization has been a boon for Ghana's political and business elites and that the neoliberal restructuring exercises of the 1980s and 1990s, especially the sale of state enterprises and the reduction in the size of the civil service, created precarious conditions for the masses, who were largely left to eke out their own existence without any guarantee of even basic social provisions such as food, lodging, water, and electricity. Yet in Ghana, there is a common perception that private developers are less corrupt and more effective than the local and national state at providing social goods. Consider Appolonia, the "new town" project in Accra's far northeastern suburbs, for example, which has managed to provide thousands of hectares of buildable lots supplied with water, electricity, and sewerage, and compare this to Accra, in which only 15 percent of the population is connected to the sewerage system, despite numerous plans to upgrade the infrastructure. Despite the fact that developments like Appolonia are out of the reach of a vast majority of the population, there is no denying the power of this image—the fact that the private sector is able to get done in only a few years what the government has been promising to do for decades.

Of course, there are historical explanations for this: structural adjustment programs enacted in 1983 took a particularly aggressive form in Ghana, eviscerating much of the public sector and dissolving whatever fragments existed of a social safety net (with, for example, the sale of government-owned housing to private entities and the privatization of water). These reforms, along with the debt that African countries accrued when taking loans from entities such as the IMF, resulted in what Achille Mbembé has called the "privatization of state sovereignty" (2001:78) and a form of government he characterizes as "indirect private government" (2001:80), whereby the state acts

primarily as a vehicle for private capital and “functions supposed to be public, and obligations that flow from sovereignty, are increasingly performed by private operators for private ends” (2001:80).

Yet such an argument presumes the prior existence of a state concerned with the provisioning of social goods, something that Ghana has not been able to accomplish since the fall of Nkrumah in 1966. Despite arguments made that the population should stop turning to government to provide them with all of their needs, such as President John Mahama’s declaration at the groundbreaking ceremony for the ill-fated Hope City project that, “Government has led growth since independence with all the major investments... The time has come for the private sector to take over” (BBC 2013), Ghanaians have long had to be self-sufficient, recognizing that government has, historically, lacked either the means or the will to provide for its population.

Self-help development did not arise with structural adjustment and the shrinking of the public sector; it has been a feature of urban life in Ghana since well before independence. During the Nkrumah era, slums, a “self-help” form of housing, were growing at a rapid pace due to the inability of government or the private sector to provide adequate shelter. Acheampong, a military leader with socialist leanings, encouraged self-reliance with programs like “Operation Feed Yourself.” Even Rawlings, despite his socialist orientations, effectively exempted government from the work of development through the formation of People’s Defense Committees and the promotion of “self-help” development. Despite early efforts of the Nkrumah government, a generous welfare state has never truly existed in Ghana, and decades of political instability and economic

decline in the 1970s and '80s led much of the population into poverty or economic precariousness long before structural adjustment programs were implemented.

“Trickle-Down” Economics and the Importance of Culture

While it is clear that new luxury development provides little benefit for most of Accra's population, who will never be able to afford to shop in malls, stay in five star hotels, or buy houses in new planned communities, the fact that these developments are widely embraced by vast swathes of the population suggests that they hold a deep cultural significance. After decades of economic decline and deteriorating living conditions, new buildings, like shopping malls, become a device for making claims of global citizenship.

Alongside the development of new shopping malls, gated housing estates, and business complexes, a new ethos has emerged within the population—one that celebrates success, entrepreneurialism, and financial accumulation. This ethos has been supported by new technologies and media, which have exposed Ghanaians to global consumer culture, creating new demands for material goods and altering lifestyles, particularly among Ghanaian youth. This ethos has also found a cultural expression in the rise of charismatic Christianity and prosperity preaching, which provide theological support for material success. While the economic benefits of new malls might not “trickle down” to most of the population, the culture of consumerism most certainly does, providing the ideological support necessary for the accommodation of global capital.

Appendix A: Accra Mall Store Directory, November 2014

Category	Name	Description	Brand Headquarters	Franchise?
Apparel	Visco	High-end African print fabric	Netherlands	No
	Woodin	Mid-range, trendy African print fabric	Netherlands	No
	Identity	On trend, youth-oriented clothing	South Africa	Yes
	Springfield	On trend, youth-oriented clothing	Spain	Yes
	Aha!	Lingerie and intimate apparel	Ghana	No
	Mother of the Year	Baby and children's clothing and supplies	Ghana	No
	Mr. Price	Low-cost, youth-oriented women and men's clothing and home goods	South Africa	Yes
	Truworths	Mid-range, on-trend women's clothing	South Africa	Yes
	Truworths Man	Mid-range, on-trend men's clothing	South Africa	Yes
	Kiki Clothing	Ready to wear African print women's apparel	Ghana	No
Mango	On-trend women's clothing	Spain	Yes	
Nallem	Mid to high-end, ready-to-wear traditional clothing	Ghana	Yes	
Armadio	High-end European men's clothing and accessories	Ghana	No	
T.M. Lewin	High-end men's business wear	United Kingdom	Yes	
Adolfo Dominguez	Luxury women's clothing	Spain	Yes	
Puma	Men's and women's sportswear	Germany	Yes	
Levi's	Men's and women's jeans and clothing	USA	Yes	
Birkenstock (Formerly Nutmeg)	Birkenstocks, along with a few other brands	Germany	No, but licensed dealer	
Payless	Affordable shoes for men, women, and children	USA	Yes	
Bata	Mid-priced men's, women's, and children's shoes	Switzerland	Yes	
Felipaul	Mid to high-end men's, women's, and children's shoes	Ghana	No	
B Fancy	Knock-off designer purses, shoes, and accessories	Ghana	No	
Zig-Zag	Costume jewelry and accessories	Ghana	No	
Callente	High-end watches and jewelry	Ghana	No	
Aurum	High-end jewelry	Ghana	No	
Swatch	Mid-range watches for men and women	Switzerland	Yes	
La Maison	Chic, high-end, European-style home décor	Ghana	No	
Maydan Colors	Imported home accessories, especially linens	Ghana	No	
Manos	Lebanese-owned Belgian chocolate shop	Ghana	No	
Legacy Gifts	Greeting cards and assorted gift items	Ghana	No	
Whiteleys	Ghanaian and African souvenirs, jewelry, and handicrafts	Ghana	No	
Telefonika	Mobile phones shop	Ghana	No	
Starlite	Multi brand electronics	Ghana	No	
SonyWorld	Sony electronics	Japan	No, but licensed dealer	
Vodafone	Mobile phones, tablets, modems, and credit	United Kingdom	No	
Kumesh	Panasonic retailer	Japan	No, but licensed dealer	
Samsung	Mobile phones and tablets	South Korea	Yes	
iShop	Apple retailer	USA	Apple Authorized Reseller	
MTN	Mobile phones, tablets, modems, and credit	South Africa	No	
Body Basics	Perfumes and cosmetics	Ghana	No	
Hair Depot	Hairpieces, hair extensions, and hair accessories	Ghana	No	
Fusion Spa	Offers a variety of spa services including waxing and manicures	Ghana	No	
Couture	High-end human hairpieces with stores in Ghana, Nigeria, and Tanzania	Unknown	Unknown	
Exotic Trendz	High-end hair salon	Ghana	No	
Life Healthcare	Medical and dental clinic, pharmacy, and perfume shop	Ghana	No	
Eyeglass Emporium	Optometry clinic and eyeglass store	Ghana	No	
Unibank	Pan-African banking conglomerate	Togo	No	
Ecobank		Ghana	No	
Stanbic Bank		South Africa	No	
Yasore Forex	Foreign exchange bureau	Ghana	No	

Restaurants and Eateries	Basilisa	Shawarma, burgers, pasta, chicken, and pizza	Ghana	No
	Nominom	Frozen yogurt	Australia	Yes
	Pizza Inn	Fast food pizza	South Africa	Yes
	Chicken Inn	Grilled and fried chicken	South Africa	Yes
	Frankie's	Auxiliary location of famed Oxford Street restaurant, serves ice cream only	Ghana	No
	Barcelos	Portuguese-themed chicken restaurant	South Africa	Yes
	Enda	Coffee shop, Chinese restaurant, and Continental and local restaurant	Ghana	No
	Maquis Tante Marie	Ghanaian and African dishes, with three Accra locations	Ghana	No
	Rhapsody's	High-end restaurant, bar, and nightclub	South Africa	Yes
Books	Silverbird Lifestyle	Books and magazines	Nigeria	No
Liquor Stores	Say Cheers	Wine, liquor, and beer	Ghana	No
Grocery and general merchandise	Shoprite	Grocery store	South Africa	No
	Game	An "everything" store- home goods, groceries, sporting equipment, etc.	South Africa, owned by US- No	
Travel	Travel Bureau	Multiple locations in Accra, this one serves walk-in customers only	Ghana	No
Entertainment	Fotostore	Photo studio	Ghana	No
	Silverbird Cinema	Movie theater	Nigeria	No
	Silver Lounge	Cocktail bar	Nigeria	No
	Silverbird Arcade	Arcade games, located next to the movie theater	Nigeria	No

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