



# ORGANISING NEW NEIGHBOURHOODS

Understanding the Emergence of  
Amenities In Accra From Below

Joris Tieleman





# Organising New Neighbourhoods

Understanding the Emergence of Amenities in Accra from below

## De organisatie van nieuwe wijken

Het ontstaan van Accra's collectieve voorzieningen van onderaf

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Joris Tieleman

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Promotiecommissie:

Promotoren: Prof. dr. J.L. Uitermark  
Prof. dr. J. Edelenbos

Overige leden: Prof. G. Owusu, PhD  
Prof. dr. J. Heilbron  
dr. M. van Eerd



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SUMMARY



## Summary

We are currently in the midst of a century of unprecedented urban growth. Between 1950 and 2045, the global urban population is projected to increase eightfold, to six billion people. While Africa is the least urbanised continent, its urban population is growing faster than that of any other continent. Sub-Saharan Africa's urban areas currently contain some 424 million people, and that number is expected to double over the next two decades. Ghana is a regional forerunner in urbanisation, and Accra its main growth pole with a population growth of four percent per year and a land area growth of five percent.

There is a rich academic literature on this process of African urbanisation. Largely, this literature focuses on the spectacular: the pressure cooker of inner-city squatter areas and slums, the ultra-rich in their gated communities that slice through the city, and the fraying social fabric of original, inner-city communities. The outskirts, that sprawling expanse of rather bland Sub-Saharan suburbia, have received markedly less attention. These areas are not part of a dominant geography of theory, nor of popular discourse.

Yet they house the majority of Africa's new urbanites.

Today's urbanisation is primarily suburbanisation. Every year, another fifty square kilometres around Accra begin their decades-long process of transformation to urban fabric. This thesis contributes to the literature by investigating this predominant but little studied form of urban fabric. Specifically, the thesis looks at how residents deal with the fact that their new neighborhoods have to be built from scratch, in the context of a weak state.

The central research question is:

*How do residents of Accra's newly developing neighbourhoods organise to create collective amenities for their area?*

To understand the ways in which people depend on one another in the process of urban fabric formation, the ways in which they are interdependent, I use the figurational sociology approach, founded by Norbert Elias. This relational and processual approach makes it easier to see how the urban fabric grows, to understand the kinds of social bonds that enable certain forms of local organisation to arise, and to see through what relations to the wider urban world they succeed in bringing in amenities. For instance,

the concept of the figuration allows us to see forms of organisation and connectedness that are not restricted to organisational boundaries: between residents, (parts of) formal institutions, political networks and all kinds of civil society elements more broadly.

The methodology employed by this thesis is the historical relational ethnography, where a local case study is understood as part of a larger institutional and historical analysis. The ethnography centers on a neighbourhood called Sebrepur, which I investigate primarily through semi-structured and unstructured interviews: with ethnic leaders, civil servants, religious workers, local politicians, organisers and ordinary residents. These interviews are augmented with informal conversations and observations, over a total period of ten months of fieldwork. The neighborhood case study is contextualised with research on historical developments and the (state) institutions and other elements of the larger urban fabric, which are woven through the neighbourhood. In other words, Sebrepur is not treated as a standalone microcosm, but as a lens on larger figurations and long-term developments.

The four analytical chapters focus on, respectively, Residents Associations, chiefs, churches and the water infrastructure.

The first of the four empirical chapters focuses on Residents Associations (RAs). These are secular, task-specific organisations at the neighbourhood level formed by volunteer residents, working to create concrete collective amenities such as roads, water pipe networks and public security. Using the RAs as a focal point, I investigate how residents organise themselves in the early stages of neighbourhood development, and how this changes as larger organisations such as churches, political parties and government bodies become more active in the neighbourhood. In this, I specifically study the dynamic relationship between grassroots organising efforts and government provision of infrastructure.

I find that RAs drive the development of a significant chunk of neighbourhood-level amenities. Especially in the early stages of neighborhood formation, very few larger organisations are present in the area, and residents have no choice but to do the heavy lifting themselves. In subsequent stages, local government may amplify these efforts with funds and heavy machinery, but the bulk of the work remains with the RA. Later, as local government gets more established, promises of development are made and taxation structures are set up, resident organization starts to decline. Through processes of anonymisation, politicisation and establishment of formal institutions in the area, the autonomous forms of local organisation are being crowded out.

The findings of this chapter contribute to several research fields. First, the study of resident organisation in (informal) neighbourhoods growing on the urban fringe worldwide. Second, the study of co-production of collective amenities between residents and the state. And third, the study of the emergence and forms of collective organisation more in general.

The second empirical chapter focuses on traditional ethnic chiefs, tracing how a chief's role evolves as areas on the urban fringe are settled, densified and become part of the urban fabric. Although there is a substantial body of literature on chiefs in Ghana, there is little to no material about their positions in cities. This is an omission, as chiefs are crucial for questions of development. Not because all chiefs contribute actively to local development, but because they generally occupy a central position in the web of local power relations, and therefore affect to what extent organising can occur in the neighbourhood.

I find that through the historical state formation process of Ghana, the institution of chieftaincy has evolved to a point where chiefs have a strong position in urban neighbourhood figurations by default. They were used as middle men by the colonial administration, and have retained much of that position under the successive post-colonial regimes. Positioned as traditional local figureheads, chiefs control the most important resource of a city: the land. Formally, they do so in a position of custodianship, but in practice, many control it as their own private resource. In addition, they have a position as middle men between a variety of government agencies and the local population. Especially during the phase where government institutions are established in the burgeoning neighborhood, this is a crucial linchpin position.

The chapter uses a Weberian approach to authority, showing how the traditional authority of the chiefs has historically become interwoven with the legal-rational authority of the formal state. Apart from providing an empirical study of the role of a traditional authority in contemporary Accra, this chapter thereby contributes to studies of the position of royalty and nobility in modern (democratic) constitutional states.

The third empirical chapter looks at churches, investigating the link between churches' internal workings on the one hand, and contribution to public amenities on the other hand. Churches have been the central factors in building up education and medical infrastructure in Ghana. There is a large and well-developed body of research on Ghana's religious institutions, but the literature has by and large neglected the question



why, how, and under what conditions religious communities develop amenities and how they function internally in an economic sense.

The internal organisation and doctrine of the churches turn out to be crucial variables here. These, in turn, are shaped by the form of the religious field and its relations to the larger state figuration in the era when the church developed. A sharp increase of the degree of voluntarism in the religious landscape since the second half of the 20th century has shifted the conditions of survival, continuation and expansion for churches. The charismatic church movement, a growing religious group whose doctrines and internal organisation differ radically from the previous generation of churches, is taking over the field. These charismatic churches are far more structured like business enterprises, organised for survival, expansion and financial profit in a competitive religious marketplace. Their internal welfare systems are more ad-hoc, providing less of a structural social safety net. They are generally hardly focused on building a broader civil society and playing a role in the state and semi-state figuration. Finally, their individualist ideology is less suitable for the collective action required to produce public goods.

In short, contrasting much of the literature: an overly active marketplace for religious institutions does not appear to lead to the provision of more and higher quality collective amenities.

The fourth empirical chapter focuses on a specific amenity, water. I interrogate the assumption of *collectiveness* of amenities, by providing an analysis of how the water supply of Accra's neighbourhoods moves between processes of individualisation and processes of collectivisation. Specifically, I focus on the dynamics within and around that infrastructure between local, more or less informal, collective action, and the larger, citywide collective represented by the Ghana Water Company.

In the first half of the 20th century, Ghana's water pipe infrastructure was geographically limited and strictly managed by the utility company. In the decades following independence, the network grew ever more rapidly, first primarily through top-down coordinated government action, but increasingly through self-help projects at the grassroots level (legal or not). The drastic increase in its user base and geographical scope caused systemic weaknesses in Accra's piped water network. The state utility company responds to the uncontrolled expansion of the system with attempts to combat the public perception of uncontrolled sprawl, to control the network, to prohibit or incorporate informal extensions, and works to expand the backbone

of water treatment plants and mainlines. Still, the bad service is leading to elite abandonment: those who can afford it leave the system, choosing individual provision technologies such as boreholes, tankers, bottled and sachet water.

This chapter bridges two separate strands of research: theoretical approaches focusing on grassroots infrastructure production and more traditional top-down development theory.

What general conclusions may be drawn from this thesis as a whole, with regard to the central question *How do residents of Accra's newly developing neighbourhoods organise to create collective amenities for their area?* One important finding is that every form of organisation for collective amenities, however informal it may be, is strongly intertwined with the state. This applies even in a relatively weak state like Ghana. However, the form of interdependence varies widely. Some are like communicating vessels, becoming weaker as the state becomes stronger. Others, like the chiefs, rise and fall together with the state, even though they also compete with it for power and resources.

A second finding concerns the way many collectives originate in Accra's growing newly urbanizing areas. For many of Accra's organisations, subdivision and upgrading is the most common mode of geographical spreading. Police stations, water and electricity district offices and all sorts of other government structures grow in the same way: their spatial units swell in population, are subdivided and upgraded. The same applies to churches and political parties, and even to municipalities.

A third finding concerns institutional drift. Many existing institutions are partially reinvented as they are established in the new suburbs. The churches form a good example: many people moving to a new location are forced to change denomination; equally many take the opportunity themselves. This makes the newly growing suburbs an especially fertile ground for up-and-coming forms of religious organisation, such as the charismatic churches. In an area where everything is built from scratch, it is easier to try something different. Thus, the growth of the suburbs allows new religious models to increasingly break through the old gridlock of the religious field, through outright replacement and more subtle emulation.

Finally, the conclusion provides a number of further research suggestions. Policy recommendations are given in Appendix 1, rather than in the main body of the thesis, as they go beyond the academic findings of the thesis.







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# Introduction

**T**his introductory chapter starts with a section providing some background to the research theme of this thesis. Section 1.2 then introduces the research topic: the growth process of African suburbs. In section 1.3, I discuss the research objectives, research question and sub-themes. Section 1.4 is concerned with the theoretical framework and methodology. Section 1.5, finally, provides an overview of the entire book, chapter by chapter.



*One day in July of 1994, Deborah Omeheng, market queen of the fish sellers at Tema Harbour and known to all as Auntie Yaa, finally gathered all her courage and took the leap. Deborah and her husband had spent the past decade acquiring their own plot of land and constructing their house. Now, at last, it was time to move in there and start building a new life.*

*Their land was located in New Jerusalem, on the northernmost fringes of Accra. Today, that area is a lively neighbourhood, part of the bustling urban frontier town of Afienya. But at the time, New Jerusalem was a barren place made up of tangled bushes, little streams and dusty stretches of sand pockmarked by rocks. There were no roads; not even footpaths in the area. Auntie Yaa and her husband had been forced to clear the land of vegetation with machetes and an excavator themselves, before they could even start their construction work.*

*The only other house around was Mr Donkor's. In the early years, the two pioneer households helped each other out in many ways; providing shelter during storms, protection in case of danger and sharing food when the monsoon rains cut them off from the city. Those first years in New Jerusalem were rough. Four years after moving to the area, Auntie Yaa's husband died. Now, she was out there alone. The land was still wild, and poisonous snakes sometimes crept into her house, once even into her bed. Robbers roamed around the area, looking for isolated houses to loot. One night, she heard a knock on the door, and found three young guys standing on her porch. They put a gun to her head. Finding she had no money around, they nearly beat her up; she managed to calm them down by offering them all the beer she had, which she normally sold to construction crews that were working nearby. They drank it all and left her alone.*

*To get some protection, she took in two young couples as tenants. But after four months, she came home to find the tenants gone and the house empty, except for some of her clothes and her mosquito net. When she came to report these crimes to the police, they paid little notice. The officers did not have the capacity to cover all those scattered houses around the outlying neighbourhoods, they had their hands full in the city itself. So, she called up her brother, who was the Member of Parliament for a nearby constituency. He used his political connections to get several police officers stationed in Auntie Yaa's neighbourhood. As there was no police station in the area yet, those officers ended up living in her house, together with their wives and children.*

*The land, itself, was also a cause for violence. Its ownership was disputed between the chief, from whom she had bought her plot, and his cousin, who felt that the chieftaincy of the area should have been rightfully his. Sometimes residents were drawn into the dispute and forced to choose sides, depending on who they had bought their land from. One day, she came*

*back from her daily work in Tema harbour to find her house had been emptied again and set on fire. She suspected it was the competing chief's men, who had been around earlier to threaten her. Her house had almost burned down to the ground.*

*This time, she did not go to the police, nor did she pray for help in the church. As she explained: "We have God, and then we have the local gods. Sometimes, you have to know who to ask for help." So, she went to see a powerful juju master. After he had performed his magic, she said, all of the men who had threatened her that day and had burned down her house, died. One by one, from mysterious diseases, or in freak accidents. The general conflict between the two chiefs lasted a few more years, but it calmed down when the sitting chief consolidated his power within the family.*

*Slowly, more people started trickling into the area. They were not many, but they were enough to warrant some public services. The first thing the community did was building a church, in 1999. Still, life was primitive. To get water, Auntie Yaa and Mr Donkor would enlist the help of a farmer from the nearest town, who brought two of his cows to carry several drums of water that could be filled up at a nearby stream. In 1999, this was still the best way to obtain water, as there were no standpipes nearby, nor roads for water tankers to drive in on. There was no electricity. Garbage was burned or thrown into a nearby creek. And they still had to keep the footpaths to their houses clear using a machete.*

*To improve their living conditions, Auntie Yaa, Mr Donkor and their neighbour Mr. Narh formed a Residents Association. They collected money from all the residents, including those who were still building their houses and did not yet live there. With this money, and with the help of Auntie's politically connected brother, they got the state utility companies to stretch water pipes and electricity wires out to the edge of their newly growing neighbourhood. From there, each next household paid for the extension of wires and pipes to their own lot.*

*"Now, we have water, now, we have lights, come and live here!" they told friends and acquaintances in Accra who were also looking for their own piece of land. This new influx would allow them to develop the area into a real neighbourhood, with shops, schools and a proper police station. It led to local representation in formal government, through the appointment of the neighbourhood's own Assembly member. It also brought about a wave of legal disputes over land ownership, however, led to the establishment of a number of very noisy churches and included a host of perceived potential criminals: those who lived in rental housing.*

*The times when Auntie Yaa's and Mr Donkor's houses stood solitary in the bush are long gone. They are now surrounded by rental blocks and villas, and the neighbourhood is lively,*

*full of new residents and more construction crews. But Mr. Donkor still lives right there, about 100 meters away, hidden from Auntie's view by a particularly large cluster of palm oil trees. As for the New Jerusalem Residents Association, it is long defunct. After water and electricity were brought in and roads were cleared to allow cars to move in, there was no longer enough common cause to bind the neighbours together. Auntie Yaa has become bitter and disillusioned, and resolved to do no more local organising.*

*"The Association, they cheated me. I contributed for electricity but never got my connection. I contributed for water but the pipes stay dry for months at a time, so we have to buy from tankers. My Methodist church; I helped them build here but they never came to visit me during my sickness, so I joined another church. And these politicians, they're crooks. They promise quality and deliver trash. Two weeks is how long their so-called 'quality street lights' lasted and then they burned out. I called them several times to lodge my complaints but they responded the first few times and ignored the rest of my calls. Out of desperation I bought my own materials and got people to fix them for me. In Ghana, one thing I have learnt is that if you need something done, you just have to do it yourself."*

## 1.1 Background

Although Auntie Yaa was an exceptionally resourceful and courageous pioneer, the story of her neighbourhood is very unexceptional. Places like New Jerusalem are the bread and butter of Ghana's rapid and chaotic urban growth process. The new urban fabric is coming into being in a rather haphazard way, with housing construction moving far ahead of government planners and infrastructure. Hence, resident activity in creating roads, water, electricity and other collective amenities is a crucial formative factor in these new stretches of urban fabric. Their successes and failures in developing infrastructure, in the early days of these areas, will lock in the development path for quality of life in these cities for a long time to come. In this thesis, I study the grassroots building of amenities; a formative force in the newly growing cities of the global South.

### **Urban growth in Africa**

We are currently in the midst of a century of unprecedented worldwide urban growth: from an urban population of 746 million in 1950 to an estimated 6 billion in 2045 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Population Division, 2018). Throughout this entire century of global urban growth, Africa has been the least urbanised continent, which meant the field of urban research on Africa was small.

However, for the past 70 years, Africa has also been the continent with the fastest growing urban population and it is expected to stay in that leading position for the foreseeable future (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Population Division, 2018). Sub-Saharan Africa's urban areas currently contain some 424 million people, and that number is expected to double over the next 20 years. It should be noted that the driving forces behind this urbanisation, as well as the long-term prospects for the rural-urban population distribution, are still debated (De Brauw, Mueller, & Lee, 2014; Jiang & O'Neill, 2017; Potts, 2012). What is not disputed is that these cities are growing rapidly, the land area even faster than the population levels.

### Research location

This research is set in Accra, Ghana. In principle, it could have been done in any rapidly growing Southern city, as the dynamics of local versus centralised organisation, expanding institutions, rural-urban land transformation and boundary struggles play out throughout the Global South. They do, however, take on a different form in each cultural, economic and political context. Thus, this research is as much a case study which others might use in comparative research, as it is an attempt to directly contribute to theory. Still, the choice of location is not random: Accra does provide a compelling case study. With an urbanisation rate of 55.4%, the highest in West Africa besides Gambia and Cape Verde, Ghana is a regional forerunner in the process of urbanisation (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Population Division, 2018, see figure below). Despite this already high level, Ghana still has an annual urban population growth of 3.4% and it, therefore, represents a good example of ongoing rapid urbanisation.

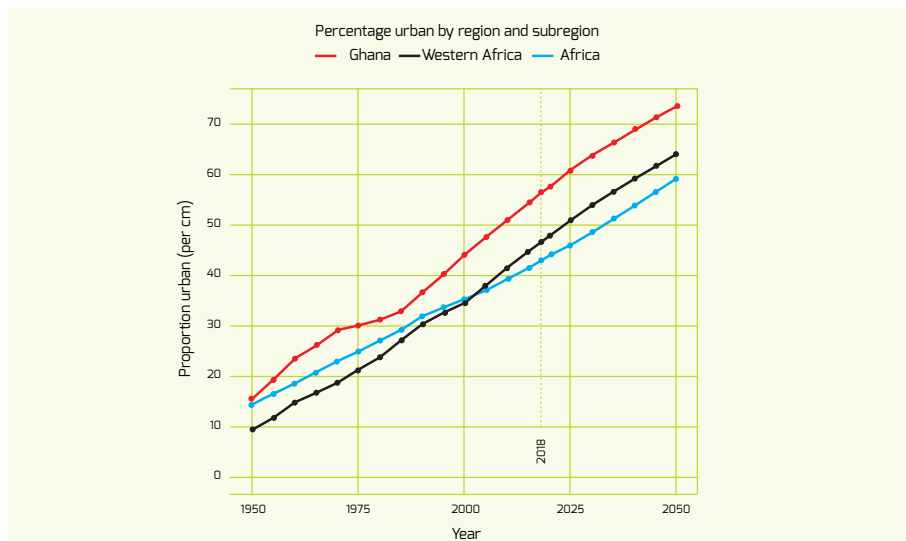


Figure 1.1: the urban population of Ghana compared to Western Africa and Africa as a whole. Source: UN, *World Urbanisation Prospects (2018)*.



Within Ghana, Accra is the main growth pole, both economically and in terms of population and land coverage. The city's economic growth pace is extremely rapid, one of the fastest in Africa (Arup International Development, 2016). Its population is 55% internal migrants. Its population is growing at 4% per year and its land area at 5,3% (Angel, Parent, Civco, & Blei, 2016, see figure 1.2 below). In other words, every year another 50 square kilometres around Accra begin their decades-long process of transformation to urban fabric.

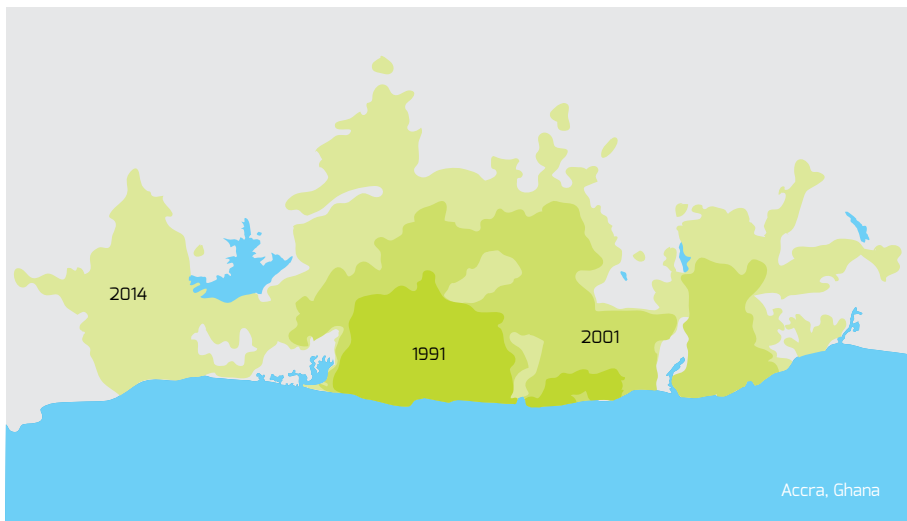


Figure 1.2: The expansion of the built-up area of Accra, Ghana, 1991–2014. Source: Angel et al. (2016), *City Data Sheets*.

## 1.2 Research theme

### **Growing African suburbs: a missing theme in the literature**

The process of African urbanisation has not gone unnoticed. Much has been written about the pressure cooker of inner-city squatter areas and slums, and the tension of great ethnic, religious and social diversity in an extremely confined space (De Smedt, 2009; Paller, 2014). There are tomes of work on the geographies of the ultra-rich, the gated communities that slice through the city and their private world of luxury. See Bloch (2015) for an overview; Atkinson (2013) and Webster (2002) on African cities; Grant (2005, 2007) and Asiedu (2009) in Ghana, specifically in Accra. The fraying social fabric of original, inner-city communities has been amply described, too (Arguello, Grant, Oteng-Ababio, & Ayele, 2013; Grant, 2006; Pellow, 2008).

While such extremes on the spectrum of urban forms have received much of the attention, something else is missing from this literature: the sprawling expanse of the rather bland Sub-Saharan suburbia. What about those endless outskirts, that are less and less densely populated as they roll further out from the centre (Angel et al., 2016)? These areas are not part of a dominant geography of theory (Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009a), nor of popular discourse. The first time I visited Accra, I brought a travel guide. Out of 494 pages, it spent exactly four lines on these places. It said:

*“The remainder [areas outside the ring road] – supporting the overwhelming majority of the city’s inhabitants – are unplanned slum-like suburbs suffering from poor drainage and sewerage, limited road access, and an insufficient supply of water and electricity.” (Briggs, 2014, p. 312).*

As far as the guidebook was concerned, these four lines contained everything you needed to know about Accra’s burgeoning suburbs.

To be fair, one can see why. As the guide notes, these areas look sad, under-served, chaotic and non-descript. They are slum-like but lack the explosiveness of an inner-city slum. They contain some walled villas but fall far short of the opulent extremes of large gated communities with their barbed-wire electrified fences, swimming pools and in-house fitness centres. They do not have a clear ethnic history, or a long-rooted community which has come under pressure in this new process of urbanisation. Let’s just be honest: these places seem somewhat boring.

Yet, they house the majority of Africa’s new urbanites. Today’s urbanisation is primarily sub-urbanisation (Angel et al., 2016).

In fact, these suburbs are only boring in their lack of extremes. They form a fascinating and highly diverse prism on the urban fabric, as a whole (Keil, 2017, p. 39). What happens in these non-descript areas is nothing less than the silent cultural and social revolution called ‘African urbanisation’. Two transformations are taking place here. The first concerns people, who are moving into the city, transforming themselves socially, culturally and economically from villagers to urbanites and urbanistas; a personal transformation which continues well into the second and third generation. This transformation has many dimensions. It takes place in churches, at the secret meetings of political parties, in the workplace, in tro-tro mini-buses, at weddings, on the streets and of course, inside homes. As these people are being transformed into

urban dwellers in so many ways, they collectively weave the amazingly complex social fabric of the city.

The second transformation is that of an area, from quiet farmland scattered with a few mud huts and animals, to densely populated suburb. The areas surrounding the city are not, as is sometimes assumed, a *tabula rasa* across which the city simply rolls out. Long before the city came, “before politics grew here,” as one early settler put it, structures of ownership, stories of belonging and a logic of (land)rights grew here. According to that traditional narrative about Accra, the Ga-Dangbe are the locals, and the other three quarters of Greater Accra’s current inhabitants are guests (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013, p. 34). But these people are not guests, of course. They are there to stay. So, they organise themselves somehow, to survive in this newly urbanising space. Thus, the rural social fabric and order is transformed, expanded, or even replaced by new forms of social organisation. At the same time, many elements of the existing urban fabric expand to the newly urbanising land, creating local divisions, franchises and branches.

### **Urban fabric**

The term ‘urban fabric’ is frequently used to refer to the urban morphology, the physical composition of buildings and the infrastructure between them. It conjures up an image of the city as a tapestry of concrete, steel, wood and glass that is laid out over the land. To me, the urban fabric is more than that. Yes, it is made up of buildings and physical infrastructure, such as roads, electricity cables, water pipes and drains. But it is also constituted of institutional webs, such as the system of districts and electoral areas, paramount chieftaincies and their divisional substructures, police and army barracks and the areas they cover, and of the networks of churches which may be rooted in one area but expand into nearby parts of the city. It also includes the political party networks, the local clusters of ‘royal families’ that form the substrate of the chieftaincy system and other such semi-formalised webs of power. So, for me the ‘urban fabric’ does not just consist of the physical structures, but includes a dynamic web of human networks.

Finally, the urban fabric consists of an enormous amount of personal connections; a dense weaving in some areas, surprisingly limited in other areas. These strands of connection exist within a neighbourhood between neighbours, friends, members of church congregations and local political party branches. They also rise above that spatial scale, invisible connections spanning across the entire city, between family members, old friends and former colleagues. For good or for ill, these informal, uncatalogued, invisible connections make up much of the urban fabric and importantly give shape

to the city. As Auntie Yaa's story made clear, personal connections play a large role in the pioneer phase of neighborhood development. Those in power help their relatives in outlying areas to build infrastructure, security and useful connections (a set of practices which is often unhelpfully equated with the handing out of sinecures to relatives, under the term 'nepotism'. As well as physical structures and networks, one cannot truly study the urban fabric without considering the major role played by social connections in it.

### **The genesis of new urban fabric<sup>1</sup>**

This thesis is not primarily a description of the components of the urban fabric. Rather, this is a description of the *genesis* of that urban fabric, in a place where previously, not much human fabric of any kind existed. In this sense, our way of talking about cities can be deceptive. We give them a name, and from that moment on, we see them as a distinct entity. An entity which of course changes over time, but still, which fundamentally remains the same in name and concept. This view is inaccurate for most contemporary Southern cities, which do not simply change. Rather, they are in a process of formation, of genesis: they are being born, right now. True, there was always something called Accra. Until some 150 years ago, however, that 'something' was a village. Before World War II, what we know as Accra was a small city, with a population of some 73,000 souls. Today, in the same vicinity but on an area of land 50 times larger, we find a vast stretch of urban fabric that contains between four and five million people, which is also called Accra. In some places and some ways, this stretch of urban fabric still contains remnants of *the village Accra* and other villages that used to exist there, which have been consumed by the growing city. Even though it has the same name, it is something fundamentally different from those villages and the small colonial city that existed in its place. Accra today is almost entirely something new, which has grown on nearly barren soil.

This process of growth of the urban fabric could be termed the 'formation of new urban space'. This definition, which is used in studies of human geography, describes space as something that is created by social structures that shape or underpin it. New modalities of

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1 While I use ecological metaphors throughout this thesis, it is important to note that my approach is not quite aligned with either the Chicago School of the early 20th century or the Urban Political Ecology approach. My use of ecological metaphors differs from the Chicago school most importantly in the sense that they looked upon the city as a more or less stable ecosystem, while I describe the growth of new urban fabric. As for UPE, it does not use ecological terms as a metaphor but rather to refer to actual combinations of plant, animal and human life-forms, whereas I use 'growth', 'stretching branches' and similar metaphors to describe the spatial extension of institutions and other specifically human-based artefacts.

power form and new leaders emerge. Successful forms of organisation propel themselves from the existing urban fabric into the newly forming space. Churches spawn franchises there, local branches of national bureaucracies settle in, and neighbourhood-level power relations and activist energies are incorporated into larger political networks and figurations. In this process of expansion, these existing figurations and organisations are also transformed themselves, as they are forced to renew and adapt to the new space. Sometimes, very rarely, radically new forms of organisation emerge. Mostly, however, the growth of the urban fabric is a process of institutional evolution.

As the urban frontier creeps outward across the countryside, the land becomes the most significant element in an area's transformation to urban fabric. Particularly its slow and haphazard inclusion into the cadastral system fundamentally shapes the locally growing urban fabric. When plots of land are demarcated and formally sold for the first time, their institutional mode of land ownership fundamentally shifts (Scott, 1998, p. 3; see also Wood & Fels, 1992). Before urbanisation, the land is governed by multiple interlocking and overlapping of claims to use, inhabit, farm and even simply cross land. Once the urban fabric has formed, in the place of locally negotiated space, is a new system which bundles all those historic land rights in an absolute private ownership scheme, that is backed by a centralised registry and the formal legal system.<sup>2</sup>

This transformation of the land governance system is a long and painful one. To be sure, it is formally governed by a clear institutionalised organising principle. A formally gazetted chief sells parcels of the land to individuals or businesses, on behalf of the local ethnic community. These parcels are subsequently registered at the Lands Commission, and thus have passed over into the freehold cadastral system. In theory, this is a clean transition process. But the complexity of unregistered sales, prior rights, competing and overlapping chiefs, a corrupt judicial system, competing government agencies and overlapping registrations at the Lands Commission make this a completely different picture. This arduous process is what makes the chiefs so powerful, even in absence (see chapter 5), what keeps Ghana's courts flooded with land cases, what makes the transition to urban space extremely messy and what makes spatial planning nearly impossible.

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2 This should not be constructed as a transition from a natural or original system into a modern one. Indeed, the lands under traditional authority are still part of the Ghanaian state in a very real and practical sense: the state's rules shape the playing field there. The way the state has done this, beginning with the colonial state, is to make sure every area has a chief, and to make that chief the arbiter of the local rules concerning land ownership (and other local customs). Even though the state has not yet established most of its institutions in many rural areas, the chief's claims to land stewardship there would generally be backed up by the legal system.

Even though Ghana does not have the phenomenon of mass squatting, practical occupation of land does matter very much to determine land rights. A common tactic of new settlers is to start with impermanent structures or farms, in an area which is not currently in use. This is generally done with the approval and often the encouragement of the local chiefs and is condoned by authorities, as long as the structures are not permanent. This dynamic, whereby chiefs 'invade' their own land to claim it back, occurs throughout Accra, generally in areas which have somehow been claimed by the state (such as nature reserves or future development sites), but which have not yet been used. The reverse also occurs, where land is taken away from chiefs by powerful developers who use a combination of strong-arm tactics ('land guards'), judicial and police corruption, as well as legal tactics to lay claim to a piece of land. Land guards are thus employed by land speculators, chiefs and others who are trying to claim a portion of unoccupied land. They tend to be particularly present in the early stages of a settlement, when population density is low. At this stage, intimidation of those few individuals who have moved in can potentially win an entire stretch of land for the land guards' unscrupulous employers. As the original landowners litigate, the developers quickly build residencies on the land and thus make their claim practically irreversible, leaving the original landowners with no other option than to negotiate for a sale (Interview Nukpenu, 2018). In either case, there are good reasons for building in an area without waiting for formal planners to do their work. After all, possession is nine-tenths of the law.

As the urban fabric takes hold in a new space, the organisation of utilities in the area also shifts. In rural areas, water supply is managed by the small Community Water and Sanitation Agency, which mostly strikes boreholes and leaves them in the hands of locally organised Water Committees. As inhabitation of the area densifies, the Ghana Water Company comes in. This company, which only serves urban centres with a population of over 50,000, does not strike one-off boreholes only to leave the locals to manage them. It is permanently present: laying, maintaining, managing and continuously expanding a dense network of pipelines, through which potable water flows from several large water treatment plants located around the city. So, as the population grows in an area, networks for amenities, such as water, are developed.

Other elements of the urban fabric also begin to appear in the newly urbanising area. Garbage in rural areas is burned, buried or simply thrown away, but in cities this is not a tenable practice. So, operators with small tricycles start to collect the waste, generally on a commercial basis where residents pay per collected trash bag. Security schemes also start to take shape, often first organised by the residents in a neighbourhood

watchdog organisation. These are frequently later augmented by the police or army patrols from a nearby base, who are convinced to extend their patrol lines in exchange for a payment to the crew and the officer in charge. Layer by layer, the urban fabric slowly develops.

Thus, the new urban fabric slowly grows, in a place where there had only been bush and perhaps a few farmers. To be more precise, though, the urban fabric does not grow; it is painstakingly built. Every house, church, school, police station; every stretch of street, pipeline; every electricity pole, in many places every single streetlight has its own background story. A story of people who worked tenaciously to get it there; convincing others and gathering precious resources to make it work. This do-it-yourself urbanisation is particularly prevalent in a country like Ghana, where cities grow incredibly fast, public budgets are small and public institutions are weakly developed. In such a context, the public resources are completely inadequate to service all new neighbourhoods with even basic amenities, and the production of every piece of infrastructure is a struggle.

### 1.3 Research objectives and research question

This book aims to contribute to our understanding of the larger process of growing urban fabric. Within that process, this book specifically focuses on the emergence of social organisation in the new suburbs, and its embedding in the larger figurations of the existing city. The core objective of the project is to analyse how residents (manage or fail to) organise to realise collective amenities, under conditions of vastly insufficient state capacity, while faced with rapid and large-scale urbanisation. Chapters 4-7 each analyse a specific sub-theme of this question. A secondary objective of this work is to design a suitable methodology for conducting such analyses. The conclusion provides a summary and reflection on the findings with regards to each of these objectives, as well as suggesting further areas for investigation.

At its core, the book is a classical empirical case study of the settlement of new land at the urban edge, in a particular Southern city. It follows Jennifer Robinson's critique of Western universalism and her appeal that "[c]onsideration needs to be given to the difference [that] the diversity of cities makes to theory" (Robinson, 2002, p. 549). It has been questioned whether case studies of single cities are the way forward for urban theory building, since they all too easily dwindle into an undue focus on idiosyncrasies and celebrations of particularism (Peck, 2015). However, I follow Nijman's (2015)



stress on the importance of empirical work. This study carries neither the pretence of universalism, nor the suggestion of uniqueness, providing instead an empirical case study with modest theoretical ambitions. I hope it will facilitate scholars in their comparative work with other cities, or in work on general theory construction.

### **Research question**

The central research question of this thesis is: *how do residents of Accra's newly developing neighbourhoods organise to create collective amenities for their area?* This question is operationalised through four empirical sub-themes, which are discussed below. This section provides a brief note on the overarching lines of inquiry that surround this central question and on the ways each chapter approaches these.

In exploring this central question, we frequently touch on a broader category of organisations: those producing the types of physical, practical amenities that are best provided collectively. Starting from the grassroots perspective, this thesis investigates many kinds of such organisations, with varying degrees of formalisation, legal standing, and force of moral obligation, at various geographical and social scales and reaches of collectivity.

The thesis aims to better understand these organisations from several perspectives. First, it considers the most important condition affecting each form of collective organisation at the grassroots level: the form and degree of activity of the formal state. Second, it explores the overlapping of collectivities, each with their different rules, a different geographical scale and different driving forces. Third, this work investigates the urban growth process described in the most abstract terms, of subdivision and boundary struggles. Fourth and finally, it analyses the institutional drift that occurs when organisations extend themselves to the suburbs and are changed in the process. These lines of inquiry are explored through four analytical chapters, each focused on an empirical phenomenon: a type of organisation or a type of amenity. Every one of these empirical studies teaches us something about all of the theoretical lines of inquiry regarding collectives.

### **Research sub-themes**

The four analytical chapters of this thesis each concern a certain aspect of this research question. It should be noted that these chapters far from exhaust the investigation of the central question; it is far too broad an issue for that. It should also be noted that the four topics were not pre-set but have been delineated over the course of the research project, grounded in a growing understanding of Accra's new neighbourhoods. They

were chosen based on their importance for the development of neighbourhood-level amenities and a lack of prior coverage in the literature.

Starting from the most local relations, those between neighbours, I ask: *how does local grassroots organisation leads to concrete collective amenities such as roads, water pipe networks and public security?* In this, I focus on Residents Associations: secular, task-specific organisations at the neighbourhood level that work to organise local infrastructure development. More generally, I investigate how residents organise themselves in the early stages of neighbourhood development and how this changes, as thicker strands of organisational connection develop between the neighbourhood and the wider urban fabric. These bodies form the platform through which a surprising amount of neighbourhood-level amenities are developed. They cannot be ignored.

The next focus of this investigation is the institution of chieftaincy. This is a strongly embedded and yet strangely undefined institution, which has gained prominence in neighbourhood figurations through the process of state formation. This topic was included not because all chiefs necessarily contribute to the organisation of local development, but because theirs is almost always a central position in the web of local power relations. Therefore, it affects the extent to which organisation can occur in the neighbourhood.

Regarding the chiefs, I ask: *how has the institution of chieftaincy been shaped by the historical state formation process, and how does chieftaincy today evolve in an urbanising area?* The combination of approaches is necessary to gain a fuller overview of the role of chieftaincy in its current context.

The third empirical chapter studies the role of churches as developers of neighborhood infrastructure. Churches are collective amenities in their own right, which provide a structure for community building and spiritual purposes. Beyond that, however, they are a special type of collective amenity, as they spawn the development of further collective amenities. Ghana's churches, historically, channeled the energies of residents quite effectively towards the development of medical and educational infrastructure. This function, though, appears to be dwindling in recent years. I ask: *what determines whether churches channel the collective energy gathered, in their services and their congregations, into durable collective amenities?*

The internal organisation and doctrine of the churches turn out to be crucial variables here. These, in turn, are shaped by the form of the religious field and its relations to the larger state figuration, in the era when the church developed (Swaan, 1988). Again, the role of churches in neighborhood development is not straightforward and can only be truly appreciated within its current and historical setting.

The fourth sub-theme is not an organisational form but a particular amenity: water. I interrogate the assumption of the *collectiveness* of amenities, by asking the question: *how does the water supply of Accra's neighbourhoods move between processes of individualisation and collectivization?* Specifically, I focus on the dynamics within and around that infrastructure between local, relatively informal collective action, and the larger, citywide collective represented by the Ghana Water Company. This sub-theme is also unique in that it not only investigates the conditions that affect resident organisation but it also explicitly focuses on how neighbourhood-level resident organisation ultimately affects the citywide conditions for collectivisation.

## 1.4 Theory and methodology

While the theoretical framework and methodology of this thesis are dealt with in detail by chapters 2 and 3 respectively, I provide a brief overview in this section.

### **Theoretical framework**

This book studies processes of local organisation for collective amenities. It does so in a sociological framework with anthropological, geographical and economic overtones. The thesis is sociological because its primary focus is social structure and process: the interaction of various collectivities and other institutions. The basis of the methodology is taken from the discipline of anthropology; it begins ethnographically, even if it does branch out from there in a more sociological manner. The chosen vantage points and the ontology explicitly include geography; spatial scales are an important element in the analysis, as is distance, the physicality of networks, and the fact that *new space* is being created at the urban fringe. Finally, the subject of interest of this thesis might be termed *economic*, as the entire analysis is aimed towards building an understanding of how and why collective amenities such as roads, schools and water pipes are, or are not, produced.<sup>3</sup> Thus, this is an interdisciplinary approach to the question, with the

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3 A brief aside on disciplinary boundaries. Within sociology, and within my department, I find myself happily able to combine all of these methods, interests and approaches. Such open-mindedness is not always the standard in social sciences (Cedrini & Fontana, 2017; Hodgson, Mäki, & McCloskey, 1992) and should be treasured.

hope of piecing together a fuller picture of the situation, which would be limited by the scope of each field, individually.

What are the sociological influences in this work? To understand the ways in which people depend on one another in the formation of urban fabric and the ways in which they are interdependent, I use the figurational sociology approach that was founded by Norbert Elias and which is described in detail in chapter 2. This relational and processual approach makes it easier to see how the urban fabric grows. It helps us to understand the kinds of social bonds that enable certain forms of local organisation to arise, and to see through what relations to the wider urban world they succeed in bringing amenities into the area. The terms of figurational sociology are generally more open and flexible than most approaches. This allows for a more in-depth description of the shifting social ties, responsibilities and power-relations in the rapidly growing and socially transforming context of a newly developing urban neighbourhood.

For instance, the concept of the figuration allows us to see forms of organisation and connectedness that are not restricted to organisational boundaries, such as those between residents, parts of formal institutions, political networks and other elements of civil society more broadly. The concept of power relations, in figurational sociology, is that of *interdependence*; a fluid and bidirectional relationship where power is not held exclusively by one party or the other. Finally, the figurational approach is a historical one. Today's institutions and figurations cannot be understood separately from their historical precursors and from their own developmental processes. This approach touches on these elements with a degree of adaptability, which is necessary and appropriate for the study of constantly transforming neighborhoods in growth.

Chapter 2 provides a more detailed overview of my theoretical approach, and sets out the surrounding fields of literature, under the fourth section: *Related theoretical perspectives*.

### **Methodology**

The analytical and empirical point of departure for each chapter is a neighbourhood called Sebrepur. It occupies some two square kilometres of land on the outskirts of Tema, where the first farmers settled some 50 years ago and which is now an established urban neighbourhood. Its population is ethnically, religiously and socio-economically mixed, its political life is quite active and its residents organisations are somewhat more active than in most surrounding neighbourhoods, because settlement in Sebrepur started earlier than in other areas.



Figure 1.3: Sebrepor, the analytical and empirical point of departure for each chapter of this thesis.

This area functions as a lens onto the larger processes and evolving structures in the context of which the new residents organise themselves to build up their (collective) new home. At this level, I start by analysing the social structures which enable residents to bundle their strengths and coordinate themselves, to gather contributions, to apply political pressure to formal organisations and to do all those other things that are needed to get the collective amenities they need. The larger structures are more formalised and are more often discussed in research. They have their own dedicated officials, which makes them more visible and easier to study. For this reason, I do not start with them; they would too easily come to dominate and obscure the picture.

This investigation of Sebrepor and sub-urban development in Accra took place over a period of 10 months of fieldwork, spread out over four separate visits to Accra. I investigated its neighborhood relations primarily through interviews with ethnic leaders, civil servants, church workers, local politicians, organisers of many kinds and of course, a great many ordinary residents. These interviews consisted of open questions, were informed by my observations walking around in these areas and were supported by a large amount of more informal conversations.

The analysis, however, is not confined to the neighbourhood level, it merely starts there. The methodology employed by this thesis is the *historical relational ethnography* approach, in which a local case study is understood as part of a larger institutional and

historical analysis. For each analytical chapter, I add a comparative dimension to the local case study, by drawing on chiefs, churches, civil servants and citizens in other areas. I also include interviews with, and data of, centralised government agencies. Here, too, the figurational approach helps to understand the circumstances that preclude or erode the bonds necessary for local organisation, such as the petrification of institutions that no longer work, the presence of individualised commercial alternatives, the competition of other religious organisations, or the appearance of formal organisations who promise to take over the work. The neighbourhood level, then, is a starting point for a deeper analysis into the workings of urban development. It also provides a richer source of evidence to work up from than would have been the case if I had started from the higher institutions and moved down the scale.

## 1.5 Chapters overview

What is the structure of this book? This introduction is chapter 1. Chapters 2 and 3, respectively, set out the theoretical and methodological framework of this thesis. Chapters 4-7 provide the empirical analysis, each discussing a single element of the institutional fabric around the development of collective amenities. Chapter 8 is the conclusion, providing the research findings, notes on the wider applicability of the developed methodology, and further research suggestions. Below, each of these chapters is described in more detail.

*Chapter 2* sets out the theoretical framework used for this research project, which centres on figurational sociological theory. It starts with a description of this framework in general terms, including the most important criticisms, and then defines several terms which are especially relevant for this thesis, such as figuration, web and interdependence. Following this, it sketches the way this theory is used in each chapter and sets out the complementary strands of theory which augment the figurational perspective. It also provides notes on a few neighbouring schools of thought and discusses either how these are incorporated into this study, or, where this work really takes on a different perspective.

*Chapter 3* describes the methodology developed for this research, the historical relational ethnography approach, and the concrete methods used during fieldwork. It first sets out why the analytical level of the neighbourhood forms the most logical starting point for this analysis and looks at how ‘the neighbourhood’ is conceptualised in research. The chapter, then, provides a discussion of the case study selection and

its use in each of the analytical chapters. The focus turns to the research methods and techniques used for data gathering. It details the grounded theory process used to operationalise the research question and categorizes the research design into concrete analytical objects and data gathering methods. From there, it closes by providing the rationale, description and discussion of the different methods used for gathering data.

Organisation towards the production of collective amenities starts at the grassroots level, as soon as the first pioneers settle in the area. That is a truism. However, this level of activity is generally ignored in the literature; it is a significant blind spot. In the neighbourhoods I have investigated, throughout Greater Accra, the early stages of area settlement actually play a central role in shaping the neighbourhood that will later grow there. The early pioneers often get a lot built. And even when the neighbourhood becomes more strongly embedded in formal state structures, organisation at the local level remains paramount in the production of collective amenities.

*Chapter 4* traces this process of local organisation in depth. It traces the development trajectory of a single neighbourhood over the course of 50 years. The time-scale starts with the first settlers, who came together to face threats of material hardship and even expulsion. It ends with the densification of the area, accompanied by the politicisation and formalisation of the local networks. Thus, the chapter shows how and on what basis residents organise, or fail to do so. It explores how they strategically relate to the world outside their area, and how grassroots organisation is affected by the influx of greater numbers of residents and the gradual embedding of the area in webs of formal and centrally organised institutions.

The chapter's contribution to the larger project is threefold. First, it lays the foundation for the rest of the thesis by introducing Sebrepur, the case study neighbourhood. Second, it provides a rare empirical case study of evolving resident organisation in a newly growing neighbourhood from its beginnings. Third, it helps us to understand the conditions which cause Residents Associations and similar organisations to flourish or break down.

*Chapter 5* discusses the traditional chiefs, who play an important role in the governmental figuration of urban Ghana. Firmly institutionalised as traditional local leaders, with roots in the pre-colonial and colonial era, they hold sway over the land and often also have a powerful position within the political arena. Appointed by state fiat as the default custodians of all traditional areas (except those plots whose ownership is formally registered in the Lands Commission's cadastral system), the chiefs control some 80% of Ghana's land. They have a central position in the process of settlement and area development, planning of zoning and infrastructure, and the transition from a complex



and largely informal system of land rights to a modern structure of freehold ownership. In addition, the chiefs are widely seen, addressed and expected to speak as the natural leaders of (assumed) local communities at the neighbourhood level. They are expected to keep the peace and to lead local organisational efforts. In a position of such high public recognition, they have great influence on the grassroots organisational patterns that can grow in such neighbourhoods. They impact the shape of the local 'civil society' and the amenities that are developed, campaigned for, realised and maintained. Chapter 5 analyses what their position in Accra looks like today, how it was shaped through the process of state formation and how it evolves as areas on the urban fringe are incorporated into the urban fabric. Besides Elias, the chapter builds on Weberian notions of authority (Weber, 1968, p. 215) and Ananya Roy's work regarding informality and the state (Roy, 2009b), to shed light on the role of chiefs in urbanisation.

The next chapter takes churches as a subject of study. The first collective building that goes up in a new neighbourhood in Accra is generally a church; the second, a school. Historically, educational and medical amenities in Ghana have been largely provided by the churches. *Chapter 6* builds on De Swaans' (1988) depiction of churches as quasi-statal agencies in Western Europe, showing how they had a similar role in Ghana's early state formation process. Over the 20th century, religious voluntarism became the norm in Ghana, ushering in an era of intense religious competition. A process of cultural drift ensued, in which the Ghanaian churches were transformed from institutions working to actively shape people and doggedly build up amenities, to fast-paced spiritual entrepreneurs. This has led to a breakdown of the church as quasi-statal institution, at a time when state did not have the capacity to take over all functions of the church. Besides building on work of De Swaan (1988), the chapter makes use of the *religious marketplace* metaphor (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987) to better place the church within its modern context.

The urban fabric consists not only of organisations and broader social figurations, it is also importantly held together by physical networks, which are discussed in the following chapter. In the process of Accra's growth, these progressively expand and diffuse, connecting ever greater numbers of people and adding layers of complexity and interrelation to the urban fabric that binds them. *Chapter 7* analyses the development of one such network: the piped water network. Again, it does so from the neighbourhood level, starting with the case of Sebrepor, an extreme case of self-help where residents built the entire neighbourhood water network with almost no involvement of the utility company. Still, such local distribution networks are inevitably tied into the city-wide network for production and distribution of treated water.

This chapter offers a lens on a broader dynamic of suburban development. It investigates the co-production of amenities between local residents and larger state institutions, as well as casting an eye on the frictions this entails at multiple scale levels. It shows that what can look like people messing around in the system from one perspective, looks like local coordination and experimentation from another perspective. Zooming out from local dynamics, the chapter also shows how both shifting political and organisational dimensions, as well as technological progress affect the form and dissemination of collective amenities. This happens as individualised solutions arise and change the degree to which various groups within the city are interdependent in terms of this network and amenity.

*Chapter 8* concludes the book. It starts with a brief recap of the developed methodology, the historical relational ethnography. It then turns to the findings of the four empirical research chapters, before setting them out with regard to the central research question.

Finally, it sets out some potentially fruitful avenues for further research, building on the work of this thesis.

Policy recommendations are outlined in Appendix 1, rather than in the main body of the thesis, as they go beyond the academic findings of the thesis.

















2



# Theoretical framework: a figurational perspective

*"The essential problem for developmental sociology is (...) to discover and explain how later social formations arise out of earlier ones."*

*- (Elias, 1978b, p. 152)*

In this chapter, I describe the framework which forms this thesis' theoretical backbone, figurational sociology, first in general terms, including the most important criticisms (2.1), and then through defining a number of core terms such as figuration, web and interdependence (2.2). I then sketch the way I use this theory in each chapter and set out the complementary strands of theory which I use to augment the figurational perspective (2.3). I also provide notes on a few neighbouring schools of thought, discussing either how I incorporate them or where this study really takes a different perspective (2.4).



## 2.1 Figurational sociology

The newly forming urban areas which are the subject of this study are constantly in a state of transformation. Admittedly, this could be said about any place in the world. But still, most places are a lot more socially, culturally and institutionally stable than Ghanaian suburbs, which are literally being built right now. Most of these new neighbourhoods transform from nearly fallow land to densely inhabited area within the space of a single generation. In the process, they develop and adopt a number of different organisational forms and institutional linkages in rapid succession and overlap, and are in a constant process of becoming.

Since the focus of this research is this process of becoming, rather than any assumed end state or present form, its ontological approach should focus as much as possible on processes rather than on fixed states. As David Harvey put it, we should focus on urbanisation as a process instead of the city as a thing (Harvey, 1996). That idea is hip, these days. Everybody wants to be processual rather than static; calls are emerging in disciplines throughout the social sciences (e.g. Bartels, 2012; C. Harris, 1987; Nayak, 2008; Vandenbussche, Edelenbos, & Eshuis, 2018). A processual approach entails that we no longer claim to have captured the essence of static systems in our theoretical constructs, instead taking mobility, movement and change as the core of our understanding of the world.

But it is not easy to really take processes as the unit of analysis, and sometimes this appears more like a utopian intention than a fully reachable goal, especially due to the problem of excess: there is simply too much going on, and text, our medium of analysis, is linear (Abbott, 2016, p. 105). To make this intention of doing process sociology more concrete and attainable, I take ontological inspiration from a particular strand of process sociology: the figurational approach. This approach also has other aspects which recommend it for the particular situation under study, which I discuss as well. In the following paragraphs, I briefly set out the origins of figurational sociology, the reasons why I find it particularly useful for my field of study, and the most frequent criticisms it receives.

The figurational approach, pioneered by Norbert Elias (1969, 1978a, 1978b), studies emerging order. It combines in a single framework both cultural change at the grassroots and processes of state formation. It is a relational approach, which focuses on social bonds and interdependencies between groups and persons, seeing for instance (asymmetric) power as an element of, and shaped by the other elements

of, a relationship, rather than understanding power as a kind of discrete weapon or tool, independently owned or held by one party, to be used on the other party at any time (Elias, 1978b, p. 131; Emirbayer, 1997, p. 291). Finally, figurational sociology is a process sociology, with an ontology of change rather than an assumption of a static world, and a strongly historical perspective.

In his magnum opus, *The Civilising Process* (1978), Elias describes how large figurations of mutual dependence grew in Europe, over a prolonged process of structural changes, spanning centuries, connecting geographically distant areas and societies. He connects these macro-process of (among other things) state formation to the micro-processes in a very direct way, superseding the usual dichotomy between external and internal (personal/behavioural) processes. In later figurational work, Abram de Swaan (1988) deals with the collectivising process in health care, education and welfare, showing how the welfare state state emerged in Western Europe and the U.S. by tracing the confluence between local coping arrangements and larger processes of state formation. Such perspectives provide the kind of ontology we need to understand these emerging neighbourhoods, in a number of ways. I will mention five of these.

First, figurational sociology recognises the ‘primacy of the process’ (Johan Goudsblom, 1977, p. 105). It is a perspective that studies the emergence of new figurations, rather than assuming a fixed structure. In Accra, this is what we face: a situation where something emerges. A growing city, new urban fabric. More specific, Elias’ focus on state formation in *State Formation and Civilisation* has left his vocabulary exceptionally suitable for the study of how new strands of *state fabric* emerge over time. Time and again, this is what I found in Accra: although locals often do not perceive it as such, the fabric of their newly growing neighbourhoods is shot through with strands of state institutions, which are woven through it ever more tightly, taking shape at the same time the urban fabric develops and takes its shape (see also chapter 7).

Second, in this process of emergence, local organisation and centralising institutions levels are highly interconnected, influencing and shaping each other. So we need a framework which also allows us to move between levels, which bridges the divide between neighbours, neighbourhood and urban system levels. For instance, in order to understand the dynamics of water and electricity supply systems in rapidly growing cities, and the political consequences of under-performance of the network as a whole, it is necessary to understand the process of extension at the granular level, house to house through residents’ self-help practices. The figurational perspective allows such an interweaving of levels.

Third, figurational sociology offers a historical perspective, allowing the researcher and the reader to search for the precursors of institutions and arrangements before explaining their contemporary appearances. This is useful and perhaps even necessary for any research undertaking. But it becomes all the more vital since we are dealing here with non-Western sociology, written by a Western author (Goody, 2012).

Many of the institutions found in Ghana today have clear Western counterparts. Indeed, they were often modeled on these. This goes for the churches, the utility companies, the state structure, and other institutions which were (partially) imported, rather than homegrown. But it also applies to the chiefs, who were forced by colonial rulers to at least partially adopt a Western mode of operating, and to less formalised groups like Residents Associations and political pressure groups. This creates a misleading sense of familiarity: 'I know how this works, I've seen this at home'. However, although these institutions look very much familiar to me, they are rooted in a background which is unfamiliar, with other pre-existing logics and institutions, where other conditions of development apply.

By looking at these through a historical lens, it is possible to understand more about them, to observe the world they function in and to understand a little more of how this changes the nature of these transplanted institutions. In the same way, institutions like chieftaincy create a misleading sense of strangeness, because they look very unfamiliar at first sight, involving highly localised and exotic-looking rituals and seemingly drawing on a register of social relations which is typically 'African'. Again, the historical approach helps to better understand the nature of such institutions, to place them in the contemporary socio-political field of the city.

Fourth, in a complex urbanising setting such as contemporary Accra, there are many instances where power and influence run two ways, where groups, institutions and individuals are interdependent, interwoven in a complex figuration. For instance, the chiefs and the formal state at first sight seem to compete. But a closer look reveals that they actually support and prop up each other in multiple ways; the weakening of one would greatly damage the position of the other. Even in seemingly crystal-clear hierarchical situations, a closer inspection often reveals that power never runs one way. The local District offices of the Ghana Water Company seem to be clearly subject to the control of its headquarters. But the headquarters need the District officers to keep the network from sprawling out too much, depend on them for this, and thus again, influence runs two ways. The ontology of figurational sociology is exceptionally suitable to study such 'asymmetrical power balances' (Van Benthem van den Bergh, 1971).

Fifth, figurational sociology has much attention for the way technological development (re)shapes social relations. The paradigmatic study in this respect is Johan Goudsblom's (1992) analysis of the way the highly valuable domestication of fire also forced humans into new dependency relations. Specifically, the unforgiving discipline of a 'fire regime' of fuel collection and fire maintenance, which would ensure that the precious fire never went out. Elias (1978a, p. 206; 1995) discusses the social systemic impact of advances in another technology: road systems. In the chapters 5 and 7, I set out how respectively central electronic storage of land ownership and improvements in private water sachet sealing and borehole systems caused shifts in both local and city-wide dependency relations with important political repercussions.

On a more general note, the figurational ontology is flexible in terms of the ways people relate to each other, the ways they form networks and the stories, and the behaviours that accompany those networks. The focus of this research is not on individuals, but on the ways they bond. When discussing how people bond socially, we need to have some idea of their psychology, a set of assumptions about their worldview. It seems that in much of the social sciences, the rational choice framework (Becker, 1976) has crept in as the default psychological model (Nik-Khah & Van Horn, 2012). This framework sees humans as essentially selfish, somewhat atomistic, mechanistic entities, who act only on their own behalf and for their own benefit. Its rather bleak theoretical point of departure has been softened over the years to include reciprocity and even forms of charitable behaviour, 'broad rationality', but the point of departure remains the same: calculated selfishness in a knowable, primarily material and non-connected world (Iannaccone, 1995).

In situations where the scale and scope of our research is such that we have no time for individual psychology and need a standard model of the mind, it is very well possible and effective to integrate figurational sociology with rational choice (see e.g. Swaan, 1988). Still, however convenient and broadened it may be, such a perspective does tend to remove real human agency from the analysis, reducing morality to norm-following (Iannaccone, 1995) and casting altruism as either a calculated act of covert selfishness (again, usually through improving institutions by strengthening norms) or an individually preferred form of 'consumption' (Neilson, 2010). This picture of humanity is incomplete at best. People have wildly varying motivations for the way they position themselves and the ways they act, at times including degrees of altruism and sustained action for certain ideals which are simply inimical to the basic axioms of fields like rational choice. Therefore, it remains essential to include psychology and human agency in the analysis, as well as the often long-lasting belief systems (ideologies, doctrines, etc.) which humans tend to hold.

As noted, when there is no space for attention to individuals or no time for qualitative primary research, such a research choice is understandable and can still be highly productive, despite its simplistic assumptions of psychological structure. Fortunately, this thesis is an empirical case study of a limited scale and scope. Thus, it is possible to let in a little bit more real human agency. To do so, I let research subjects speak for themselves whenever possible (while carefully triangulating their self-descriptions with concrete observations), and pay attention to *why* people do what they do, how they think, how they justify their actions or lack thereof. I do so specifically for two factors influencing people's behaviour: long-lasting belief systems, and the motive of altruism.

Examples may provide some background on both counts here. First, the notion of long-lasting belief systems. In chapter 6 I describe how the Methodist, Presbyterian and other 'orthodox' churches are increasingly being out-competed by the Charismatic movement. This would not fit into that perspective, as these churches are not acting 'rationally' in the current ecology of religious organisations. To fit in, they should simply change their doctrine and adapt their internal organisation to also be able to rapidly expand to the newly growing urban areas, and to attract new followers. But they do so only to a limited degree, stubbornly building schools and clinics and making other non-rational investments. Apparently, their doctrine is so strongly embedded in their organisational fabric that it simply does not change much. Thus, doctrine and more in general, ways of thinking, are an essential part of the analytical framework if we are to understand these areas.

Second, the motive of altruism, or spiritual satisfaction derived from helping others. Mr Jacob, described at the start of chapter 7, provides perhaps the best example of this type of behaviour. His construction of the water pipe network in his own area could easily be understood as a self-serving activity, although he must have invested far more energy in it than he got out. But to extend the network to neighbouring areas requires a different mind-set. Mr Jacob has not benefited much from this himself in material terms, and has rather experienced discomfort from it, as he is often called up at ungodly hours to do emergency maintenance work on the network. The explanation can rather be found in another direction: spiritual satisfaction. In several conversations with Mr Jacob, this became very clear, as he explained his beliefs, noting as an aside that he had chosen to convert to Buddhism (a highly unusual move in Ghana) because he felt that it better fit his worldview.

Mr Jacob and the orthodox church leaders are good examples of the way the psychological factor tends to transcend mechanistic models of behaviour, but certainly not the only ones. During my research I have met a number of other people who do work for the community for which the motivation really cannot be retraced to personal benefits or the avoidance of discomfort. Most of them have not made it into the final draft of this thesis. But all in all, they provide a powerful impetus for continuing to respect both real human agency, the motive of altruism and the power of long-lasting belief systems and personality structures.<sup>4</sup> Figurational sociology explicitly includes these factors in its analysis.

### **Criticism**

For all these reasons, figurational sociology provides a very useful ontology to form the theoretical backbone of this thesis. However, the approach does not stand uncriticised. Especially its main proponent, Norbert Elias, has received his share of censure over the years. Perhaps the most urgent of these criticisms is an attack on his use of the term 'civilisation'. Critics (Duerr, 1988; Goody, 2003) claim that his concept of 'civilisation' is quite hierarchical and is only one step removed from declarations of cultural superiority. He refers to passages such as this one, about what Elias calls the *civilising process*:

*"What must be pointed out here is the simple fact that even in civilised society no human beings come into the world civilised, and that the individual civilising process that they compulsorily undergo is a function of the social civilising process. Therefore, the structure of a child's affects and consciousness no doubt bears a certain resemblance to that of 'uncivilised' peoples, and the same applies to the psychological stratum in grown-ups which, with the advance of civilisation, is subjected to more or less heavy censorship and consequently finds an outlet in dreams, for example." (Elias, 1978a, p. xi)*

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- 4 A frequently made argument is that people acting from such purely altruistic or ideological motivations are rather rare and therefore should not inform our standard view of humanity. This may or may not be true, it is very hard to test. But even if it were true, their extraordinariness would not be sufficient reason to exclude such motivations from the analysis. Mr Jacob has coordinated the production of a water network that serves several thousands of residents. And the churches have provided, and continue to provide, the education of important swaths of the Ghanaian elite, thus imparting their ideas (for good or for ill) on that society in a fundamentally important way. In such ways, a small amount of people can have a disproportionately large impact.



Here, Elias places societies on a scale of development, saying that children raised in certain societies (by which he meant European ones) pass through a stage in their development which is more akin to less developed societies (in which he undoubtedly included much of Ghana), before arriving at the 'stage of civilisation' of their own society.

Such quasi-Freudian (Goody, 2003) theoretical stances have been softened and apologised for by Elias himself and his supporters, (Elias, 2008; Liston & Mennell, 2009), and they may or may not hold water empirically. But they have been effectively censured in the social sciences (Mennell, 1998, pp. 2-4), because they lend themselves too easily, especially in popularised or vulgarised form, to legitimate racism or to political projects which categorise some cultures as inferior, thus justifying conquest, exclusion or other forms of violence.

I believe such criticism to be well justified. Elias' project of understanding 'the civilising process' was a hugely ambitious one, both in timescale and in theoretical scope, and he did not hesitate in setting it out as broadly as he saw it, notwithstanding possible social consequences. This may seem strange for someone who had been forced to flee 'scientific racism' (Brustein, 2003, pp. 95-96) in his own lifetime, as a Jew escaping from 1930s Germany, but it was the case.

Fortunately, later scholars have refined his ideas of a 'civilising process' so as to take out this edge of cultural hierarchy and progress and make the theory less Euro-centric, even while in some cases taking an even broader empirical frame (Johan Goudsblom, 1992). I take it on board in this thesis, re-framed as the statement that with increasing social complexity and longer chains of interdependence, 'more people are forced more often to pay more attention to more and more other people' (Johan Goudsblom, 1989, p. 722). Stated that way, I believe Elias' ideas of the (blind) civilising process have academic value in them and are largely freed from the risk of abuse by unsavory vulgarisation towards political goals.

A second criticism is more general: that of Eurocentricity, exporting Western theoretical notions uncritically to cities of the Global South (McFarlane, 2011; Parnell & Robinson, 2012b; Simone, 2004a). As explained below, my theoretical framework consists primarily of Elias and De Swaan, coupled with some Weber and some post-colonial notions from Mamdani and Roy. However, I do not believe that I export their ideas uncritically. I also try to avoid applying Western taxonomies of systems, such as identifying overarching 'modes of governance' (e.g. Ekers, Hamel, & Keil, 2012). I

do use Weber's types of authority, but I use them to describe components of specific relationships rather than entire political systems.

Nor do I seek to develop or apply fixed schemes or taxonomies of suburbs (R. Harris, 2010), certainly not taxonomies imported from the West. Rather, I use the ontological basis of Elias' and others' work to be able to theoretically model bonds and figurations, to structure my approach of spatial levels and (inter-/intra-)group relations. I have found no better frame than this one to understand my research matter. Because after all, we may deconstruct as much as we like, but in the end empirical research in the professional sociology tradition (Burawoy, 2005) requires an ontology to work with (Nijman, 2015).

Third and finally, when writing about Ghana from an Eliasian framework, it is unavoidable to discuss his own work on the country. Norbert Elias spent two years in Ghana, working in the sociology department of the University of Ghana from 1962 to 1964. During this time he wrote very little. He finally published no academic work at all on Ghana, only two essays for an exhibition catalog of (partly his own collection of) African art (Elias, 2009a, 2009c). The general impression one gets of Elias in Ghana is that of a scholar seeking confirmation of his already established theory about civilisation, not that of an open mind looking for new insights.

## 2.2 Core terms

Having explained the core principles of the theory and its main criticisms, it is time to define some of the core terms used in this thesis. Elias was passionate about developing new "structures of speaking and thinking" (Elias, 1978b). Indeed, he was perhaps less interested in leaving behind a new school of thought than in creating a new vocabulary (Krieken, 2001, p. 354). I define (my use of) some of these terms: urban fabric, figuration, web, valency, and evolving chains of interdependence.

The first notion to be defined is the one which refers to the research subject as a whole: urban fabric. I have already used the term extensively in the introduction chapter, but do want to take a moment here to formally define it. What I investigate in this thesis is the emergence, development and integration of new parts of urban fabric. This term is often used to refer to the urban morphology, the physical composition of buildings and the infrastructure between them (Levy, 1999; Scheer & Stanilov, 2003). This brings up an image of the city as a tapestry of concrete, steel, wood and glass,

laid out over the land (i.e. Carr & Whitehand, 2014; Compagnon, 2004). I use the term in a somewhat broader sense, including in the term urban fabric also the social infrastructure (Simone, 2004b), more akin to Friedman and Miller's (Friedman & Miller, 1965) or Lefebvre's (Lefebvre, 1991) use of the term.

To me, the urban fabric consists not only of buildings, physical infrastructure such as roads, electricity cables, water pipes and drains, but also of institutional webs such as the system of districts and electoral areas, the hybrid public transportation system of minibuses, paramount chieftaincies and their divisional substructures, police and army barracks and the areas they control, and the networks of churches which may be rooted in one area but expand with new franchises in nearby parts of the city. All these factors are part of the urban fabric, just as much as the buildings, roads, cables, pipelines and open spaces of the physical city.

Both the physical and the social-institutional urban fabric are by their nature continuous, although they contains many fault lines and breaks, forced by physical barriers, land holders with sufficient clout, or other institutions such as governmental district boundaries. Despite such breaks, the urban fabric forms a single tapestry and as such it spreads itself out over the surrounding countryside. Within this urban fabric, I define a suburb as an inhabited area away from the urban center, connected to this center by (near) continuous built-up land.

In terms of theoretical constructs, the basic unit of analysis in figurational theory is the figuration. This term describes what we might term a 'flexible latticework of tensions' between a number of people or groups (Elias, 1978b, p. 126). That can be four people around a table, or it can span an entire city. Through this term, Elias tried to put an end to the unproductive sharp posited boundaries between entities 'individual', 'organisation' and 'society', which he saw as 'desensitising terms'. Elias responded to Weber's ideal types of organisations, composed of individual agents, and Durkheim's society, which was still external to the individual. Figurations shape the thoughts and actions of the people or groups that form their 'building blocks', and are in turn shaped by those people or groups (Elias, 2009b, p. 2). This term is used throughout the study, as its flexibility allows very differentiated applications.

One example of its use is in describing the early grassroots forms of organising in Sebrepor, chapter 4. Residents there got together without much formal organisation at first, to establish basic infrastructure in the area. Later, this local figuration became more formalised, and turned into what one might simply call a (volunteer-based)

organisation: the Residents Association (RA). However, this RA and its organisers quickly became entangled in a much bigger, more complex figuration, involving various officials and arms of the local government, political party leaders organising in the area and an increasingly densely populated environment. To understand the fluid boundaries and links in such a context, the notion of a 'figuration' is very practical, more so than 'organisation' or 'network', as it does not presuppose the uniformity of its units or hard (or even any) boundaries.

In figuration sociology, the mode of relationship between the various entities in a figuration (such as individuals, groups or organisations) is generally described with the Eliasian term *interdependence*. This term describes the relationship between two or more persons, groups or organisations in terms of power, signifying that these depend on each other to a certain degree. I use the term frequently in describing Ghana's process of state formation and the shifting position of the chiefs within that process (chapter 5), as well as relations in the urban water field (chapter 7). This term functions well to describe the power relations found in the field. To take the example of chapter 5, it is not the case that the chiefs were simply subject to the state at any point in time, nor is it the case that the chiefs hold the vulnerable state in their firm grasp of power.

Rather, both depend on each other and both have power over each other. Individual chiefs were and are easily crushed by a targeted attack of powerful actors within the state, both in colonial times and in the post-independence era. But at the same time, local politicians of all parties generally depend on a good relationship with the local chiefs in order to effectively govern. Chiefs are seen as connected to the spirits of the land, thus enjoying a natural sense of (Weberian traditional) authority among the local residents. Another, more materialist reason for their power over politicians is that chiefs are *enstooled* (appointed) for life, whereas politicians have to campaign for re-election every four years. The locals know this, and strategically divide their loyalty accordingly.

Finally, the relationship between the state and individual chiefs is something completely different from the relationship between the state and the chieftaincy institution as a whole. Even powerful and determined actors within the state (such as Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president) were unable to uproot the institution, as it is tightly interwoven with the state. Finally, both chiefs and politicians often come from the same small sets of families, the so-called royals, and are further interwoven at that level. Hence the term *interdependence*, a mutual dependence.

From interdependence between a relatively limited number of entities we arrive at the concept of evolving (often lengthening) chains or networks of interdependence. In his central methodological work *What is Sociology?*, Elias describes the societal development process as follows: “Chains of interdependence become more differentiated and grow longer; consequently they become more opaque and, for any single group or individual, more uncontrollable” (Elias, 1978b, p. 64).

This elegant but rather abstract piece of theory becomes directly applicable when we look at Greater Accra’s piped water network. Through a convoluted and often resident-driven construction process throughout decades of poor utility company management and rapid urban growth, the physical water distribution system has actually become so large that the Ghana Water Company has been forced to start a major project simply to *re-capture* their own pipe network. They are forced to go out into the newly built neighbourhoods to unearth exactly where their pipes run and what state they are in, they are unaware of how exactly the water flows through the system of pipes, they have lost track of many of their customers as the city expanded over the decades. To understand how this came about, the concept of lengthening chains of interdependence and growing opaqueness is very useful.

## 2.3 Theory by chapter

The methodology described in chapter 3 flows directly from this theoretical framework, as described in section 3.1 In this section (2.3) I briefly describe how I use this theory in the four empirical chapters. Where chapters build on additional theory to augment the figurational perspective, this is also explained and linked to the basic figurational framework. This section should not be seen as a summary of the empirical chapters, but rather as a more extensive operationalisation and complete sketch of the theoretical framework of the thesis.

### **Chapter 4: The rise and fall of resident organisations**

The first research chapter of this thesis is an empirical, highly localised study of a particular kind of organising: successful volunteer grassroots-led organising for collective amenities. At first sight, the study looks so simple that very little theory is required. And indeed, in that chapter I hardly use the theoretical terms described above or refer to literature. However, in understanding Sebrepur, the figurational perspective is highly productive. For one, I look at the grassroots organising not as organisation but as figuration, evolving networks and coalitions of interdependence and temporary

structure, whether formalised or not. For such a research subject, 'figuration' is a useful concept.

But the application of figurational ways of thinking in this chapter goes further: it describes the processes connected to lengthening chains of interdependence. A brief quote may be useful here, in which Elias discusses the *changes in and between people*, as the society they live in becomes increasingly tightly integrated, their world bigger and its social groups more complex, more varied and (geographically) larger.

*"What changed was the way in which people bonded to each other. This is why their behaviour changed, and why their consciousness and their drive-economy, and in fact their personality structure as a whole, changed. The 'circumstances' that change are not something that comes upon people from 'outside', they are the relationships between people themselves." (Elias, 1978a, p. 402)*

Here, Elias notes that as the outside world changes, this change is mirrored by a shift in very local, personal relations. We see the same process happening in Sebrepor, as that neighbourhood becomes more densely populated and more tightly interwoven with the outside world, the rest of the city. A few examples. As political parties establish a foothold in the neighbourhood, the local grassroots organising becomes coloured by party politics. As the municipality provides bulldozers to clear access roads within the settlement, some of the residents are chosen to guide them on where roads should be made. This means their personal vision of the neighbourhood is suddenly backed with formal power, making the hierarchy of local organising suddenly far more pronounced. As a local municipality was established, the tight web of relations between locals fell apart, breaking up not only the infrastructure-related functions of the Residents Association, but also the informal social security function which the Association provided.

In all of these instances, the ways people relate to each other change, as their social and practical world becomes bigger and more complex. One difference is that in Sebrepor, this did not happen on the timescale described by Elias in the above quote. This seems most relevant for people's personalities: of all of the described shifts (bonds, behaviour, consciousness, personality structure) the shift in personality structure takes longest, as personality is formed early on in life, and is likely to change mostly over generations, rather than over lifetimes.

## Chapter 5: Traditional authorities in the city

The chapter on chieftaincy embeds Weberian ideal types of bureaucratic and traditional authority in the figurational perspective. The goal of this chapter is to understand how these different forms of authority combine to form particular state structures (see also Baldwin, 2015; Vaughan, 2006). It describes the historical origins of the chieftaincy institution, and goes on to show how state formation and urbanisation processes have led to a more complex figuration where traditional authority (chieftaincy) is embedded in a larger legal-rational authority (the modern state) and where traditional authorities in various parts of the country support each other through this shared embedding in the state.

This chapter does not only use the figurational perspective as its ontological framework, it also draws on Elias' more empirical work directly. Elias' examination of state formation in *The Civilising Process* (1978a) and *The Court Society* (1969) shows how the formation of modern states both demanded and spawned expansive bureaucracies to coordinate complex divisions of labour. As part of these processes of state formation, elites' roles and sources of power changed. Whereas notables under feudalism achieved their position through combat and conquest, they were increasingly incorporated into an expansive state structure in which they performed specialised tasks associated with specific privileges and responsibilities.

Notables had to accept that they were subordinate to the monarch, but in exchange their position consolidated. Not only did they command vast amounts of wealth, they also performed critical roles in expanding local administration as well as the justice system (Mann, 1986). They were 'drawn increasingly into central state offices, both military and civil', while 'the *court* was the focus of activity, and *offices* the focus of hopes' (ibid., original emphasis).

While in some countries (notably France) traditional authorities were disposed of to facilitate direct rule, in most countries, both in Europe and in the colonies, traditional authorities have continued to play key roles as intermediaries between central governments and their remote subjects (Tilly, 1990). Where traditional authorities have survived, their position has stabilised in conjunction with the consolidation of the modern state. In the United Kingdom, for example, traditional authorities still perform pivotal functions within government (for instance, as monarch or member of the House of Lords), by and large preserve their charisma (as evidenced by intense and often flattering media coverage), and control vast amounts of land and wealth.

The major advantage of Elias' work is that it shows how traditional authority transforms through broader processes of state transformation. In Elias' understanding, traditional authorities and the state are not simply adversaries striving for power in a zero-sum game. Rather, they are interwoven in multiple ways, such that the stability of either is predicated on the continued existence of the other. They become interdependent as they come to fulfil increasingly limited and specialised functions within increasingly extensive and encompassing networks.

The chapter augments Elias' perspective on state formation with a framework developed especially for the colonial state: Mahmood Mamdani's theorisation of the bifurcated state (Mamdani, 1996). In the Ghanaian context, processes of state formation grew out of a colonial legacy: the establishment of a bifurcated state by the British government in the late 19th and 20th century. While constitutional law was dominant in those parts of the cities where colonial settlers resided, 'customary law' prevailed elsewhere (Mamdani, 1996). Colonial governments made chiefs responsible for carrying out the administrative edicts of the colonial state while allowing them a large degree of discretion. Weber's definition of traditional authority (Weber, 1968, p. 227) shows why this type of authority is so effective in exercising power: with a large degree of local discretion and flexibility (backed by a colonial force), this ruler is able to adapt to local values as necessary and at the same time produce whatever results the colonial power needs.

This fits into a larger pattern where historically, when countries recognise group-specific communal rights and privileges, they tend also to accord power and recognition to traditional authorities representing those groups. The conditions under which traditional authorities receive such state recognition varies radically. Sometimes rights are afforded because traditional authorities represent powerful interests that must be reckoned with for any modern state project to be successful (as in the case of monarchs of Western Europe), and sometimes those rights are a meager compensation for mass killings and land grabs (as in the case of indigenous communities in many settler societies). But in all cases, a similar trade-off appears: the consolidation of a state deprives traditional authorities of much of their former power, yet at the same provides a framework that durably recognises some of their specific claims and roles.

In order to understand the chief's position, the chapter also incorporates the Weberian framework of traditional, legal-rational and charismatic authority.



*“Authority will be called traditional if legitimacy is claimed for it and believed in by virtue of the sanctity of age-old rules and powers. The masters are designated according to traditional rules and are obeyed because of their traditional status (Eigenwurde). (...) Obedience is owed not to enacted rules but to the person who occupies a position of authority by tradition or who has been chosen for it by the traditional master. (Weber, 1968, p. 227)*

As Weber explains, traditional authority is primarily attached to a person, who is not bound by strict rules in wielding this power. This condition was very useful for the practitioners of indirect rule as described by Mamdani (1996). It enables colonial regimes, which internally function as more or less rule-based bureaucracies, to use local traditional authorities as a buffer governance layer. As this local governance layer was based on traditional authority, it was less bound by rules and prescribed hierarchies of authority and thus relatively free to take any action necessary to hold on to power, steered by the central (colonial) authority only on the points that matter to them. And as twenty-first century regional and national governments try to manage their sprawling cities, they again rely on traditional authorities. The government recognises the chief as a legitimate authority and stipulates his domain and territory, but it does so without specifying procedures or rules, allowing chiefs the discretion to deal with dynamic and complex local conditions as they see fit.

This is the only chapter of the thesis where I discuss the production of informality and the deployment of the terms ‘formal’ and ‘informal’, using Roy’s (2009b) definition of *informal*. These terms originate with the state, and are not natural categories which can be clearly distinguished in practice apart from where the state actively creates them. Roy describes how in India, urban governance structures include ‘zones of informality’, which state bureaucrats intentionally keep vague, ‘un-map’, re-interpreting rights and responsibilities as the occasion demands. In urban Ghana, the bureaucrats do not need to do this themselves, as the chiefs are strategically positioned to take on this role. When the Ghanaian state extends itself to a newly developing (urban) area, it does so to an important degree through the chiefs, who form a nexus between the legal-rational authority of the state and the messy practice of a developing area, where strict rule-following would lead to untenable situations.

In sum, this chapter uses a macro-historical perspective on state formation processes that illuminates the long-term trajectory and contemporary conditions that shape Ghana’s chieftaincy institution. Instead of viewing the traditional chief as auxiliary,

competitor, or residue, it examines the transformation of chieftaincy as part and parcel of broader processes of state formation.

Where the chieftaincy chapter focuses on the development of structures of power and authority in the process of state formation, showing indirectly how these affect the potential production of public amenities in newly growing neighbourhoods, the subsequent two chapters go more directly into this production process. Both chapters 6 and 7 build on Abram de Swaan's (1988) work on the development of state-organised collective amenities in Europe and the U.S.. In a wide-ranging historical analysis, De Swaan used figurational sociology to show how rapid urbanisation in the 19th century led to the emergence of the complex of collective amenities that is today known as the welfare state. In this analysis, De Swaan continuously lays the connections both between the personal and the urban or state level, and between the cultural and the material spheres. De Swaan's work strongly builds on Elias, both in conceptual terms and in its object of analysis: growing forms of interconnectedness and interdependency in European nation-states. This forms a useful basis for an understanding of state formation processes, and more specifically the understanding of how collective amenities developed.

#### **Chapter 6: Collective effervescence, collective amenities?**

De Swaan (1988) describes the figuration of churches and states which arose from the late Middle Ages in countries like the Netherlands, Germany and the U.K. In this figuration, the churches created educational, medical and social security amenities, all of which today are in Western Europe seen as responsibilities of the state. These efforts were partially motivated by considerations of competition. Churches used medical and educational facilities as ways to bind people to them in the long run, with a special role for the education facilities to ensure the long-term institutional survival. They also organised social insurance systems and in doing so, helped created the communities that were the foundation for later integration into larger structures such as the state. An important way that the community actually came into being was through the development of these shared amenities. As De Swaan describes, churches were especially well placed to organise collective amenities and the required moral and social communities in situations where there were none, because they had the moral position to coax hesitant participants into their systems, which helped to solve collective action problems.

Chapter 6 maps the role churches play in the production of collective amenities in contemporary Accra, asking why certain churches are highly active in this production process but others are less so. It seeks the explanation for this differential in the internal organisation and doctrine of the churches. These, in turn, are shaped by the form of

the religious field and its relations to the larger state figuration in the era when the church developed. As such, it provides an analysis of the feedback process between the state figuration and the church's contribution to the state formation process, locating the connection between these two processes in the doctrine and internal organisation of the church.

This chapter sets out how in Ghana, the European churches described by De Swaan were invited by the various colonial powers. As missionaries, they came to provide education for the locals, thus training a cadre of Ghanaians in a shared language, morality and structure of hierarchy, a precondition to the colonial project. This is a role similar to the one the churches played in Western Europe, where educational systems were an important step in the formation of both a state apparatus and the required ways of relating and thinking.

In other words, churches were imported in the hope that they would transfer European logics and sensibilities to the locals, and it was especially churches which were imported because they had played this role so successfully in European countries. And indeed, the mission churches created a large amount of high-quality educational and medical amenities. Among other feats: ten of the eleven former Presidents of Ghana received their primary and secondary education in (Ghanaian) Roman Catholic, Methodist or Presbyterian mission schools.

But where in Europe these church-built collective amenities were actively and purposely taken over by the state, thus crowding out the churches, the Ghanaian state has until today not had the capacity to take them over to the same degree. Still, this has not led to the level of continued or even increased collective amenity creation by the churches one might have expected. A sharp increase of the degree of voluntarism in the religious field has radically shifted the conditions of survival, continuation and expansion for churches. A growing group of churches whose doctrines and internal organisation differ radically from the previous generation of churches, the Charismatic Pentecostal movement, is taking over the field. These churches work on a much shorter time horizon, with a strong focus on competition for potential believers. This new wave of religious organisations does not share the same tendencies towards long-term construction and maintenance of educational and medical facilities.

To understand these emerging dynamics in the religious field, an analytical framework of market competition is embedded in the larger story of state formation and the accompanying church-state figuration. This framework is used to describe the

atmosphere of religious competition currently present in Ghana. Indeed, religious competition is seen by many as a form of business competition, and shows many of the same tenets. This includes large branding and event campaigns in the public space and a wide range of franchising structures. But it also becomes apparent in the discourse of the church leaders, both in personal conversations and in preaching.

The chapter therefore uses the framework of a religious marketplace, including its terminology of commercial competition, attracting potential believers, shopping around, entrepreneurship, franchises and (local) monopolies. This aligns roughly with the rational choice framework of the religious field as a marketplace, as popularised by sociologists Rodney Stark, Roger Finke, William Bainbridge and economist Laurence Iannaccone. In my analysis, as in theirs, the framework of a religious marketplace does not stand on its own, but is used to explain the decreasing construction of collective amenities by churches, thus remaining embedded in the larger analytical terrain of state formation processes.

### **Chapter 7: Expansion patterns of connective goods**

Elias described how in Europe, advances in technology allowed for greater and more effective networks of communication and transportation, leading to the long historical process of state formation, where larger areas became effectively integrated in several ways, through lengthening chains of interdependence and densifying as well as deeper integrating fabrics of social organisation (Elias, 1978a, p. 206). The development of an effective road network made it possible for rulers to economically integrate and rule a far larger territory than before, and enabled the transformation of the power structure from a web of feudal lords to a centrally organised hierarchy centered on the court. Road technology, and the network it enables, is a crucial variable here.

De Swaan (1988) specifies how this process culminated in the 19th and 20th century formation of the welfare state, the most tightly interconnected national society structure we know of, where people in a large area (a country) are connected to the same road system, pass through the same educational system, are cared for by the same health system and secured by a shared social security safety net, hooked up to the same water and electricity provision systems, all of which are centrally organised and collectively funded. In other words, the story of state formation in the *longue duree* is a story of how strides in technology made possible the formation of overwhelmingly large and complete physical and social structures of collectivity.

Chapter 7 provides a case study drawn from those larger processes of state formation, as they are currently happening in urban Ghana. It investigates at the network for the provision of clean water, an archetypal collective amenity, through the same analytical lens, using as central variables the shifting interdependencies between the neighbourhood level and various state institutions. More concretely, the chapter develops an analysis of the larger socio-political figuration surrounding the piped water system, mapping how local residents, state, utility company and the political class interact in the production of both a collective network and a parallel industry of individualised provision of the same amenity. For water, a collective piped water network and an industry for drilling private boreholes and delivering prepackaged water; for power, a city-wide electricity network and a private power generator supply chain.

Here De Swaan's figural work again provides a very helpful background. He shows the concrete processes through which physical networks for the provision of clean drinking water as well as drainage and sewer systems emerged in 19th century European cities. The initial investments in backbone infrastructure like water purification plants and a distribution pipe network were generally made by wealthier strata. As a side effect of their investment, the amenity became more easily attainable for less privileged groups by lowering the marginal costs of connecting to the network for the poorer residents living in nearby areas (see also Granovetter, 1978).

We see the same process in Ghana. The scale is even more fine-grained than what De Swaan describes, who was writing about cities with a high degree of spatial segregation into poor and wealthy areas. In the Ghanaian urban context, the degree of spatial segregation between wealthy and poor strata of the urban population is quite limited. Thus, the process of network extension often involves a single wealthy resident in a street who is able to extend water or electricity to his house, whose connection subsequently lowers the financial threshold for his neighbours. We see the same process at a larger scale, where a small settlement or gated community extends the lies for a kilometre or so, and those living close to this extension are able to also connect.

In this chapter, technology plays a particularly large role. On the one hand, modern technology such as PVC pipes, better water treatment systems and improved GIS technology significantly aid the effectiveness of the piped water distribution network in a rapidly sprawling urban area. On the other hand, technological progress in the borehole industry and in individually packaged water solutions invite elites to abandon the overstretched communal provisions in favor of individual solutions. I analyse the

difference between the water and the electricity sector through this lens, investigating how the process of elite individualisation leads to divergent investments in water and electricity backbone infrastructure, because of the different possibilities offered by technology.

## 2.4 Related theoretical perspectives

The study of newly growing neighbourhoods around existing urban areas, often called suburban studies, is a proliferating field that carries with it a host of methodological approaches, disciplinary histories and definitions (R. Harris, 2010). In this section I discuss several frequently used perspectives on Southern cities, which are related in one way or another to my own approach.

Some of these perspectives have come to form almost a standard part of the way we view these cities, but are not quite applicable to the newly growing neighbourhoods of Greater Accra. Others are very much applicable to Greater Accra, but do not fit my research topic or what I view as the most fruitful way to approach it. In either case, it is worthwhile spending some time to set out how this thesis relates to them.

I start by discussing approaches focused on capitalism as an overarching system and other systemically economic perspectives, continue with some other political economy or class-based perspectives, then touch on ecological approaches, and finish with a brief note on the development literature.

### **Perspectives focusing on the larger economic system**

There is a strong literature strand in (sub-)urbanisation studies which take the political economy of land production as the primary theoretical point of departure, often directly tying this in with the current dominance of (late) capitalism as an economic mode of governance and a transformative force more generally (Roy, 2011b, p. 8). This idea is perhaps most extremely expressed by Walker (1981) who saw suburbanisation as a 'spatial fix' for capitalism, an outlet for underused capital (see also Beauregard, 2006; R. Harris, 2013). I do not believe it would be justified to understand the political economy of land production in Greater Accra in those terms. The production of Accra's new neighbourhoods is certainly influenced, and in some ways driven, by investors and speculators (Bansah, 2017; Darkwa & Attuquayefio, 2012). But there is very little systemic investment that could be understood as capitalist in the commonest sense of the word (e.g. Ingham, 2013; Shaikh, 2016).

However, it is a fact that the space in these new neighbourhoods is produced in a neoliberal context, constructing land as something newly existing, by being sold for profit into freehold ownership and thus entering the economic field in a new guise (Lefebvre, 1991), akin to the ‘great transformation’ in the U.K. (Polanyi, 1944). Understanding this aspect of the growth of these new neighbourhoods is in fact vital for understanding how the relational webs of these areas are spun and how power runs throughout them. In this sense, the ‘suburban land question’ is key to understanding the suburbs themselves. This knowledge forms the backdrop to my analysis, and is a condition I treat extensively in chapter 5, but it does not form the main analytical thrust of the thesis. I take up Parnell and Robinson’s (2012b) suggestion in focusing on local organisation and its interactions with the (local) state, and seeing the capitalist mode of production of space as only one of the conditions, not necessarily the most defining one.

The economic aspects of these new neighbourhoods, more broadly, are vitally important to understanding them. As Streeck (2012, p. 1) notes, “contemporary society cannot really be understood by a sociology that makes no reference to its capitalist economy”. And I do study economic phenomena. Chapter 4 discusses grassroots solutions to the collective action problem of constructing initial infrastructure. Chapter 5 describes how chiefs shore up their traditional authority through their grip on the land. Chapter 6 shows how more profit-oriented churches crowd out churches which create the kind of cohesion necessary for the production of collective amenities. And chapter 7 describes how competing industries and collective arrangements for the water sector interact in a series of negative and positive feedback loops.

However, I would like to discuss these suburbs in some more general economic frames. The process of urbanisation has long been seen as coupled with industrialisation (Habitat, 2016), as this link existed in Europe, the U.S., large parts of Asia and to a lesser degree Latin America. But Africa’s urbanisation does not appear to be strongly tied to industrialisation; these are largely ‘consumption cities’ (Rémi Jedwab, 2013). That does not mean there is no economic activity, but it does mean that this economic activity is largely focused on local consumption (Habitat, 2010, pp. 166-168). In a related frame, also borrowed primarily from the 20th century US and European urbanisation, unwanted functions, people and activities are pushed out to the periphery (Teaford, 2008). I have not found this frame to be applicable in Accra either.



### **Class-based perspectives**

Then there is the lens of class struggle, mass mobilisation, land invasions and insurgency (Holston, 2009). A strand of literature with its center of gravity in Latin American describes new suburbs being formed through (both gradual and mass-action) land invasions by disadvantaged groups of aspiring city dwellers. This ties into a particular socio-spatial model often deployed in research on post-colonial cities, of persistent core-periphery spatial inequality. In this image, a former colonial city, the 'cement city', lies in the center, surrounded by poor underserved peripheral slum areas (Freund, 2007; Oppenheimer, Raposo, & Amado, 2013). In this model, the peri-urban areas generally form the 'arrival city' (Saunders, 2011), consisting mainly of auto-constructed (mass occupied) squatter settlements (Caldeira, 2017).<sup>5</sup> The newly arrived subsequently (attempt to) mount an 'insurgency', struggling literally from the outside in, to gain a foothold in the urban fabric (Heinrich & Nuissl, 2015)

This socio-spatial model of a wealthy center and a poor periphery does not apply to the newly growing neighbourhoods of Accra. As in many other growing cities (e.g. Karpat, 1976), in Accra it's not primarily the poor or the disadvantaged who shape the newly growing neighbourhoods. The first step for newly arriving urban migrants generally involves bunking down in precarious conditions in one of the inner-city slum areas such as Old Fadama, parts of Ashiaman or the older zongo's (Pellow, 2008) - or sometimes squatting or living as a 'caretaker' in an unfinished building in a newly growing area. A second step is renting a 'hall and chamber', a tiny rental apartment, which could be anywhere in the city. A final step, and the paradigmatic sign of having 'made it' in the city, is to buy a plot in an outlying area from the local chief, and to build one's own home there. Thus, the suburbs are mostly built by the middle class and upper classes, and with the exception of caretakers, the poorer strata of the population come in later to the peri-urban areas (Grant, 2007; Obeng-Odoom, 2010; Owusu-Ansah & O'Connor, 2010). This makes these newly growing neighbourhoods socio-economically more like U.S. suburbs than like Brazilian favelas.

This also means that the poor are not spatially concentrated as much as in many other countries. This point is related to another frequently found perspective, notably borne out by Roy but used more broadly: urbanism as 'a set of social struggles over urban space' (Roy, 2011b, p. 8) and 'marked by unimaginable fragmentation and

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5 Notably, there are also accounts of a similar socio-spatial distribution in which the poor were actually there first, thus reversing the 'established and the outsiders' (Elias & Scotson, 1965) aspect implicit in the former model. This we find in the 'gentrification as a global strategy' literature, which discusses the phenomenon of new wealthy arrivals pushing the proletariat outward (N. Smith, 2002).

extraordinary violence' (Roy, 2011b, p. 9). Struggle certainly plays an important part in shaping these areas, but it is much less organised, all-encompassing and violent than the type of collective struggles Roy and others have observed elsewhere. I have not found signs of (collective) class struggle in these newly developing neighbourhoods, only ambition for social climbing. The days of Nkrumah's socialism are long gone, and such ideas mostly survive in certain pockets of the universities (Interview Senah, 2018).

As for squatting and land invasions, these are exceedingly rare in Ghana. As far as I have been able to ascertain, illicit land grabbing is really only done by the very wealthy and powerful.<sup>6</sup> While squatting is widespread in Accra, it is generally semi-hidden, or out on very small fringes like the cleared zones next to large drains or along highways, where people come to settle in a trickle, not in a sudden invasion. In short, the lenses of class struggle, land invasions and insurgency, so familiar from the Latin American context, do not seem to broadly apply to Accra.

### **Informality, chaos and crisis perspectives**

The core-periphery inequality model ties into broader spatial notions of informality in the literature. While there is much literature critiquing and nuancing the concept of informality theoretically speaking (e.g. Roy, 2011a), spatially speaking the term is still frequently applied wholesale to particular areas, 'informal settlements' (Myers, 2011; Roy, 2011a; Simone, 2004a). It is important to note that this term does not apply to the vast majority of Greater Accra's suburbs, which are not much less formalised in terms of level and governance structure than the inner city areas.

A related topic is a focus, frequently found in research on peri-urban areas in Ghana, on the haphazardness of the suburbs. For instance, Owusu-Ansah and O'Connor (2010) sketch these newly growing physical landscapes as a "mosaic of housing structures scattered haphazardly on the fringes of Kumasi". Such analysis is often coupled with descriptions of power abuse, corruption and illegality. This disorder is indeed real and present, as are the power abuse and corruption. But they are not my focus. I do not depart from any notion of order or proper bureaucratic procedures, but rather look for whatever patterns of collective organisation are present in the development of these areas, messy or not.

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6 The only significant exception to this is the neighborhood of Old Fadama, which lies right in the center of Accra, on a piece of marshland which according to custom belongs to nearby Jamestown. This is *the* squatter area of Ghana, the most fiercely contested half of a square kilometer in the country, and the subject of so much research (e.g. Afehan, 2012; Farouk & Owusu, 2012; Grant, 2006; Monney, Buamah, Odai, Awuah, & Nyenje, 2013; Stoler, Tutu, Ahmed, Frimpong, & Bello, 2014) that it may distort our image of how frequent large-scale squatting actually occurs in Ghanaian cities.

Finally, there is the frequently applied perspective of crisis (Davis, 2005). This perspective is also applied in some of the literature closest to this work, such as the bundle of Tostensen, Tvedten and Vaa (2001, see specifically Gough and Yankson, p. 127). As Mbembe & Nutall (2004) set out, the lens of crisis is at best a very incomplete way to understand these newly growing cities (see also Mabin, Butcher, & Bloch, 2013) and at worst rather demeaning. To view entire cities as zones of crisis is extremely unhelpful. These are new urban spaces, developing along their own historically unique pathways, which have a number of things in common with previously grown urban areas in other parts of the world and also have a number of more or less unique or different elements.

Certainly, the fact that these cities are developing at an extremely rapid pace creates all sorts of problems. There are many problems: with the water supply, with infectious diseases, poor spatial planning, pollution, and abject poverty. Some of these will most likely have a more or less permanent impact. For instance, if no space is made today for parks, then there will be no parks in the future either (Arku, Yeboah, & Nyantakyi-Frimpong, 2016). But my impression is that most of the problems Accra faces are in fact being resolved gradually, and that most of its residents live there by choice. In short, to view Greater Accra primarily through a lens of urban crisis would offer a misleading picture of the situation.

### **Ecological perspectives**

There is another literature on the urbanising areas, which often refers to them as the 'peri-urban interface', focused on the physical transformation of rural to urban land (Simon, McGregor, & Thompson, 2006), often framing urban expansion as 'sprawl' (Mundia & Murayama, 2010). This literature is generally focused on what is lost in this process: agricultural land, nature, ecological functions (Simon, 2008). I fully agree that this is a loss, and find it an important literature. But I do not see these areas in the frame of what is destroyed or lost; I focus on what 'grows' there, the new urban forms.

A broader city-wide approach focused on ecological sustainability is the literature strand of Urban Political Ecology (UPE), which is concerned with issues of urban metabolism (Kaika, Heynen, & Swyngedouw, 2006). UPE conceptualises the city as a sub-system located within a larger socio-spatial system (an urban region) and the notion of metabolism highlights the interaction between and among multi-scalar systems (Heynen, 2014), the interface between the urban and nature, in some cases extending to the planetary scale (Brenner, 2014).

Excellent work from this literature strand has also done in Greater Accra, on the water supply systems (Alba, 2016; Schulz & Bruns, 2016) and the electricity network (Silver, 2015). Such work stems from the notion that there is “a need to revisit the overtly ‘sociological’ nature of much of twentieth-century urban theory” and proposals towards “interrogating the failure of twentieth-century urban social theory to take account of physical or ecological processes” (Kaika et al., 2006, p. 2).

I wholeheartedly agree with the notion that ecological system dynamics need to form a paramount part of our research agenda today. We are living in the Anthropocene and must act like it (Crutzen, 2006). Moreover, such analysis could have been included in chapters 4 and 7 of this thesis. However, I did not include it, because I feel that the inclusion of the human-ecological interface in the analysis makes the writing and reading *so* complicated that the analysis of human institutions itself becomes vastly harder and easily muddled. For examples of how quickly this complexity can become overwhelming, see the (well executed) recent work of the Trier University WaterPower group.

Hence, although I applaud attempts at integration, I believe that both fields also still benefit from separate study, with integration done on the practical and policy level. My work in this thesis, therefore, is not concerned with the physical or ecological world, but solely with the (historical development of) human-institutional figurations emerging in the new neighbourhoods.

### **Policy-oriented perspectives**

A completely different literature than those mentioned above is the development literature, set out in journals like the *Journal of Urban Planning and Development*, *Journal of Urban Management*, and in the publications of UN Habitat (e.g. Habitat, 2018). This broad strand of work is in many ways related with what I do here and the types of literature described above. There is one difference, but it is a vital difference: the development literature is applied research, aimed towards designing better ‘development’ policies. Here, development is interpreted in a range of ways: from macro-economic development towards a clearly defined end state of an industrialised society (Rostow, 1990 [1959]) to work focused on increasing locals’ positive freedoms, defined in a very broad sense (Sen, 1989). But nearly all development work centers on policy: as it is, as it could be or should be, as it should not be.

Such policy-related work is a vital strand of research, to which this thesis contributes little in a direct sense. Although I do study how Ghana’s constitutional and broader

legislative framework plays a role, only chapter 7 touches briefly on specific government action or policy. In the concluding chapter, I return to the question of the usefulness of this kind of basic research for practitioners.

### **Chapter summary**

This chapter has described figurational sociology, the framework which forms this thesis' theoretical backbone. This approach combines in a single framework both cultural change at the grassroots and processes of state formation (Elias, 1978a). It is a relational approach, which focuses on social bonds and interdependencies between groups and persons (Elias, 1978b). This perspective provides the kind of ontology we need to understand these emerging neighbourhoods, in a number of ways. I mention five of these.

First, figurational sociology recognises the 'primacy of the process' (Johan Goudsblom, 1977, p. 105). It is a perspective that studies the emergence of new figurations, rather than assuming a fixed structure. Second, it allows the seamless interweaving of scale levels, bridging the divide between neighbours, neighbourhood and urban system levels. Third, figurational sociology offers a historical perspective, allowing the researcher and the reader to search for the precursors of institutions and arrangements before explaining their contemporary appearances. Fourth, the ontology of figurational sociology is exceptionally suitable to study the kinds of 'asymmetrical power balances' (Van Benthem van den Bergh, 1971) we find in a rapidly developing city like Accra. Fifth, figurational sociology has much attention for the way technological development (re)shapes social relations. I have also taken on board criticisms of Eliasian work, such as its quasi-Freudian notion of an implicitly linear civilising process (Goody, 2003), its Eurocentricity (McFarlane, 2011; Parnell & Robinson, 2012a), and the dominance of preconceived notions appearing in Elias' own work on Ghana (Elias, 2009a, 2009c). Finally, I have described core terms such as *urban fabric*, *figuration* and *interdependence*.

Subsequently, I have set out the ways in which I apply this theory to the empirical world of Accra's burgeoning suburbs, coupled with additional theory where necessary. In chapter 4, the interdependence of newly growing neighbourhoods' grassroots organisational structures and formal state agencies. In chapter 5, the application of a long-term historical state formation process, coupled with Weberian notions of authority (Weber, 1968, p. 215) and Roy's (2009b) concept of informality, to the contemporary institution of chieftaincy. In chapter 6, the religious marketplace (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987) embedded in De Swaan's figurational research on the emergence of church-state figurations and the welfare state in Western Europe (Swaan, 1988). In

chapter 7, the relationship between grassroots extensions of the water pipe network and city-wide processes of collectivisation and fragmentation, analysed through a lens of city-level interdependence relations.

Finally, I have provided notes on a few neighbouring schools of thought, discussing either how I incorporate them or where this study really takes a different perspective. This section started with approaches focused on capitalism as an overarching system and other systemically economic perspectives, continued with some other political economy or class-based perspectives, then touched on ecological approaches, and finished with a brief note on the development literature.



























3

# Methodology: mapping the city from below

**T**he chapter describes the methodology and research methods of the thesis. Section 3.1 starts with a discussion of the methodology or research design: a historical form of the relational ethnography (Desmond, 2014). Here I set out why the analytical level of the neighbourhood forms the most logical starting point for this analysis, and how 'the neighbourhood' is conceptualised in past work and in this study. In section 3.2, I provide a discussion of the case study selection and its use in each of the analytical chapters. In section 3.3, the chapter turns to the research *methods*, the techniques used for data gathering. I set out the grounded theory process through which I operationalised the research question and methodology into concrete analytical objects and data gathering methods. From there, I provide the rationale, description and discussion of the different data gathering methods I used.





*Research, especially the more formal kind, is often presented as disembodied. A question was asked. A method was determined. Data were gathered and analysed, and conclusions were reached, with certain caveats. But research and researchers do not exist in abstract space. We physically enter areas (or fail to do so), we talk to specific people. We trudge sweating through unfamiliar neighbourhoods in strange and distant lands, trying to find people who will help us build an understanding of what is going on around us. Some will talk to us, others will be harder or impossible to make contact with. We sit in the sparsely decorated rooms of government agencies, reading their dusty files or sifting through their digital databases, all of which were composed by specific agencies with a specific purpose, internal struggles and their own orientation on the outside world. The selection of these vantage points matters: one does not see the same thing from everywhere. In this chapter I discuss the vantage points which I have taken throughout this research project, and demonstrate how they matter.*

### 3.1 Research methodology and case study

This section connects the central research question and the theoretical framework set out in the previous chapter to my research methodology, the *historical relational ethnography* (in other words, mapping the city from below). In short, I study several forms of collective organisation which occur at the grassroots level, using an in-depth, relational ethnographic lens (Desmond, 2014). I extend this lens to a large-scale figurational and historical view (Elias, 1978b) to uncover non-local causes and connections. Thus, I use a relatively small and geographically specific sliver of space as an entry point into the relations that matter most for the (lack of) emergence of collective amenities. In other words, I map from below.

While tying this methodology to the central research question, “*how do residents of Accra’s newly developing neighbourhoods organise to create collective amenities for their area?*”, I unpack the methodology word by word. That is, I start with *ethnography*: why begin the analysis of aspects of a growing urban fabric through an ethnography at the neighbourhood level? Then, I go to the *relational* aspect: why is it not sufficient to investigate dynamics at the neighbourhood level, why should we include the relations of this neighbourhood with institutions throughout the city? Finally, I briefly discuss the *historical* aspect: an Eliasian approach including state formation processes and related longer-term historical developments. Here, I also connect the methodology to the theoretical framework in a broader sense.

However, before I go deeper into the details of the historical relational ethnography design, I want to interject a brief note on a few metrics of quality: transparency, measurement validity, external validity or transferability and ecological validity. In order to provide transparency I have supplied an overview of the type of people I talked to and the type of questions I asked (see headings *Door-to-door interviews* and *Semi-structured interviews with a variety of actors* below, as well as Appendices 2-4). To improve measurement validity, I have used the grounded theory approach (see section Data Gathering and Fieldwork below). To improve the external validity and transferability of my results, I have added a comparative dimension of other neighbourhoods to the research design. As for the ecological validity (Cicourel, 1982, p. 15) of the research, the method of ethnography helps here, as this is one of the most naturalistic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) methods within the social sciences. The method of adaptive semi-structured interviewing coupled with informal conversations also helps, as this allows interview subjects to structure their own narratives.

#### **“...ethnography”: local relations**

What kind of empirical perspective does it entail, taking the (newly growing) neighbourhood (R. Harris, 2010) as a starting point? In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a brief but very intensive period in sociology of studying local urban areas, generally known as *community studies* (e.g. Berger, 1960; Elias & Scotson, 1965; Gans, 1982). This brought together several branches: population studies (social surveyors, statisticians and social reformists), cultural and even anthropological work in the functionalist tradition, and the Comtesque literature on the decline of social relations. Perhaps it was mainly this final part which earned the field so much criticism, on romanticising and essentialising the concept of *community* and ignoring the often antagonistic nature of community life in its contemporary manifestations.

A more general criticism was the all too frequent conflation of *neighbourhood* and *community* (Blokland, 2003). Blokland (2017) shows the sheer volume of intellectual baggage that has come to be attached to the concept of ‘community’, a convolution of ideas about cohesion, naturalness, belonging and homogeneity, but also manipulation and imagination (see Day, 2006). Such confusion should certainly not dissuade us from studying urban communities. But in contrast to Blokland I do conclude that using terms other than ‘community’ facilitates the discussion. Hence, in this thesis I simply dodge its intellectual back-load by leaving the term aside almost entirely. I take the more neutral and physically geographical term ‘neighbourhood’ as my point of departure, but do not assume or discredit any notions of the existence of a social ‘community’ there.

Much of urban African anthropology, which is one of the strands of contemporary literature most closely associated with the neighbourhood level, focuses on the way the city is experienced and understood by the city dwellers, seeing economic forces and constructive activities as more of a backdrop for cultural phenomena, networks and understanding. Such analyses, cast in terms of 'crisis and creativity', are generally underpinned by a Marxian economic framework, a (for anthropologists) strangely one-sided materialistic understanding of culture and social networks as mere superstructure, being inescapably shaped by economic forces beyond people's control (T. O. Ranger, 1979; Van Binsbergen & Van, 1981).

In many ways, such an approach seems justified in macro-economically weak or peripheral (Wallerstein, 1974) areas such as most African cities. Still, whether people manage to actively create collective resources which fulfil substantial elements of their material needs does not solely depend on their self-perceived and actual position in a worldwide or even local power structure: agency and the capacity to act depend on more than (lack of) power in greater structures.

This thesis therefore focuses on the agency that people do have to shape their environment, and more specifically, on the instances where they act collectively and succeed in doing so. Of course, I do not solely focus on success. On the contrary, I try to understand how such successes are later undermined by all kinds of forces, how they in many cases never come to fruition and so on. But the core of my analysis is: when *do* people succeed in acting collectively to produce collective amenities?

**“...relational...”: embeddedness in a wider urban fabric**

Recently, the field of neighbourhood-level studies has been thinner, but certainly not non-existent. Perhaps the most relevant bundle in this context is (Konings & Foeken, 2006), which takes in the turn towards focus on embeddedness in larger networks (Massey, 1991) and works towards no longer constituting the neighbourhood as an isolated unit, providing a geographically open understanding of community which was set out by early African urban anthropologists, focusing on the relationship between various bonding structures such as ethnicity, religion or politics (Peil, 1981) rather than assuming that spatial proximity would lead to community. Instead, contributions like Moyon, Piot, De Bruijn and Van Til in the Konings and Foeken bundle (2006) provide an image of the city as a highly spatialised and almost tangible geography of differential opportunities. Such perspectives of the neighbourhood and of the city as a tapestry of networks are certainly fruitful, and my work closely relates with their understanding of the 'social construction of locality and its meaning in social interaction' (Konings & Foeken, 2006, p. 13).

But our focus differs somewhat, on two points. First, although we do share an interest for urbanites' agency, we look at different groups. Where these authors focus on showing that the marginalised in society have agency, I look more specifically at the role neighbourhood-level networks play in physically constructing these neighbourhoods themselves. This generally involves zooming in on the more affluent and empowered residents of an area rather than the most marginalised. Second, my unit of analysis is somewhat less individual. That may sound odd, as the aforementioned studies consider individuals hardly in isolation; they see them explicitly as located within their social networks, their families, their ethnicities, religious affiliations and so on. Still, their unit of analysis (within the neighbourhood case study) is the (networked, embedded) individual, whereas my primary unit of analysis is the (localised) collective, as it constructively acts to produce collective amenities.

This means that mine is a unit of analysis which rather rarely, and even then always only temporarily, actually comes into existence. Most of the time, people do not act as part of a collective. And even when they do, this collective action is effectively directed towards the construction of durable collective amenities only under rather specific circumstances, as chapters 4 and 6 show only too clearly. Still, however rarely they come into being, such collectives often have a decisive role in shaping the new neighbourhoods mushrooming around Accra and building up the infrastructure there. In my view, this makes them a fascinating and very worthy unit of analysis.

Despite these differences in focus, my analysis also has much in common with these studies. This work could be seen as a community study or ethnography, too. More specifically, and following the methodological turns described above, it should be seen as a *relational* ethnography, studying the neighbourhood of Sebrepor not as an isolated and bounded community but as a *space of flows* (Massey, 1991), a lens on the multi-layered, dynamic networks that form the world around it. Desmond describes relational ethnography as giving "...ontological primacy, not to groups or places, but to configurations of relations" (Desmond, 2014, p. 554). This is what the fieldwork approach of this study is designed to do; to show a broader spectrum of institutional forms than would have been possible when focusing only on a single neighbourhood, while trying to approach the depth and continuity associated with a single extended case study. It is in that sense also inspired by the 'extended case method' (Burawoy, 1998, 2017).

An illustrative line of work in this sense is Pellow's (2003, 2008) longstanding analysis of an inner-city Hausa community in Accra. It is illustrative because it is an excellent ethnography, showing a rich and detailed profile of the miniature world of a community. If my work can in any way approach the local rootedness of Pellow's analysis, I will be proud. But it is also an example of what I try not to do: it remains very much within the walls of this particular community, discussing its architectural roots but not its economic embeddings, describing its historical line of chieftains but not their current political ties and wider interdependence. In studying each of the three topics of my empirical chapters, I work to situate them in the larger context of, among other things, the state structure and the ever-shifting composition of the newly growing suburbs, mapping the social relations across this political field (Desmond, 2014, p. 555).

Does the combination of the neighbourhood level and figurational sociology work? After all, neighbourhoods do not generally figure prominently in figurational sociology. Elias and Scotson's (1965) work in Winston Parva is an exception, but even there, the neighbourhood was approached as a microcosm, a small mirroring of the larger world, rather than as a piece of social fabric, historically embedded in state and societal figurations. However, as this chapter and the conclusion set out, the combination is actually rather fruitful. That is, as long as the neighbourhood case study does not stand alone. The case of Sebrepur works well because it is a suitable case (see below), and because it is a *relational* ethnography, contextualised with research on historical developments and the (state) institutions and larger urban fabric which are woven through the neighbourhood. In other words, Sebrepur is not treated as a standalone microcosm, but as a lens on larger figurations and long-term developments.

#### **“historical...”: Eliasian embedding of the relational ethnography**

This brings us to the third part of the methodology: the empirical approach of this study is not only relational, but also *historical*. It is historical in two ways. First, in the relatively common sense of viewing the larger institutions (chieftaincy, the religious field, the water utility company) in a historical perspective. I trace their various precursors, keeping a specific focus on their relationship with the unfolding state formation process, from colonial times until today. Tracing the relations between chiefs and state or church and state over time allows us to understand their interdependency at a much deeper level. Equally, tracing how water provision was organised throughout the past century allows us to see historical shifts from a small, tightly managed state operation to the sprawling, partially citizen-built network that provisions Accra with water now. Thus, we can better understand the various forces pushing and pulling on this system today.

Second, somewhat less usual, I also study *the neighbourhood itself* through a historical, long-term lens. Chapter 4 describes how the neighbourhood of Sebrepor developed from being a nearly uninhabited area consisting mostly of bush, to the densely inhabited urban neighbourhood it is today. Chapter 5 looks at how the chieftaincy in Sebrepor came to be, how it was transferred to this formerly uninhabited area from a nearby village in the 1970s and then settled in as an ‘ancient, local’ tradition. Chapter 6 traces the local development dynamics of two churches, and chapter 7 sets out how the network of water pipes in Sebrepor grew. This allows us a detailed view of how residents organise for collective amenities, and to comprehend better what factors are important in stimulating, enabling or discouraging this.

By using a historical lens on a newly urbanising area, this study contributes something which is surprisingly rare in the urban studies literature: a descriptive understanding of how *new urban fabric* forms. Through ‘staying in a single area’ and describing various aspects of its urbanisation process over several decades, it provides a multifaceted lens on the process of the city’s expansion onto the surrounding land, the formation process of new urban fabric. It allows us to trace how interdependencies within the neighbourhood and between the neighbourhood and the surrounding urban area shift over time, as the neighbourhood develops. Thus, it provides a much richer understanding of how the urban fabric grows and interrelates than a single-moment snapshot could do.

Building on the theoretical framework set out in the previous chapter, how does the combination work between the historical relational ethnography methodology and the figurational sociology theory? The emphasis which figurational work places on relatively complex interdependences is well served by the detailed qualitative study of behaviours and relationships made possible by ethnographic fieldwork. Equally, the study of individual orientations and worldviews as interconnected with state formation processes and other long term, large scale shifts pioneered by Elias (1978a) in contemporary form requires detailed, personal fieldwork. The methodological approach of taking the neighbourhood as an analytical starting point is unusual in figurational work, which normally focuses on larger constellations such as urban or (supra-)national levels. But as this is a *relational* ethnography, those larger figuration do come into view eventually, and all the more sharply because they are understood from the grassroots up. Finally, the historical character of my methodology fits well with the notion of a *process sociology*, which is core to the figurational approach.

### **Starting point: the neighbourhood**

Having set out these various components of the methodology, I want to mention the crucial aspect of sequentiality: the analysis *starts from the neighbourhood*. The pioneers forming new urban fabric are faced with a host of challenges: how to get connected to the piped water network, the electricity lines, to stay safe from robbers, to prevent their houses from flooding and to get their kids in a school. Especially in such a situation of weak collective institutions, both organisational institutions and cultural institutions, it is the local relations that make all the difference.<sup>7</sup> ‘Neighbourhood’ is the most effective term to refer to the local level of analysis, the level where social bonds between generally non-professionals for the purpose of improving physical and social infrastructure and structuring local power relations play an important role. And indeed, the networks of local relations are often dense and highly active.

Starting from below has the advantage that the focus is not limited to the larger, more formal institutions, but starts with the practically existing relations and organisation on the ground. For instance: if I had studied the water pipe network from the center outward, as is the more usual (top-down) method, I might have observed that it has somewhat loose ends. I would have observed and heard that at times, people take matters into their own hands (illegally) and construct a connection without the knowledge or permission of the utility company. However, I would have never found out that entire networks (two square kilometres of dense water pipe network, in and around Sebepor) were built by the residents themselves, through local organisation, and that these only later were institutionally integrated with the central system - a process which is very much on-going. I would also never have observed all the alternative water supply systems, or perceived them only as annexes of the piped water system, missing the rise of a private borehole industry and the fact that many people simply do without a connection to the central network.

Equally, when studying the chiefs, I might have started with a systematic overview of the chieftaincy structure of Greater Accra, starting from the Paramount Chiefs and working my way down from there. That might have been complemented by a profile of the position chiefs generally take in a community, assuming that they do indeed take a central position (which chiefs and all those around them would tell you, for better or for worse). However, starting from the neighbourhood level, I found out that there are large expectations attached to the position, but that these are often far from fulfilled.

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7 Residents' organizing is all the more important in cities which are growing without accompanying industrialization, such as Accra (Rémi Jedwab, 2013), and where the new urban fabric is thus almost entirely residential.



Having starting out by interviewing residents at the grassroots level, I ended up with a central case study of a neighbourhood whose chief is absent most of the time. In a top-down research project on chieftaincy, such a situation would almost certainly have been written off as an aberration. I also ended up with a clear picture of the way the chief's persona, in absence, still shapes the relationships between opinion leaders in the neighbourhood, the way he affects local organisation. Such insights come naturally with a perspective from the neighbourhood level, mapping from below, as opposed to an institution-centered perspective. This is closely related to Berry's approach, with her focus on 'everyday politics' (S. Berry, 2002).

### 3.2 The primary case study area: Sebrepor

Having set out all these theoretical notions, one rather practical methodological question does remain unanswered: the concrete spatial one. What exactly then constitutes the neighbourhood, which forms the point of departure of this study? Where is it located, and what are its boundaries? Sebrepor lies on the northern suburbs of Tema, which is the eastern half of the Greater Accra urban agglomeration. Its geographical boundaries could be delineated in many different ways: as an electoral area, as a partition of the local municipality, as the traditional area of a chief, or in the streets and landmarks that locals use to indicate its boundaries. Each of these delineations would give us a different cut-out of the stretch urban fabric called Sebrepor, in which I did my primary fieldwork.

But taking the average of all these approaches, we might end up with an area containing some 7.000 residents, covering about two square kilometres. This is close to the average for Accra in general, depending on how close to the center you are, where population is more dense and electoral areas are smaller. Sebrepor is quite mixed in terms of ethnic and religious composition, although a relatively large proportion of the population is of Ewe ethnic origins and Christians are perhaps slightly over-represented vis-a-vis Muslims. It is also quite mixed in socio-economic terms, with a reasonable amount of single family houses and even some villas sprinkled through a criss-crossing network of streets, which contain everything from tiny wooden shacks to rows and rows of hall-and-chamber rental housing, made of wooden boards or sometimes bricks. I describe the area in more detail in chapter 4.

### Use of the case study for each chapter

In the empirical strategy of the historical relational ethnography, much hinges on the choice of the primary research site. While this selection process is always partially serendipitous, Sebrepor does have a number of strategic characteristics, which recommend it as a case study area for each of the four topics of the analytical chapters. I discuss these in the order in which they appear in this book, following Yin's (2017) typology of critical, extreme, exemplifying and revelatory cases. At the same time, I provide a somewhat more general description of the way I use the case study neighbourhood in each chapter, in terms of the historical relational ethnography methodology.

Chapter 4 is based entirely in Sebrepor, a historical analysis of the neighbourhood's development trajectory focusing on the role of grassroots organisation in the neighbourhood. This analysis could not have been written without extensive local ethnographic fieldwork. For the analysis of this chapter, Sebrepor functions an *exemplifying* case, one representative of a majority of cases. Sebrepor has the advantage that it allows for a somewhat deeper historical analysis than most other neighbourhoods would have allowed. As this neighbourhood started its development somewhat earlier than most of the surrounding areas, it is possible to find traces of more different stages of urban development, which enfolded under different political and economic conditions. This made it possible to observe change over the years of this project. For instance, in Sebrepor we find the traces of grassroots organisation during the long reign of Rawlings, a time when the country was economically weaker but self-organisation was also actively encouraged by the state.

Chapter 5 is a *historical* relational ethnography *pur sang*, focusing on the chief of Sebrepor and his relationship with the local state. This local-level analysis is coupled with a historical perspective at the national level on the state-chieftaincy relationship as it developed through the colonial and post-colonial period. For this chapter, the case of Sebrepor is instructive as an *critical* case. A critical case is one that allows us to see what happens to an institution or system when a crucial element of the situation changes. That is: while chiefs are normally seen as the embodiment of groundedness, having deep local roots and forming the center of community life, Sebrepor's chief does not reside in the neighbourhood, and almost never makes an appearance there, because of family strife over his position. Sebrepor thus allows us to see what happens to the position of the chieftaincy in the local social fabric in the case of such an 'absentee chief', who despite a lack of physical presence still holds the 'traditional authority' over the area.

Chapter 6 also starts from Sebrepor, looking at the contribution of churches to the production of collective amenities such as schools and clinics. It does so less through a spatial lens, focusing instead on church doctrines and organisational forms and how these transform or remain stable over time, as the socio-economic background changes around them, shifting from a colonial state with local monopolies for individual churches to the contemporary highly competitive arena of religious pluralism. Here, Sebrepor forms an *exemplifying* or representative case again. In fact, the neighbourhood as a unit of analysis does not figure very prominently in this chapter: the analysis rather revolves around the churches themselves. However, Sebrepor's age is relevant here once again, as this chapter's analysis relies on the comparison between churches which dominated the religious landscape until 10-20 years ago, and churches who do so now. It is instructive to find both types of churches in the same neighbourhood.

Chapter 7 is again firmly grounded in the historical relational ethnography model, taking Sebrepor as a strategic case to show how local organisation interacts with more settled and formalised institutions in the creation of utility networks. From there the analysis slowly fans out, extended through case studies in other neighbourhoods to broaden the analysis, and slowly zooming out to the Ghana Water Company's organisational form, then to the water provision sector as a whole. For this chapter, we can best see Sebrepor as an *extreme* case, one where one factor is very extreme: in this case an unusually high and effective degree of self-organisation. This chapter investigates the historical decentralised network development process of the water network and its consequences for city-wide levels of collectivity. Sebrepor is extreme in this regard, as the entire piped water network in Sebrepor (and surrounding areas) was auto-constructed by area residents, with very little involvement of the state utility company. This makes it easier to see the dynamics originating from such highly developed self-help organisation.

### 3.3 Data gathering and fieldwork

Having described the overarching methodology or research *design* of the study, we are left with the nuts and bolt of the fieldwork: the research *methods*. I was fortunate enough, through generous and flexible funding, to have the opportunity to split the fieldwork up in several periods of stay. This made it possible to start with a round of exploratory interviews and neighbourhood visits, to test the initial assumptions and allow the research subject to gradually take shape. In total the fieldwork took place over four visits to Ghana between 2014 and 2018: first an exploratory visit of a single

month, and in subsequent years roughly three months per year, totalling 10 months of fieldwork. Part of this period was spent living in Sebrepor and other newly growing neighbourhoods, with another part spent in central Accra to facilitate access to gather data from government institutions.

This section sets out the practical methods used for data gathering during these fieldwork episodes. In brief: I first set out my general approach, which can be summed up as *fixed central question, flexible use of methods*. I then set out the process of approaching the research subject, gaining a first understanding of Accra's ecology and its core institutions, and grounding the research. From there, I chose a case study area, conducted a block of door-to-door interviews there, and subsequently branched out into various lines of inquiry with a series of semi-structured interviews with grassroots leaders, civil servants, politicians and other key informants. I augmented these with ethnographic work and document analysis from various archives. To broaden the research base beyond the central case study area, I added a comparative dimension: I conducted systematic observations and interviews in eight other neighbourhoods. Finally, and not unimportantly, I kept exploring the city in an open-ended sense. Below, I describe each of these data gathering methods in detail.

### **Fixed central question, flexible use of methods**

Throughout the research process for this thesis, I kept quite an open approach to the research subject, based in the *grounded theory* research philosophy (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Within this, my efforts fall primarily under the heading of 'theory construction' (Glaser, 1992) rather than under 'concept development' (A. Strauss & Corbin, 1990; A. L. Strauss, 1987). I believe that in such an unfamiliar situation, working with a diversity of data gathering techniques, constant grounding and re-evaluating, and actively triangulating is the most effective way towards promising theory formation.

The anchoring point throughout the project remained the core research question: *how do residents of Accra's newly developing neighbourhoods organise to create collective amenities for their area?* It took me a long time to become more or less familiar with the peculiarities of Accra as a city and Ghana as a highly diverse and complex cultural and institutional world. Parallel to this journey of discovery and growing understanding, I built a network of personal connections in Accra and in the process 'made the city my own.' These two processes of preparation, as one might call them, are rarely mentioned in descriptions of research projects.<sup>8</sup> But they form a vital part of the work.

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8 As the apocryphal Einstein quote goes: "if we knew what we were doing, it wouldn't be called research".

Hence my approach, both in terms of analytical objects and research methods, changed throughout the process. As for the core objects of analysis, two examples may serve: chiefs and churches. Over time, I came to understand that chiefs held a very central position in Ghana's institutional fabric, anchored both in the formal state structure and looming large in the popular imagination of a Ghanaian community, whether urban or rural. This led me to focus a full chapter on these traditional leaders, although there was no mention of chiefs in my research proposal, because I found that their position in the cities had not been adequately theorised or empirically investigated so far.

Similarly, it also took me quite a while to discover the immensely central role of churches in building up Ghana's educational and medical infrastructure. Having discovered this, however, I decided to focus an entire chapter on the churches. None of this was planned or indeed knowable before I started the research project. Through a similar process of discovery, I found out about the centrality of the Residents Association. I decided to interview all present and former leadership figures I could locate, which led to the development of chapter 4. Thus, although my central question remained constant, the core objects of analysis within that overarching question changed throughout the research project.

Following the same logic for data gathering methods as I did for analytical objects of focus, I made a conscious choice not to fix myself to a particular set of empirical methods before the start of the project. During the fieldwork, I used a wide variety of data gathering methods, flexibly determined by the needs of the research subject at hand, as described in the remainder of this section. Working on unfamiliar territory, I tried to form hypotheses as early on in the research as possible, which I then actively tried to falsify during subsequent interviews and other data gathering activities.

Take again, for instance, the persona of the chief. I first discovered his importance during exploratory door-to-door interviews of ordinary residents, in which I had included questions asking what people felt was the biggest problem in the neighbourhood, also asking whose responsibility it might be to fix those problems. This in turn led me to conduct semi-structured interviews with Sebrepor's chief and several others. From here, I started looking for additional forms of data. Finally, an interview with a neighbourhood elder serendipitously led me to a rich source of information: the chief's Divisional Council archives.

### **Approaching the research subject**

Having set out the methodological philosophy and its motivations, I now briefly discuss how I structured this grounded theory process in practice. In short, I started with an exploratory phase, followed by a systematic pursuit of various research subjects that emerged from the exploratory interviews and observations. The general technique for finding research topics used in this project could be summarised as follows: ask people what they considered infrastructural deficits in their environment, then ask them “who *should* fix that” or “who *does* fix that” and then find those people or institutions. If they indeed appeared to play an important role, the analysis then consisted of tracing the network of social connections, historical precursors and other lines flowing outward from these people or institutions, slowly working towards larger geographical scales and into history. I traced these lines until I felt I properly understood how they ticked, what the figuration around them looked like, what their power or ability to act rested on and what moral or social obligations or desires drove them. In the following paragraphs, this methodological trajectory and its internal logic are set out in more detail.

As I first arrived in Accra, aiming to understand how people organise for collective amenities, I had very few local contacts, but I knew of one NGO that worked to ‘empower communities’: People’s Dialogue. So my research started through them, with interviews with NGO workers and their contacts in the community, ‘community representatives’, working from the offices and the resources of PD, the best-known community development NGO in Accra. However, as I delved deeper into their network, I came to realise that PD did not actually seek out pre-existing community leaders but rather worked with a small amount of fixed contacts, whom they introduced to all visitors who came to inspect field projects. In addition, it became clear that Accra does not have many neighbourhoods that could be characterised as ‘informal settlements’. Although land ownership in many areas is more or less contested, wholesale squatting of areas is extremely rare. So I decided to cast my net wider, at the newly emerging neighbourhoods on the urban fringe.

Through contacts at the university and chance conversations, I acquired entry points in various neighbourhoods: Old Fadama in Accra center, Okatabanman, between Madina and Adenta, Sebepor, on the northern side of Tema, and Darkuman, on the north-western side of Accra. In each of these neighbourhoods, I did exploratory interviews and observations. From there I selected the neighbourhood that seemed most promising on the basis of my criteria at the time. That is: the neighbourhood should be relatively new, not quite finished in terms of infrastructure, contain at least

some resident organising networks, and not be too unique or extraordinary in any particular dimension. That neighbourhood was Sebrepur.

### Door-to-door interviews

After doing some exploratory interviews in Sebrepur, I started with the first round of structured data gathering, at the absolute grassroots level. That is, a series of door-to-door semi-structured interviews covering a complete street block. The block was selected according to the following criteria: socio-economically mixed, ethnically mixed, politically mixed, and roughly average for the rest of the neighbourhood in all of these areas (see table 3.1 below). The choice to interview every household on a single block was made to ensure that there was no self-selection or accessibility bias in the respondents. The choice for such a mixed block was made in order to capture as broad a range of lived experiences as possible. Some basic characteristics of the respondents are pasted below.

| Gender            | Age bracket       | Housing situation (socio-economic indicator) |
|-------------------|-------------------|--|
| male <b>10x</b>   | 18-30: <b>8x</b>  | shack: <b>10x</b>                            |
| female <b>29x</b> | 30-39: <b>6x</b>  | hall&chamber: <b>26x</b>                     |
|                   | 40-49: <b>10x</b> | 3+ rooms or complete house: <b>13x</b>       |
|                   | 50-59: <b>6x</b>  |  |
|                   | 60+: <b>6x</b>    |  |
|                   | unknown <b>3x</b> |  |

*Table 3.1: basic descriptives of the respondents to the door-to-door interviews*

Within this block I conducted a standardised interview with at least one, but preferably more, respondent from every household on that block. The questionnaire was designed to shed light on the basic social fabric of the neighbourhood, focusing on residents' background, their relations to each other, and their view of the area. It included questions about personal characteristics, housing situation, personal history, neighbourhood history, personal social networks, social cohesion in the neighbourhood, infrastructure development and the presence or lack of organisation and leadership in neighbourhood development.

For instance, I asked how well people knew their neighbours, whether they felt they had friends in the area, whether they belonged to any groups or clubs, where they



would borrow a chair, some pots or some money in case of need, how they got their water on a daily basis, what was wrong with the neighbourhood and who should work to fix it, and much more. I first tested the questionnaire with five respondents, then updated it and used the same questionnaire for the rest of the block. For the full questionnaire, see Appendix 3.

These were not easy conversations. People found it hard to understand why anyone would ask such basic questions, and even harder to see how I could have such a terribly poor understanding of their answers, often repeating the same question twice or thrice even after they had provided a crystal clear answer. Because the answers, indeed the entire conversations, were often shockingly surprising and revealing, at least to me.

There was another reason why these conversations were hard and frustrating for both sides: I did not understand people well. For my benefit, they did speak English. But Ghanaian English is quite an idiosyncratic language (Simo Bobda, 2000). And quite apart from spoken language, Ghanaian body language also has its own conventions. I had to get used to subtle nods or tilts of the head, the meaning of longer or shorter silences, the ways people say no (or yes) when they do not want to say it outright, the ways people signal that they are uncomfortable talking to you or want to end the conversation, and so much more. And then of course there are the social conventions. For instance about giving back: when you fly in from a country with much larger material wealth, and ask for somebody's time and energy in a strange and seemingly useless interview, are you expected to provide any material gift in return? And how do you do this without being rude or making people feel like beggars?

In all of these matters, I was a novice, and this made my research quite difficult. For instance, these misunderstandings made interviewees irritated, tired and suspicious. At one point, people started physically fighting provoked by our presence, and I and my research quickly had to retreat to safer quarters. At other moments, my research assistant was asked "why she had brought a political spy" into the neighbourhood. She was subsequently threatened, and cautioned not to walk outside alone after nightfall. Despite the fact that we had introduced ourselves and gotten research permission from the Assemblyman and the chief's elders, such issues could not be wholly prevented.

In the foreword I have dutifully thanked my interlocutors for their great patience, and my research assistants for their invaluable help and translation in linguistic, cultural, social and many more dimensions. But here I want to note that these issues are not just good stories afterward, or reasons to hand out thanks. They are real methodological

concerns as well. For instance, the language barrier means that many researchers do interviews only with the help of a translator, or end up interviewing only those who are accustomed to western (linguistic) habits. This is completely understandable: it took me several months of intense fieldwork before I was able to ask questions and interpret answers in a way that actually made the conversation flow, and many people do not have that time. But it is a real methodological problem as well, as it often limits the perspective of researchers to the more formal and westernised aspects of a society. Hence, I included this brief discussion of these issues in this methodological section.

In short, many of these door-to-door interviews were among the hardest I have done during my entire fieldwork, and I had to push myself hard every day just to go out there again and do more of them. But in terms of research, it was more than worth it. These interviews gave me a foundational understanding of the neighbourhood's internal social dynamics, and provided a host of leads for productive further research.

### **Semi-structured interviews with a variety of actors**

From this initial block of door-to-door interviews, I branched out in different directions, following different lines of inquiry. Throughout the project, the main source of information consisted of interviews, generally semi-structured. I conducted these with traditional leaders, neighbourhood leaders and activists ('opinion leaders'), civil servants at the local and central levels, political big men and ordinary residents, each of which I discuss below in more detail. Apart from conducting interviews, I used ethnographic methods, including key informants, participant observation, field notes and extensive informal conversations. I used various types of documents, from local meeting notes and letters to formal reports of utility companies. And finally, I did not stay solely in Sebrepor; I kept comparing the neighbourhood to others, using both systematic and less systematic techniques.

I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with Sebrepor's chief and all elders on his Divisional Council. These interviews were mostly about how these leaders saw their position, what tasks, roles and activities they took up on a regular basis, and how they saw the social fabric of Sebrepor. To augment this to a *relational ethnography*, I also interviewed his (superior) paramount chief, several chiefs in the neighbouring areas, officials at the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs including the Chief Director, dr. Afful. Branching out in another direction from the chief of Sebrepor, I also interviewed his land registrar. Finally, I spent a week of interviews, data gathering and observations at the Lands Commission (cadastral registry), the government institution which provides chiefs with their formal ties to the land. Here, I

worked to find out how the web of traditional leaders is embedded in the formal state and how their 'stewardship of the land' is interpreted in practice and translated to by the front line bureaucrats dealing with land ownership issues.

To further probe the social fabric of Sebrepor, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews (several times) with Sebrepor's Assemblyman and both of his predecessors, as well as Assemblymen in surrounding and other neighbourhoods. The questions were comparable to those asked of the chief and the people around him, although tailored to the specific positions of the person I was interviewing and using any additional information found through other interviews and observations, in order to stimulate deeper discussion. I also interviewed all other Sebrepor residents who were referred to as 'opinion leaders' by the residents. This included prominent businesspeople, school directors, political activists and church leaders, as well as leaders affiliated with the Sebrepor Water Committee.

Working my way outward from the neighbourhood, I visited the Kpone-Katamanso District Assembly (currently a Municipal Assembly) to conduct interviews with the Presiding Member of the Assembly, the Chief Planning Officer, the Head of Planning, the Head of Social Services and several more junior civil servants. A major purpose of these visits to the Assembly was to obtain documentation on the work of the Assembly and on the activities and organisation of resident groups. Other interviews were with civil servants in ministries and other municipalities who had spent a year at the IHS in Rotterdam. These officials generally found it easier than most to be frank with me, and to explain the 'less official' version of how things worked in their institute. I also interviewed officials in the Ghana Water Company, Electricity Company of Ghana, and Department of Urban Roads, at various levels throughout these organisations. In all of these civil servant interviews, the goal was the same: to find out how their organisation worked in practical terms, and how it related to neighbourhood organisers and activists.

I also conducted interviews with the District Chief Executive, former PM, and repeated interviews with the Member of Parliament for my research area. These interviews were generally conducted on Sunday afternoon in their respective gardens, a setting which allowed for undisturbed discussions, thanks to the generosity and the good network of my local research connections. These interviews were informative largely with regard to the ways these men (they were all men) portrayed themselves. The interviews with the MP, for instance, taught me that his emphasis was on freely giving out his phone numbers, being reachable. Indeed, he had three cell phones, all of which rang at least ten times during the interview. His assistants answered them, sometimes briefly

handing the phone to him. Such insights help to understand the ways people relate, and to see what is important in those contacts.

In each of these networks, organisations and fields, my main technique for selecting interviewees was theoretical sampling, as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In this technique, “[t]he process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45). That is, the sampling is an “ongoing process rather than a distinct and single stage” (Bryman, 2008, p. 415). This is a non-probability sampling approach, meant to progressively develop theory rather than to generalise a population.

Some technical details. As table 3.2 shows, I conducted some 153 formal interviews over these years, roughly two thirds of which were in Sebrepur, all of which I transcribed, and 55 of which I coded using Nvivo. About a quarter of these interviews were repeat interviews with previously interviewed respondents. The number of interviews per category was not fixed beforehand, but determined in a continuous process of data evaluation. Generally, respondents allowed me to record the interviews; in a few cases, I had to rely on note-taking. Where possible, I have included direct quotes in the thesis in order to preserve local voices and details which may be of interest to other researchers. Interviews generally lasted 1-2 hours. All of these interviews were semi-structured, with a prepared questionnaire of 10-15 questions which I adapted for every respondent and often wrote from scratch as the situation demanded. Examples of these questionnaires are available in Appendix 4.

| Category   | Amount     |
|--|------------|
| Politicians, including Assembly members              | 17         |
| Traditional authorities: chiefs and paramount chiefs | 11         |
| Preachers and other religious leaders                | 14         |
| Neighborhood elders (Sebrepur)                       | 25         |
| Sebrepur residents who were otherwise relevant       | 12         |
| Neighborhood elders (non-Sebrepur)                   | 20         |
| Central government functionaries                     | 15         |
| Local government functionaries                       | 10         |
| NGO workers  | 12         |
| Academics  | 10         |
| Technical experts                                    | 7          |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>153</b> |

*Table 3.2: an overview of the different categories of interviewees.*

## **Ethnography**

To gain an understanding of the networks and organisations in Sebrepor, I also used ethnographic methods (Agar, 1996). I follow Bryman (2008) in conflating these with participant observation methods. In practical terms, the research setting was open, and my role always overt (Bell, 1969). In Gold's (1957) scheme of participant observation, my work in Sebrepor, Old Fadama and Okatabanman would be placed in the bracket 'observer-as-participant'. That is, I was present mainly as an interviewer and an observer, but also joined meals, attended birthdays, church services and other celebrations with my local interlocutors, got intoxicated with them on occasion and was invited to partake in and bear witness to some locally significant rituals such as libation and faith healing actions. During most of the time, I stayed in a nearby residence but not inside the neighbourhood, traveling back and forth during the day; during one month of the fieldwork, I lived in Sebrepor with the neighbour of Mr. Aryeetey (see below).

In Sebrepor, I had two key informants: Emmanuel Aryeetey and Levina Dubin, with whom I developed an apprenticeship relation (Downey, Dalidowicz, & Mason, 2015). Mr. Aryeetey had been one of the first people to move into the area, and had lived there for several decades. As a former executive member of the local NDC leadership, he provided an entry point to political party networks, which enabled me to attend several closed-door political meetings and gain an inside understanding of the logic of political parties. As a former secretary of the chief's Divisional Council, he provided access to Sebrepor's chief, his paramount (superior) chief in Kpone, and to several other chiefs and related figures around the area. Finally, as a former executive in the Residents Association, he was able to put me in touch with many current and former resident activists in the area. Exploring his personal network and history also helped me to understand the degree to which leadership roles of various institutions are frequently combined in single 'big men' in urban Ghana.

My second key informant, Mrs. Dubin, has lived nearly all of her life in Sebrepor. She is the daughter of one of the most prominent NPP political actors in and around Sebrepor, Charles Dubin. Thus, I was a frequent guest in the Dubin family home during each of my fieldwork bouts. This facilitated my access to an experienced politician, Charles Dubin. Spending time with Mrs. Dubin also allowed me to learn more about the political process from someone who had been a frequent observer of political gatherings without having a clear personal stake in them. Having Mrs. Dubin as a key informant also allowed me to get closer access to gendered perspectives on neighbourhood relations, to learn about the kinds of gossip that did the rounds in

the area and to simply see the area from the perspective of someone who grew up there and spent time as a child in the area's developing stages. Mrs. Dubin frequently also acted as my research assistant, translating interviews and helping me to navigate social settings, especially in the early stages of the research. On rare occasions she also individually conducted interviews and made covert observations, in situations where I could not have gained access.

To gather the data for chapter 6, I participated in Sunday services and other activities in some ten different churches. Here, my role was that of a researcher-participant (Gans, 1968). That is, I entered these services as a participant, joined the prayer and other parts of the service, signed up as a church member and generally participated as an ordinary congregant to the best of my understanding.<sup>9</sup> But I was not a total participant: having a smart phone allowed me to take brief notes during the service and to take pictures and even record brief videos.<sup>10</sup> I finally chose two of these churches as my case studies, which I visited more frequently.

In these two churches, the Christ the King Presbyterian Church and the Freedom Chapel, I participated in a number of church services and conducted semi-structured interviews with believers, ushers and assistant pastors, as well as the head pastors. Again inspired by authors who might be seen as operating on the border between anthropology and sociology, I try to follow Benson and Jackson's (Benson & Jackson, 2013) recommendation to incorporate performativity into this analysis, looking at how people come together, through what rituals and regularities they constitute their community and give it a practical form of cohesion (chapters 4 and 6). After all, community is a 'public *doing*' (Jenkins, 2014, pp. 138, ).

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9 That is not to say that I did not stand out in these church services. Although I tried my best to blend in, I sometimes misunderstood rituals, and on one occasion found myself dancing around the open space in front of the pew, as did many other church-goers, only to look around and realize that the other dancers were all ladies - from the church's official dancing team. Fortunately, the Ghanaians I met nearly universally valued active and indeed fervent participation in the service over accurate rule-following, and were rather forgiving of such beginners' mistakes.

A more important reason why I stand out is the fact that I am white-skinned. I came to realize just how visible and indeed observed that makes a researcher after participating in the Sunday service of a 2000-person church. I had joined the service in a seat towards the back of the church and kept a modest profile during the more effervescent parts of the service, trying to be as unobtrusive as possible. However, over the subsequent weeks I found myself having several conversations where people (whom I had never met before) mentioned having seen me in that church and (approvingly) mentioned details of the way I had participated there, indicating that a large amount of congregants had paid close attention to my behavior during the service.

10 Unfortunately, I had to use the latter technique sparsely: church services seem to be among the very few occasions where Ghanaians do not enjoy snapping pictures to share on social media.



In exploring Sebrepor, I used field notes as much as possible. Generally, these were jotted notes first, worked out as full field notes later that evening when I returned to the privacy of my home (Lofland & Lofland, 1984; Sanjek, 1990). In addition to these formal field notes, I also kept a blog during each episode of my fieldwork, on which I recorded the most striking impressions in my research area and in Accra in general. Working out field notes in this way also enabled me to think them through as if in conversation, which led me to explore situations and impressions in more depth.

In addition to these formal interviews, ethnographic immersion techniques and key informant connections, I also gained many insights from other, less formalised informants. Sometimes these were experts of various kinds, such as political operators, academics or resident organisers. Others were simply observant citizens. Most Ghanaians I have met are very friendly and open people, willing to discuss almost any aspect of the world they live in, which they often viewed in a radically different way than I did. In addition, Accra is an exceptionally safe city (except for its traffic) and access to every kind of area was therefore uninhibited by considerations of safety. This allowed me to gather a wealth of additional information, research leads and insights from discussions with friends, neighbours, taxi drivers, academics, research assistants, expatriates, fellow fieldworkers and other people I met throughout the city.

To better understand the position of the chief in the contemporary Ghanaian urban fabric, one organisation I studied in-depth was the Divisional Council. This is a council of some 5-7 elders from various ethnicities in Sebrepor, brought together by the chief to consolidate his position in the neighbourhood and facilitate the resolution of local conflicts among residents. Since it was not possible for me to attend their meetings, which had become infrequent by the time my fieldwork started, I complemented my interviews of the council's members with an analysis of the council's archive, which consists of meeting notes, letters sent and received and several other types of documents related to the council's work. I used these documents to gain a historical understanding of the council's activities, to understand their perspective on developments in the neighbourhood, to theorise the position of the chief in contemporary urban Ghana, and to draw leads from which I used as probes in subsequent interviews.

### **Document analysis**

More broadly in the research process, I used documents to understand organisational logics and to gather quantitative information where possible. For chapter 7 I spent the better part of some weeks in the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), where I systematically combed through all folders from the

colonial and post-colonial era that seemed to have anything to do with the (piped) water supply system, the electricity network or the roads network. I also acquired a number of internal historical reports of the GWC and the Department of Urban Roads from my interlocutors there, which helped to understand their internal logic and which also provided a broader spectrum of information on their respective physical networks throughout the city. Finally, I received a number of documents from the Kpone-Katamanso District Assembly, which helped to get an overview of what a municipality does and what sort of practical problems it runs into. Besides this, I sometimes used newspaper report to triangulate insight about these organisations and to help gauge public sentiments about issues.

### **Comparative dimension: other neighbourhoods**

However informative the lens of a relational neighbourhood ethnography is, it also has its limitations. One limitation is that a single case of a small-scale area study carries the risk of drawing unwarranted generalised conclusions (Sarsby, 1984). So even after selecting Sebrepor as my primary case study, I kept spending time and conducting interviews in other neighbourhoods. This served partly to include more extreme cases, such as the resident organisation CD-Rec in Okatabanman, an extremely energetic and effective resident organisation platform that goes far beyond what most Residents Associations tend to accomplish. Following this organisation's work through interviews, participant observations in their meetings and three years of presence in their neighbourhood organising WhatsApp group greatly helped to augment my understanding of how neighbourhood organising works in contemporary Accra.

Apart from gaining what I could from my network of personal connections, I also built in a more systematic comparative dimension, selecting other neighbourhoods of various types and locations to augment the case study of Sebrepor. With the invaluable assistance of the tireless fieldworker Levina Dubin, who has accompanied this project almost from the very beginning, I put together profiles of eight other newly growing neighbourhoods (see Appendix 2 for an overview). To improve inter-observer consistency, we mapped four of these eight neighbourhoods together, each taking our own observations and subsequently comparing notes and discussing differences in interpretation.

These neighbourhood profiles included systematic observations on collective amenities in two different blocks of each neighbourhood, as well as interviews with at least one, but generally two or three long-time residents, selected for their knowledge of the area. The below table provides an overview of these comparative cases. Throughout the

thesis, these neighbourhoods sometimes figure as minor comparative case studies. But more often they served chiefly to inform and sharpen the descriptions of the processes as found in Sebrepur, and to help flag developments or conditions that were specific to Sebrepur and not broadly generalisable.

| Neighborhood             | Description   | Socio-economic profile | Resident Association active | Est. |
|--------------------------|---|------------------------|-----------------------------|------|
| <b>Afienva</b>           | Village core on the northern edge of the urban fringe area.                 | Lower middle class     | Yes                         | 1998 |
| <b>Bulasu</b>            | Relatively new neighborhood, clearly delineated plots.                      | Upper middle class     | Yes                         | 2013 |
| <b>Christian Village</b> | Part of the older Ashiaan agglomeration, no pre-existing village.           | Middle class           | Yes                         | 1995 |
| <b>Community 25</b>      | Relatively new neighborhood, clearly delineated plots.                      | Middle class           | Yes                         | 2010 |
| <b>Dawhenya</b>          | Older village on the urban fringe, established in 1970s for farming.        | Lower middle class     | No                          | 1960 |
| <b>Gbetsile</b>          | Dense neighborhood within the urban fabric.                                 | Poor                   | No                          | 1985 |
| <b>Golf City</b>         | Older, but organized, quite centrally positioned neighborhood.              | Middle class           | No                          | 2000 |
| <b>Kpone</b>             | Old village core, dense, messy, a lot of communal housing.                  | Lower middle class     | Yes                         | 1950 |
| <b>Sbrepur</b>           | Mixed buildings, somewhat older than surrounding neighborhoods, no village. | Middle class           | Yes                         | 1975 |

*Table 3.3: an overview of the neighbourhoods in which I did comparative research*

### Exploration as a fieldwork method

Finally, in order to further broaden my understanding of the urban fabric, I also undertook frequent trips throughout other parts of Accra's built-up area, in taxis or on the back of a friend's motorbike, taking pictures and making notes throughout the day and chatting to as many people as possible. If I may end this methodological chapter with a recommendation to future researchers (and my future self), I would echo the advice given by Doug Saunders, author of *Arrival City* (2011). That is (paraphrased from p. 2 of that work):

*Ride the train, bus or whatever you can find, from the city center to the furthest station. Get out there, walk around, talk to random people. Then slowly make your way back to the center over the course of a day. That is the best way to really get to know a city, and to find out things that you would have never looked for.*



LOCKER CENTER AND MAPPER  
DT  
DAILY TRAVEL

HANGEN

HEAVEN

Carnitas



Choose Quality

Choose Nestle

NESCAFÉ

MILO

IDEAL

NIDO

CERELAC

CERELAC























4

# Neighbours: the rise and fall of residents organisations

This chapter analyses the most local level of organising for amenities: between neighbors. In section 4.1, I provide a brief chapter introduction and position this material within the thesis as a whole. The next section of the chapter, 4.2, sketches a portrait of Sebrepur today and provides an impression of its social fabric. Section 4.3 describes the founding years and the kinds of claims and relationships to the land that existed before peri-urban settlers started moving here. Section 4.4 describes the rise of Sebrepur's Residents Associations, a cluster of effective grassroots organisers for collective amenities. Section 4.5 describes their demise, as the neighbourhood became more densely inhabited, its population more heterogeneous and as competing organisations entered the fray. Section 4.6 describes the proper arrival of formal government on the scene, the process that led to the establishment of a local municipality and the effect it had on the grassroots organisations. Section 4.7 discusses commercial and grassroots organisations that do not work to provide collective amenities, in order to provide a more complete picture of the organisational fabric of the area. Finally, section 4.8 concludes with an analysis of the evolving interrelation between the neighbourhood's grassroots organisation and the formal institutions that extend into the growing neighbourhood from the existing city and state.





## 4.1 Introduction

Within the thesis, this chapter discusses the most local relations, those between neighbours. It analyses how purely local grassroots organising leads to concrete collective amenities such as roads, water pipe networks and public security. It centers on Residents Associations: secular, goal-specific organisations at the neighbourhood level, working to organise local infrastructure development. These bodies form the platform through which a surprising amount of neighbourhood-level amenities are developed. More generally, the chapter investigates how residents organise themselves in the early stages of neighbourhood development and how this changes as thicker and more diverse strands of organisational connection develop between the neighbourhood and the wider urban fabric.

The chapter's contribution to the larger project is threefold. First, it introduces the central case study neighbourhood Sebrepur (see Figure 4.1, below). Second, it provides a rare empirical case study of evolving resident organisation in a newly growing neighbourhood from the start, helping us to understand under what conditions grassroots organisations like Residents Associations flourish and break down. Third, it provides a first vista on the development process of newly growing urban fabric, seen from the ground. Chapter 5-7 do that too, but this chapter is less specialised in a single institution or amenity, thus providing a broader perspective on the process as a whole.

*Figure 4.1: Sebrepur, 2018*



It is based on the historical relational ethnography as a methodological approach, while following a chronological story line over the past 50 years of Sebrepor's development. It describes the evolution of social organisation in Sebrepor, as it grew from an unnamed patch of bush, a few hours walking distance from the Atlantic coast, to a fully developed neighbourhood, part of the growing tapestry of urban fabric known as Greater Accra, the capital city of Ghana. It shows through what processes was Sebrepor tied into the urban fabric more closely, and how this process of integration into the city changed the neighbourhood's internal social fabric. By studying the area through a historical, relational and geographic lens, it simultaneously uses Sebrepor as a lens on the broader development processes of Greater Accra.

## 4.2 An impression of Sebrepor

Sebrepor is not a clearly demarcated neighbourhood with a strong identity. Nobody will call themselves a 'Sebreporian'. Some people call the place Kakatomanso 2, some say Old Sebrepor, others do not give this area any particular name. The locals will roughly know the boundaries of area they are referring to. But there is no spatial unity in any form; the neighbourhood could be best viewed as an archipelago of many little islands. Nor is Sebrepor a uniform area. Its population is a mix, in terms of wealth, religion, ethnicity, education, and this diversity shows. Some areas consist mainly of walled mansions, nested in a raster of dirt roads, empty and faced with walls on all sides. In other parts there are no walls at all. One can walk freely between the houses, and this is not seen as trespassing. But come too close to the front door or porch, and there is a zone which is private. We say "co-co-co" before entering that zone, indicating that we are knocking on the door. This does not necessarily require an answer before advancing further.

### **Limited street life**

The streets and public spaces are rather abandoned, considering the amount of people that live in the area. Some, almost all women, are sitting around the houses, although not very many during the daytime. Clearly, this is a bit of a sleeping neighbourhood; most of the residents spend their day elsewhere, the men as well as the women. But some are at home during the daytime. They do washing outside, or sometimes just sit on their porch or in front of their house. Little kiosks dot the landscape, selling phone credit, little sachets of washing powder, water or milk, candy and lottery tickets. These are basically standing plywood boxes with a woman, nearly always a woman, inside them. It's the women who do the petty trading in Ghana, for as long as anyone can



*Figure 4.2: a shop is being moved, to make way for an expansion of the road. Most of the shops in Greater Accra are mobile, either wooden kiosks or halved shipping containers, and are frequently moved around as the neighbourhoods develop.*

Along the wider unpaved streets, where cars can drive, there are little shops, mostly built into the frontage of homes, or in halved shipping containers, retrofitted for this purpose and rented out throughout Accra (see Figure 4.2, above). Most of these shops have roughly the same assortment as the kiosks, expanded with different kinds of drinks and packaged foodstuffs, others specialise in frozen meat, fashion, there are also restaurants and barber shops. Some sell only packaged drinking water.

Taking a closer look, one notices how many of these shops have iron grills welded in front of their door. Some of them do the business through these iron bars, passing the goods through them and taking the money in that way too. Most do open their door completely, and only close those iron grills at night. People explain that they are there because of armed robbers. Armed robbers and other types of bandits play a large role in people's imagination of the neighbourhood. It is difficult to ascertain how many are really there, but every area I have been had recent stories of thieves or armed robbers coming around and stealing from people. Many of these stories included a vigilante group catching the robbers and beating them to death.

Little bars are sprinkled around the neighbourhood. Old billboard tarpaulins, cut into long narrow strips, serve as something in between a wall and a curtain to the outside

world, for the privacy of the drinkers. They don't work very well; it is generally very possible to look inside and see who are there: almost exclusively men, between 20 and 70 years old. Usually just a few, or even one, drinking alone. They don't limit their drinking to specific times of the day, but are not in it to get screaming drunk either. They are just spending time there.

People gather in other places too. From colourfully painted buildings, several stories high (a rarity in this neighbourhood), the chatter of schoolchildren is heard. In other streets, crackling loudspeakers carry the urgent voice of a preacher and the answers of his congregation out into the street from large, barn-like church structures with names like Doctor Jesus Prayer Ministry, Christ the King Presbyterian, International Central Gospel Church and Beautiful Gate. At night, light spills out through the ventilation openings in the walls, as their choir, their youth wing or their Women's League gather inside for their weekly meeting.

But most people are not outside. Surprisingly many people spend their days sitting inside their homes, even throughout the midday heat. Although there are trees outside to sit under, with a bit of wind to cool down and a view on the streets to pass the time, many people choose instead to isolate themselves inside their home, mostly watching television. These homes are sparsely decorated, both on the outside and on the inside. The only thing covering most walls are some family pictures, some images of Jesus. Oh, and calendars, calendars everywhere, from last year or from ten years ago. These are handed out by companies or churches as advertising tools, and people put them up on the wall for a bit of colour.

Spending some more time in the neighbourhood, chatting with people here and there, an odd sensation arises: most people don't seem to feel at ease in this new urban world they live in. They don't like to associate beyond the boundaries of their home, and seem to feel quite alone in the area. People often move along the street alone, and somewhat hurried, like moving around the neighbourhood is a liability. This sensation is also expressed in the sermons of those very jubilant churches, sermons which are alive with stories of (mis)fortune, curses and spells. The armed robbers figuring so prominently in the accounts of residents and shop-owners, too, seem to stand for something else than just robbers. In these stories, they take on a grander and more sinister character, of nightly danger, of the darkness itself.

And there is no safety in personal contacts, either. "People are always talking," one of the oldest residents cautioned. "I go around, sure, to do my shopping and everything.

I go to church. But I don't stop to talk to people. No, no, no, no, no. That will only get you into trouble." In fact, most people don't seem to fraternise with their neighbours much either. When asked where they would borrow something in need, most people reply that they would never borrow anything. Not even a pan, or a couple of chairs in the case of visitors. Sure, the neighbours would lend it to them, but they would "always harass me afterward, looking down on me". Many also explain that they "don't do friends", since friends, too, will only get you in trouble. In fact, that is what many of these churches promise deliverance from: evil spells cast by one's jealous friends and family members, chains which bind one to the ground, the 'pull-him-down syndrome', demons, witchcraft.

### **Collective action**

In this kind of environment, it is not easy to get people together for a shared enterprise, even in daylight. The fact that neighbours have so many shared problems, if only of physical infrastructure, does not automatically lead to shared action or neighbourly organisation. One resident complained:

*"I've tried to get my neighbours together to fill up the big hole in our dead-end alley here. We all have cars and they all have to go through that giant pit, which is damaging them. We are five, so it should not be too difficult. But I could not even get them interested." (Interview Robbins, 2015)*

When something does get off the ground, people often find it hard to keep track of the process.

*"A man came by the door. He said he was our neighbour and he was gathering money to build a gutter along this street. We didn't believe him at first, but then he convinced us and we gave him some money. The gutter never came. After a year, we started wondering about this. My father eventually went to the Assemblyman, who told our neighbour to give the money back. He did." (Interview Owusu, 2015)*

It seems that in such situations at some point inevitably some money disappears or seems to disappear, and the brief spurt of neighbourly activism is ended. Doors close, and people don't talk to their neighbour again.



But such mishaps do not stop people from trying to come together. After all, everyone needs some kind of community. What is more, these specific people, living in newly settled areas, have a great shared need of infrastructure. And attempts are made. In fact, Greater Accra is absolutely buzzing with grassroots initiatives to improve collective amenities. When I went house to house in Sebrepor for interviews, it turned out that at least every second homeowner had in the past years gathered their neighbours to tackle one or more projects. They often included a local church or business, and worked to build a stretch of drainage, fix holes in the road, create speed bumps and so on.

People really do try. In a sea of perceived dangers, mistrust and anonymity, people work hard to build islands of trust and cooperation. This chapter is about those islands.<sup>11</sup>

### 4.3 Early days

The neighbourhood lies on the outskirts of Tema along the northward Tema-Akosombo road, just opposite the army base Michel Camp. The first settlers in the area were poultry farmers, a few scattered farms in the bush. Their main connection to the outside world was an overgrown footpath to the Tema-Ada road, which today forms part of the Trans-West African Coastal Highway, linking together the entire West African coastline. Each week, the farmers would pool together to send one person to the market in Tema to buy chicken feed. Sometimes, traders passed by the farms to buy their poultry, transporting it on a flatbed pickup truck to the Tema or Accra markets.

Under Acheampong's Operation Feed Yourself (1972-1978), some more pioneers moved into the area (Interview Vinoko, 2018). For a bottle of schnapps and a symbolic payment, they acquired permission to farm there from Nii Dortey I, a noble from the local Ga tribe. The tribal elders of Kpone, a village ten kilometres south of Sebrepor on the Atlantic shore, had sent Nii there to act as headman of the nascent hamlet. However, he warned the arriving farmers: they were not allowed to build anything permanent on the land (Interview Vinoko, 2018). The area had been acquisitioned under Nkrumah's presidency from the traditional owners by the government-owned Tema Development Corporation (TDC). The TDC had subsequently leased the land to the army, who had built the Michel Camp barracks on it, but left most of the land empty. Seeing the land remain fallow, the chiefs had recently decided to reoccupy the land. Not with any grand moves, but simply by sending a few of their family members to farm there,

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11 The chapter focuses on Accra's Residents Associations, a topic on which I only know of one other piece of substantial research, by Katherine Gough (1999).

living in temporary structures of mud and plywood. During Acheampong's reign in the 1970s, farming was encouraged as part of Operation Feed Yourself, so the Michel Camp army command turned a blind eye as farmers built their provisional mud and wood structures in the bush outside their gates (Interview Abotey, 2015).

As the 1970s went on, however, the settlement slowly acquired the first signs of permanence. One of the pioneers, Jacob Milehu, was a retired army plumber. He convinced the state water company to draw up a standpipe at the edge of newly growing Sebrepur. From there, he gathered contributions from the other farmers to finance connections from the standpipe to the homesteads in the immediate surroundings. Another settler, Vinoko, had a father in law who was a high-ranking military officer. Through this connection, he got some army engineers to draw an electricity wire from the base to Vinoko's homestead, just across the road (Interview Vinoko, 2018). From there, several wires stretched out to his neighbours' houses.

However, a few years later the base commander was replaced. Fearing that the land would slip out of his grip, the new commander decided to act. Soldiers were sent out to rip down the electricity wires, and the farmers were told they would have to vacate the land (Interview Kueli, 2015). Curiously, this crisis provided an impetus that would carry the settlement forward over the subsequent decades. In response to this existential threat, the settlers set aside their differences, quickly organised themselves in the Sebrepur Settler Society and formed a negotiation team which would hold monthly discussions with the base command and the Tema Development Corporation until the threat abated. As many of the settlers were retired soldiers from that very base, the army did not evict them in the end, on the condition that they would continue to not build any permanent structures in the area.

In the 1980s, the small cluster of farms began to attract more and more ex-servicemen from the nearby base, as well as retired civil servants, slowly expanding into a village (Interview Aryeetey, 2015). Homesteads sprang up everywhere in the bush. Electricity was still not present, but Mr. Jacob's Water Committee had made some headway in spreading the piped water network, doubling the amount of connections in the area. By the end of the 1980s, the first churches were also constructed in the area. Before then, people had grouped according to their denomination (when the concentration of worshippers was sufficiently large) gathering in unfinished houses, on porches and under trees. But now, as the danger of eviction seemed to have subsided, they pooled their money and built the first churches: a Pentecostal and a Methodist church (Interview Aryeetey, 2018). A few years after, the Presbyterians also got their own

church established (Interview Abotey, 2015). This made it somewhat easier to organise locally, as residents could now be reached through the churches, rather than through labor-intensive house to house visits. Roads, however, were still lacking, and the water had not reached most of the new settlers (Interview Achina, 2018).

The 1990s saw the influx grow further. As Tema and nearby Ashiaman grew denser and spawned their own suburbs around them, more and more people started coming in. Increasingly, the newcomers were not there to farm, but simply to live. Still, a large percentage of the incoming population were retired civil servants and soldiers (Interview Aryeetey, 2015). Others were low-income workers from the Tema harbor, who found a home in the rental housing that some of the older farmers had started to build on their land. In the early 1990s, the area got its first shop: a wooden kiosk, just big enough to stand in, which sold tinned fish, sugar, matches and cheap pomade (Interview Kueli, 2018).

In sum, during the initial neighbourhood development phase of collective action, residents produced a number of basic amenities almost entirely through self-help. They built up small, localised networks for the distribution of electricity and water, which they acquired through a legally gray-zone process from the nearby army barracks. They constructed churches, which formed an important organising platform for these self-help efforts and facilitated coordination, trust and communication. Accessibility of the area, however, remained poor throughout this phase, partially on purpose. Contact with the state was minimal: some expulsion threats and an on-and-off permission to tap the local utility networks, dependent on the personal connections of specific settlers with army and other state personnel.

#### 4.4 The rise of the Residents Associations

With Sebrepur expanding, it became harder for the leadership of the Settlers Association to gather the entire community for collective action. So in 1992, the Settlers Society subdivided itself into three Residents Associations (Interview Aryeetey, 2018). They now restarted their efforts for electricity in earnest. Vinoko, who lived in the oldest part of Sebrepur right next to the military base, had a cousin who was Regional Director of the ECG, who got that part of Sebrepur short-tracked for the state-funded Rural Electrification Project (Interview Vinoko, 2018). The other two Residents Associations banded together and collected money from the landowners in their respective areas, to fund the start of their own electricity networks with some help from the new chief (Interview Aryeetey, 2016).

By the second half of the 1990s, with the three Residents Associations firmly established, the opinion leaders<sup>12</sup> of the area were emboldened enough to “open the place up”. Until then, the growth of the settlement had been covered up by the abundantly growing trees and bushes in the area. As Mike G, one of the oldest residents, explained:

*“We first people, we don’t want to be at the roadside. Because if development comes, or if soldiers come, these people will be seeing you, they will come and demolish, because you have to be hiding yourself. They can see you, they can gossip about you, so we like to be hidden.”*  
(Interview G., 2018)

Though the soldiers could see that there were people living in the area, residents did not want to make it obvious how many people were really there, as this might provoke the army into action. But this also meant that the area still had no roads fit for cars and no structured drainage, which made life harder in many ways. Now, the Associations decided to open up.

The construction of open roads was done in cooperation with the Tema municipality, which Sebrepur fell under at the time. In appreciation of the residents’ efforts, the municipality provided a bulldozer on loan and a professional street planner, but it was up to the residents to do the rest. The committee collected contributions from the residents to pay for the bulldozer’s fuel, decided where the roads should be constructed, cleared vegetation that was in the way, and guided the operator of the bulldozer (Interview Aryeetey, 2018). Until then, tractor tracks and footpaths had been the only transportation network of the area. Now, they had dirt roads cleared of debris, tree stumps and larger rocks (Interview Aryeetey, 2018), so that normal passenger cars could enter the place.

This also meant that wooden structures would no longer suffice. As the area was now opened up to outside prying eyes, any outside observer might note that here was a potential residential area, being actively settled. Aryeetey:

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12 *Opinion leaders* is a local term which was hard to grasp at first, but is in fact surprisingly effective. It refers to anyone who has the power or the status to sway local opinion. Thus, it is a more effective term than ‘notables’ or ‘leaders’, grouping together wealthy businessmen, respected for their money, those with exceptionally high education, respected elders, pastors and so on. Generally the first people to have moved to an area are also among the opinion leaders, because they know the history of the area well. This section will make clear in more detail how important that is in an area where much is kept under the surface, and essential questions like land ownership are rarely definitively determined, depending instead on a combination of political power, legal documentation and importantly: historical claims.

*“The opening up of the area caused people to feel exposed, to feel that, oh, now we can be accessed, we are vulnerable. So we cannot continue sleeping in wooden structures. Especially along a highway like the one from Tema to Akosombo. If we don’t do this, some authorities, or developers, may come and overtake us with their own chief and some legal paperwork, and they will ask us to vacate the area. Because their wooden houses can easily be demolished. But when you put up something concrete, the one who will be asking you to move first will think, the cost involved in asking you to go leaving that block structure there. They’ll have to pay!” (Interview Aryeetey, 2018)*

The ballooning population of the area raised another concern: security. As the area became more anonymous, theft increased and it became harder to spot intruders. Through an initiative of the Residents Association, some of the unemployed young men in the area were drafted into the newly formed Community Watchdog Group (Interview Samuels, 2015). This project, however, was beset with troubles from the beginning. The group was poorly funded, and the security they provided appears to have been accordingly poor. What’s more, many of the residents felt that the unemployed young men that formed the organisation were precisely the type of people they should be worried about (Interview Aryeetey, 2016). As the chairman of one of the Residents Associations put it:

*“As for security, well, it’s a problem. And we’ve come to discuss vigilante groups and those things. But that too will not work. Because the people signing up for those vigilante groups, most of the time, they themselves are the thieves. (...) They are dropouts, they can’t get any apprenticeship, that’s because they are trouble. Before you realise, there’s a break-in here, and they are patrolling half a mile away.” (Interview Agbey, 2018)*

And since constant pay for a reliable security force could not be realised, the Watchdog groups were indeed disbanded in one of Sebrepor’s Residents Associations. In the other zones, they lasted longer, as the ex-military officers living there had more confidence in their abilities to control the Watchdogs. The feeling of insecurity, however, has remained until today. During our fieldwork in 2015-2018, our interlocutors were highly worried about safety, both ours and theirs. Some insisted that we do not go out unaccompanied. When we conducted interviews throughout the area, several people would only speak to us from behind the iron grills on their shop frontages.

Despite such setbacks, the decade around the year 2000 was the high water mark for local organisation in Sebrepor. The carving out of roads through the settlement also set the general spatial plan for the area. This allowed easier expansion of the water and electricity networks, funded through fixed monthly contributions to the Residents Associations. Members with greater wealth, evident because they owned a car, tractor or a bigger farm, were pressured socially to contribute more (Interview Achina, 2018). These Associations used both carrots and sticks to gather their contributions: backed with the legal power to force contributions and obligatory membership for all landowners, they also ran basic social security ('welfare') schemes and promised members potential regularisation of their land (Interview Johnson, 2016). But being rather far removed from an effective judicial system, the mere threat of legal troubles was not always enough to prevent free riding. Different Residents Associations handled this in different styles. As Aryeetey, the former secretary of Zone 3, explained:

*"Let me compare the administration of Zone 1 with that of Zone 3. Here, the leadership appears to have been a bit gentle. They tried to convince the landlords [homeowners]. But our end, where the landlords were livestock farmers, we came down on you heavily. If your money will not do the job, you must contribute your labor. If you are [too] old [to work], then your children. They must bring pickaxes, shovels, and what have you. Then no matter if it is drainage, or electricity pole, or laying of water pipes; you come, you do the job. So either your money or your labor. And we keep a register. If we have noticed that you are not prepared to contribute in any way, we also find a way to punish you. You'll not enjoy the usage of any utility. If you try to drive your car on the road we all built together, oh, don't worry. We'll take it off the road for you. In our zone, everybody paid." (Interview Aryeetey, 2016)*

In 2004 the neighbourhood also got its first secondary school, a public one. Confronted with the choice between low-quality expensive private schools or traveling costs for their children every school day, a group of parents came together. They sent out letters to the parents of all children enrolled in the three primary schools of the area to pitch the idea, and a general meeting was organised. Encouraged and facilitated by several of the community elders, the parents contributed enough to build the first two classroom blocks, helped by an advance of roofing materials from a local construction shop. The Tema Department of Education seconded two teachers for a year. After the school had successfully run its first year, the local Member of Parliament secured government funding to build two more classroom blocks and formally adopt the school into the



public system, thus guaranteeing its continuity (Interview Aryeetey, 2016). A few years later, the Presbyterian Christ the King church, the largest religious community of the area, constructed the second Junior Secondary School in the area (see also chapter 6).

It might be good to put the success of the Residents Associations somewhat into perspective here. Since most of the residents were far from wealthy, the networks for electricity and water spread through the area haltingly. It took until the year 2000 for electricity to transverse the first kilometre from the Michel Camp gate, and only around 2010 would the network reach all corners of the settlement. At that point, many people were still not connected, as this requires a financial outlay of around €150. As for water, its expansion was slowed down somewhat by the fact that those who already had water were trying to recoup their investment by selling the water by the bucket. Hence, they were hesitant to let their neighbours connect onward from their pipeline, as this would destroy that business model.

The Residents Association model also had its limits in terms of financial carrying capacity: residents could only contribute so much. That meant the furthest they could get for roads was the clearance of dirt roads wide enough for cars, with the loaned bulldozer from the municipality; tarmac or bitumen are far too expensive to finance through such local collection schemes in all but the wealthiest neighbourhoods. Drains, too, were beyond the reach of the Residents Associations and were only constructed in individual streets, when 3-4 neighbours were able to come together (Interview Johnson, 2016).

It was around the turn of the century that troubles started brewing around Sebrepor's chieftaincy (see also chapter 5). The Ga headman, who welcomed the first poultry farmers to the area in exchange for a few bottles of schnapps, had passed away in the 1980s. He was succeeded by his oldest nephew, who got promoted to a full divisional chief by the Kpone elders on account of the growing population in the area. But as the area opened up, a conflict was sparked. The children of the old headman were still making their living by selling land in the name of their (deceased) father, but land was no longer an unlimited resource.

At the end of the 1990s, the new chief finally put his foot down. He publicly scolded his relatives, and even had some of them arrested by the police. Before long, a backlash followed, and the chief's wider family was soon divided into two camps. He tried to stabilise his position by drawing leaders from both political parties into a newly formed Sebrepor Council of Elders, which worked for some time to steady the governance of

the area. But eventually, the chieftaincy conflict got out of hand. In 2009, the chief was chased out of Sebrepor by his disgruntled relatives (Interview Dubin, 2016). Despite attempts by the Council of Elders to conciliate the various sides of the conflict, he still lived outside the area in 2018, with no peace in sight.

Summarising, in the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s, Sebrepor underwent a major transformation. The residents had become organised enough, numerous enough and bold enough to “open the place up”, to make it visible that here was a permanent settlement. The grassroots organisation had now split up from the old Settler Society to form three separate Residents Associations for various zones in the community. Through these organisations, they created a substantial amount of basic infrastructure including electricity, water, roads and a secondary school. In this period, a conflict arose in the extended family of the local traditional authority, which displaced that authority and disabled it as a grassroots force for development.

With respect to the area's relations with the state, much of this infrastructure was produced through a process of co-production with the local municipality, which was distant enough not to initiate projects in the neighbourhood or even suggest that it would, but also near enough to provide material assistance in more capital-intensive areas like heavy machinery and year-long salaries for school teachers. In other areas, residents attempted to get government projects, such as the Rural Electrification Project, but if they did not receive this help, did it themselves. In the water provision sector, the residents managed to greatly extend the network throughout the neighbourhood through concerted and now informally institutionalised resident action: the Sebrepor Water Committee. As for the position of the state vis-a-vis neighbourhood organisation, we might say that the state is present in many forms, but still not interwoven into the neighbourhood's organisational fabric.

#### 4.5 The demise of the Residents Associations

Around the middle of the 2000s, the Residents Associations started hitting on hard times. The influx of new residents had been so great that most people in the area did not know each other anymore. Some of the new homeowners did not even realise there was such a thing as a Residents Association. As one old-time organiser put it: “it's easier to lead a few people than to govern the whole world”. Besides this, a great amount of renters had moved into the neighbourhood, who did not participate in the Residents Association, as renters in Ghana are seen as transient, impermanent

residents.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, when the old leadership tried getting people to meetings, they were ridiculed by some of the wealthier new immigrants. The former secretary of zone 2 explains:

*“There are people who feel that they are big. You know, my house, it’s a two-story building but uncompleted. And if somebody is putting up a luxurious mansion...how can I go to this person and say, come to my house, for a meeting? He will just look at me like I’m not a serious person. Of course, if there’s a common problem, like they are coming to demolish the houses, then everyone will come rushing. But otherwise, I cannot get these people to move.” (Interview Achina, 2018)*

Meetings were getting harder and harder to organise. And these were crucial; as one Residents Association leader put it: “If you don’t meet, how will you contribute?” (Interview Agbey, 2016). With meetings unattended, contributions also dwindled. These dynamics put the Residents Associations in a vicious circle of decreasing efficacy and decreasing commitment. Newcomers were no longer arriving into an area where they felt the presence of a neighbourhood organisation. In our door-to-door interviews, most of the newer residents reported that when they arrived in the area, no-one had welcomed them or introduced them to others in the community.

While the Residents Associations were going downhill, another form of local organisation came up: party politics (Interview Vinoko, 2018). Initially, Sebrepor’s population had consisted mainly of Ewe, who could be counted on to put out a block vote for the National Democratic Congress (NDC), ran by their fellow Ewe Jerry Rawlings. There was little political discussion in the area, and little party-line activism. But in the 2000s, a group of Ashanti came together to establish the first NPP branches

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13 If we should summarize the ‘Ghanaian Dream’ in a single concept, it would be ‘to own a piece of land’. The whole sequence would be something like: moving out of one’s village to the city, then climbing up from renting a mattress in a city-center slum, sharing a room with friends, renting a ‘hall & chamber’, renting a bigger apartment and finally buying a plot of land to build one’s own house. This is part of the reason why Greater Accra is sprawling so incredibly fast: most people want their own plot of land. Renting is seen as an impermanent and inferior condition. Home ownership on the other hand is generally thought of as permanent, even to the point that homes are mostly self-built and rarely sold on the market. Residents Associations, by law, include only those who own property in the area. The same issue plays in electoral politics. Candidates who do not own property in an area have a hard time campaigning, as people suspect that they are not committed to the development of the area. What is more, since renters are seen as having no ties to the area, such politicians “could easily abscond with any funds allocated to them” (Interview Aryeetey, 2018).

in the area (Interview Dubin, 2015).<sup>14</sup> Today, Sebrepor alone has seven different NDC branches and five NPP branches (Interview Adams, 2016). Again, such branches do not appear out of nowhere. An experienced political operator working all over the Kpone-Katamanso District Assembly explained how he routinely works to set up new branches in recently inhabited areas:

*“Once people have come to settle in a certain place (...), you quickly get closer to them, to find out their affiliations. You know, there is no-one that doesn’t belong to a party. Some pretend, at the initial stage. ‘No, I don’t belong to any political party, or I don’t want to be part of it.’ But they, brother, take decisions for the community, because they are in the Residents Association positions. So we find out their leaning. Then gradually, we work to start the branches. People will do it at night, meeting in secret.*

*(...) One day, it rises above the table. You will find someone who says: we need electricity. I think if we pass through this politician or that person, we will get it faster. They bring in that politician, just for a meeting. And the politician may say: oh, I’m going to make sure to bring this, to lobby to bring those things to your place. Organise yourselves, in a branch. We will need the votes to put pressure up top. (...)*

*So you see how it works. People start to organise to get something, and then they need the politicians. Either it will be monetary, or it’s just infrastructure. Some who go into the party branches do it just for themselves. Some do it because they want to see development, so they affiliate to politicians who can help them get those things. (...) But whatever the reason, they join the branches. And then, it shifts things.”*  
*(Interview Bogtiabor, 2016)*

The increasing prominence politics in the neighbourhood shifted things. Not because political debate was new to the area; people were often passionately political even in new neighbourhoods where branches had not yet been formed. But the formation of new branches concretised and institutionalised such fault lines among the residents (Interview Allenge, 2018). This undermined the Residents Associations and other forms of independent citizen activism, as partisan considerations often made cooperation harder.

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<sup>14</sup> In Sebrepor the development of local political branches coincided historically with the moment that democracy came back in, but I heard of the same process in many other areas.

At one instant, residents were setting up a project to flatten a certain road and clear it of overgrowth to make it suitable for motor traffic. But the sitting Assemblyman refused his support; in fact, he actively blocked the move (Interview Achina, 2018). Most of the residents involved with the project were aligned with the opposition, and it would not have favored his party in the upcoming elections.<sup>15</sup> In small ways like this, political framing started to affect everything people did, and the meetings of Residents Associations were suddenly fraught with suspicion. When another residents wanted to form a pressure group to protest an illegal landfill in the area, they were accused of taking sponsorship from the opposition party, and their original message was buried in a political shouting match (Interview Johnson, 2016).

Nor were all these suspicions just paranoia. There were indeed party political groups being organised in the area, often cloaked in other guises. For instance, politicians from either party would gather a bunch of young guys, give them football jerseys and some drinks, and keep up a regular trickle of gifts to that group (Interview Allenge, 2018). All this in preparation for “the day when you will need their strength”, as one contestant put it: to spread posters and leaflets, to attend a rally or demonstration, or to show up in physical strength around election day (see also Klaus & Paller, 2017). These teams, as he explained, were not openly politicised.

*“When you go there, you won’t see that it’s politics. They will not make it visible. Their activities don’t say. Only once you enter, you’ll find out that this leader organised the club to support a political party. Some of the youth clubs are mostly political, some others are not at all political, just keep-fit clubs, or welfare, or doing something to make some money.”*  
(Interview Dubin, 2016)

Why did this happen in secret? Unlike organising in a Residents Association, organising through political parties is not without risk. The so-called foot soldiers, the political grassroots workers, are unpopular in many areas (Interview Hayibor, 2015). Politics can get rather personal. Sometimes, revenge is even taken on the losing side after the election. As Bogtiabor explains:

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<sup>15</sup> Such stories may sound like accusatory tales, exaggerations from party loyalists. But I believe they are not. In many of the interviews I have done about these topics, members of both parties were present. It often happened that they joined forces in trying to explain to me how politically charged the atmosphere often was. In the interview where this instance was discussed, all those present seemed rather shocked that I did not seem to comprehend why, naturally, the Assemblyman should try to block such this road-clearing project.

*"If we win, well, things could be good. But in case the other party wins, then all your hard work has been wasteful. They can even target you! There's gonna be a spy on you. Living in Africa after losing an election is very difficult. You know, victimisation, vilification, it's in African politics. We have this winner-take-all-syndrome. In Africa, you're gonna be tacked. They're gonna come after you. 'He's one of the other guys, keep a close eye on him, make sure he stays at home.' That is it. So it is very difficult. So it has taken a lot of people aback, politically. They'll go out and vote, they have their favorite. But they don't want to come away [come to a public rally]. The few people that come away, they are facing difficulties." (Interview Bogtiabor, 2016)*

Apart from undermining mutual trust among neighbourhood leaders, the advent of politics had another effect on local organising. As party leaders started making bigger campaign promises, local initiative was dampened. Residents became more and more inclined to wait and see whether politicians might indeed deliver, before spending their own money on collective amenities. This effect would become even more pronounced with the establishment of a local municipality. As government gained an increasingly visible presence in the neighbourhood, self-help decreased.

But Sebrepur's closer connection with state institutions, which brought in all these political complications, did also have its advantages. The aspiring politicians organised women's groups, who met weekly to learn skills and form micro-credit circles. They organised pressure groups which explicitly existed to pressure politicians (of the other party) into action. And the advent of government and political representation for the neighbourhood brought development into the area, improving roads, fixing streetlights, extending the electricity network. However, many of our interlocutors reported that this development came in a very particular rhythm, which some described Bible-abiding locals as 'one fat year, three lean years'. As they noted, 'since politics grew here', in the year leading up to an election, street lights, water and electricity extensions and other long-desired developments would arrive in the area 'like manna from heaven' (Interview Allenge, 2016).

However, people noted that such projects would often be stalled in the following three years, as there was no immediate electoral pressure, leaving many projects unfinished (Interviews Nukpenu, Oglie, Dubin, Allenge, 2018). This idea was widespread, coming up in interviews with various present and former Assembly members of both parties, several chiefs, other opinion leaders and a high-ranking local government official who



spoke off the record. However, this broadly living notion and the anecdotal evidence from Sebrepor should not be uncritically extrapolated, as they are not supported by recent quantitative work on project completion rates, which does not find lower finishing rates around the date of the election (Williams, 2017).

Not all development projects suffer equally from the election cycle. Larger projects, often also connected with outside sponsorship or which transcend the scale of constituencies and EAs, suffer less from such election cycle-dependency (Interview Vanderpuije, 2018). But smaller projects stall very frequently (Interview Nukpenu, 2018, see also Williams, 2017). This is where non-partisan local organisation is essential: to make sure local government<sup>16</sup> delivers on its promises and its started projects. As several respondents made clear, the local elites who may contest each other in the political arena also realise that they all own houses in the same neighbourhood, where they and their children expect to live for a long time to come. So they often try to work across the aisle to develop it.

Whether or not government spending changes throughout the electoral cycle, it is often heavily politicised. Around the elections, including local government elections, this politicisation becomes more explicit.<sup>17</sup> Sebrepor's Assemblyman Charles Dubin was aligned with the opposition party NPP, and quite vocal about the perceived failures of the NDC government. This did not go very well with the local MP, known as Lion, who belonged to the ruling party. With his party controlling the budget strings, the MP let the roads in Dubin's area deteriorate, to the point where the main thoroughfare road of Sebrepor and surroundings was untarred only in Dubin's area. In fact, the paving stopped and started precisely at his boundaries, as various residents pointed out. Then, he spread the rumour that Dubin had taken the budget for road tarring for himself.

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16 Ghana's local government is seriously underfunded, most of the state budget runs through the central state apparatus. It is also not taken very seriously locally: the 2015 local government elections were postponed for a year, but the term of the incumbents did run out, leaving committees unstaffed and Assemblymen formally not in function for over a year. Only international donors such as DANIDA and the World Bank are pushing to get it taken more seriously, for instance by running a fund which adds €100M per year to the local government budgets of which the donors supply €80M (Interview Hayibor, 2015).

17 In Ghana, the local government system is designed explicitly to be non-partisan, unconnected to the highly competitive two-party system at the national level. Assembly members (AM) are forbidden from using party colors or logos, and may not publicly discuss their party membership. In practice, national politics do often filter in and shape local dynamics. Almost all AM in the areas I investigated appear to be partisan-aligned, often seeing this position as a stepping stone in a political career. The AM I interviewed provided the numbers off the top of their head: ten of the municipality's AM were members of the governing party, eight were with the opposition. Voting in the Assembly happens largely on party lines; committee chairs are divided between the parties first and foremost.

This is unlikely, since AM don't have access to these kinds of budgets, but most people don't bother to get into the details of Assembly budgeting rules, and many believed it.

On election day, an industrial road grading machine rolled through the neighbourhood. On top of the machine, next to the operator, sat the NDC candidate for Assembly Member. Just to be sure that the message would get across, the grader was followed by an announcement vehicle with large speakers on the roof, proclaiming that this candidate was going to grade all roads in the area, and then put asphalt on them. Although the election was a close call, this kind of pressure is not easily countered by door-to-door campaigning. Although Dubin was known as an honest and hardworking Assemblyman, it was clear to many residents that he was simply not able to get government funds to the area, so he lost the elections. As one voter explained on election day:

*"I hate to say this, but we all here know that the current Assemblyman is not making any headway at the Assembly, because he is not an NDC man. Frankly I don't dispute the competency of Honorable Dubin, but he is struggling. Ghana today is about links, who you know, and what party is on." (Interview Akpokavie, 2015)*

After the elections the road grader disappeared from the area again, leaving most of the roads bumpy as ever (see figure 4.3 above). No tarmac or bitumen was forthcoming. And when frustrated residents sent an inquiry to the government agencies involved, they were sent away. Residents felt that this was part of a larger pattern. As one resident explained:

*"When we came to call on government to deliver on their promises, they would tell you that there are no people here. Their map will say: it's just bush. Yes, that's it. They come for votes though. So some of us will tell them, during election you realise that we are here. After election, oh...this place appears on their maps as a wilderness." (Interview Agbey, 2016)*

Notably, the fact that development may be politicised does not automatically mean that areas with opposition-aligned Assemblymen or opposition-aligned populations are left standing in the cold. In this case, Sebrepur got extra attention (although after being passed over first) exactly because its Assemblyman was in the opposition. And during national election campaigns, the political alignments of Assemblymen are largely ignored, as the incumbent party needs their knowledge of the situation on



*Figure 4.3: mountains of laterite, ostensible destined to improve the road, remained on the central Sebepor thoroughfare for months after the elections.*

the ground to effectively channel development into their areas and convince voters to support them for another term (Interview Dubin, 2016).

In sum, from the middle of the 2000s grassroots organisation in Sebrepor started to break down. One factor in this was the increased size and heterogeneity of the area's population, which made it harder to organise residents. But an even bigger factor was politicisation. As political parties entered the area, they took over much of the grassroots organising energy. In addition, they made people more suspicious toward one another; where previously there was self-interest and the communal interest, now a whole layer of potential scheming and power games had been added in the form of political parties.

In sum, residents' self-organisation fell off during this phase. Through processes of anonymization, politicisation and establishment of formal institutions in the area, the autonomous forms of local organisation were being crowded out. Several local institutions which had previously gathered momentum did manage to keep going and produce impressive results, often co-producing with the state. The local Presbyterian church built the second secondary school in the neighbourhood, a large investment, made possible by a large and active congregation. The school was subsequently run in co-operation with the municipality, which provides teachers and some materials. And the Sebrepor Water Committee kept functioning, managing and expanding the network. These are the strongest elements of the self-organisation fabric that grew in the previous periods. In addition, these were areas where collective action problems were limited, as these are so-called 'club goods,' goods which require collectivity but do allow for exclusion on the basis of contribution or membership (Sandler & Tschirhart, 1997). But there were few successful new initiatives. Trust fell throughout the neighborhood. And the residents' gaze in general became directed toward the state and toward commercialised solutions.

#### 4.6 Formal government

In short, the fraternal spirit of the pioneer days had disappeared. Local organising either died down (none of the Residents Associations held regular meetings after 2005) or it got reshaped as party-aligned organising (Interview Achina, 2015). With the Residents Associations mostly out of business, the development of collective amenities in the area now depended very much on the more formal institutions: the state utility companies, the Assembly member (AM), the District Assembly and the Member of Parliament for the area.

Much here hinges on the AM. The civil servants of local government frequently hardly know the area they are working in, as they are rotated to a different Assembly every five years (Interviews Baeka, Hayibor, 2015). This is done to prevent corruption from taking root, but it also means knowledge build-up in the civil service is difficult and frequently undone (Interview Ofori, 2015). In addition, they often take on additional side jobs to augment their pay, leaving even less time for working in the area (Interview Brouwer, 2014). This puts a heavy burden on the shoulders of the (nearly unpaid) AM, who form the crucial node between residents and Assembly. They are not only a channel for complaints and requests from citizens, but also an important link from the local government to the assumed 'community' in the area. As former AM Dubin explained:

*"I know all the people here, the land areas, the associations, the companies around. The Assembly does have a list of the companies here, but they don't know them well. But physically, I know that company A is here, B is here, C is there. So if the Assembly sends some people to come and see something, they will pass through me." (Interview Dubin, 2016)*

In the more institutionalised neighbourhood, the AM is an essential middle man between residents and formal government (a role he partly shares with the chief, see chapter 5). But underfunded and overstretched, many are challenged to effectively work and mobilise local organising to translate governmental possibilities to developments on the ground. This is made even more difficult by the fact that this position comes with extensive social obligations: several funerals and weddings every week, and demands on the personal purse.

Although political fault lines increasingly dominated the organisational landscape of the neighbourhood, local opinion leaders were not automatically co-opted into this logic. They still cooperated strategically across party lines whenever the occasion required it. After all, those who owned houses in the area wanted the infrastructure to improve, regardless of party colours. On several occasions, Sebrepur's NPP-aligned and NDC-aligned members of the Council of Elders cooperated in applying political pressure for the production of a better road, the development of a market area and other such developments, closely coordinating their actions to achieve the best results for the neighbourhood.

One such campaign occurred in the late 2000s and early 2010s. With the area's population multiplied, the role of the Assemblyman had become increasingly taxing.

As one elder explained: “One Assemblyman was doing the whole area, from Bethlehem to Golf City. If they bring ten bags of cement, each Assemblyman will get one, so it’s not good if one man runs a large area.” (Interview Aryeetey, 2018). Several leaders from the area decided to mount a campaign for the subdivision of the electoral area. This campaign involved discussions behind closed doors with the chiefs of Sebrepor and neighbouring areas, pulpit activism and a round table discussion with all sorts of opinion leaders, the local MP and officials from the Ministry of the Interior. In the process, media attention was used strategically, as the activists wanted to make it very clear that something was stirring in the area, but did not want to provoke things with a demonstration or other visible protest (Interview Allenge, 2018).

In 2012, the campaign came to fruition. The electoral area was split into five new ones, and Sebrepor got its own Assembly member. A similar drive had taken place for the establishment of a new district, as Sebrepor and the surrounding areas continued to be a distant and largely neglected part of the now metropolitan district of Tema. This campaign also succeeded in 2012, with the establishment of the Kpone-Katamanso District Assembly. The newly appointed District Chief Executive (DCE, the mayor) started his work with a tour of four months throughout the district. For the occasion, the chief came out of his exile and spoke, in name of all the residents, about the amenities they had created and what more they needed from the Assembly.

However festive the occasion, the establishing of the nearby Kpone-Katamanso District Assembly in 2012 was a further nail in the coffin for the Residents Associations. The Assembly and the Residents Association have largely overlapping activities: improving infrastructure, providing social services such as schools, and providing some basic form of social security. Hence, most residents saw them as mutually redundant. However, in the first years of its existence the Assembly produced little of use to its residents; it was, as the DCE put it, “a baby Assembly, with little strength” (Interview Alhaji, 2016). Offended that the Assembly was not delivering anything of tangible benefit, many of the residents refused to pay its taxes (Interview Johnson, 2016). However, many others decided instead to stop contributing to the Residents Association, since they felt they were being taxed twice for the same purposes, and the Assembly could more easily enforce their taxation (Interview Johnson, 2016). As Mr. Aryeetey explains, viewing the same phenomenon from a more optimistic angle:

*“The Residents Association ceased to be active when the District Assembly was born. Because these associations were formed to promote our health and our needs, socially, economically, religiously,*



*educationally. (...) That's why we started contributing the little money we could, to boost our efforts. Then fortunately, the Assembly came into existence. So now all of us lean against the Assembly for our support." (Interview Aryeetey, 2015)*

The same happened to the security efforts: as soon as the police announced that they would patrol in the area, most people stopped contributing to the remaining Watchdog groups (Interview Johnson, 2016). Equally, the Sebrepor Water Committee has been trying to transfer its responsibilities to the state utility, the Ghana Water Company, for several years now, although so far they seem not to have succeeded. Still, many of the newer residents only find out that their area has its own (grassroots) Water Committee once they are directed to get its permission to connect their house to the water pipe network which the area's pioneers have painstakingly built. In short, through processes of anonymisation, politicisation and establishment of formal institutions in the area, the autonomous forms of local organisation were being crowded out.

And there was a final factor contributing to the demise of the Residents Associations. The old Settler Association's vision for the area had mostly been realised, so people have gone back to their private issues. This is largely a matter of standards: the expectations people have also play a big role. As the former chairman of Sebrepor's Zone 2 colourfully put it:

*"Land, electricity and water, that's about it. First [people want] land [security], then water is number one, then electricity. The next thing they might be fighting for are streetlights. After that, they will be more or less satisfied. They will start talking of roads and drainage, sure. But, Mr Joris Tieleman, if you put the black man in a new area, you add water, electricity, then streetlights. Oh, you have done sixty to eighty percent of the job for him. And if you give him drainage, untarred roads, then you've done more than eighty percent of the job for him. You are his lord!" (Interview Agbey, 2016)*

As the quote shows, people's standards play a big role in the activity of a Residents Association. In neighbourhoods with high concentrations of wealthy homeowners, the Residents Association may well continue beyond providing water and electricity. For instance, in Bulasu the Residents Association has not only put up water, power and streetlights, but also provided effective security, and is now tarring roads and constructing drainage. But from the data I have gathered (see also chapter 3, last page),

the above estimate from Mr. Agbey appears to be roughly accurate for the average neighbourhood built today in Greater Accra.

Today in Sebrepur, it appears that only one thing will still bring the residents together: when there is an update on the formal status of their land ownership. That situation has not progressed since the 1970s. Formally, the Tema Development Corporation still owns the land, which they have still formally allocated to the military, despite the fact that a full-grown neighbourhood stands there. This stalemate prevents the residents from registering their property at the Lands Commission, which prevents them from selling the house, getting a mortgage, a home insurance or any of the other home-related financial instruments which are becoming increasingly common in Ghana (Interview Theophilus, 2016, see also De Soto, 1989).

For most residents, these are still theoretical problems only. But among the opinion leaders of the neighbourhood, the ones who organise in Residents Associations, this is the cause of much strife. For instance, when the previous Assembly member tried to start a formal process of regularisation, he got into a severe conflict with the chief, who preferred to lie low until the legal period of the government lease would have run out. The tactic of lying low and 'not stirring the mud' is considered crucial by many of the early settlers, who had been visually hiding their neighbourhood's presence in the bush for decades, before 'opening up'. As one of them put it: "If elephants are fighting, it is the grass which gets trampled" (Interview Aryeetey, 2018). Hence, several members of the chief's Council of Elders and other old-timers campaigned vigorously to upset this activist Assemblyman during the following election. Using the considerable weight of their position as community elders and early settlers, they speeched during church services that he, a relative newcomer, was endangering the safety of the neighbourhood by disobeying the chief. He was not re-elected.

Summarising, the increasingly tight interweaving of local government into the area's organising fabric had a severely dampening effect on local grassroots organising. Residents' energy was increasingly channeled largely toward the Assembly Member, who forms an essential but generally overworked and underfunded linchpin in Ghana's local government system. Hence, residents did still actively organise to increase the amount of representatives of their area in local and national government, campaigning for a split in electoral areas, constituencies and municipal districts. A final factor in the demise of grassroots organising for infrastructure in the area was the fact that much of what people considered the most essential infrastructure had already been realised. Today, the only thing that will bring together residents for collective, neighbourhood-

broad organising is a development concerning the legal status of the land they live on: this is still unresolved, and most residents do not have legal ownership of the land they live on.

## 4.7 Commercial and non-public organisation

Before moving on to the conclusions of the above analysis of grassroots organising throughout the history of Sebrepor, we will briefly look at two other forms of organisation: commercial activity, and non-public associations. This forms somewhat of a break in the chapter's line of analysis. Nevertheless, there are two reasons why I have added this description here. First, because this chapter also serves as an introduction to the case study neighbourhood, and the topic of the research project is grassroots organising in Accra's new neighbourhoods. I have not found anywhere in the literature a rich description of the small-scale social and commercial infrastructure in such newly growing neighbourhoods. In other words, this section completes the picture of grassroots organising in the neighbourhood. Second, it is important because the organisations described below also border on the RAs, just like local government. The RAs do much in terms of building social fabric, and providing basic social security. In this they are complemented by, and partially compete with, the types of organisations described below.

First, commercial activity. Most commercial activity in areas like Sebrepor is petty trading, and thus far from collective organisation, whereas this story is focused on collective organisation and the shifting interdependence between neighbourhood-level and centralised institutions of collective organisation. However, it is important enough to be briefly included in this account. The general rule appears to be: anything that can be organised commercially, will be organised commercially rather than collectively (Interview Agbey, 2016).

The boundary between the two modes is mobile: increasingly, schools are being organised on a commercial basis, whereas in the past they were usually set up by churches. In fact, the churches springing up in currently growing settlements are looking more and more like commercial establishments themselves. They are increasingly run like businesses, have an unapologetically profit-oriented ethos and are often kick-started with outside investments (see also chapter 6). Water too is increasingly produced on an individual, commercial basis rather than through the collective process of extending the pipe network ever further into the neighbourhood

(see also chapter 7). For all these categories, the quality of the private solution is generally lower than the quality of a collective solution. But the growing commercial sector does have the effect of making it harder to organise collectively, as wealthy residents are able to cop out and the need is less felt.

Second, although this chapter focuses on the development of collective amenities which are generally physical and mostly cover the entire neighbourhood or at least a major part of it, there is also a lot of local organisation in smaller groups, for less infrastructural purposes. In our door-to-door interview sample among 50 households, 82% of the interviewed residents reported being member of one or more groups. Dominant among these are the welfare groups in church, which provide a basic form of social security, and the Men's/Women's/Youth Fellowships in the churches, which are generally not compulsory but which most people do join if they have the money to afford the weekly contributions. Especially church groups extend far outside the neighbourhoods. For instance, wearing a Sebepor Methodist Men's Fellowship shirt (all these groups identify by dress) will very quickly help to build trust in other Methodist churches across the city, and in universities a very active network is held up by groups like the Pentecost Student Association.

Other social groups abound as well. There are professional associations of every kind imaginable. Hairdressers, dressmakers, taxi drivers, beauticians, Indomie noodle sellers, fish mongers, fruit sellers, teachers, private school owners, bar owners, nurses and shopkeepers all have formed local associations which regularly meet, contribute money, help each other out in troubled times and celebrate together.<sup>18</sup> Other associations include Old School (alumni) groups, veterans groups, and all sorts of rather open-ended groups like Keep-Fit collectives, Rotary clubs, Artisans Associations and women's clubs, which women often join without the knowledge of their husband and which can play an important emancipatory role.

Apart from their shared characteristics such as church membership, gender, professional activity and so on, these groups are constituted and held together by several regularly shared practices. The first thing a group must do if it is to remain in existence is to regularly meet. Then, at meetings, people will contribute a small, fixed sum, usually in the order of 5 cedi (€1) or more, depending on the wealth of the group members, for the shared expenses of simply running the group (renting chairs for meetings, getting drinks, etc.). The next step up the group cohesion ladder is a

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<sup>18</sup> There is even an association set up by the people who make a living by collecting and recycling the plastic drinking water bags that have been discarded on the streetside.

shared welfare fund, out of which people are paid when they get married, give birth, lose a close relative and other major life events. Many groups also start up a savings scheme, through which people either save up and give the sum to one group member each time, or simply encourage each other to save individually, sometimes in a shared bank account.

To put the above in perspective: not everyone is part of such groups. Nearly 20% of the residents we interviewed in the door-to-door interviews reported not being member of any groups, and often these actually seemed rather sad stories of social isolation. Especially since the advent of electricity in the area, many people spend their days inside their own houses. As one resident described their social life: “During Christmas, and Easter, I go to visit my parents. Apart from that, when I am not working, I just sit inside my house and watch TV.” These houses are generally very cramped places, but people still prefer to spend their time inside there rather than outside, although there is enough public space to sit in. These were generally the poorest respondents. Membership of a club costs money and time, and not everybody has those. Virtually all clubs have a welfare component, and contributions are compulsory, with the penalty for missing presence or contributions often being expulsion. Especially for those with irregular incomes, this discourages membership.

But there is also another factor in such social isolation: many of the residents described the neighbourhood as a hostile space. They emphasised that there is a lot of malicious gossip in the area, that people do not trust each other and indeed are not to be trusted, and that the atmosphere on the street is unfriendly. Such sentiments were also expressed by many people who are members of one or more social groups and several who are very actively organising in the area. A seemingly related notion which I still cannot claim to understand properly is the widespread idea that “friends are bad for you”, generally expressed in exactly these terms. As one resident put it: “I was told not to mingle, because people will put you in trouble.”

In sum, the commercial activity in Sebrepor covers an increasing extend of people’s need for infrastructure. For instance, schools used to be a public affair, but these days are privately organised. Churches, too, were formerly a communal effort but are increasingly often constructed as private enterprises (see chapter 6 for details and figure 4.4 for an example). Then, there are many kinds of welfare and savings groups in the area, including professional associations of every kind imaginable. These are held together by shared practices and generally run a small social welfare fund for their members. But not everyone is part of such circles: nearly 20% of the residents interviewed in door-to-door

interviews was not part of such groups. To many people, the neighbourhood feels like a (potentially) hostile space, in which they prefer not to mingle.

## 4.8 Conclusion

This concluding section draws out the more general patterns found in the empirical material presented above. It first generalises and abstracts the empirical material directly, then provides a brief discussion on the degree to which these findings may be extrapolated, and finally returns to the central question of the thesis as a whole, placing the chapter's findings in that context.

*Figure 4.4: Today, Sebrepur is filled in, its population swollen. This is the first church in the neighbourhood, the Zion Church. Its congregation has grown, so they are building a new church, which is so much bigger that the old building fits inside it entirely. Once it is done, the old church will be broken apart. Its wooden planks, which sheltered the congregation during their first two decades in this new neighbourhood, will be ceremoniously carried away through the door of the new church.*





### Resident organising conclusions

Let us come back to the central subject of this thesis, the urban fabric spreading outward. As this chapter shows, much of the initial momentum of this spread outward is provided by the pioneering residents of all these new neighbourhoods: settling, organising, building. In Sebrepor and throughout the city, the organisational form this takes is volunteer work, prefiguring local government, often in Residents Associations. The pioneers found ways to overcome their divisions<sup>19</sup>, got together, pooled resources and connections, and got their basic amenities.

The organisational form *Residents Association* is institutionalised quite strongly: membership is obligatory if you own property in the area, and it has the legal right to levy contributions from its members. In addition, government agencies generally recognise this form and are used to co-producing amenities with them. Especially in situations where settlements are somewhat isolated, the social cohesion is often further strengthened by including elements like a mutual assistance fund. It should be noted that this tendency was particularly strong in Sebrepor, likely because of the long relative isolation of the area. Sebrepor's associations were also helped by the fact that a lot of the settlers there were civil service and army retirees, which made organising along shared templates easier. Thus, mutuality is both nurtured and enforced, especially in isolation.

However, well-organised grassroots initiatives will often break out of that isolation themselves, and initiate projects of co-production with the state. It is very common that infrastructure is built in cooperative projects between residents and government agencies. Often, residents will supply the simple physical labor, will supply part of the funding through contributions, or even completely kick-start the project, with the state coming in to complete the project. Residents built the first two classroom blocks of the Ebenezer Hill Secondary School and ran it during the first year, while the state supplied a teacher and picked the project up afterward. The Ghana Water Company put out the initial standpipe, for residents to build out its network into the area. The

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19 To be sure, as the introduction chapter of this thesis also makes clear, this does not imply that people usually succeed, only that in nearly every neighborhood, *some* people *eventually* succeed. For every project that is successful, several others run aground because of language and culture barriers. Ghana has more than 250 recognized languages and dialects (Ethnologue, 2014), and a startling variety of local cultures, all of which come together in the great cosmopolitan melting pot of Accra. Most Ghanaians are trilingual or more, speaking at least their native language, Akan and some amount of English. But skill levels vary, and cultural barriers and ethnic distrust and discomfort persist. The ethnic and socio-economic mixing of Accra, favorable though it may be for peace and democracy, is often a detriment to local self-organization.

Tema Assembly provided bulldozers for road clearances, but residents had to buy the fuel. This pattern also appears in the other eight comparative neighbourhoods (see section 3.3). Streetlights in Accra's neighbourhoods are mostly bought and (home-) mounted by residents, while the electricity to light them is provided by government. And so on and so forth. In fact, the co-production approach is firmly built into the local government bureaucracy. Assembly planning officers also expect residents to help out with monitoring the contractors working on Assembly projects, and will often provide them with the technical specifics required to do so.

But while the formal institutions can be temporarily harnessed by grassroots organisations to leverage their development projects, it appears to also signal the start of their demise. The process described above in Sebrepur is a particular case of this, but the pattern appears to be quite broad. We have found very few instances of Residents Associations surviving once the land rights were secured and basic amenities developed. This is partly a matter of having created the bare necessities like roads, power and water, and the arrival of formal government institutions.

In addition, the unraveling of the Residents Associations is accelerated by the anonymisation of the area and the politicisation of its local organisation. As formal organisations came in or even just said they were coming in, this had a big impact on the local figuration: organisation started to decline. And it is important to note that this is not simply a matter of passing the baton of local government from a volunteer corps to the professionals (see Swaan, 1988). The collapse of grassroots networks often actually slows down local developments, because some local organisation and active pressure is often still required to get serviced by formal organisations.

### **Discussion**

What elements from this history can be generalised? Certainly much of this development was geographically and historically specific. Despite its remote location, the area was settled relatively early as it was close to the army base, where its soldiers felt safer. Coupled with the fact that shared army pasts enabled residents to organise more easily, this also facilitated early connections to water and electricity. Therefore, this area's settlement started relatively early and was also more drawn out - it is only in the last ten years that Sebrepur was really filled in, roughly at the same time as surrounding neighbourhoods, some of which got started decades after Sebrepur. The politicisation of local organisation coincided with the rebirth of active democracy in the country at the end of the 1990s, so that is at least partially historically specific. But many important elements of this history can be generalised to a smaller or larger

degree. The above analysis is based not only on the material from Sebrepur, but also on the other neighbourhoods investigated during fieldwork, described in more detail in chapter 3, last section.

It is noteworthy that this rise and fall of area-based organising in Residents Associations does not appear to strongly affect the kind of smaller clubs and groups described in the above section, for good or for ill. Throughout the existence of a neighbourhood, people get together to create small welfare groups, professional associations and all kinds of clubs. This happens primarily within the churches, which provide an excellent rhythm for weekly meetings, a moral community and, not unimportant, a physical building to meet in. But also outside the churches, the urban fabric is rife with such small-scale groups.

This process of social group formation does not appear to be much touched by the anonymisation of the neighbourhood, the rise and fall of the Residents Association, the politicisation of the area or the demise of local organising for collective infrastructure. Most members of such clubs and associations told us that politics plays no role in their group. As for the growth of the neighbourhood population, if anything this increases the formation of such groups as further specialisation is made possible. Denser areas like Ashiaman and Madina were often reported by respondents to have an even greater proliferation of groups and an even more active population in this regard.

### **Urban growth process: division and upgrading**

In short, we see collective action arising under conditions of isolation, reaching its peak production when stepping out of that isolation and embarking on co-production with the state. Subsequently, it also collapses after that breakup of isolation, because of three factors: anonymisation and loss of solidarity, politicisation of the local organising atmosphere, establishment of formal institutions in the neighbourhood.

Besides introducing the case study, the above description of Sebrepur provides us with a small, localised lens on the growth processes of the city's organisational institutions. What does this growth look like? As the urban fabric spreads outward, its spatial collectivities are continuously being enlarged, subdivided and upgraded. Sebrepur started with a few farmers in the bush under a headman; his successor was a full Divisional Chief, with several headmen working under him. As his area grows more populous, it might be split up again. With the growth of Sebrepur and the surrounding hamlets, an Assembly Member was assigned to represent those farmers in the Tema Metropolitan Assembly. Later, in 2008 and 2012, the Tema Assembly itself was subdivided into Ashiaman, Adenta and Kpone-Katamanso District Assembly. Also in

2012, a national record was set by splitting Sebrepor's electoral area into five, creating four new Assembly member positions at once. In 2017, Kpone-Katamanso was promoted to a Municipal Assembly on account of the growing population (Interview Adams, 2016).

The same thing happens with political party branches, administrative regions, church congregations, parliamentary constituencies, Residents Associations and all sorts of other entities: a continuous process of division and upgrading, division and upgrading. Such processes are generally the result of a struggle of some kind: an internal fight causing a rift, a campaign for independence, or simply for the increase in allocated resources that comes with an upgrade or subdivision. But the trend is universal: expansion, subdivision, upgrading.<sup>20</sup>

The division and upgrading process does not only happen within categories of organisations, churches splitting to form more churches, administrative units being subdivided; it also happens between categories of organisations. While Residents Associations are often the first among these institutions to take root in a newly growing neighbourhood, they should be understood as part of that institutional tapestry. Thus, as this social fabric grows more complex, the bonds between people that form these general, area-based Residents Associations are slowly split apart, woven instead into more specific organisations such as various churches, political parties and other organisations. This, in turn, results in the demise of the Residents Associations, and their organisational capacity and drive along with it.

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<sup>20</sup> To be clear, this process is slow. In some areas, it takes years or even decades to get the first hundred settlers, in other neighborhoods the pace is somewhat higher. The same goes for infrastructure like water pipes, electricity lines, roads and drains: this is generally built in a highly incremental fashion, connecting house by house, often taking years to travel a single kilometer into the neighborhood (depending on the level of wealth and organization in the area). These neighborhoods are not created by land invasions, but rather by a slow trickle of settlers.

















## ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (A.D.R) KPONE AREA



**WE DEAL WITH CASES INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:-**

- ☀ LAND DISPUTES, RENTAL DISPUTES, ETC
- ☀ DEBT OUT OF TRANSACTION, ETC
- ☀ MARITAL PROBLEMS AND DISAGREEMENT; CONFLICTS OUT OF UNMARITAL LIVING PARTNERSHIPS, QUARRELS AMONG PEOPLE IN THE SOCIETY.
- ☀ PROVOCATIVE LANGUAGE; INCLUDING CURSING, INSULTS AND INVOKING EVIL SPIRIT ETC. WITHIN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD
- ☀ DISRESPECT OF PARENTS AND THE ELDERLY  
ALSO THIEVERIES OF ITEMS WITHIN SOCIETY

### OFFICE HOURS:

**MONDAY TO THURSDAY:**

8:30AM - 12:00PM / 1:00PM - 5:00PM

**FRIDAY:**

8:30AM - 2:00PM



**ALL WELCOME**



5



# Chiefs: traditional authorities in the city<sup>21</sup>

In this chapter, I explore the foundations and form of the contemporary urban chieftaincy position, Section 5.1 provides some theoretical and methodological background. In section 5.2, I trace the historical development of the chieftaincy institution in Ghana. In sections 3.3-3.5, I unpack three different roles the chief plays in relation to both residents and a variety of departments of the formal state, showing a shift during the urbanisation process between these three roles.

Section 5.3 looks at the chief in his role as a traditional informal leader, where the chief judges, leads, and generally governs much like a sovereign. Section 5.4 studies the chief's role as a lower-level bureaucrat, where he acts in direct cooperation with several state and semi-state bureaucracies. Section 5.5 focuses on the chief as landlord, as chiefs have an important position as managers and owners of the land in their area. I show a trend over time from the first role to the second and the third, developing as the complexity of organisational structures deepens during the period of densification and urbanisation of his area.

Following this, I historically locate this neighbourhood chieftaincy figuration in Ghana's national state-tribal figuration (5.6). I show that the traditional institution of chieftaincy endures and rejuvenates in the cities, not in spite of the omnipresence of the modern state, but because of it. Finally, I draw conclusions regarding the central question of this thesis: how does the institution of chieftaincy affect the development of grassroots organisation for collective amenities?

21 This chapter has been published as: Tieleman, J., & Uitermark, J. (2019). Chiefs in the City: Traditional Authority in the Modern State. *Sociology*, 53(4), 707-723.





*It was about a month since I had started fieldwork in Sebrepor, and I had been able to get appointments with the local Assembly Member, the Divisional Council of local elders, various local ethnic leaders and church leaders. Only the chief himself had proven hard to get in touch with. I was in good contact with Emmanuel Aryeetey, the secretary of the Sebrepor Divisional Council, and finally, he had promised to take me to the chief. He told me to wear something decent, and gently asked after “the weight of my pocket, as a student”. Then, he advised me to buy some foreign schnapps as a courtesy gift. This request became a little more precise later on. As it turned out, the traditional gift to a chief (strictly: to the chief’s stool) is a 70 cl. bottle of Henkes’ Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps, certified ‘Produce of Holland’.*

*Sebrepor’s chief, Nii Dortey Abotsi III, is a pleasant old gentleman. He speaks slow, measured English and receives visitors in his private house. Visits are somewhat ritualised, starting with the exchange of gifts, normally the colonial liquor and a small amount of money. He answered all my questions extensively and politely, explaining his role as traditional ruler of the community, head of the royal family and guardian of the land. He spoke of his relations with the municipality, how he worked with various offices to get development into the neighbourhood. And he explained how he had set up the Divisional Council, composed of elders of all major tribes in the area, to “let peace and sanity reign in the community”.*

*In fact, it was hard to match this caring old man with the stories I had heard from ordinary residents of Sebrepor. Several people in the area, including his own relatives, had described him to me as an illegitimate chief, who does not take any responsibility for the neighbourhood, who steals the money that is meant for the development of the community, and who even uses black magic to desperately hold on to his power.*

*But if he was such a caring chief, why was he not among his people? Why was he living so far away from ‘his subjects’, in a private house in Nungua, more than an hour’s travel away from Sebrepor? And if he was indeed not much of a leader, an absentee chief, then how was it possible that he still held on to his position as the main spokesperson of the community, the foremost grassroots leader? Why did others not rise up to replace him, in an area like Sebrepor, which was clearly in such urgent need of development? Or, if the traditional authority was not functioning to the benefit of the residents, or indeed, to anyone’s apparent benefit, why did it even still exist?*

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the position of the *chief*, an institution carrying great traditional authority in contemporary Ghanaian society. It assesses primarily the position of the chief in the neighbourhood's power structure, and from there asks what effect the institution has on the development of grassroots organisation for collective amenities.

In media and public debate, chiefs are portrayed as all-round community leaders who guard traditional customs in the face of rampant modernisation. The chiefs are celebrated as the embodiment of values, communities, and traditions which come under threat as urbanisation, modernisation, and commodification proceed. However, chieftaincy in its current form is neither an ancient nor a decaying institution. Local stools are often not ancient, because the current system of chieftaincy is largely a creation of the colonial state. And the institution is anything but decaying: it remains integral to the functioning of the formal state. In fact, there has been a veritable resurgence of chieftaincies in many African countries (Holzinger, Kern, & Kromrey, 2016). Significantly, and contrary to common perception, it is not only in the rural communities that chiefs reign. They also obtain strong new positions in the governance figurations of the neighbourhoods of rapidly growing cities. In Ghana, a new chief emerges in every new urban neighbourhood that grows onto the outskirts of existing cities.

### **Theoretical approach**

To define the shifting roles of the chief in his immediate surroundings, I use Weberian categories of traditional and legal-rational authority, especially focusing on the interrelation of bureaucratic and traditional organisational forms and the development of traditional authority regimes under urbanisation (Weber, 1968). I embed these in the Eliasian perspective that forms the overarching theoretical framework for the thesis as a whole. That is, I see chieftaincies and state agencies such as municipalities, ministries and state utility companies forming a 'flexible latticework of tensions' of interdependent institutions, which themselves can be unpacked to reveal their own internal figurations (Elias, 1978b, p. 126). More in particular, I see the chieftaincy structure as *folded into the formal state*. This is an important relation within the larger figuration, one so stable that even in newly settled areas, chieftaincies emerge in a process indirectly but strongly supported by the legal-rational institutions of the formal state. That is, the standard figuration of local bureaucracies of the formal state contains *valencies*, figurative openings, which chieftaincy structures snugly fit into.

In order to understand the kind of position that emerges for the chief at this intersection of traditional authority and bureaucratic power structures, I build on Roy's concept of *informality* as an idiom of urbanisation. I follow her in seeing informality as a 'state of exception' and therefore a *mode of urbanisation*, an 'organising logic' rather than a sector (Roy, 2005). In Roy (2009b), she describes 'planning by informality', a practice or an 'idiom of urbanisation' characterised primarily by its inherent informality. This informality is "inscribed in the ever-shifting relationship between what is legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, authorised and unauthorised" (ibid). Thus it allows for the arbitrary division between squatters and slum dwellers, who can be framed as 'nuisance', as opposed to 'normal, private property-owning citizens'.

This technique of 'governing by informality' is a mode quite opposed to everything that Weberian legal-rational bureaucratic regimes stand for, such as "technologies of visibility, counting, mapping, and enumerating" (Roy, 2009b). It is, in fact, an 'un-mapping' of cities (ibid.). Yet it is used by the state itself, which Roy describes as a "deeply informalised entity, one that actively utilise informality as an instrument of both accumulation and authority".

I use much of this idea, denoted by the term *governing by informality*. However, two differences with Roy's term must be noted. First, I use the notion in a slightly broader sense than Roy does: not only as applied to spatial planning, but to governing in general. Second, I do not apply the term directly to the state, but to the institution of chieftaincy, functioning in a sense as the most local extension of the formal state. As I show, the institution of chieftaincy may not be technically a part of the formal state, but it is still folded very tightly inside of it. Thus, I portray the chiefs' regimes as 'governing by informality', both independently and as an extension of the formal state.

### **Empirical strategy**

The relation between chieftaincy and the modern state is an ambiguous one, a complex balance of power further complicated by the asymmetry in geographical scale between the two structures. Chiefs are folded into the state in multiple ways, and this relationship is transformed and further complicated during the urbanisation process. To understand how and why this relationship is transformed, I combine the social dynamics within the neighbourhood, the structure and logic of formal local government, and the national-level processes shaping the legal position of the chiefs.

It is not easy to situate Sebepor, the central fieldwork site of this thesis, as a case study area for this topic. On the one hand, it is an *exemplifying* case study (Yin, 2017)

because like in most of Accra's new neighbourhoods, there is no long-standing village in the area. The land is as close to terra nova as one can find around Ghana's major cities, and hence there is also no long-standing chieftaincy in the area.<sup>22</sup> This creates a suitable setting for the question I want to answer: what type of chief's position develops in an area where everyone, including the chief, is to some extent a newcomer? In other words, what does the chief's position today look like if his palace is not rooted in an urbanised village, but has been created in the same time-frame as the urban neighbourhood around it?

On the other hand, Sebrepor forms a *critical case study* (Yin, 2017), that is, a case study where one critical condition is different from the ideal type situation. Several years ago, the chief moved out of his neighbourhood because of a conflict with parts of his extended family. This recently developed situation of absenteeism allows for a comparison between a present chief and an absent chief within the same area. It allows us to observe what aspects of his position depend on his presence, activity and local bonds, and what aspects of his position remain after he became a contested figure and therefore stopped living in the neighbourhood, being only dependent on his position as a formally enstooled chief within the Ghanaian state figuration.

### Summary

I conclude that the institution of chieftaincy, although its organisation and discourse largely remain that of a locally rooted, popular and socially central *traditional authority*, increasingly starts to lean on rational-legal sources of power such as its interdependence with several bureaucratic state agencies as a local 'governor by informality' and its formal land ownership. With regard to the chief's effect on grassroots organisation for the development of collective amenities in the neighbourhood, I conclude that the chief has formidable power there. This is primarily blocking power; that is, if the chief wants to *stop* a particular group or activity, he can easily do so. But depending on the disposition of the chief and his degree of security in power, a chief can also contribute powerfully to local action for development, by taking the lead and using his influence to stimulate residents to participate in collective action.

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22 It should be noted, however, that even though there was no local chief, the land still fell under a chief *in theory*. In the case of the Ga-Dangbe, most of those chiefs historically lived in coastal villages, and the inland land, which was largely unoccupied, was categorised in complex local and frequently unwritten patterns as belonging to one of the coastal chiefdoms. Every square meter of land in Ghana belongs, in the end, to one chief or another. But when the city expands to cover previously uninhabited land, the chieftaincy *in* those newly growing neighborhoods is generally as young as the neighborhood itself – appointed by an older, distant chief.

## 5.2 Background

In this section, I briefly set out a history of the institution of chieftaincy. I show how diversely chieftaincy has historically been constituted, how the institution developed in interdependency with various extractive and colonial regimes, how it was then interwoven with the state during the British colonial regime and how that arrangement was taken over by Ghana's post-colonial government at independence after 1957.

Ghanaian chieftaincy is a highly diverse institution, ranging from the fully centralised and hierarchical to the quasi-acephalous. There have been a number of kingdoms in what is now Ghana, formerly Gold Coast and part of the Lower Volta Seini (Brempong, 2006). These were notably the Ashanti in the center and the Mamprusi and the Dagbon in the north of the country. These tribes had, and have, highly centralised leadership systems with a king at the apex, and a clear military organisational structure. The Ashanti also had highly elaborate taxation legislation and collection systems (Reindorf, 1895).

Such concentration of power and militarisation were stimulated by the arrival of Arabic traders from the North and the European colonial powers on the coast, whose demand for slaves was most easily satisfied by fighting wars with the neighbouring tribes and selling the captives. The Ashanti, which started through a military unification of various Twi-speaking tribes in central Ghana, are the best example of this; their name literally means 'because of war' (Graeber, 2011).

However, most tribes were, and are, organised much more loosely. The Ewe were, and often still are, regarded as highly spiritual by the general public in Ghana, and their chiefs were accordingly more spiritual leaders than military ones (Meyer, 1999). The same goes for the Ga-Dangbe, who hold traditional authority over the central part of the coast, including all of the Greater Accra Region. The Ga villages, in fact, did not use to have military leaders at all. Their highest decision-making authority used to be a council of priests. The concept of secular chiefs and stools, now seen as the traditional form of local government, was quite foreign to them and seems to have been imported from the Ashanti, "greatly to the detriment of Ga peace", because it did not fit into the Ga non-dogmatic theocracies and their democratic, deliberative mode of self-governance (Field, 1937, p. 3).

There are many other differences between the different tribal organisation systems within Ghana (Boateng, 1994). For present purposes however, the spectrum sketched



above should serve. It shows that the modern concept “chief” in Ghana is a mixture of very different types of origins. Within the different systems, chieftaincy has combined military, religious, judicial, administrative, legislative, economic and cultural functions, and to various degrees it still does so. It should also be noted that the institution is, and always has been, subject to constant change. That means the institution adapts to new circumstances, such as urbanisation, and it also means that the definition of its roles, responsibilities and powers is always up for debate.

But how did the modern, somewhat standardised and legally enshrined national network of chiefs originate, with its National and Regional Houses of Chiefs? It was created in the colonial era by the British. When shaping the area into the Gold Coast colony, these had no desire to fight all the local strongmen they encountered. Instead, they included them into the fabric of their colonial state. The British colonial administration model was largely one of indirect rule, which required local leaders who could act as a layer of home-grown administrators, cushioning the colonial rulers from the complexity of local politics.

To this end, colonial administrators crudely divided up the land and the people into a number of discrete ethnic groups, in the process ignoring any ambiguity, any political arrangements or identities that did not fit this new order (Mamdani, 1996). They required each of these ethnic groupings to identify ‘chiefs,’ who were to act as local authorities. When local communities had no individual chiefs, the colonial administration recognised as ‘chief’ whatever local elites they found pliable (Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal & Van Dijk, 1999).

For instance the Ga, living in the Greater Accra region, had no worldly leaders to speak of, but only a small number of purely spiritual ‘earth priests’ (Field, 1940). This lack of a clear negotiating partner frustrated the British, who finally simply appointed one of these priests, the Mantse, to be chief, roughly modelling the Ga chieftaincy system on that of the nearby Akan. In exchange for their loyalty as local proxies, these chiefs were endowed by the colonial government with a large amount of local discretion and military backing (Mamdani, 1996).

However, the colonial administration deliberately did not institute any clear succession rules for the chiefs. This had the (publicly espoused) advantage that any local traditions for succession would not be violated, but it also had the (less publicly espoused) advantage that the colonial rulers could more easily influence who would be chief. This started a long tradition of state structures governing Ghana by informality.

It also led to a situation where endless legal fights are waged between candidates for succession, often ranging over more than a decade after the previous chief has died, as well as a practical to install chiefs based on political party preference, made possible by the vagueness of succession rules.

Thus, tradition was often invented, as the needs of the colonial government dictated (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). However, this lack of local institutional continuity does not make chiefs any less of a traditional authority in the Weberian sense. This became clearly visible in our interviews and longer interactions with Ga chiefs, elders and others involved with the institution, who scrupulously study old books, obscure archival material and oral history to find out the 'correct' rules of succession and power lines – correctness of the rules being defined by their age.

Surrounding independence in 1957, there was deep distrust between the Ashanti, whose region formed Ghana's economic and political powerhouse, and the first president Kwame Nkrumah, who had gathered a coalition from all regions of the new Ghana. The final compromise, partly brokered by the British, was that the chiefs would get a powerful position in the newly formed independent state, symbolised by their presence in the national coat of arms. This went against the will of the nationalist Nkrumah, who saw many chiefs as henchmen of the former colonial regime (Rathbone, 2000).

This entrenchment of the chiefs' power was a concession to regionalism, since the Ashanti chiefs were the *de facto* leaders of that region and could be expected to form a stronghold against any overly centralist policies emanating from Accra. However, it applied and still applies to *all* chiefs in Ghana, which includes many in regions where they are far less rooted leaders than the Ashanti chiefs are. They thus held on to the strong position they had held under the British, which was enshrined in Ghana's first independent constitution (art. 267, Const. 1992), protecting their local right to govern and their stewardship over the land, with its most recent incarnation in the Chieftaincy Act 759 of 2008.

Today, most Ghanaians still cannot imagine a community without a chief. Research among residents of villages around Kumasi, Ghana's second city, shows that even those who feel their chief is grossly malfunctioning do not feel that chieftaincy itself should be abolished (Ubink, 2007). In Accra, only 5% of the residents would want to abolish chieftaincy (Knierzinger, 2007). Whether they perform well, poorly, or not at all, their position is accepted as a fact of life by almost everyone, including the institutions of the formal state.

How can we understand chiefs today, and unpack the various roles they play, especially in urban areas? It is notoriously hard to categorise and pinpoint chief's activities (Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal & Van Dijk, 1999), if only because they differ so much between chiefs. They differ not only between various ethnic traditions and local customs, but also between chiefs of the same tribe whose areas are right next to each other, because the position is a highly flexible one, allowing for a large degree of personalisation. In the end, there is no job description, and chiefs interpret their duties very differently (Odotei & Awedoba, 2006). Some work hard to develop their area, others see their role as limited to preserving tradition, some actively engage with formal state authorities and maintain their social presence in the neighbourhood through active mingling, whilst others wait to be approached or are even very hard to approach for the residents of their area.

To deal with this, I have narrowed down the description of chief's roles and positions for this chapter in a very simple way: I have looked only at the chief's sources of power, and within those, I have only looked at the observable, direct lines of power, excluding for instance the power chiefs have through their influence on local politicians around election time. By tracing the chief's sources of power, it becomes possible to establish a bare-bones image of his position within Ghana's modern state figuration, one which is roughly similar for all chiefs in southern and central urban Ghana.<sup>23</sup> What chiefs subsequently *do* with such power is another matter altogether, and one which differs radically between chiefs.

Finally, a note on terminology. The word 'chief' is applied to a variety of positions in contemporary Ghanaian society (Odotei & Awedoba, 2006). The one which is the topic of this paper is the *enstooled* (or *enskinned*) *chief* of the 'indigenous' ethnicity, appointed by the *kingmakers* and generally gazetted as chief by the Regional House of Chiefs (although positions are frequently contested).

Then there are the so-called *migrant chiefs*, leading and representing clusters of Ghanaians of the same ethnicity living outside their area of origin. These chiefs are generally appointed or elected by popular acclaim, and as such more easily held accountable by their community than *enstooled* chiefs. These have a social leadership role, and can have substantial influence. But they do not control the land on which

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23 There is a cultural divide in this sense around the lower Black Volta. The regions to the north (Upper East, Upper West and Northern) often did not have any chiefs of the kind found in modern-day Ghana, until this institution were forced on them by colonizing powers who required similar structures of indirect rule throughout the country (Abotchie, Awedoba, & Odotei, 2006).

they and their people live, and they are not protected by the constitution, since they are not considered proper chiefs. Unlike enstooled chiefs, their position fully depends on their performance.

Finally, there are *development chiefs* or *Nkɔsuohene* (Bob-Milliar, 2009). This is an honorary title given to people who have done much to develop a certain village or area, like European knighthoods bestowed for services rendered to society.

This section has provided a historical introduction of the chief's institutional position throughout Ghana's state formation process, showing the trajectory through which this position was developed and specified during the state formation process, and progressively embedded in the nation state's narrative and legal fabric. In the following four empirical sections, I study the contemporary roles of the chief, using Sebrepur as the central case study, relying mainly on interviews, observations and the archives of the chief's Divisional Council.

The empirical part of this chapter is divided into four sections (5.3-5.6). Section 5.3 looks at the chief as a local traditional leader, unpacking the relationship between the chief and the residents of the area. Section 5.4 goes into the interdependencies between the chief and a variety of government bureaucracies, also sketching the change over time in this figuration. In section 5.5, I discuss a particular source of power, which is not so much relational as it is technical: the chief's position as land manager, and his attached legal hold on the land. In section 5.6, I pose the question "who is 'the chief'?", and unpack the dynamics around this private person, centering on that larger definition of the chieftaincy institution, 'the palace'. In this section, I also zoom out and extrapolate from this case study to the historical and expected development of the figuration of state and urban chieftaincy in Ghana as a whole.

### 5.3 Traditional leader

*“The chief is the heart and mind of his people. When he gives directives it is seen as a law. This town has a chief, but no one has an idea who he is. He doesn’t live among his people, or even close to them. This has caused the people to lose their moral support. So if the chief who is seen as the conscience of the people is absent, the order governing the people is also absent.” – Sarah, Sebrepur resident, 2015*

“The chief is the heart and mind of his people.” The root identity of Ghanaian chiefs is that of sovereign community leader. In the literature, chiefs’ main characteristics are their traditional authority over a relatively homogeneous local population and their management of the accompanying land (S. Berry, 2013; Ray & Reddy, 2003). Chiefs are also described as the embodiments and mediators of local tradition, functioning as syncretic linchpins between the traditional and the modern (Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal & Van Dijk, 1999).

As described above, they have indeed historically taken up this role in many forms. In this section, I unpack that role as it is reshaped under the process of urbanisation, by looking at the three main elements of that role: first the chief as ‘soft’ leader, a cultural guide and a peacekeeper, second the chief as local strongman, and third the chief as a clientelist patron, delivering material benefits to his people. There has been over the past few centuries a more general pattern of structural differentiation, where various functions of the chief are taken over by modern institutions. I find that most parts of the chief’s role as a traditional leader dwindle under processes of urbanisation.

#### **The chief as ‘soft’ leader: cultural guide and peacekeeper**

As “the conscience of his people”, the chief has a cultural leadership function. Among the Ga (the native tribe of Greater Accra), this is the chief’s original primary function: they emerged from a priest-order known as the wulomo (Reindorf, 1895). Up to the present day, the chiefs work hard to keep that role as a cultural leader. This becomes very clear in a letter in which the chief reminds everyone of the stipulated traditions around engagement, marriage and death. The letter is addressed to all stools and churches in the neighbourhood.

*"RE: Review of customary practices on funerals/marriages in the Kpone Traditional Area*

*Sir,*

*I submit herewith a comprehensive review of the customary practices on funerals / marriages in the Traditional Area, for onward transmission to your family members / congregations.*

*This review took place at a general meeting of the Kpone Traditional Council held on 13th December, 2005. Defaulters will face the penalties accordingly.*

*Counting on your cooperation,*

*H. A. K. Attipoe,  
Assistant Regional Registrar"*

The letter then sets out the traditional customs surrounding the death of a man, listing all the items that should be provided by the family, the daughter-in-law and the widow (soap, a coffin, deathbed clothes, and so on). The letter also goes into the customary items surrounding marriage and general gender relations, the punishment for adultery (a monetary fine, two bottles of schnapps and a sheep), and sometimes oddly specific throwbacks to times of different material circumstances: "A man who impregnates a woman without seeking the consent of her family will provide the woman two half pieces of cloth and will provide medical care for the impregnated woman with any other responsibilities."

Efforts like this letter are part of a centuries-long power struggle between the tribal leaders and the churches for cultural hegemony. This process can be said to have started with the first attempts at Christianisation of the Gold Coast, when in March 1767, the Directors of the Danish Guinea Company...

*"...begged the Elders of the United Brethren to send missionaries to the Gold Coast to preach the Gospel to the natives for the purpose of making them orderly, faithful and diligent people like those on the three Danish islands in the West Indies" (Reindorf, 1895, p. 216).*

From the start, Christianity has undermined the religious authority of the local priests and indirectly that of chiefs. After all, even more than the kings in Europe, Ghanaian chiefs were leading 'by the grace of God', as in most ethnic groups, the chiefs were part



of a caste of priests. So as the local gods were being supplanted by Jesus, so was the religious authority and power basis of the chiefs undermined (Reindorf, 1895, p. 109). This struggle for cultural leadership continues up to the present day, although most of it is of course not captured in such letters but rather a matter of daily discourse. “Tribal organisations are wicked, our church doesn’t allow us to go there”, as Mary, another resident, put it.

Another aspect of the chief as “the order governing the people” concerns the chief functioning as an informal court of law (Englebert, 2002; Ubink, 2008; Van Kessel & Oomen, 1997). This is a major occupation for the chief and his self-appointed Divisional Council. They handle several cases each month, on land ownership conflicts, domestic disputes, conflicts between neighbours, offenses against the chief’s honor, public fighting and other local disputes. Traditionally, this is a large function of the chieftaincy, but in Sebrepur, it is now declining. As Mr. Aryeetey, the secretary of the Divisional Council, notes: “Before 10 years, we had a whole lot of cases. These days, it is decreasing. Of late, we have not been receiving many complaints at all.”

In short, the chief’s ‘soft’ leadership as the ‘heart and mind of his people’ is dwindling rapidly. This holds in the sense of cultural leadership, ‘the conscience of the people’, where the chief’s moral authority is being supplanted by a plurality of churches. It also holds in the sense of judging local disputes, as ‘the order governing the people’, where the chief is increasingly bypassed in favor of institutions of the formal state.

### **The chief as local strongman**

The chief’s cultural leadership and judging role support another one of his roles: as the guardian of the community, a local strongman. “When he gives directives it is seen as a law,” Sarah said in the above quote. As another resident, Mary, put it: “The chief is the only one with real authority. You know, we also have these other leaders here, the Assemblyman, the Traditional Council, but they don’t really hold that same power.”

We can see this role set out by the chief himself in the course of a seemingly innocent project: the naming of the streets in Sebrepur. Because of the inherently political potential in naming locations, often after prominent people, this often turns into a number of micro-level power struggles (Godin, Le Roux, & Farvacque-Vitkovic, 2005, p. 16). The chief writes a letter to the Duratec Alu & Sons Company, ordering them to stop a street naming project they are running in Sebrepur. Why?

*"It had come to my notice that you were violating the advice we all arrived at, when we were meeting at the Fire of Flames Ministries in Sebrepur." The letter ends: "NOTE: The failure to comply with this directive would be met with most stringent opposition needed, as many are dissatisfied with the exercises (work)."*

In other words, the company is not naming the streets in a manner agreeable to the chief, and he threatens to set some people against them. In his role as a traditional leader, the chief largely draws his power from a state of informality, and he uses his local strongman position to determine how and when formality will come into his neighbourhood. When the formal state comes into play, the dynamics become very different, as the following section of this chapter shows. But as long as he moves in the informal realm that falls under his traditional authority, his use of such physical power is relatively unconstrained.

There is a piece of land in Sebrepur, between a railroad and a high-tension power line, where a group of migrants had settled without obtaining formal land documentation. They had bought the land from a long-time local, who had obtained the land from the previous chief to farm on. Throughout a year, negotiations take place between the 'squatters' and the chief on how to solve the issue: formalise their residence or leave. The chief continuously puts pressure on the 'squatters' to leave their plots.

When they don't appear before his court quickly enough, he first decides to fine them. From the Council's notes: "It was agreed behind closed door discussion that the squatters should pay 1 white ram, 2 bottles of foreign schnapps, plus c3.000.000 for forcing Nii Dortey III go to the Regional Crime Officer to make them appear at his stool." It is relevant to note here that the chief actively works to discourage residents from getting the formal authorities involved - this fine is explicitly for the 'crime' of "forcing [the chief] to go to the Regional Crime Officer". And formal though the fine may sound, though, it is negotiable. When the squatters do appear, they pay several bottles of schnapps and a whiskey, and it is accepted as enough. However, the negotiations do not lead to a resolution.

So "the Council decided that Nii Mankralo, Nii Shippi, Nii Narteh and Asafoatse should move to Nii Dortey, and discuss a more pragmatic way of approach, since they are the owners of the land. The rest of the councillors are ready to give the necessary support." What 'a more pragmatic approach' means soon becomes clear: a crew of strongmen with guns and knives, so-called 'land guards', is sent to threaten the 'squatters' in order to force them out of the area.

This convinces them to appear again at the chief's palace, where the chief denies sending land guards at them, but suggestively notes that it is better for everyone to stick to his rules. After giving the 'squatters' a stern talking-to, the chief makes them "purify the Stool", i.e. pay another fine in foreign liquor and money, because the 'squatters' reported him to the local police for sending land guards at them. Finally, the land is cleared for the larger part, and the 'squatters' are re-settled in a corner of the area.

What can we conclude about this traditional strongman role of the chief? It seems to be still quite present, although in a subdued form. It could be said that this part of his traditional role remains, to the extent that the chief can operate in the informal realm. That means he can implicitly threaten people with force, like he did to the (formal) street naming company, and he can anonymously send gangs to threaten and attack people who have no formal rights to the land they occupy. But as the following section sets out, he can no longer use his strongman position in the open, being increasingly restrained by a variety of well-organised state bureaucracies around him.

### **The chief delivering material benefits to his people**

There is a third part of his role as a traditional leader: solving people's material problems. His role in this could be best seen as a patron one, where he provides limited material benefits in exchange for respect and loyalty. As he says:

*"The people, they owe allegiance to me. The citizens, they owe allegiance to me. So I also see to it that they are in perfect stay. It is my duty to meet them frequently. To consider the development of the area. If we need some amenities, we sit down, and we take a decision."*

This clientelist leadership is a role that other local leaders, such as church leaders, businessmen, politicians, also take up. But the chief has a head start on them, through his traditional leadership his bureaucratic middle man position and his land manager's role (see later this chapter). However, this role is one that depends particularly on whether one takes the initiative. Sarah, from the quote above, later elaborated on the consequences of the chief's absence: since the chief is not present to lead the locals in development efforts, nobody is doing anything. "The indigens are not ready for serious development. The chief lives outside his community, and does not even visit his people." This quote also sheds light on the broader ethnic relations in the area: the chief is seen as the head of the local Ga people, and it is their responsibility to act to develop the area. All other ethnicities, Ghanaian or otherwise, are guests. This sentiment was echoed by most of the Ga I spoke with.

In the Divisional Council notes, such development plans do crop up from time to time, but they make little headway. In 2002, during the first meeting of the Council, several projects were suggested, most importantly a marketplace for the area. However, when I came to the area for research in 2015, the marketplace was still on the agenda. Meanwhile, open land in the area had filled up almost completely.

Would things be different if the chief were living in the area? It may be helpful to compare this chief with his superior, the Kpone Paramount Chief Nii Tetteh Otoo II. Nii Tetteh is still living in his area, the nearby town Kpone, and regularly sets up development projects.

*"In the development, you see, the members of the community have been helping me to create structures, digging for foundations, everything! Every week or maybe fortnightly, we go around the neighbourhood and beat the gongong, announcing there is a project here, we are doing communal labour, and so on."*

However, he complains that the residents don't want to help with communal labor any longer.

*"We invite the boys to come and work, but some were protesting. After inviting them, some of them said, oh!, they will not do the communal labor, they will not dig, because our sponsor has given us 1.2 billion [about \$100.000] to build the maternity block. So why should we then call them to come and do communal labor for free? Meanwhile, our sponsor did not give us one peso! But these days, you know, people just don't want to come out for communal labor anymore. They say 'government, government'. They say, 'the [municipal] Assembly will do it'. Meanwhile, the Assembly doesn't have money to do all this!"*

As noted, the extent of the chief's role as a clientelist leader, delivering the goods, depends to a large degree on whether he actively takes this role. It is certainly possible to do this more actively, as his colleague in Kpone does. But even in that case, the chief's ability to deliver services is increasingly outpaced by the government agencies. And to get services from government bureaucracies, political patronage is a more effective channel than tribal patronage. There appears to be a gradual erosion of tribal identification. As the local Assemblyman explains:

*"You see, in Ghana, politics has taken over all that we do, more than 80%. If you belong to his or her party, the person will attend to you. Whether I'm an Ashante, if I don't belong to their party it won't help me. Though even the head of that party is an Ashante, but because I don't belong to their party, they won't attend to me."*

As the Assemblyman explains, tribal loyalty has largely given way to party line patronage, and for individual tribe members, this shared identity is no longer enough to ask for favours. The chief, however, does get strong channels into the various state bureaucracies, as we see in the next section. Perhaps counter-intuitively, these channels are not so much connected to his position as a tribal leader, but rather as a traditional middle man for the formal government.

As we have seen in this section, the chief's role as a traditional leadership is in principle quite wide-ranging. However, as we have also seen, Sebrepor's chief is certainly not making the most of this role. In fact, as Sarah notes, he is not around. "No one has an idea who he is," is not to be taken literally, but it does illustrate the strangeness of the absence of this presumed traditional leader from his own home area. Moreover, Sebrepor's population is ethnically highly diverse, whereas Nii Dortey is explicitly an ethnic leader. This problem is faced by most urban chiefs, regardless of their efforts: they rule over a population largely made up of 'strangers'. His cultural leadership role, too, has become very limited. His strongman role has moved underground and is now limited by formal state power. Finally, his clientelist leadership has almost disappeared. In short, his role as a traditional leader has dwindled rapidly as urbanisation progressed in the area.

## 5.4 Middle man

*"You know, if there is a chief, then definitely, if someone is trying to misbehave the first point of contact is the chief. Because if you should go to the police, then they will find out where you are residing. And then they will ask you, from whom did you acquire your land? You say the chief. Then they will ask you: why didn't you report the matter to the chief? Then what do you say? So the chief's house is the first point of call to report any matter." – Emmanuel Aryeetey, Secretary of the Divisional Council*

*"If we [the municipality] want to do a project in the area, we first call together the community. Who? Well, the chief is the head of the community, and then there is the Traditional Council, composed of the heads of the various clans in the area." – Paul Ofori, Chief Municipal Planning Officer*

Since colonial times, the chief has been a middle man between formal government and the residents of his area. Under conditions of urbanisation and the accompanying densification of bureaucracies, this creates a variety of new positions for the chief as a kind of 'lower-level bureaucrat', as I show below. Taken together, this creates a structure of 'governing by informality' with the chief mediating bureaucratic relations. For the residents, the chief thus often appears as a gatekeeper towards formal institutions.

However, the chief's intimate relationship with state bureaucracies bring him something more. From the multiplicity of lower-level bureaucrat roles which he takes on emerges a larger role: to speak in the name of 'the community' to bureaucracies in general, even when there is no individual case to be handled. The chief can thus leverage his relations with the state in the local arena, where there is an ever-expanding day-to-day influence of bureaucracies. In this respect, processes of modernisation provide him with another instrument of local neighbourhood power, even as his traditional leadership role dwindles.

### **The chief as lowest bureaucrat and gatekeeper**

The chief's role as a lower-level bureaucrat is most apparent when we see him at work as judge, or somewhat broader, as 'keeper of the peace'. His Divisional Council has frequent correspondence with the surrounding police stations, asking the police to arrest subjects for cases being adjudicated in their courts, requesting to take over cases from them or informing them of the outcome of such cases.

*"The above (...) Council has solved the problem between Mr. Otoo and Mr. Coleman and family. The arbitration team has reached a fitting compromise between the two (2) parties. The Council would therefore be grateful if you could close the docket on the case."*

This is not a one-way channel. Sometimes the Divisional Council does not manage to solve the case, and decides to refer it back to the police. At one instance, the Council writes a longer letter to the police station explaining how they arbitrated a certain dispute, but one of the parties is refusing to pay the fine.



*"Reference a case between [name], complainant, and [names], defendants, lodged at your outfit, Community 22 Police Station, withdrawn upon the request of the two defendants to the Kpone-Sebrepur Divisional Council.*

*The Kpone-Sebrepur Divisional Council arbitrated in the dispute. Rulings were made known to all the parties who consented to the rulings. The complainant [name] and one of the defendants [name] honoured their parts of the rulings and paid their fines. [name], the other defendant in the case, asked for time up to ending of May 2008 to pay her fines. She failed on this date and came to request again for 15<sup>th</sup> June 2008. The husband [name], who was present when verdict was passed, also came to confirm that he will pay on the 15<sup>th</sup> June since they are paid on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month.*

*Both failed to honour this promise up to date. The Kpone-Sebrepur Divisional Council is therefore referring the case back to your outfit."*

This letter, routine as it looks, is worth some closer reading. It does not only communicate an outcome, or simply carry a request for certain action. It also includes a detailed justification for that request, and it contains all the information the Council's leaders know the police will need to be able to continue building their file on this case. That is, here the chief's Council operates as a full-fledged part of the police bureaucracy. So in fact, the letter's routineness is exactly the point: the chief's Council is quite used to operating as the local extension of various government bureaucracies.

It also becomes clear once again that the chief's *open use* of force is no longer acceptable. When the defendant refuses to pay, the chief does not send out some of his boys to forcefully claim the payment, but instead refers the case back to the police. The case has been solved, so the police are not required to do any detective or judiciary work. Their job here is only as holders of the monopoly on violence.

In the previous examples we have seen the chief working as an extension of formal bureaucracies into the neighbourhood. But often, he also plays a role as a gatekeeper when it comes to the provision of amenities. In the 1990s, several Sebrepur residents got together to set up a water supply system for the area, autonomously organising the connection to the Ghana Water Company mainlines nearby and building the

neighbourhood distribution network. But when they write to the Ghana Water Company to register new customers, the position of the chief again comes through. The request is titled “Authority Note”, written by the Sebrepur Water Committee, but by coming through the chief’s Divisional Council, the letter carries much more weight and is more likely to move smoothly through the Ghana Water Company bureaucracy. In fact, Sebrepur is the only neighbourhood in the area to have a specific Water Committee made up of plumbers. The surrounding neighbourhoods also have such committees, but there, they are chaired by the divisional chiefs themselves, so that these are direct gatekeepers for access to this vital amenity.

In a later letter, the chief in fact orchestrates the transfer of this informally built infrastructure from the Sebrepur Water Committee to the state utility company Ghana Water Company. “Potable water supply in the township was initiated and the cost borne by the inhabitants, including its maintenance.” The infrastructure has so far served the people, but now the professional state bureaucracy needs to come in, bringing new infrastructure “serving these three big communities (...) with large populations (...) to prevent frequent pipeline bursts and wastage of precious treated water in the area.” This request is made directly by the chief, not the grassroots-organised Sebrepur Water Committee.

This is a pattern that appears time and again in the meeting notes: the Divisional Council and the municipal and other government authorities seem to work hand in hand. As the Chief Planning Officer of the municipality put it: “If we, the municipality, want to do a project in the area, we first call together the community. Who? Well, the chief is the head of the community, and then there is the Traditional Council, composed of the heads of the various clans in the area.” Two things become very clear from this quote: the municipal officers see a layer of organisation existing between them and the residents, and that layer consists primarily of the local chief and his elders. In many respects, the Traditional and Divisional Councils could then be said to function much like subsidiary layers of government in the formal system, only with somewhat different rules.

The relationship is clearly shown in an exchange of letters at the occasion when a new municipality is established under which Sebrepur falls. In a letter addressed to the chief, the District Chief Executive (DCE, basically the mayor) embarks on a “familiarisation tour” of the newly formed Kpone-Katamanso District area.

*“The purpose of the tour is to offer the Hon. DCE the opportunity to acquaint himself with the development challenges facing the Communities and institutions/establishments in order to plans solutions to address them.”*

In this tour, he visits two locations in the Sebrepur area: the local army barracks, and the chief’s palace. As the new DCE puts it, “he and his team of technocrats...are visiting the community...to interact with you and your elders”. In short, the chief is addressed as the unequivocal leader of the community, thus signposting his right to rule by informality.

The chief responds to the letter with warm words of welcome. He writes: “The Sebrepur Mantse, Nii Dortey Abotsi III (...) and the entire residents of Sebrepur township seize this opportunity to welcome you (...) and the Kpone-Katamanso District Assembly to Sebrepur.” He then describes what the residents have done for themselves, and requests, in their name, the tarring of a motorway, better water pipelines, effective road drainage, local sub-offices for better daily coordination of developmental work, and street lighting. In essence, the chief here speaks from the role in which he was addressed: as the only legitimate spokesperson for the community, the linchpin between residents and state.

In short, the entire figuration around the modern state is hardwired to recognise the chief as the natural neighbourhood leader and spokesperson, the man of the people. This goes for state bureaucrats at the local level, state bureaucrats at the national level, semi-state bureaucrats at state utility companies. Sebrepur’s chief works with the Electricity Company of Ghana to bring new connections to the neighbourhood; he signs his residents’ forms to apply for a new water connection with the Ghana Water Company; he shifts cases back and forth with formal judges and the local police commander; and he works with various municipal agencies such as the local Planning Office.

All of these organisations could in principle also communicate with other local leaders, but they are predisposed to look for the chief first.<sup>24</sup> They mostly work through the

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24 The direct competitor of the chief in this sense of being the ‘natural gatekeeper’ is the Assemblyman. And in many ways, these two positions function as communicating vessels. This detracts a little bit from the importance of the chief, but not seriously so, since most Assemblymen have full-time jobs, and chiefs are generally more respected by the public than Assemblymen (Ubink, 2007). Moreover, Assemblymen have full-time jobs, so they generally do not have time for such functions.

concept of ‘opinion leaders’, a complex category involving anyone with local influence, of which the first point of address is, certainly for those who are not intimately familiar with the local area, the chief. This gives him quite some discretionary power. Thus, urbanisation and state formation spawn a variety of new positions for the chief as a local gatekeeper between residents and formal institutions.

This is a pattern I found in all neighbourhoods I visited in Accra. The exact mix of such responsibilities and powers differs between chiefs, but what is constant is that local chiefs essentially participate in weaving a web of bureaucratic institutions and infrastructures in which they have a central position, refining and deepening of the pre-existing interdependency between chieftaincy and the state.

It is important to note here that this role goes two ways. Not only do bureaucracies approach the chief as their local extension, the chief himself also actively seeks out political connections and power. He made sure that his Divisional Council cross-cuts political party lines. The chief himself worked as an NPP Assemblyman during the same period that the Council’s secretary was part of the NDC municipal cadre, and several of the representatives of various tribes in the Council are also prominent political movers and shakers, in both parties. Thus, the chief has assembled many of the local ‘opinion leaders’ in a temporarily stable figuration around himself. In a larger pattern, such interdependencies between chiefs and politicians are widely recognised (Boakye, 2016; Rathbone, 2000).

### **The chief as community spokesman**

In his interactions with local bureaucracies, the chief seamlessly merges two parts of the middle man role. First, the government works with the chief as the local extension of many different government bureaucracies. We call this the *chief as lowest-level bureaucrat*, where the chief positions himself as one of the bureaucrats. But he interweaves this with another role: speaking *to* bureaucracies, *from* ‘the community’. Both concern the chief as seen from the point of view of government bureaucrats, and both build on from the chieftains’ colonial past as middle men. But they are subtly different in terms of the responsibilities and legitimacy they bring.

From the combination of these two roles emerges another position of independent power. The chief can use his role as community spokesman and his privileged relations with state bureaucracies to achieve personal goals and exert power independently. We see here the chief as an independent informal ruler, with close ties to the bureaucracies but not bound by the restrictions of a bureaucrat.

This becomes apparent in two letters sent to the Ghana Police Station in Ashaiman (the nearest police station) in September 2005. The chief writes:

*“To the Officer in Charge.*

*Dear Sir/Madam,*

*One Mr. Paul, a resident in the area where I am ruling as the Mantse<sup>25</sup> [traditional Ga title for the chief], is trying to misconduct himself. I have a stool land [a piece of land owned by the stool, the ‘throne’], which has been earmarked as a mini-market to serve the township. Mr. Paul has issued a warning to artisans on any attempt to develop that piece of land. We are about to start a Communal Labour to start the mini-market project. Should he make the second attempt to stop the project, I will not hesitate to communicate to your outfit for immediate police action.*

*Thank you, Hon. Nii Dortey Abotsi III”*

Mr. Paul in response defends himself with his own letter to the police station, in which he explains that he has been living on that land for two decades now, and that the chief has plenty of land on which to build a mini market.

*“But if it pleases him to use the only piece of land on which I’m resident for a mini market, he should come so that we **negotiate for appropriate compensation**. If he is not convinced of negotiating for appropriate compensation, he is free to go to court, where my lawyer is anxiously waiting for him”. (emphasis in original)*

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25 On the position of the *Mantse*: the Ga’s were originally a pure theocracy, with four types of priests. The highest of these was the *wulomo*, whose leadership was purely spiritual. Two others were the *mankralo* and the *mantse*. The latter was actually not a leader at all, but rather a beautifully-dressed man who functioned as a war mascot (‘War Medicine’). As the Ga said, this man in his role of the *mantse* ‘has no mouth’, his function was not to speak or pass judgement, let alone lead. His function was to bring luck in war. When the British started to insist that every town would have a chief to negotiate with, the *mantse* was often appointed to this function. This was the source of a large number of internal conflicts, because in the case of the *mantse* as a chief, it was not a matter of him overstepping his traditional right to rule – he had no right to rule at all. The Ga originally simply did not have any worldly leaders (Reindorf, 1895).

As he puts it:

*"The chief's letter, copied to me, seeks to intimidate me. It aims at twisting my arms behind me so that at the time of the chief's intended provocation, he can have his way out easily. I therefore humbly wish to inform the Ashaiman Police that should the chief send people to my house (land) to do anything funny, all in the name of building a mini market, I shall not hesitate to inform the **Dodowa Police Unit** since my area is under the **Dodowa District Police Jurisdiction.**" (emphasis in original)*

This letter provides a vivid illustration of how the chief can deploy his right to govern by informality: a mix of intimidation and the opportunistic use of state bureaucracies. However, it is also relevant to note the ending of Mr. Paul's letter, which shows his tactic of resistance: he refers explicitly to another police unit than the one addressed by the chief. Why? The chief is more than just the chief. As an Assemblyman (signified by the 'Honorable' before his name) he has privileged connections at the local municipal agencies, including the police. But as Mr. Paul notes, the chief's ability to govern informally, whether by right as a traditional leader or as derived from his position as middle man for the local government bureaucracies, is increasingly restricted by the various state bureaucracies surrounding him. Indeed, Mr. Paul ended up winning the case, the chief and his Council had to back down. I come back to this point in the conclusion of the chapter.

However, not everyone is able to stand up to the chief. The case of the 'squatters' under the high-tension line, introduced in the previous empirical section, is a good example. As the fines and the land guards do not have the desired effect, the chief and Council decide to involve their connections in the formal sector. They send out a letter to the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) to disconnect the 'squatters' from electricity, in order to push them out, and simultaneously send a letter to the regional police commander.

*"RE: Request for Power Disconnection*

*Dear Madam,*

*The above Council operating under the Manteship of Nii Dortey Abotsi III wishes to draw your attention to an exercise about to take place in*



*his area of traditional jurisdiction (...). People have defiantly planted wooden structures and containers under the high tension power lines in some areas in the Sebrepur township, to the detriment of unsuspecting residents. They have worsened their defiance by drawing power through some of your workers without consideration to life and properties belonging to responsible citizens. (...)*

*We are therefore appealing to your high office to remove all electrical connections (...) in the affected area before 23rd January 2008.”*

The letter sent to the police commander is almost the same, except that the request this time is not to disconnect people from a public amenity, but somewhat more martial: “for help to weed out those squatters to forestall peace and sanity in the area mentioned above before the 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2008.” Indeed, the chief won this fight and managed to remove the squatters. His position appears to be very clear: he uses his authority as a local leader of the community, representing the ‘unsuspecting residents’ and ‘responsible citizens.’ But in the Council notes, we find that the piece of land in question was in fact under litigation. Rather than being squatted, it was sold to the people living there by ‘unauthorised parties’, that is, the chief’s relatives.

Thus, in a tangle of competing claims and ambiguous property and usufructuary rights, the chief is able to push through his own. He does so with the support of the formal authorities, who follow his interpretation of the situation. What is more, he is able to punish citizens for getting the formal authorities involved in the first place, twice in fact. First, he fined the squatters first for forcing him to call in the Regional Crime Officer to bring them to his Council, and then he fined them again for reporting him to the police when he sent goons at them. This is what governing by informality looks like in practice.

### **Effect of the chief’s position on grassroots organisation**

The chief functions in a sense as a street-level bureaucrat, shaping how these institutions are concretised within his neighbourhood (Lipsky, 1980). However, he is not employed by any single bureaucracy, nor are his powers confined to those of a bureaucrat, as he plays a double role: speaking for ‘his people’ towards bureaucracies, and speaking for the bureaucracies towards his people. In addition, he has the power to act independently, and works hard to keep it so: in the previous section we saw him handing out fines to the ‘squatters’ for forcing him to get the formal authorities involved to oust them (whilst in this section we saw him fine those same people for reporting

*him* to the police!). Throughout all this, the government bureaucracies continue to stand by and support the chief's local authority. Therefore I interpret this position not, in the end, as a bureaucratic one as described by Lipsky, but as a more complex position of combined authority: a governor through informality (Roy, 2009b).

The dialectic between the chief's role as traditional leader and his role as a lower-level bureaucrat follows a certain, rather fixed course, as it plays out over time. First the chief is seen mainly as spokesman for the amorphous group of settlers which is call his 'community', then as the organisational density of the area grows, increasingly as bureaucrat. This is characteristic of the arrival by foreign organisations (such as Western colonisers, or municipal bureaucracies) in 'terra nova'. We can observe this progressive interaction at the national scale in all of Ghana over the course of centuries, as described above, first between the colonisers and the chiefs and later between the post-colonial governments and the chiefs.

But the same process shows up at a smaller scale in every new neighbourhood like Sebrepor, over the course of decades or even less. At first instance, the formal state's attitude towards chiefs is quite simple. When the (municipal) bureaucratic apparatus arrives in new terrain, the chiefs are seen as a form of local government, to be negotiated with. This role includes a very broad spectrum of powers and responsibilities, as described in the previous empirical section. But over time, in the process of state formation and formalisation, the full-fledged traditional authority position shapeshifts into 'lowest bureaucrat'. The chief is now no longer seen to independently govern the community, but is trusted to *speak for* the entire community, to 'know what's right' and to judge and manage conflicts, as well as used as a gatekeeper by formal authorities like the municipality, the police apparatus and amenity providers.

This role of 'lowest-level bureaucrat' is only one of the chief's roles, but it is an important one. It allows him to direct the power of well-equipped bureaucracies to shape the development of the neighbourhood to his advantage. Since the chief is a gatekeeper towards bureaucracies for many residents at many times, this role also provides the chief with a plethora of soft power opportunities towards any residents wanting to organise themselves locally. In nearby neighbourhoods I have witnessed chiefs working to hinder or completely preclude alternative forms of resident organisation, in order not to lose their privileged position towards government bureaucracies.

This role too shifts in the process of urbanisation of the area. Two factors increasingly limit this source of power as urbanisation progresses, both of which were visible in Mr.

Paul's letter above. First, this role is limited strictly to mediating the interface between the formal and the informal sphere. So when the chief wants to involve the police to send Mr. Paul off his land, he responds based on the formal sphere, inviting the chief to a state court of law.

Second, as Mr. Paul notes, there are *several* police stations in the area. With this he implicitly warns the police force that if they try a hands-off approach, conveniently leaving the chief his right to govern informally, there are other formal agencies he can call upon. That is, the bases of power in the area get diversified as more bureaucratic organisations enter the space. This does not mean the automatic demise of the chief's middle man position. In fact, the Council quickly responds to the implications of Mr. Paul's move. From the Council notes: "It was generally agreed that the traditional heads must introduce themselves to all the police stations dotted around the township to ease the work of the Council."

But as a more general pattern, when bureaucracies move in closer and get more knowledge of the neighbourhood, the chief's discretionary exercise of traditional power is circumscribed. It is when bureaucratic institutions become more effective at reaching the residents directly, and vice versa, that this lower-bureaucrat role of the chief diminishes and is increasingly fragmented. As the various institutions in the area develop an ever more fine-grained web of functional differentiation, the chief becomes less of a sovereign ruler and more of a link in lengthening chains of interdependence.

It should be noted that this does not immediately preclude him from wielding traditional authority, *including* the possibility of using physical force. Remember the street naming company: apart from certain strongly organised institutions like the courts of law and the police, which the chief cannot mess with, he still has a lot of latitude to determine how formality comes into his neighbourhood. But over time, as his informal sphere gets wrapped more tightly into various bureaucratic organisations, the power play of a traditional leader has to go increasingly underground and partially disappears.

## 5.5 Custodian of the land

Apart from being an informal leader with traditional authority and a middle man for government agencies, a third source of power for the chief is his legal power base as landlord. This is in the first instance a specific case of the relations mentioned in the two sections above, a mixture of the chief as spokesperson and as lowest bureaucrat, because he got these powers as community leader and he works with the legal courts to determine what land is rightfully who's, and with the municipal planning agency to keep the land organised. So it is, in a very real sense, derived from the various aspects of his middle-man position along the same lines as the various roles described above. But it deserves a separate section here, because it is also much more than that: this is the main source of the chief's power in modern times.

In this section, I sketch the contours of this role and its development up to the present. First I show how it emerged from a position as land manager for the local community, which was historically granted to the chiefs by the colonial authorities. This role includes judging land ownership disputes, a prerogative which the chief guards vigilantly, even from the formal state agencies. I then discuss the reason for the chief to spend so much attention on this particular role: it gives him land ownership or at least influence over almost all of the neighbourhood, including many of the plots that have already been bought and settled on. That again provides him with an enormous amount of soft power within the neighbourhood. While the chief's hard coercive power is declining, he is gaining influence through his bureaucratic connections and control over land, which ensures that every resident of the area wants to be in his good book.

### **The chief as land manager**

As sketched in the historical section above, the chieftaincy institution evolved in very different ways throughout Ghana, with tribes like the Ashanti and the northern Dagomba having hierarchical leadership early on, and most other tribes, like the coastal Ga, being more anarchic, loosely organised through various types of priests. When the British constructed their indirect rule apparatus, they named certain of these priests 'chiefs'. And whatever tasks these specific priests had originally, one major role that emerged afterward for all chiefs was to 'manage the land', in the name of the local community.

Today, this is the role that the chiefs display most publicly towards any outsiders. When I went to interview him and asked him to explain his duties as a chief, he first explained that he is a member of the Abotsi family, and then directly connected that to his duties of land stewardship.

*“So Abotsi family settled at Sebrepur, where you are coming from. So I was made a chief to look after that area. So I’m the head of Nii Abotsi family, in charge of the area. Me and my cousins, we are supposed to look after the land. Although I am the chief, I cannot look after the land alone, I have to have people to help me, to aid me. So three of us were chosen to look after the land.”*

The settling and densification of previously empty land is a messy process, involving lots of conflicts and tensions. The chief sees it as his responsibility to manage such conflicts. As can be seen throughout the eight years of Divisional Council notes, this is a constant preoccupation. In terms of regular work, it mainly involves various forms of keeping spatial order in the area and judging land ownership disputes. Examples run from very small matters, such as unclear boundary fencing, people exceeding their plot and building into the road, to large matters like organising a local football field for the area youth. Here, again, his Divisional Council often operates in close contact with the municipal bureaucracy. For example, in a note to the District Building Engineer, the Council writes:

*“Re: Haphazard construction*

*Dear Sir,*

*The above Divisional Council is reporting the conduct of a resident in Sebrepur – Mr. Afrifa on the Better Best Academy Road, who is constructing a manhole in the entrance lane of a neighbour. In addition, he intends to fence totally his residence which happens to be by the road. If not checked, future outbreak of fire and sucking of filled manhole would be difficult to attend to. Attempts to dissuade the culprit from carrying out this wicked undertaking are falling on deaf ears.*

*We are therefore appealing to your outfit for assistance.”*

Again, we find that when necessary, the chief and his Council perfectly blend into the bureaucratic discourse and logic, setting themselves up as lower-level bureaucrats reporting to their superiors, who are to get involved in a case that is threatening to get out of hand. And of course, here too the chief has a certain amount of discretionary power, as evidenced by the case of the ‘squatters’ described above.

### **The chief as land dispute judge**

Most of the Council’s attention spent on this role is in judging land ownership and boundary disputes. This happens in a fairly formal manner, with the chief acting

alternatively as independent local leader and as 'lower-level bureaucrat'. Most disputes are settled by the Council and never reach the formal courts. But sometimes, the chief does appeals to his role in a hierarchy of judicial powers, reporting to a judge:

*"Dear Sir,*

*I wish to write to your Lordship to confirm the true owner of the piece of land being litigated upon by Mr. Charles Tosu and one Etse Tugbenyo. Somewhere in 1982, Mr. Charles Tosu approached my late father, Nii Tetteh Abotsi II, who was the regent of the Kpone-Sebrepur Stool Land (...).*

*Mr. Charles Tosu has since been occupying that piece of land for his businesses. I therefore can't stick my neck out for Mr. Etse Togbenyo as to how he came by the said piece of land. I hope this piece of information would help you in your judgement."*

The above quote shows how the chief positions himself as a blend of manager, judge and original owner of the land. It also shows how his power as land manager is ultimately embedded in the legal structure of the formal state – he positions himself as subservient to the judge. But, as we can read between the lines, he does claim the authority to determine which land is whose.

As part of this positioning act, he also claims jurisdiction over any cases related to this, as long as they are not explicitly in the hands of a higher judge. Instructive is a letter to a nearby police commander, in which he requests that the police help him trace the defendant of a land case which is being treated in their courts.

*"RE: Invitation of a Suspect*

*(...) Unfortunately, the defendant at your end, [name], refused to honor the Council's numerous invitations. **Since the problem is about the ownership of a piece of land and access road**, the Council would appeal to your high office to **refer the problem to us for solution**. The outcome of our efforts will be communicated to you. Thank you for your cooperation." (emphasis added)*

Where there is normally a free exchange of cases between the Divisional Council and various government bureaucracies, in this case the chief explicitly claims jurisdiction. He could in principle do this in any kind of situation related to the many different roles



that chiefs have traditionally taken on, such as general conflict resolution, cultural leadership, development work, safe-keeping and other roles. But he takes an attitude of ownership most prominently and consistently surrounding land arbitration cases. By now, it will be clear why these are so central for the chief: because they affirm his role as rightful manager of the land.

### **The chief as land owner**

This leads us directly to the *ownership* the chief claims over the land in 'his' area. Clearly, this claim is a large step up from a stewardship-like function of *managing* the land. It often does not reflect the variety in historical land ownership and user patterns but rather represents a kind of land grab by the chief (Ubink, 2006). As Amanor (2008, p. 61) puts it: "The construct of customary land that developed in the 1920s sits uneasily with history. It did not reflect the social relations and transactions in lands that had existed in the nineteenth century."

Such claims of land ownership originate from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, the British colonial government attempted to enact various laws, which would have appropriated all unregistered land in Ghana as Crown Lands. In response, Gold Coast elites (from various tribes) waged a legal campaign for 'local and customary land ownership', arguing that all land on the Gold Coast had an owner, and their rights would be violated by such a declaration (Mensah Sarbah, 1897, in K. S. Amanor, 2008).

Eventually, the Privy Council in London decided in a 1921 landmark case brought by a Nigerian chief that all land in coastal West Africa had always been communally managed, never privately owned. This decision led Ghana's colonial government to grant all tribal leaders the vital position of 'custodians of the land', a position which was subsequently codified in the constitution. As a consequence, the chiefs are customarily and constitutionally obliged to administer land in the interest of the community (Ubink, 2008). These rules were developed and negotiated when commodification was weakly developed, and ethnic communities largely coincided with specific territories. In such a context, the chief could take on a role of custodian who manages land within a specific territory for his community.

Today, with urbanisation and state formation proceeding apace, the land is increasingly commodified, property relations are increasingly formalised, and ethnic communities no longer reside in specific territories. However, cobbled together from dubious historical origins though they may be, and outdated though this institution may be, today such rights are generally recognised by formal state institutions like the Ghana

Lands Commission to be vested in the paramount chiefs and their sub-chiefs, or more precisely, in their *stools* (K. S. Amanor, 2008).

Since the legal personhood of the stools is not very clearly established, there is quite some room for interpretation here. In Sebrepur, the chief has used that room to the fullest extent possible. He has hired a professional land surveyor, who has made a subdivision map of his entire area, and to whom he refers anyone who has bought a piece of land in his area, to formally register it. It is significant that the only professional on whom the chief relies on a regular basis is a technician purely related to land ownership and registration. With the assistance of this commercial land surveyor, the chief has gotten a very strong grip over the land in Sebrepur. As the surveyor puts it:

*“Chief Nii Dortei Abotchi III registered the entire Sebrepur area, at the National Land’s Commission [Ghana’s cadastral registration authority], as his own land. So yes, if anyone has a plot there, honestly bought from the chief, but didn’t register that land transaction with the Commission, then the plot will still be registered in the name of the chief. However, if you and the chief are in good faith, there won’t be a problem to register that same land in your own name now, or to register it to another person buying it from you.”*

This is governing by informality taken to the extreme. Because government is not able to disentangle all the different customary claims to land ownership and usage, they vest it in the amorphous stools. While the land is vested in the chiefs’ stools as an administrative estate, in the process of commodification this is subverted into a personal right, with chiefs often refusing to share the revenues of land transactions with the local community or local government (S. Berry, 2013; Rathbone, 2000; Ubink, 2008). Thus, in practice, this leads to the land becoming the private ownership of a single individual. Clearly, that is a source of enormous power and wealth.

This power also extends to all land that has been bought from the chief or his predecessor, unless that transaction has been officially registered with the Lands Commission. It is impossible to get exact figures on this from the Lands Commission on this, but interviewees suggest that the majority of landowners in Sebrepur have not registered their property with the Lands Commission, as this is an extremely onerous process. This is confirmed by the amount of land cases handled by the Divisional Council. It applies at least to all land distributed by the previous chief, as he was, in the words of his successor, ‘an illiterate’, who did not keep a written record of land

transactions in his area. In the case of any issue related to such informally bought land, the chief has a chance to put his mark on the situation. A sample case:

*“M. D. Koranteng was asked: why he is demarcating his land and erecting pillars without the stool’s concern? Mr. Koranteng agreed that he had erred. On the size of his land, he revealed that it covers an area of four acres. He was asked: what are the purposes of pillars and the demarcations for? At this point Mr. Aryeetey suggested that Mr. Koranteng go back to do his homework well with the stool elders. This was agreed by his wife who accompanied him.” (Kpone-Sebrepur Divisional Council, 4-4-2007)*

The Council also makes it very clear that unless formally registered with the Lands Commission (a process which can take years), a sale of land does not imply an end to responsibility or power over that land. The chief repeatedly retracts transactions, takes land from conflicting parties back into the ownership of the Stool, and forces everyone who has not had his/her land registered at the cadaster to do subsequent transactions only in his presence. In short, he claims a large bundle of rights over such lands. This becomes visible again and again in the cases appearing before the Divisional Council. One example, during a case between two residents, Aklolos and Aminu, who have a boundary dispute, “Bampoe [a secondant of the chief] came in to point out that Aklolos has no land, nor Aminu. All transactions pertaining to that plot must be carried out before the chief.” (Kpone-Sebrepur Divisional Council, 24-1-2009)

In a practical sense, Aklolos and Aminu do have that land. They live and farm on it, and as the records show, they have acquired permission of the previous chief for that. But as this quote shows, they are not considered the true owners of that land by customary law, the law that in Ghana governs traditional land ownership (K. S. Amanor, 2008). Customary law only recognises usufructuary (user) land rights for the chief’s ‘subjects’, and allodial (sovereign ownership) land rights for the chiefs, being the state-recognised founders of the local pre-state polity, the paramouncy (Chanock, 1991, in K. S. Amanor, 2008). Thus, land can only be taken out of the hands of the chief by formally registering it at the Lands Commission, for which the chief’s seal of approval is required.

Obviously, this is a powerful channel for the chief to exert influence over residents’ organisations in the area. We regularly see the chief’s control over the land registration process appearing in the Council’s notes, in rather casual form: “The executives of the

Zone 3 Residents Association appealed for the reduction of the new land registration fees. This was overruled.” (Kpone-Sebrepur Divisional Council, 3-3-'07). As these examples show, a world of local influence is hidden within that innocent side remark of the chief's surveyor above, "...if you and the chief are in good faith, there won't be a problem...".

This chiefly power is not only present at the neighbourhood level. The 80% of Ghana's land that is formally in the hands of the local chiefs also includes the sites of most government agencies. For instance, the Flagstaff House, Ghana's presidential office, as well as most ministries, stands on land of the Osu chiefs. Government offices throughout the country are generally in the same situation; they are formally hosted by the local chiefs. In most cases a yearly token amount is paid to the chiefs in question, to affirm their ultimate ownership of the land.

Nor is this power relationship purely a theoretical one. As one example, in 2013 the University of Ghana ran into trouble. The La chiefs, on whose lands its campus stands, attempted to take back some fallow parts of the university's land, saying that the UoG clearly did not need this much space after all, and the La people needed somewhere to live. A flurry of action ensued. The University of Ghana immediately started laying roads to the furthest corners of its land, hastily organised a conference with the La chiefs to describe their usage plans for the fallow land, and conferred an honorary doctorate on the La paramount chief (personal interview, anonymous source, 2018). Similar negotiations with ministries and other government bodies are reported nearly every month in Ghana's newspapers, and doubtlessly many more happen outside the limelight. Such instances show how much power the chiefs have in their interdependent figurations with government agencies.

### **A new view of the chief's position emerges**

Let's go back to the larger picture of the chief's roles. It is now clear that this role of managing the land in the name of 'the community', which has spun off from the combination of his role as a traditional leader and his role as lower-level bureaucrat, has increasingly taken on a life of its own. This happened under the process of urbanisation, increasing legal formalisation, and the accompanying commodification of the land.

As noted before, Sebrepur's chief does not live on his land these days. His house is a good hour's drive removed from Sebrepur and as he says, "I do not frequent the place". As I have shown above, this among other factors has led his traditional authority to decline. He does still have a powerful position as bureaucratic middle man, but

as I have shown, that position too is increasingly restrained as the lines between bureaucracies and residents get shorter. This role too is of course severely limited by the fact that he is not present in the town.

Unlike these two roles, which depend to a large extent on his active self-positioning in the neighbourhood, his role as landowner is hardly limited by his absence, nor is it hindered by any lack of proximity to formal state agencies. While his distance to Sebrepor undermines the chiefs' capacity and legitimacy to resolve disputes and allocate land according to custom, it actually emancipates the chief in other ways. With urbanisation proceeding apace, the chiefs' discretion increases, as he is decreasingly embedded in communal ties or bound by customary deliberations, while at the same time the land itself increases in value and can be more readily marketed.

Because although this role spun off from a confluence of his traditional leadership and his middle-man position, it is by now only dependent on the chief's legitimacy in the eyes of a single government institution: the Lands Commission. And there, the chief makes sure to be well-connected. As the chief's technical land surveyor puts it: "The chief will clearly mark transactions he approves of, with his signature and his seal. These are very familiar at the Lands Commission, he is a well-known and popular chief."

## 5.6 The Palace

As we have seen above, urbanisation transforms the role of the chief from a relatively independent traditional authority into a local extension of bureaucracies, a 'ruler by informality' and an owner of commodified land. His new bases of power are legal-rational rather than traditional. But in this section I show that it is not all Weberian rationalisation. I begin by investigating the dynamics between urban expansion and chiefs' palace formation. I then proceed to show what the internal dynamics of the Sebrepor palace look like. Following this, I zoom out, and look at the increasing complexity of stool succession struggles in general, concluding that through the process of urbanisation the internal structure of the chieftaincy institute becomes a more complex and deeper traditional leadership structure. I also show how this traditional authority does get ever more tightly embedded in the legal-rational structure of the modern state.

## Urban growth and palace expansion

When looking at the process of urban expansion, where every newly growing neighbourhood turns out to have a chief, the first question we have to answer is: how are these chiefs made? I take the answer of the Paramount Chief, who in the Greater Accra Region is the highest authority in terms of tribal organisation. A paramountcy is about the size of a municipality (although the two rarely overlap exactly, very impractical in terms of governance, and much complained about by municipal officers). All chiefs within the Kpone Traditional Area, including Sebrepor's chief, are drawn from a small group of 'royal families' centered around the local paramountcy.

*"Those days, Sebrepor was just a small...in your area you call it a hamlet. But with time, it started growing. People went to those areas, because of farming, animal rearing, crop farming. The land was vast and vacant, so you just go there and start farming. At that time, a sort of caretaker chief, caretaker authority was established by us, the traditional authorities at Kpone, to report what is going on in the area. From a hamlet this place grew into a village; now, it's even more than a village.*

*Then around 1984, when people really started trooping in, we decided to install a chief. With time, those areas really develop, so we have to raise their status to chief. If you go to the Akan areas, you will see the same thing. First, there are caretakers, then one by one, we elevate them to divisional chiefs." – Nii Tetteh Otoo II, Paramount Chief of Kpone Traditional Area*

This quote is a striking illustration of the way the city grows, and the way the chieftaincy system grows with it. At first, there is almost empty land, "vast and vacant", which only in theory falls under of a certain paramountcy. As Ghana's population grows, more and more empty tracts of land are settled by people from all around the country. The 'royal families' send a caretaker to the area to claim ownership and keep an eye out for intruders, but does not do much else.

Then as the city expands and draws closer to the area, "people start trooping in" and a divisional chieftaincy, a new stool, is established by the paramount chief's Traditional Council in Kpone. At this point, the royal families of the Kpone paramountcy really cement their traditional ownership of the area. As the current Sebrepor chief explains: "I was named a divisional chief of Sebrepor in 1984. Before I was made the chief, we

met people there. They are settlers, they were there when we arrived. But now, they are more or less citizens of Kpone.”

From the above section on the chief’s relation with formal state bureaucracies, it should be clear why this man can simply come into the area and claim chieftaincy, including a kind of lordship over settlers who arrived to the area earlier than he did: government agencies *expect* to find a chief. They are hardwired to look for the chief, that familiar middle man connecting them to ‘the community’, their governor by informality. The chiefs are thus folded into the state, and when the state rolls itself out, agency by agency, over an area following recent urban expansion, it contains what Elias calls *valencies* for stools (Elias, 1978b).

This term originates in the idea that people and organisations cannot be seen as discrete units. Their ties to others form part of themselves. In the word *valencies*, this is operationalised by assuming that people and organisations have in their system openings for certain types of others: if a man’s wife disappears, there appears in him and in his life something that could be crudely described as a wife-shaped valency. In this case, it means that the formal government institutions all assume that there is a chief, and their resident interaction practices and legal habits are attuned to this fact. This means that it is very easy for a chief, even one with very little local legitimacy, to establish himself towards the formal authorities. They expect him to be there.

### **Intra-palace power struggles**

But much like the growth of a city or the accompanying growth of a formal state apparatus, the growth of a chieftaincy structure is neither a simple nor a peaceful process. Field (1940, p. 46), an anthropologist who studied the Ga customs under colonialism, describes the process for the appointment of chiefs as follows:

*“All succession is a question of election by relatives, not of inherent right. There are certain very usual customs among the Ga, but there are no rigid rules. Native procedure has only one rigid rule, namely that the election of the successor shall be constitutionally carried out at a proper meeting of kinsmen.”*

Field describes how wide open the succession process is, how little formalised. It should be realised that he writes here about the succession of an existing stool, and as can be imagined, the claim to a *newly formed* stool is even more open. This means that some of the families and family members are bound to come out of the process dissatisfied.



In Sebrepor, this is indeed the case. Asked why her uncle is living so far away from the area he is governing, a close relative of the chief told us:

*"Oh, he was living here before. But when he was asked to vacate the stool, since he was only meant to be a caretaker, he refused. He is afraid we would find out the number of lands he has leased out. So he won't even stay here. Can he dare come live here again? After he sold all the lands, which made the stool unattractive? If he tries we will knock him dead with a club."*

*"Is it his? Is it his money? It's the stool's money. So he cannot lay claim to it. Since he wants to be chief, he can take the title, but he shouldn't think we would acknowledge him as one. As for his leg problem, which he uses as a reason not to come here, that is not a real sickness. Which sickness? It's only him who knows what is wrong with him. It's an open secret that he dabbles in occultism. He isn't sick, it's his demons that are eating his flesh alive. Call it what you want, but I say it as it is. He is a lodge member. His leg cannot heal because that is his weapon for money."*

Putting the accusations of black magic aside for the moment, what stands out from this quote is the open hostility between the chief and his family members. And indeed, this family conflict is a large part of the reason why the chief is not living inside Sebrepor. As he says:

*"We have put up a palace there, have you seen the palace? Yes! We have gotten a palace, but because of these misunderstandings, between me and my siblings, it is simply there. A white elephant. We cannot use it. They have locked it! They have prevented me from using it. So now they have prevented me from using it. We were meeting there, when these problems came. So, they are more than me. They say they will not allow me to be using the place."*



*Figure 5.1: The chief's seat of government, the Sebrepor Palace, remains closed. The door is bolted down with several padlocks, one from each fraction of the family, so that no-one can enter the building until the conflict is resolved.*

The palace door is locked. As figure 5.1 above shows, all afflicted parties have put their own lock on the door, so that nobody can open it unless all parties come to an agreement. The palace has become the physical representation of a conflict between the royal families over who should be able to profit from the ownership of the recently commodified land. It is locked not only in a literal sense, but also in a figurative sense. As Sarah said at the beginning of this chapter, in the absence of the chief, the area is lacking leadership. I have argued that the chief's traditional leadership role is declining as urbanisation progresses, this is a clear general trend. But this type of intra-palace strife, when it occurs, forms a large extra factor in the decline of his practical leadership function.

The chief continues:

*"So I, in my own wisdom, have chosen people. I have chosen people I'm ruling with. In the village, we have so many tribes. When I was first instooled, when I first came, I made some headmen, one for each tribe. So they are the people who are forming our Council now. In absence of my own blood, who have abandoned me."*

It now becomes clear that he established his Divisional Council partly with a view to strengthening his position in the neighbourhood, in the face of an antagonistic group of relatives. In fact, it is visible throughout the Council notes that the chief is less motivated than the other Council members to get any real development off the

ground. The Council members are pulling hard to get the chief present at meetings, because without him, it's hard to take decisions that will be pushed through, both for their private benefit and for developmental goals.

They also push him to make peace with the rest of his family,

*"A council member pleaded that there should be self-respect to ourselves and to the stool. (...) It was suggested that the impasse lingering among the stool owners is long overdue for a peaceful settlement. Nii Supi and Nii Asafoatse were asked to take the initiative." (Kpone-Sebrepur Divisional Council, 16-4-'05)*

On the other hand, there is always the threat of the Council becoming demotivated or even falling apart if the chief does not show up often enough, which would gravely undermine the power of the chief. This has created a complicated figuration between the Kpone stool elders, the chief and his Divisional Council members, with asymmetric power relations. Such relations are hard to pin down exactly in research, but are often expressed in smaller day-to-day instances within the council's dealing.

An example: in 2007 the Sebrepur Divisional Council took on an explicitly bureaucratic role and carried out a registration and taxation exercise. The proceeds were split equally between the Stool Elders at the Kpone Paramountcy (25%), the Stool Elders at Sebrepur, that is the chief and his second-in-command (25%), the Divisional Council coffers, from which sitting allowances and small expenses are paid (25%) and the Divisional Council members as individuals, who did (or outsourced) the registration and collection work (25%). This is often the case in such government-by-proxy arrangements, and it shows the way the figuration is tied together.

The relations surrounding the chieftaincy position in Sebrepur could best be characterised as a triangular figuration. The Divisional Council can be seen as the chief's entourage, which then forms the Palace together with the relatives fighting the chief for his position. This figuration both reflects and affects the external relations of the Palace. It reflects them, in the sense that the chief needs his Council to help him stabilise and legitimise his position in the neighbourhood in the face of his family's opposition. The Council speaks for him, for example in insisting that the name of the neighbourhood is Sebrepur and not Kakasonaka Number Two, an alternative name which is often used, and which undermines the traditional claim of the chief's family to the land. Every time that name came up, Mr. Aryeetey strongly insisted that this is

*not* the correct name for the area. The Council also forms his ears and eyes, calming unrest in the area, acting as a stabilising governing body. In return, the members get the benefits of being close to a powerful figure in the area, which they can use for their personal gain and for their attempts at (partly clientelistic, partly idealistic) development projects.

In recent years, however, the work of the Council has come to an almost complete standstill. As one Council member puts it: "...normally, we used to meet once a month. Now, we don't do anything anymore. Unless we all have a meeting, whereby we all sit with the chief, then we talk over the planning of the town." (Interview Kueli, 2015) But since the chief does not come to Sebrepur anymore, that hardly happens.

What stands out in this complicated tangle is the fact that despite his lack of neighbourhood ties, the almost complete collapse of his Council's activities, and the serious threats posed by his relatives to his legitimacy as stool owner, the chief is still able to hold on to his ownership of the land. As described in the previous section, this he thanks largely to his well-established relations with the Ghana Lands Commission. We may conclude, then, that his role as manager and owner of the land has become almost completely detached from its origins: his role as a traditional leader.

### **The succession process: increasingly arcane figurations**

How exceptional is such a situation? As for the position of the Council, the establishment of such a self-built Divisional Council, composed of representatives from each major immigrant tribe present, is not quite standard, although not unusual either. But as for the 'lingering impasse' with his family, to get a better picture of what the dynamics are like within the larger chieftaincy family ecosystem, and to understand more about the contemporary succession practices, I now briefly zoom out again to the level of the Paramount Chief in Kpone. When asked for his daily occupations, he summarises them as follows: "Primarily, my work is two things: we have family problems, and we have land issues."

He goes on to explain how these family problems originate:

*"We have Kingmakers, those are elders from a particular house. They see to it that when the chief dies, everything is done. They say that, okay, now it is your turn, this particular house's turn, to provide a chief. So they have to send to that particular house, you have to provide a chief. To make the selection, that house will then look at the background*

*of the persons. My father, he has five brothers, so before my selection, they had to look at eligible persons, out of those 5 brothers' children. They will look at personality, and other things, all those things come into play. Now if they have selected you, they will not tell you. But they have to make investigation, around you, you unknowingly. To look at your behaviour, your character, how you comport yourself, they have to go into all those things before they agree. Where and when, some of them disagree. Then that is where we have the conflict of chieftaincy issue."*

The chieftaincy institution is sometimes described as an “invented tradition”, as it was partly designed to fit the practical governance demands of the British colonisers (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). This is in many respects a fair description, especially with regard to the more hierarchical elements in modern Ga chieftaincy, which were imported under pressure from the British colonisers from the neighbouring Akan tribe. However, with respect to history it should be noted that the procedure described above, of selecting a heir to the stool, actually comes from a locally rooted tradition that used to served its purpose quite effectively. Field (1940) describes the governments of the Ga towns in the 1930s as highly deliberative ‘democratic gerontocracies’, generally peaceful. Field may well have taken this term directly from Weber, who defines the ‘decisive characteristic’ of a gerontocracy as follows.

*“...the belief of the members that domination, even though it is an inherent traditional right of the master, must definitely be exercised as a joint right in the interest of all members and is thus not freely appropriated by the incumbent.”*

In that kind of situation, such a lengthy, open and deliberative selection process makes sense. However, in the modern urban context, where only a small percentage of the chief’s ‘subjects’ even belong to his tribe, let alone to its ‘royal families’, it becomes something of a sham. As the paramount chief continues:

*“The conflict comes when you get to the house of where they have to install the chief. So it’s inside the house they create problems. The kingmakers. Everyone knows that it should be house B this time, but then who from house B? You see, because when it gets to our house, and we get to know that it is our turn, some of us induce these kingmakers. You know, they are old men, we induce them with a little currency, or something else... So let’s say, once it has come to our turn, I say, “oh,*

*why don't you support me to be..." So they have to influence each other, so that is where the split comes between the kingmakers. Then, it will start with the litigation. Then some of them will also influence other houses, to support them, so sometimes it becomes two houses against one person, from another house."*

How then are these conflicts settled, in practice?

*"It can take very long to resolve something like that. Very long. Very very. Because you will start...if it's a divisional chief, divisional chiefs, they have to start from the Traditional Council, where and when they'll adjudicate on the issue. And one, is found guilty. And is not happy with it, can make an appeal against it. Then from the Traditional Council, then to the Regional House of Chiefs. Then from the Regional House of the Chiefs, you are still not happy with the verdict, you have the right to appeal to the National House of Chiefs. There, too, when you are not satisfied, the last option is to go to the Supreme Court. Oh yes. And I have gone through the same process before (laughs loudly). Yes, I've been to Supreme Court, before they could install me. So you see, sometimes it takes some time. Sometimes, more than ten years. Depending on the situation."*

As becomes clear from the above description, the chiefs jostle for their positions in complicated struggles involving a mixture of traditional legitimation, family politics and clientelist networks. This leads to a large number of empty stools (sometimes over a decade, as the paramount chief explains), or chiefs weakened by intra-palace conflict, which can hardly be regarded effective traditional leaders, such as the one in Sebrepor. Clearly, the traditional gerontocracy has long been left behind. In the chieftaincy figurations that currently grow in the process of urbanisation, the appointment is done by a select group of nobles of his own tribe, the kingmakers, and the majority of the locals have little to do with it. Once appointed, the influence of established chiefs mainly rests on outside sources of power (relationships with state bureaucracies), not on a good relation with his 'subjects'.

It may seem strange that the chieftaincy internally develops into such an arcane traditional authority figuration, despite the fact that the urban world around him is moving in the legal-rational direction. All the chief's new powers are derived from the legal-rational sphere, and his traditional leadership position is crumbling. But the

chief's own story *has to* remain a traditional one. His current personalised hold on the commodified urban land may be a far cry from the original story of land rights in the hands of the long-time leaders of locally rooted communities, but he continues to uphold that story. After all, if he is not seen as a traditional local leader, who is simply managing the land for his community, and interacting with authorities on behalf of his people, then the foundation of all his other roles and claims to power is undermined. Traditional authority is bound by “certain limits that cannot be overstepped without endangering the master’s traditional status” (Weber, 1968). Or as Kleist (2011, p. 636) puts it: “Chiefs have to remain within a circumscribed space of action in order for them to be recognised as legitimate rulers, and they have to position and negotiate their innovations as being located within this space”.

### **Traditional authority, but deeply embedded in the formal state**

The Ghanaian chiefs are generally described as rather independent local traditional grassroots leaders, who often defy the encroaching formal state. But many of these urban chieftaincies are the reverse: their power, as we have seen in the previous empirical sections, is largely predicated on the power of the state and the state’s recognition of their position, rather than on any large grassroots support base. Their sphere of governing by informality, is indeed permanently being threatened by the expansion of those same state bureaucracies, but in the case of such ‘*tabula rasa*-chieftaincies’ it was also *created* by the formal state in the first place, through their de facto appointment as governors by informality. Finally, their battles for succession are fought in the formal state courts.

So how deep exactly are the chiefs then folded into the formal state? I have described how the chief acts as an extension of several bureaucracies, and how he takes the power that that privileged access to government agencies brings further at his own discretion. But there is another dimension to his embeddedness, which comes from the side of the formal state. This is visible in the way succession disputes are fought out, in the way the chiefs handle their daily work, and in the way government is continuing to wrap the chiefs’ unpredictable local power figurations ever further into an insulating blanket of legal-rational organisation.

As explained above by the paramount chief, the succession disputes are in principle decided in-house, by the kingmakers of the family. But in practice, they often go through three different levels of formal law courts, ending at the nation’s Supreme Court. The court levels before that are populated by the chiefs, but originate from the government-sponsored Chieftaincy Act 759, which stipulates the responsibilities of



the (government-sponsored) National House of Chiefs. To wit: to improve relations between chiefs and the government, to formally codify succession and customary law, to update 'old-fashioned' customary law, and any other functions delegated to it by the Parliament. In other words, to get a grip on those unpredictable traditional authorities. Such insulating institutions, however, have also had the effect of further entrenching the *traditionality* of the chiefs, which ultimately protects their position from government interventions which are based on a legal-rational logic (Interview Senah, 2018).

How does this regulatory framework affect the chieftaincy figurations? When royal families are disputing the legality of a chieftaincy position, the closing argument is that one of the two contestants is the "gazetted Mankralo" – the state's law courts have the final say (GNA, 2017). And as for the tribal hierarchies, these too are ultimately not only instituted, but also continuously managed by the formal state. Sebrepor's present chief is a divisional chief, who has himself succeeded a caretaker chief. At this level, the paramountcies are responsible not only for the appointment of individual chiefs, but also for the creation and promotions of stools, from caretakers to divisional chieftaincies.

But the career ladder of chieftaincy goes even higher, all the way up to paramountcy. At this level, the formal state plays an important role in its management. As a government announcement read: "President John Dramani Mahama yesterday announced that government through the Ministry of Chieftaincy Affairs is working around the clock to promote more chieftaincy divisions to paramountcy levels." (GNA, 2016) Whilst generally, such promotions are widely seen as rewards for politically loyal chiefs, they are also interpreted as divide-and-rule tactics, where formal government cuts up the chieftaincy power structures into ever smaller paramountcies in order to fragment their power (Boakye, 2016).

Government and the state bureaucracy work to increasingly encapsulate traditional authorities, who in turn are often highly active in the electoral and broader political process, throwing their weight behind politicians and demanding rewards for themselves and their area in return. Despite the efforts of the Ministry of Chieftaincy to encapsulate the chiefs, they retain much of their discretionary power. In fact, during the writing of the current constitution in 1992, a heavy presence of chiefs in the Constitutional drafting committee ensured that chiefs would have greater independence from the state in determining their successors (Ray, 1996).

However, the Ministry's regulatory and supporting frameworks do have the effect of making the various chieftaincies throughout the country more alike, further severing the connection between the local-historical origins of the chiefs and their current position. This is visible in the daily traditional leadership work of the chiefs, such as their meetings, their land court sessions, and their campaign to keep their cultural leadership position. As the paramount chief explains:

*"We have also government staffs who are working with the Traditional Council. Government equips all Traditional Councils with their required staffs. It falls under the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs. They will train government workers, and send them to the traditional areas, to work on their behalf. They do a lot of the correspondence, sending out things, when it comes to meetings, they take our minutes and all of these things. Every day, from Monday to Friday, they are always there."*

They are always there. And if we look closely, we can see them in action in the first letter quoted in this chapter, the one on the marriage and death customs in the Kpone-Sebrepur Traditional Area. In fact, this letter ironically summarises the modern condition of Ghanaian chieftaincy. The surface message is one of traditional rulers, asserting their cultural authority over the ancient rituals surrounding the sexual relations, marriages, births and deaths of anyone living in their traditional lands. But the tone is emphatically that of a bureaucrat.

*"I submit herewith a comprehensive review...*

*...for onward transmission to...*

*The review took place at a general meeting of..., held on ....*

*Defaulters will face the penalties accordingly."*

In fact, the letter is written by a state bureaucrat, the Assistant Regional Registrar. And it carries all the regalia of a bureaucratic product: a formal header, a postal address, the seal of the Ghana Republic, and of course that core attribute of bureaucratic agencies: a 10-digit reference number. "In case of reply, the date and number of this letter should be quoted."

This ever-tightening state embrace of the chieftaincy structures is an ongoing effort, and it's not over yet. In 2014 the Ministry of Chieftaincy still had to publicly call for chiefs to enter themselves into the National Register of Chiefs (Dennis, 2014). That is, the formal state does not currently have a complete register of all chiefs in Ghana, let alone having a number of government bureaucrats at each of their desks, keeping watch over their traditional rule. It still has quite a way to go, but it's working hard. As Ghana's Minister of Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs put it in his yearly progress report:

*"We always say that there are no bad chiefs, but bad advisors. It is therefore important for us to continuously train and develop the skillfulness and expertise of our staff, and then equip them with the necessary working tools to help them deliver effectively on the job." (Daannaa, 2014)*

Slowly and carefully, the Ministry works to embrace the chiefs, taking great care not to offend them or publicly threaten their authority. Out of a patchwork of locally grown chieftaincies, this creates an increasingly uniform traditional-cum-bureaucratic web, stretching across the country.

## 5.7 Conclusion

### **The general position of chieftaincy in developing neighbourhoods**

In this chapter, I have described the various roles of the chief: as traditional leader, as lower-level bureaucrat plugged into the formal state, and as landlord. His traditional leadership role declined, most notably its cultural and 'soft leadership' components, but also his position as a local strongman and his position as a clientelist patron. At the same time, new bureaucratic roles emerged through the expansion of the formal state and its (initial) arrangement of government by informality, where bureaucratic relations are mediated by the chief.

Urbanisation and state formation do not replace the traditional authorities, but place them in a new position within a more complex web of interdependencies. Throughout the process of urbanisation, the scope of this government by informality continuously expands and shrinks at the same time. It expands, because ever more bureaucratic agencies become involved in the area, requiring mediation. And it shrinks, because over time, these agencies develop more direct and formal connections with the area's residents, decreasing the mediating role of the chief.

In the process, while the chief's claim to the land is decreasingly sustained through his reputation and relations within the neighbourhood, the expanding bureaucratic and legal apparatus casts him into a key position as land manager and furnishes him with entitlements to individual and tradeable plots. As a consequence, the chief is increasingly able to extract resources from the neighbourhood, as his *traditional* authority is buttressed with *legal-rational* authority. The commodification and registration of land are thus transforming the role of the chief from that of a conflict manager into that of a gentry.

This is governing by informality, which is a modified form of what Roy (2009b) describes. In her work, the formal state directly governs the city through informality. In Ghana, there is a layer of local players, the chiefs, forming a flexible layer of informality. Just like the state bureaucrats in India, they keep things vague, they un-map, and they re-interpret rights and responsibilities as the occasion demands. But the difference is that the chiefs are not civil servants. They are partly dependent on their position within the formal state apparatus, but not exclusively so. The chiefs also have their own agency, based on their traditional leadership and their land ownership, which makes them less pliable towards the various incarnations of the formal state.

Taken to its logical extreme, the chiefs' powers of traditional leadership and their lower-level bureaucrat role would be further and further diluted, replaced by a plurality of other organisational forms. And at some point, having de facto lost their foundational 'right to rule' as a traditional leader their land management role would lose its support. In theory at that point some kind of land reform, which is indeed sometimes called for in public debate, might happen.

However, this is the point where we have to zoom out of Greater Accra, to the national level. The dilution of local leadership and bureaucratic roles is not a universal trend in Ghana: many chiefs do manage to keep these roles very much alive, particularly in the Akan areas and in northern Ghana, where the national government is less present. And since the entire chieftaincy system is co-dependent, existing in an asymmetrical figuration with the state, the continuing prominence of those well-organised chiefs would ensure that the weaker ones remain in place as well, and that in the continuing urbanisation of the country, empty stools will continue to be created in all new neighbourhoods. After all, the various local-level forms of chieftaincy are all folded into the same national-level state.

This makes it relevant to ask again: what exactly does this contemporary chieftaincy look like, in areas which have undergone a process of urbanisation? It consists of

expanding palaces, which are throughout the densification of the area being promoted from caretakers to divisional chieftaincies and eventually, paramountcies. Internally, these palaces form increasingly arcane figurations. Externally, they are increasingly tightly embraced by a state-sponsored fabric of bureaucratic organisation. While their discretion is circumscribed, the chiefs also derive power and security from their immersion into the expanding state. They are no longer all-powerful in any one domain, but this is compensated by the fact that their position is now undergirded by laws, vested in institutions, and recognised by the array of organisations that have expanded their operations in areas that were virtually unpopulated until recently. The chiefs are circumscribed and domesticated, confined but strengthened.

While in colonial times there was a crude division of labour, with the chief acting as a local sovereign at the behest of the colonial government, today ethnic, legal, political, and administrative relations form a complex, interwoven web. This web not only covers areas where chiefs have long ruled, like existing villages which are swallowed up by the city, but also develops in previously unpopulated areas like Sebrepor.

### **Effects of the chieftaincy institution on grassroots organising**

The chief's position as a traditional leader helped to keep the peace in the neighbourhood, by judging disputes and exerting a forceful dampening effect on any conflicts that might erupt. In addition, his power to call up young men living in the neighbourhood for communal action can be a powerful aid to local development projects, whether grassroots-initiated or government-led. In many neighbourhoods, this makes the chief a strong actor in local development.

But his position as a local strongman also means that others tend to tread very carefully around him. A group of migrants whose shacks displeased the chief were first beset by thugs and then, having asked the police for protection from physical violence, suddenly found themselves apologising to the chief for calling in the cops. This power is slowly replaced, as the neighbourhood develops, by a legal stranglehold over any land that is not securely registered at the government Lands Commission. His position as 'custodian' of the 'traditional lands' gives the chief an extensive degree of leverage over most residents in the community, providing a modern, bureaucracy-supported version of the chief as strongman.

The chief's position as a middle man between residents and various government agencies compounds the effects described above. As a prominent spokesperson for the community, the chief is able to speak powerfully to government agencies and

demand improvements to inadequate water infrastructure, work with spatial planning officers to improve the layout and facilities of the neighbourhood, or stimulate the development of electricity in the area. At the same time, he can effectively block any developments he does not like. The street naming company which displeased the chief was kicked out. And he can use this middle man position, once again, as leverage over ordinary residents, as in the case where he set the police on Mr Paul.

This was borne out throughout the fieldwork: those active in grassroots organising always appeared to spend an inordinate amount of time on ‘managing’ the chief. The conflict in Sebrepur’s palace brought the chief’s contribution to local development to a complete standstill, as well as absorbing a large amount of energy from other prominent grassroots leaders in the area. This patterns was borne out throughout the fieldwork in other neighbourhoods: those active in grassroots organising always appeared to spend an inordinate amount of time on ‘managing’ the chief and the figuration around him.

In sum, the continuity of power throughout the urbanisation of the area (from sovereignty to bureaucracy-supported ‘informal rule’) makes the chief an extraordinary important figure in grassroots organising networks. In Sebrepur, no meaningful grassroots activity could take place without the blessing of the chief, even as he had moved away to live in another part of the city. The other neighbourhoods we investigated showed the same image: the persona of the chief nearly always figures prominently in residents’ imaginations of the neighbourhood’s social structure. This gives him a large power to obstruct local organising, especially if this seems to empower alternative big men in the area and create alternative ‘informal rulers’. But it also allows him to effectively promote grassroots organisation for development. The balance between his productive and his obstructive activities rests mainly on the personality of the chief and the power structures in his family and wider palace figuration.









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SUN. EVENING  
• 5PM - 8PM

30TH MAY  
- 1ST JUNE 2014  
5:30PM  
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Prophet  
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for me



presence of God through  
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HOPE that are relevant  
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6

# Churches: collective effervescence, collective amenities?

**T**his chapter investigates the contribution made by Accra's ubiquitous churches to the formation of its collective amenities. It starts with a brief theoretical exposition regarding the position of churches as collective amenities (section 6.1). It continues with a historical analysis, showcasing how different socio-political figurations led to the emergence of different types of churches (section 6.2 and 6.3). From there, it goes into a more detailed description of the differences between those churches in terms of doctrine, internal organisation and production of collective amenities (section 6.4 and 6.5). Section 6.6 describes how this plays out in today's religious marketplace, unraveling the factors behind the transition from orthodox to charismatic churches in newly developing neighbourhoods. Finally, section 6.7 brings together the relevance of these developments for neighborhoods like Sebrepor.



*"These business churches, they are now even more than the traditional ones! You see, those people, they use psychology to woo you, to get you. When you go to one, they will tell you that oh, your grandmother is a witch, and other things. Oh, when you start one, within one or two years you will be OK. So when you go to their churches, they have a lot of very big cars. They travel, they have a lot of money. And the little that you have, they will rather collect it from you. And they don't do so many things too, to help the society. Unlike other churches. Look at Methodist church. Look at Baptist. Look at the Catholics. They put a lot of schools across the country. They have a lot of clinics and hospitals. They have a university, they have colleges. They do give a lot of scholarships. They help society."*

*– Charles Dubin, Assemblyman of Sebrepor*

## 6.1 Introduction

When walking around Accra, it is impossible to miss the many manifestations of Christianity. Billboards, posters and stickers of Jesus and his earthly representatives are ubiquitous. The minibuses which form the throbbing transportation veins of this growing city are almost without exception decorated with Christian slogans, often quoting a specific verse from the bible. Churches, big and small, dominate the cityscape, both through their massive buildings and through their impressive sound systems and the crowds they attract. Most commercial enterprises have religious names. For instance, I usually got my lunch at the *God is Great Restaurant*. I did my shopping at the *In His Name Grocery Store*. On the way, I would pass the *Jesus is my Friend Bakery*, the *Blood of Christ Bicycle Repair and Maintenance Shop*, as well as a meat shop with the unfortunate name *God Loves Butchers*.

As the quotation at the chapter's start from Sebrepor's Assemblyman shows, there are large differences between the various religious strands, in terms of their internal organisation, their doctrine and in terms of their role in providing social services and building up the newly growing suburbs. This chapter describes two ideal types of churches, investigates the differences between them in terms of producing collective amenities, and ties that into a historical analysis of the connection between Ghana's religious landscape and its state formation process.

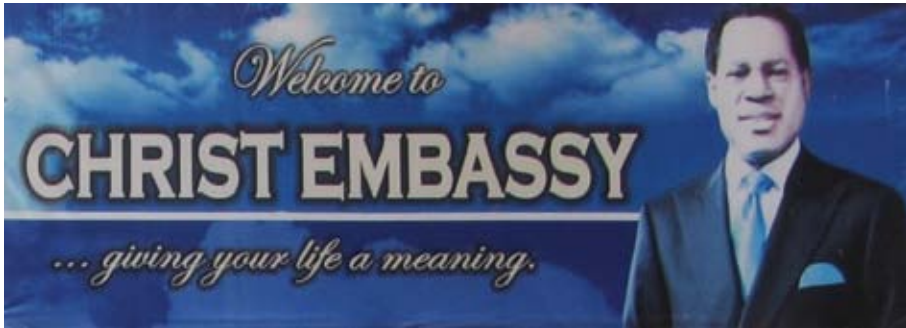


Figure 6.1: Churches offer an anchor in a sometimes bewildering world.

### **Churches as collective amenities**

Churches are clearly a focal point of people's attention and energies (see figure 6.1, above). They could even be described as the most successfully established type of collective amenity in Ghana's cities. In a PhD thesis on collective amenities, they could not go undiscussed, for two reasons. First, because they are such a successful and ubiquitous collective amenity in their own right, providing not only weekly religious services, but also creating a community within which many amenities can effectively be organised, providing an effective platform to quickly reach many residents, and creating material structures such as a building which can be used for other collective purposes as well. I briefly discuss the role they play in that sense for the newly growing urban areas in that sense, as it is an important role, but then I move on, because those functions of churches as collective amenities is generally well studied in the literature (i.e. Putnam, 1993).

The second reason why a chapter on churches could not be omitted here is that churches are not only amenities in their own right: they also spawn other collective amenities, like schools and medical facilities. This mechanism has been explored somewhat in the literature, but key aspects of it have remained outside the limelight, especially surrounding the question of how doctrine and internal organisation lead churches to radically differing levels of collective amenity production. These are the focus of analysis in this chapter.

First though, it should be noted that churches are an important type of collective amenity in their own right, and are extremely successful in Ghana, no less in the new suburbs than in the inner cities. According to the latest census, 70% of Ghana's population self-identifies as Christian (see table 6.1 below). In major cities, the

Christian population even stands at 81% (ibid).<sup>26</sup> Why is a high degree of Christianity relevant for a study of collective amenities? Not because Christianity is necessarily a better or even a more collective belief system than any other. Rather, the point is that the *form* of Christian organised religion is different from traditional spiritual practices in Ghana, which are more individual in nature, and do not bring people together on a weekly or even more frequent basis like churches do.

The most salient feature of churches is their weekly core activity, a Sunday service where people are addressed together, sing, dance and celebrate. This is also their most frequently explored aspect in the literature, in terms of collective effervescence, theology and material culture. But as a collective amenity, churches are much more than that. Besides religious preaching, these services also provide a variety of other organisations with a suitable platform for quickly disseminating political, practical, medical and other information. During elections, candidates hold brief stump speeches in churches. Municipal workers often spread their announcements of durbars<sup>27</sup>, collective cleaning exercises, new taxes, infrastructure projects and other news, at the end of church services. In the same time slot, doctors and nurses often spread information on medical best practices. Furthermore, the weekly services provide residents with ample informal opportunity for socialising and organising before and after the service, keeping in touch with friends and neighbours and generally forming a community.

Churches also provide infrastructure for all sorts of activities in the rest of the week, such as a building, musical instruments to play together, etc., enabling smaller sub-groups within the congregation to use this infrastructure throughout the week. Organisations unrelated to the use churches use the building at other times, such as in vaccination drives or for longer municipal events such as durbars. This is no mean feat, in a newly growing city where good infrastructure is scarce, and churches are often the biggest and best buildings in an area. In this sense, churches are platforms for collective action, socialising and so on, and are important collective amenities.

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26 In fact, the massive growth of Christianity in cities may be masking a decline in the rural areas. In a recent joint communique of the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, these two bodies dramatically called for renewed missionary activity in the rural areas, stating that "whereas individual denominations may be growing in the cities, most denominations in the rural areas are dying" (CCG and GPCC, 2017).

27 Durbars are large meetings, where the entire neighborhood or town is invited to discuss topics of collective importance. They are often organized by state organizations such as municipalities, but also by other groups and in rare cases, by individuals.



Having noted how churches are collective amenities in their own right, it should be observed that churches are a special type of collective amenity: they also spawn further collective amenities. In Ghana, these have mainly been educational and medical facilities, making an important contribution to the development of the country and the well-being and affluence of its population. The process by which churches produce these collective amenities is the focus of the rest of this chapter. In the form of a question: what determines whether churches channel the collective energy gathered in their services and their congregations into durable collective amenities?

In the newly developing urban areas on which this thesis focuses, it quickly becomes visible that there are not nearly as many church-built schools and clinics as there are in older parts of the urban fabric. Instead such facilities are generally provided there by entrepreneurial individuals, on a commercial basis. In fact, the newer the neighbourhood, the more pronounced this difference becomes. An additional observation of my fieldwork is that those church-built amenities that do exist in these neighbourhoods are almost exclusively built by a particular category of churches: the so-called *orthodox* churches. This is all the more noteworthy because most of the churches found in the new neighbourhoods are not orthodox, but fall on the charismatic side of the spectrum.<sup>28</sup>

### **Theoretical and empirical strategy**

This leads us to ask the following question: why are church-built collective amenities mainly built by the orthodox churches, even though these form a minority within the peri-urban Christian population? Following De Swaan (1988), I use a figurational perspective to answer this question. This includes understanding the churches as part of larger figurations, at times tied into strong interdependency with the central state, at times engaged in intense competition in the religious marketplace. It involves embedding the analysis in a historical perspective, and shifting its focus between the macro-, meso- and micro-levels of state-church figuration, religious marketplace and individual churches.

In terms of data, I make use of a variety of fieldwork interviews and observations, augmented with online data gathering, secondary sources and other material. This is a broad cross-section of data. That is necessary because the area covered is wide, from macro-historical developments to the nitty-gritty micro environment of a church's internal organisation and doctrine, and personal decisions on which church to join.

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<sup>28</sup> I will specify the meaning of these labels and the general classification of churches in sections 5.4 and 5.5 of this chapter.

It also helps to developed a broad view on the studied phenomena, as there is not much research on how the internal organisation of churches affects their production of collective amenities.

Two factors are central to answer this question: the doctrine and the internal organisation of the churches. I locate the origins of both doctrine and internal organisation of a church in the circumstances prevalent during the period in which it was established. Thus, I assume that doctrine and internal organisation are relatively fixed, although I allow for some change over time. To get a proper understanding of the circumstances during a church's genesis, a historical perspective and a macro view of church-state relations are required. Most of these terms are self-evident, but allow me to briefly operationalise these three: doctrine, internal organisation, religious marketplace.

I use the word doctrine to denote the beliefs and values of a church. In this, I focus on earthly matters. Of course any church's doctrine also has a large spiritual component, but in my discussion I leave that by the side, remaining largely within the earthly domain of material activity, dress and decorum, service components and rituals, and social organisation (although these too are generally legitimated and described by references to the divine). Around these themes I ask: what behaviour does this church encourage? What are held to be its highest goals? What is this church's attitude towards other religions and non-believers? What personal conduct does it encourage or permit? In short, what are its societal values?

As for internal organisation, that is a less abstract term, but since churches are rarely discussed from this angle (Iannaccone, 1995) I still briefly define it. I use it to refer to organisational structure and economics, hierarchy and division of labor, noting the types of positions that exist and the types of activities that are formally organised by and through the church. I also include in this term the organisational culture: what attitudes do church workers project, how much hierarchy is tolerated or encouraged, what type of words are used to describe the work done and the church organisation?

Finally, throughout this chapter, I use the metaphor of the *religious marketplace* to describe Ghana's contemporary religious field. This metaphor is generally associated with the rational choice<sup>29</sup> literature on religion, popularised by sociologists Rodney Stark, Roger Finke, William Bainbridge and economist Laurence Iannaccone. In this literature, a core term is *religious mobilisation*, denoting the increased activity that results from religious pluralism (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987). Religious organisations will be stimulated to work harder, as they compete with each other to attract believers. Believers will be more inclined to shop, drawn to the marketplace through the activities undertaken to attract them. In short, as a result of greater competition, there is greater supply, which in turn raises demand. As Chaves and Gorki (2001) find, whether this theory applies is highly context-dependent. In Ghana, the mechanism does appear to work, as I set out in empirical sections four and five. From the marketplace metaphor, I furthermore adopt the idea of (essentially commercial) *entrepreneurs*, as well as *competition*, including its relative: (local) *monopoly*.

In my view, the religious marketplace metaphor adequately describes the religious field in Ghana for the analytical purposes of this chapter, with a few caveats. First, the churches are embedded in a larger context, a figuration involving local and national elements of the state as well as religious organisations and cultures outside Ghana. To properly capture these in the analysis, I embed the religious marketplace metaphor in an Eliasian framework, where changes in the cultural and the political structures influence each other and where organisations like churches are analysed as part of a greater figuration. Second, the churches do not only offer a bundle of services to believers, as conventional firms do. They also use the funds, time and energy taken in return to produce a variety of collective amenities, many of which are not limited to their congregation. First, a church building and all its associated possibilities (see above), and second, amenities like educational and medical facilities. This is known as a positive externality in the rational choice literature, and it is the main focus of this chapter.

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29 From this perspective, the keyword for me is *choice*. *Rational* is a highly loaded term, requiring a host of unrealistic assumptions. It assumes a clear pattern of personal preferences, as well as thorough knowledge of any relevant systems and the consequences in these systems of one's personal choices for the achievement of one's preferences. What is more, it is not a necessary term. As long as individuals have concrete and actionable choice in terms of their providers, we have a marketplace, and we are free from tacitly assuming or laboriously defining the mechanisms those choices are made. Therefore, I will follow more recent scholarship in the study of markets in not pre-defining the mechanism of choice, as rational or otherwise (Shaikh, 2016). I will however define the mechanisms of believers' choices empirically, drawing both on self-description and observation by neighborhood leaders and other observers.

### **Detailed chapter overview**

The following paragraphs set out how the chapter moves between the various levels of analysis, and provides an overview of the structure of the chapter.

Section 6.2 describes two different historical periods, focusing on the state-church figuration, dominant doctrines brought in from outside Ghana, and the level and nature of competition in the religious arena. It first describes the colonial era, when the first Christian churches arrived in Ghana and a patchwork of missions was established throughout the southern and central regions of the country. This era was characterised by a strong interdependency between churches and the colonial state, low levels of competition between the churches, and a strong strand of missionary spirit in the churches' doctrines. The second historical period described in the section are the most recent decades of Ghana's history. This era saw a veritable explosion in the number of denominations and independent churches, especially in Ghana's urban areas. It was characterised by loose church-state relations, a high degree of competition among the churches, and the arrival of the prosperity gospel from the U.S..

To understand what churches emerged from those two eras, the section 6.3 leaves the historical perspective. It provides an overview of Ghana's contemporary field of organised religion, mapping the differences between so-called orthodox churches, pentecostal churches, charismatic churches and sects. This section focuses on the key variables for the production of additional collective amenities: doctrine and internal organisation, as well as period of church genesis, the main driver of these two variables. It is of necessity largely built on secondary literature.

On the basis of this mapping of the contemporary religious field in Ghana, I proceed with the central analytical thrust of the chapter. That is, a comparison at the micro-level, between the internal organisation and doctrine of a contemporary orthodox church (section 6.4) and charismatic church (section 6.5). In these sections, I show how the different orientations of these churches lead to radically different outcomes in terms of the production of additional collective amenities such as educational and medical facilities. These case studies build on observations within church services, interviews and informal conversations with the pastors, other church workers and congregation members, as well as printed and digital material produced by the churches, such as a church constitution, billboards in Accra and text from online platforms. The two case studies are augmented by examples from other churches, to further flesh out the spectrum of orthodox and charismatic churches, and the territory in between these two extremes. The material for this augmentation is drawn from interviews with congregants, online sources and interviews with neighbourhood leaders.

In section 6.6 I zoom out again to describe the meso-level of Ghana's contemporary religious marketplace, particularly in the newly developing neighbourhoods. This section shows how the societal shake-up inherent in the development of a new geographic area provides numerous impetuses for a reorientation in the religious field, favoring the transition from orthodox towards charismatic churches. It is based on interviews with congregation members, other neighbourhood leaders, and a series of door-to-door interviews I conducted on the choices people made in terms of church and other social group memberships, augmented with census data.

On the basis of this empirical analysis I conclude that the charismatic churches, which increasingly dominate Ghana's religious landscape, play a much smaller role in the provision of material collective amenities than the orthodox churches did and still do. I attribute this to deep-seated differences in doctrine and internal organisation structure between these two types of religious organisations. I find that the charismatic churches are far more structured like business enterprises, organised for survival and profit in a competitive religious marketplace. This leaves little room for the construction of collective amenities except for those directly benefiting the church services and organisation, such as the church structure itself, and its means of transportation.<sup>30</sup> They are also more focused on the short term and the visible, which hinders the type of sustained energy, resource and organisational investments required to construct and maintain schools, clinics, and the type of dense local institutional network which is conducive to neighbourhood development.

## 6.2 Churches and the state formation process

This section provide the historical background for the rest of the chapter, showcasing how different socio-political figurations led to the emergence of different types of churches. Distinguishing two different historical periods, it focuses on the state-church figuration, dominant doctrines brought in from outside Ghana, and the level and nature of competition in the religious arena. I first describe the colonial era, when the first Christian churches arrived in Ghana and a patchwork of missions was established throughout the southern and central regions of the country. This era was characterised by a strong interdependency between churches and the colonial state, low levels of

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<sup>30</sup> Many churches also have extravagant cars, which may see like a waste of resources in such a competitive market. However, most observers explained this to me as the equivalent of private profit in regular enterprises. That is, these cars are seen as a reward the pastors give themselves for having performed well.

competition between the churches, and a strong strand of missionary spirit in the churches' doctrines. I then turn to the most recent decades of Ghana's history. This era saw a veritable explosion in the number of denominations and independent churches, especially in Ghana's urban areas. It was characterised by loose church-state relations, a high degree of competition among the churches, and the arrival of the prosperity gospel from the U.S..

The Christianisation of Ghana started in May 1752, with the landing of Reverend Thomas Thompson, of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, in response to a request of the British Royal African Company (Assimeng, 2010, p. 86). In March 1767 this British invitation was echoed by the Danish, when the Directors of the Danish Guinea Company wrote a letter to the Elders of the United Brethren, a missionary denomination in Copenhagen "begging them to send missionaries to the Gold Coast, to preach the Gospel to the natives, for the purpose of making them orderly, faithful and diligent people, like those on the three Danish islands in the West Indies." (Reindorf, 1895, p. 216) The missionaries were called in by the colonial government, in order to make the natives more obedient and more fit to work in the colonial project.

Five missionaries were sent in 1767, all of whom died of various diseases within a few years. So did the second group, consisting of four more Danishmen. This was too much for the United Brethren, who stopped their attempts to Christianise the Gold Coast. But the first seeds had been sown, and a small mission was established, now manned by natives and those of mixed Euro-African origin. The first substantial churches, however, were founded between 1827 and 1848 by the humanist oriented Basel Mission. At the invitation of the Danish Governor, Basel sent in a mixture of Europeans from several countries and people of Ghanaian ancestry, born and raised as Christians on Jamaica (Assimeng, 2010, p. 86; Reindorf, 1895, p. 227).

Such missionaries were invited in by the colonial powers, and they quickly established an working relationship with those powers, along the same lines as in so many other colonies. The missionaries were to educate the natives, which meant, following Western European standards of public education of the time, "to render them virtuous, patient and industrious" (Swaan, 1988, p. 57).<sup>31</sup> In the colonial state figuration, it was the churches' task to pacify the natives, to develop the land in terms of schools, hospitals and agriculture, to create a layer of administratively competent natives who would

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31 Although De Swaan's work is European in focus, and this research investigates the historical development of Ghana, I believe his work has relevance here, because these missionaries were requested by the (European) colonizers explicitly in their role as carriers of specific aspects of *European* cultures and worldviews.



be assigned roles in the project of colonial extraction, and to form a fine-grained network of European settlements throughout the country. Although usually presented as a 'civilising mission', an enriching project, the invitation of missionaries was largely intended to create a more obedient population and a layer of capable administrators, which could be counted on to facilitate the extraction of natural resources and of human beings.<sup>32</sup>

However cynical the reasons for inviting them had been, it should be made clear that the churches were by no means simply a tool in the hands of the colonial powers. Their agenda was to spread the Gospel, but it also contained an earnest push to improve the well-being of the natives; not just through education, but also by medical and economic means. Additionally, the mission churches were inevitably shaped by local culture and circumstances (Meyer, 1999, p. xix; T. Ranger, 1986). And as the missionaries realised that the colonial state depended on them for the education of a local administrative workforce, a network of stable settlements throughout the colony, and vital health care services, the relationship between the two was an interdependency, both needing the other to survive and thrive (Plange, 1984).

Throughout the 19th century, the British, Dutch, Asante and Fante kingdoms competed for supremacy in the southern part of current-day Ghana. As the century progressed, the British and their Fante allies slowly gained the upper hand. In 1850, the Danish sold out their colonial possessions to the British, followed in 1872 by the Dutch. In 1900, the British definitively asserted their dominance over southern and central Ghana, as they crushed the Asante Uprising and captured the Asante capital city Kumasi. This enabled Christian missionaries to start working in all of modern-day Ghana. At this point, something resembling the territory of Ghana in its current form was first unified under a single state, as the Gold Coast, a crown colony of Britain.

This enabled missionaries to work more widely throughout Ghana, and soon, the country was more or less divided in terms of missionary activity: the Evangelical Presbyterians in the Volta region, the Presbyterians around Akwapim in the Eastern Region, the Roman Catholics generally further north among the Ashanti, in the Brong-Ahafo Region and in the Northern Territories, the Anglicans in the northwest,

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32 It was not always possible to tailor-make and -break the traditional aspects of culture. The British wanted the locals to be educated in Christian culture and to adopt its work ethic, but as chapter 5 explains, they also wanted them to accept a 'traditional' regime of chieftaincy (for the Native Administration system of indirect colonial rule), which in many places had to be cobbled together in questionable ways from various local traditions. At some point, groups of zealous Christian converts started walking around the villages carrying red flags and 'giving out that the authority of the chiefs was at an end' (Der, 1974, p. 54).

the Wesleyans or Methodists in the Central Region, and so on (L. Berry, 1994, p. 104; Der, 1974). These mission churches normally worked in close concert with the newly unified colonial state. Archive work shows that the missions would always ask the colonial authorities for permission to establish themselves in a new area, reported frequently on events in their area and the progress they made in ‘civilising the natives’, and formed a channel of information ‘from the ground’ for the more distant colonial government (Montana, 2009).

The missions attracted followers at a high pace and grew quickly, because they effectively offered their converts a powerful socio-economic lure. Conversion to Christianity enabled natives to work as clerks, farming headmen and similar lower- and middle-rank positions in the colonial state apparatus (Meyer, 1999, p. 11). Although Ghanaians could not achieve the same status as Europeans, Christianity opened doors to status, knowledge and relative economic wealth. This was not only because Christianity was a prerequisite for positions in the formal colonial apparatus, but also because the only educational institutions at the time were church schools.

Around the time when the first missionaries were being sent out to Ghana, education had become a core concern of many European churches. Churches worked hard to develop the minds of young people, in order to spread their own ethos and ensure their own continuity as well as for more idealistic reasons. But while churches in Europe were engaged in fierce competition with each other, in Ghana they held regional religious semi-monopolies, competing only with pre-existing local spiritual traditions. This was mainly so because the capacity of most churches to expand was severely limited, because of poor transportation and communication technology, keeping the missionary churches largely from competing with each other (Remi Jedwab, Meier Zu Selhausen, & Moradi, 2018). Colonial government, which needed the missions for the provision of education but did not have the final say in land grants and mission permits, also stopped them from competing on several occasions. The Wesleyan mission (the later Methodist church) was barred from opening a mission in the north (Wa and Tamale) since competition with the Catholics already settled there was seen to be undesirable. As the Chief Commissioner noted in a 1913 letter, he did not want to disturb the monopoly of the Catholics: “I do not think that the establishment of missions of various denominations in this Dependency would be conducive to the good of the country or its inhabitants.” (Armitage, 1913)

Although there was a strong relationship between the missions and the colonial government at this time, they did have rather divergent aims.<sup>33</sup> Often, the missionaries (especially the Protestant denominations) were more inclined towards creating local independent prosperity. Meanwhile, the colonial administration was rather more focused on getting well-educated personnel to build a more streamlined operation for the production and extraction of raw materials (Grier, 1981).

In some cases, the missionaries and the colonial government even engaged in long-term conflict. The *Pères Blancs* (White Fathers) were largely French Catholics, who started a mission at Navrongo in the far north of Ghana in 1906. They had recurring difficulties with the colonial administrator of that area, the Chief Commissioner (Der, 1974). He felt they did not sufficiently educate the people, they were a cause of possible strife with the local Muslim community. He also felt that they were far too active in proselytising rather than focusing on quality education. This fear was not unfounded, as effective proselytising by the White Fathers in the North-West soon led to iconoclastic fury against other religious traditions. Finally, they were French, which was politically impractical in the so-called Scramble for Africa. This was part of a pattern where the nationality of the various missionary denominations came into play more frequently. Depending on the political circumstances at the time in Europe, French and German missionaries (such as the Catholic *Pères Blancs* and the Presbyterian Basel Mission) were distrusted and suppressed, or even evicted.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the first cracks appeared in the patchwork of local religious monopolies by mission churches that had come about during colonialism. Growing internal migration of Ghanaians led to mixing, which gave rise to the first stirrings in Ghana of *voluntarism*, a situation where religious affiliation is by choice (Warner, 1993). To be sure, Christianity was always optional, never a collectively enforced religion in Ghana. During the colonial era Christians were a distinct, if powerful, minority among Ghanaians. Most Ghanaians remained fully within the pre-existing spiritual traditions. But the territorially discrete nature of the mission churches had always provided a strong incentive for Ghanaians to join a specific church: the mission church active in their area, which provided a bridge towards the colonial government.

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33 Differences in purpose did not only exist between the missionaries and the colonial state. Prior research also shows that missionaries regularly clashed with their pupils on the content and emphasis of the curriculum. Berman (1974, p. 528) describes: "The differing perceptions of the schools' role by the missionary and his African clientele inevitably led to conflict. The missionary continued to place religious instruction at the forefront of the school curriculum. (...) The Africans, on the other hand, asked that more utilitarian subjects - those which would enable them to move into the European economy, to modernize, if you will - be emphasized."

As internal migration accelerated, the local monopolies of specific denominations were dismantled further, with various churches co-existing in the same, generally urban, areas. At the same time, the various missions had also reached a stage where they had the capacity to expand their missions into territories already settled by other denominations.

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the monopoly of the orthodox churches was definitively broken by the rise of African Independent Churches (AICs<sup>34</sup>) and the first Pentecostal churches. 'AIC' is originally a colonial denominator for the first wave of different African-led churches, meaning simply that they were not supervised by whites (Maxwell, 1999). I mention them together with the classical Pentecostals since many of the AICs cast themselves part of the broader worldwide Pentecostal movement, straddling the typological divide (Meyer, 1999). Ghanaian-started and -led AICs adopted the names of worldwide Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Church and the Assemblies of God, and western missionaries from these churches had come to Ghana to further their growth. Hence, researchers treated AICs and classical Pentecostals as a single category until around 1990 (Meyer, 2004). Classical Pentecostalism was a movement of spiritual renewal, rejecting much of the dogma and rigidity that had built up within the Christian denominations over centuries, and claiming a return to the original Christian values by placing special emphasis on a direct personal experience of God, rather than through formal rituals (Cox, 2009).

As Ghana became independent, the AIC movement took off even further. Was this correlated with the independence movement? The AIC religious movement had usually not agitated openly for independence, or generally been openly political in the explicit sense of the word, organising political action. But it was a movement which emphasised cultural, spiritual and political self-determination in general, and as such broke open both the political dominance of the colonial regime and the religious hegemony of the mission churches (Meyer, 2004; Sackey, 1996). The spread of Pentecostalism was also aided by the activities of non-denominational or lay Christian fellowships such as Women Aglow and the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International, which are extremely active in terms of evangelism (K. Asamoah-Gyadu, 1997).

Concurrent with the further growth and maturing of the AICs, Ghana became increasingly oriented towards the more enterprising religious field of the USA (Hastings, 1979). In the 1970s, a new movement came in, which was to eventually

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34 For a further discussion of the term AICs, including potential re-labelings as African Indigenous Churches (Appiah-Kubi, 1981) or African Initiated Churches (A. H. Anderson, 2001), see Meyer (2004).

supersede the AICs as West Africa's primary growth pole of Christianity: the *charismatic church movement*.<sup>35</sup> This movement, generally taken to have originated in 1965 with the Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, has taken not only West Africa, but also the rest of the world by storm, rising to over 300 million followers worldwide by 2010 (cf. Meyer, 2004; Pew, 2011; Sweeney, 2005, p. 150). The rise of AICs and classical Pentecostal churches had broken open the religious field and legitimised religious pluralism. This was an important enabling factor in the extreme growth and wide diversity of the charismatic movement (Meyer, 2004).

It was also over this period that Christianity became the dominant religion in Ghana and most of the surrounding countries. In 1910, 1.7% of West-Africans was Christian, still only a small minority. In 1970, this had grown explosively to 29.3%. In 2010, the figure stood at 36.5%. In Ghana, the growth was even more rapid. Although statistics differ, the pattern is impressive by any account. For instance, the Gordon Conwell Center for the Study of Global Christianity registers a percentage of 51% Christianity in Ghana for 1970, growing to 65.4% projected in 2020 (Johnson, 2013, p. 32). The reasons for this are difficult to capture, as they most likely span the spiritual, cultural, social, political and economic domain. In general, it appears that in this situation, the religious mobilisation theory (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987) appears to be applicable. What is much more clear, and a necessary preliminary to the rest of this chapter, is the transition between dominance of various *strands* of Christianity: from orthodox, to African Initiated Churches and Pentecostal, to charismatic (J. D. Amanor, 2004).

Since the 1980s, the charismatic churches have seen spectacular growth in Ghana. It seems most sensible to discuss this growth in relative terms, as Ghana's entire population has been growing enormously, from 10 million in 1975 to 28 million in 2015 (World Bank, 2016). The religious composition of Ghana in the first post-independence population census of 1960 was 41% Christian, 38% Traditionalist, 12% Muslim, and the remainder (some 9%) reporting no religious affiliation. Of the Christians, 25% were Protestant (orthodox), 13% Roman Catholic, 2% Protestant (Pentecostal) and 1% Independent African Churches.

The next dataset is from the 1980s, when the Ghana Evangelism Committee conducted two surveys, in 1986 and in 1991 (Gifford, 1998, p. 38). According to the 1985 estimate, Ghana's population was 62% Christian, 15% Muslim, 22% indigenous or nonbelievers. The Christian group was composed of Protestants (25%, largely

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35 The characteristics of this movement are discussed in detail in the following section, as part of a larger overview of the contemporary Ghanaian religious field.

Methodists and Presbyterians), Roman Catholics (15%), Protestant Pentecostals (8%), and Independent African Churches (14%) (Federal Research Division, 1994, p. 102). That is, within a single generation, one fifth of Ghana's entire population had converted to Christianity, and the Pentecostal and AIC shares had taken in that entire growth. Between 1986 and 1991 the traditional AICs, the older Pentecostals, had lost members, the orthodox church membership had remained constant in absolute terms, and the new Pentecostal churches, most of which would later be recognised as part of the charismatic movement, had gained enormously. Later surveys, in particular the census data from 2000 and 2010, show the continuation of this trend (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). The membership of the orthodox churches did not really decline, but the vast majority of the explosive population growth over the past 25 years has swelled the charismatic congregations, making this the dominant religious category in seven out of Ghana's ten regions (ibid). In short: Ghana's market for organised religion is expanding, and the charismatic movement is capturing the large majority of the newcomers.

The process of decolonisation also had other impacts on the religious field and the relationship between churches and state. At first there had been a clear division of labor between the colonial state and the mission churches. The churches did education, health, smaller development projects, organised some forms of social security, and provided the cultural and religious framework. The colonial state organised larger infrastructure projects and held the country together and racially suppressed by military force. After decolonisation in 1957, the First Republic under President Nkrumah took over all schools from the churches, reforming the curriculum and adding nationalist elements (Berman, 1974).

Although this complete nationalisation of the school system was reversed after Nkrumah's overthrow in 1966, the state remained strongly involved in education. In 1992, the Fourth Republic Constitution declared free and compulsory basic education for all children between 4 and 14 years old. In 2017, the newly elected NPP government extended this to free Senior High School education (severely straining the educational resources of the state). Today the situation is that churches are allowed to run their own schools, with a government-approved curriculum, or work with local government for this, sharing the building, the teaching materials, the teachers and other costs in a variety of constellations. This cooperative approach has contributed to one of the best educated youth populations south of the Sahara (World Bank, 2016).



Churches still today organise another important material collective amenity: social security. The most common form of this in Ghana is the *welfare fund*, which consists of a group of people pooling money every week, during a live meeting which participants *must* attend. This money is not stockpiled for long, but rather used that same week or month to support one or more of the participants, who gave birth, was bereaved or had another major life event. This money is not personal savings, nor is it comparable to a pension system. Welfare funds are more like health or other insurance systems: needs based, short term. There are many different systems for this: either fixed payments, or ad-hoc, give-what-you-can collections; either fixed payouts, or payouts determined by the discretion of church leadership; either as a separate financial system, or integrated with the rest of the church's financial flows. Almost every church offers members at least one of these options. I use the term “welfare” to denote all such systems.

Unlike schooling, this function was hardly taken over by the state. The public sector has a state insurance company called SSNIT, but this is only for formal-sector employees. The idea of mutual funds has also spread from the churches in other directions, and today a wide variety of secular groups or ‘clubs’ exist, which are also organised as welfare funds. These fill part of that gap, especially for the urban upper middle classes (Interview Agyere, 2015). However, for most Ghanaians, the church welfare fund and the family are still the main forms of insurance.

### 6.3 Categories of churches today

This section of the chapter describes the various groups of churches active in Ghana today. It builds on the previous section in the sense that it shows the outcomes of the historic processes described there. The section stays largely at the meso-level, describing categories of churches, their group characteristics and the organisations representing them. The section also delineates which groups of churches exactly are described in the following section, and briefly denotes why some Christian groups, the so-called sects, as well as other religions such as Muslims, are *not* covered in this chapter.

|                         | Greater Accra | Other urban | Rural south | Rural center | Rural north | Total       |
|-------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| Catholic                | 9%            | 15%         | 15%         | 18%          | 43%         | 17%         |
| Protestant              | 22%           | 25%         | 21%         | 28%          | 13%         | 25%         |
| Pentecostal/Charismatic | 54%           | 44%         | 48%         | 39%          | 32%         | 44%         |
| Other Christian         | 13%           | 16%         | 16%         | 16%          | 11%         | 15%         |
| <b>Christians total</b> | <b>86%</b>    | <b>75%</b>  | <b>71%</b>  | <b>80%</b>   | <b>40%</b>  | <b>73%</b>  |
| Islam                   | 12%           | 21%         | 18%         | 10%          | 52%         | 20%         |
| Traditional             | 0%            | 0%          | 0%          | 0%           | 0%          | 0%          |
| No religion             | 2%            | 5%          | 12%         | 11%          | 8%          | 7%          |
| Other                   | 0%            | 0%          | 0%          | 0%           | 0%          | 0%          |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>100%</b>   | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b>  | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> |

*Table 6.1: An overview of membership of organised religion in various parts of Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014, p. 10).*

Building taxonomies of churches and religious movements is a tricky enterprise (Meyer, 2004). Scholars of Christianity in Ghana estimate that around 7000 different churches are active in Ghana, and it is impossible to definitively categorise them, whatever theoretical, doctrinal or empirical basis one chooses (Assimeng, 2010, p. 245). However, a rough grouping around ideal types is possible, and is actually a prerequisite for analysing the declining contribution of churches to the production of collective amenities. Therefore, this section briefly sets out a number of categories. To provide an indicator of where the boundaries between these categories currently lie and how porous or rigid these are, I also provide an overview of the associations and councils through which Ghanaian churches have organised themselves.

Following common parlance in Ghana I divide Christian groups in Ghana into five main groups, eventually focusing on two of them. These groups are: Orthodox churches, Spiritual churches, Pentecostal churches, Charismatic churches and so-called sects. Following the previous section, I treat these in order of their appearance on the religious scene. There is an additional difficulty, in that even where there is broad agreement on the categorisation, most of these categories are referred to by a number of different labels. I use for each category the label which I have heard most frequently in Ghana, starting the description with that label and continuing to use it throughout the chapter, while also noting in these descriptions other labels that have been used to refer to these groups in academic literature or elsewhere.

First, the Orthodox churches, which generally have European origins, and came into the country as mission churches in the colonial era. These missionary churches are sometimes also referred to as mainline churches (Gifford, 2004). They have an extensive and relatively bureaucratic internal organisation, and are relatively strict in terms of doctrine. This category is the only one of the five described here whose boundaries are more or less uncontested. It includes the Calvinists (Presbyterian), Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, Anglicans/Episcopals and the Roman Catholics. I describe this category in more detail in empirical section three.

Second, the Spiritual churches. The early Spiritual churches were often conflated in the literature with Classical Pentecostal churches, under the header African Independent Churches or AICs (Sackey, 2001).<sup>36</sup> Originated around the 1880's (see Fernandez, 1978), this movement brought in African elements like drumming and dancing into the services, and was considered revolutionary in that sense. During my fieldwork I have visited several church services of this type. The first thing I noticed was that they are very relaxed in terms of protocol. Much of the services consisted of music, communal or simultaneous individual prayer, and speaking in tongues. In general, these churches emphasise collective effervescence, a direct experience of God, and are often rather loose in their use of the Bible and their general theology, as far as I can tell. These churches do not appear to be very active in the provision of collective amenities.

Third, and often conflated with the previous category, we have what are in Ghana called the Pentecostal churches, known in the literature as Classical Pentecostal churches (see Cox, 2009). Pentecostalism originated in the late 19th century, and emerged as an apostolic and evangelical movement, which was also actively taken up in West Africa starting around the 1920s. Having originated in California and the U.K., these churches emphasise personal connection with God through baptism, rather than biblical doctrines. They also provide room for prophetism, dreams and visions, speaking in tongues, prayer healing, and deliverance from evil spirits (Meyer, 2004). Although they are generally less traditional than most of the orthodox churches, I found the major churches of this category in Ghana to be rather strictly organised and relatively conservative in their doctrine. This category includes churches like the Assemblies of God, the Apostolic Church, the Church of Pentecost and many others. Several of the churches in this category are actively involved in the production of

<sup>36</sup> The term "independent" was originally a colonial term, designating Christian movements without white supervision (Maxwell, 1999). I will not use the term AIC in this chapter, as it is a somewhat arbitrary grouping, at least with respect to the purposes of my analysis. It ranges across the full doctrinal spectrum: from African spin-offs of Orthodox churches (such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church) to Spiritual churches with radically different doctrines and organizational structures.

collective amenities, generally focusing on education. But their numbers are on the decline (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013; Gifford, 1998).

Fourth, the Charismatic churches. These are well described by Gifford (2004), core elements being their focus on charismatic leadership, the exuberance of their services and their focus on ‘healing’. In terms of doctrine, it is similar to the Pentecostal churches, with the notable addition of the Prosperity gospel (see Bowler, 2013). A second main point of difference between these and prior religious movements in Ghana, which “remained community enterprises within, resisting modernisation in the capitalist sense” (Fernandez, 1978) is that the Charismatics fully embrace capitalism, also in the religious field itself. Other notable factors are their strong global orientations and ambitions, which are also reflected in their doctrine as a “complete break with the past” (Meyer, 1998).

The development of Charismatic churches in Ghana was strongly related to, and inspired by, similar churches rising in the USA, and happened at the same time in nearby Nigeria. However, the Charismatic movement has always been less institutionally integrated than both the Orthodox and the Pentecostal churches, and the churches founded in Ghana were institutionally independent from their American inspirators. Initially, these churches were not very big, and also generally not international, although they always aspired to be (Meyer, 2004).<sup>37</sup> Although there are several large and thoroughly structured Charismatic denominations, this category also stands out because of the large volume of independent religious entrepreneurs it includes. In fact, even its larger denominations often work with franchise models which leave individual churches much more freedom than the Orthodox or Pentecostal churches do.

Finally, the so-called sects, a category which includes Jehova Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, the Salvation Army and other strongly independent, somewhat idiosyncratic denominations. These groups are relatively small in Ghana, comprising less than 10% of the Christian population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013), and are largely ignored in the literature. I follow suit here, since they form such a small percentage of the population, and did not have a recognisable presence in my case study areas. Most of these churches do not appear to be very active in structurally providing collective amenities. It should be noted, however, that the Salvation Army and the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) are important exceptions to this rule. In fact, SDA activities in the

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37 One way to note this is in the names, many of which end in “International”, even when that is clearly not the case, i.e. when the church in question is a single, local group gathering in a small structure, with no other affiliations.

areas of health, education, water and sanitation, and livelihood and agriculture are well established in Ghana, driven in part through the NGO Adventists Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

This complex field of churches is grouped in a number of councils and associations. I briefly discuss these, first to denote which of the categories may be considered neighbours or allies, and which stand further apart from each other, and second to emphasise once again how fluid the boundaries between the categories are. The Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) brings together most of the Orthodox churches, except for the Catholics (who are not members of any of these councils), as well as a number of their AIC spin-offs. The Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC) represents some 450 different denominations, including classical Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Church and the Assemblies of God, as well as several large Charismatic churches, such as the Royal House Chapel International and the Perez Chapel International. This group, founded in the 1960s to facilitate pan-African gatherings of the Pentecostal movement, could be said to stand for the majority of institutionalised non-orthodox churches. Its leadership recently issued a call to “regulate lone rangers”, as these damage the societal standing of Christian churches in general (Frimpong-Manso, 2018). Finally, there is the National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches (NACCC), which unites some 50 Charismatic denominations, among others the Lighthouse Chapel International of Dag Heward-Mills and the Action Chapel International of Archbishop Duncan-Williams. Some of the spiritual churches are members of the GPCC, several others have found a home in the NACCC, but the majority is simply independent, as are nearly all of the sects. A large amount of Charismatic churches, especially the smaller ones, are also independent.

This overview of the religious field, as shown in Table 6.2, leaves out two main groups. First, Muslims. I have left these out because mosques have historically been much less active than churches in the production of collective amenities and are still not nearly as active as churches in this field, apart from maintaining the mosque building and enabling social bonding to facilitate peer assistance (Interview Alhassan, 2015). Second, apart from formal religion, Ghana has a lively landscape of spiritual providers, colloquially known as witch doctors or fetish priests (whose followers are denoted in table 6.1 as ‘traditional religion’). They are generally not engaged in institution building, nor indeed do they gather groups of followers in any practical sense. However, they answer to a widely felt need to intervene in the spiritual plane on behalf of individuals, providing protection from spiritual harm and support from powerful

spirits and 'lesser Gods'. They play their role in the background of the story laid out in this chapter, often by supporting Christian preachers, especially on the charismatic side of the spectrum, with spiritual energy. For a good example, see fetish priest Nana Kwaku Bonsam, who often speaks out in the Ghanaian press and through Twitter on religious and other issues.

Out of these five groups, the chapter focuses on orthodox and on charismatic churches. On orthodox churches, because these have historically dominated the religious field in Ghana and are still the most active group in terms of building collective amenities. And on charismatic churches, because these appear to be taking over the religious field, so their productivity in terms of collective amenities matters most for the newly developing urban areas, where collective amenities are yet to be built. The Pentecostals are also regularly active in terms of building collective amenities, but less visibly so than the orthodox churches, and their share of the religious marketplace is dwindling, so they are less relevant to the analysis for newly growing parts of the urban fabric. As for the so-called sects, I have seen relatively little activity in terms of building collective amenities on their part, and they do not constitute a major part of Ghana's Christian population.

A final note, to provide transparency and to discuss and signal the border between personal opinion and scientific work. The charismatic churches of West Africa have been receiving much flak lately. Ghana's press regularly features attacks on the opulent lifestyles of their leaders. Some academic authors describe these churches as parasitic on the society they work in, as businesses which blatantly disregard the damage they do to society to achieve their financial aims (Sackey, 2006). Others have written about such churches in nearby Nigeria as providing investment vehicles for corrupt politicians (Ukah, 2016, p. 537). This gives an indication of the stakes in the discussion surrounding the material and financial culture of this new wave of churches.

I personally share many of the broader notions surrounding the moral character of many charismatic church leaders posited by such pieces, but it is not up to a social scientific researcher to pass moral judgment. So I have tried my best to keep the empirical material in this chapter strictly focused on its theoretical goal: explaining why there appears to be a large difference in the provision of material collective amenities between the orthodox and the charismatic churches. That does involve citing fieldwork respondents who hold strong opinions on these churches. But there too, I have ensured to triangulate observations. Furthermore, I have refrained as far as possible from quoting respondents who had clear personal interests in or against the churches under discussion.

|                     |  |  |   |
|---------------------|--|--|---|
| <b>Historical</b>   | From mid-18th century  | From early 20th century  | From 1980s  |
|                     | <b>Mission churches</b><br><br>Calvinist (Presbyterian),<br>Baptist, Lutheran,<br>Methodist,<br>Anglican/Episcopal,<br>Roman Catholic, ... | <b>Spiritual &amp; Pentecostal churches (AICs)</b><br><br>Christ Apostolic Church,<br>Church of Pentecost,<br>Deeper Life, ... | <b>Charismatic churches)</b><br><br>Assemblies of God,<br>Heavenly Gate,<br>Royal House, ...  |
| <b>Contemporary</b> | <b>Orthodox</b><br><br>Calvinist (Presbyterian),<br>Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist,<br>Anglican/Episcopal,<br>Roman Catholic, ...            |  | <b>Charismatic</b><br><br>Winner's Chapel,<br>Action Chapel International,<br>International Central Gospel Church,<br>Lighthouse,<br>many smaller organised<br>church groups,<br>and "one-man churches" |

Table 6.2: an overview of the typology of churches developed in this chapter.

## 6.4 Orthodox churches: a case study

This section and the following form the central analytical thrust of the chapter, by providing a comparison at the micro-level between the internal organisation and doctrine of a contemporary orthodox church (section 4) and charismatic church (section 5). In these sections, I show how the different orientations of these churches lead to radically different outcomes in terms of the production of additional collective amenities such as educational and medical facilities. These case studies build on observations within church services, interviews and informal conversations with the pastors, other church workers and congregation members, as well as printed and



digital material produced by the churches, such as a church constitution, billboards in Accra and text from online platforms. The two case studies are augmented by examples from other churches, to further flesh out the spectrum of orthodox and charismatic churches, and the territory in between these two extremes. The material for this augmentation is drawn from interviews with congregants, online sources and interviews with neighbourhood leaders.

To flesh out the ideal type of an orthodox church, I provide an example which comes fairly close to the ideal type: the Presbyterian Church in Sebrepor, a descendant of the Basel mission. Its doctrine was expressed by its reverend as follows:

*"We think of the holistic of the people. We need to cater for the spiritual aspect of the person, the soul aspect which is renewing their mind, and the physical aspect. So if the person is not strong, is not healthy, well... So our Social Services Department also caters for the environment, they work to improve the health, they try to organise employment for the youth. It is our duty to run these social services, because in the end, the church is for the society."*

*Francis Akey, Reverend of the Christ the King Presbyterian Church, Sebrepor*

The Presbyterian church is one of the biggest buildings in Sebrepor, a massive pointed roof rising above the surrounding villas, shacks and dirt roads. On Sunday mornings, it is surrounded by a sea of ladies in long, flowing dresses of every style imaginable. Sprinkled between these ladies is a notably smaller amount of men, wearing eminently respectable suits which they crown with brightly coloured ties. The crowd is fairly old, the average age between forty and fifty years old. More people arrive and slowly trickle into the building through the wide open doors, stopping every few meters to greet friends.

### **Traditional values**

The various parts of the service flow smoothly into one another. Since the first missionaries from Copenhagen landed on Ghanaian shores to start their missionary work, a number of new elements have been introduced: more singing, colourful clothing, clapping and dancing. As Reverend Akey explains, "God has spoken to us, so we have to respond. Yes! We dance while we do our offerings. Your country, you are so stiff in worshipping, when you should be flexible. You are going to your daddy God, and God is love. So go to your daddy with joy!"

Beyond such visible elements, important though they may be, the service has remained true to its Basel Mission roots to a surprising degree. There is a strong emphasis on Bible study, with half an hour reserved for that in the beginning of the service and three public Scripture readings later on. Bible study takes the majority of time in this service. The sermon, too, is very much focused on interpreting these readings and weaving them together into a theologically sound storyline. Singing and dancing take an important place, but the singing is hymns, in classical style, accompanied by the organ.

Beyond these Bible readings, the service does contain some elements more commonly associated with Pentecostalism which go beyond visual style elements. The most notable of these is *deliverance*, an element brought in strongly by the Charismatic churches. Its purpose is to drive out evil spirits and to promote health and well-being. During this part of the service, everyone in the congregation is asked to close their eyes, raise their right hand, and pray fervently to drive out any evil spirits and to attract positive energies. But as I looked around the church through my half-closed eyelids, I saw many of the older members around me grudgingly sit still, hands in their lap, eyes open, looking around impatiently while they waited for this ‘modern nonsense’, as some called it, to be finished.

Clearly, there is a generational conflict here. Many of the older members resist the introduction of such recently adopted elements as deliverance, much dance and collective rapture, instead putting great weight on ‘proper dress’, and emphasising a careful reading and interpretation of the Bible. This comes at a cost (Assimeng, 2010, p. 31). It comes at the cost of dynamism, at a cost of attracting new members, and in the end could prove to be an existential threat to these churches. Still, its services clearly show that in this church, the traditional habits are still dominant. And the advanced age of the congregation reflects this fact.

### **Internal organisation**

It is not hard to see why people look up to Reverend Francis Akey as a leader. Chairman of the *Christ the King Congregation* in Sebrepor, he is an imposing preacher. He speaks with authority, and clearly has no time for distractions. His office, where he receives me to explain the inner workings of his church, is furnished with a broad desk and wooden panels on the wall. Alternating between his laptop, various paper files and his Samsung tablet to explain the different aspects of his church, Akey is more reminiscent of a small-town mayor than of a reverend.

Asked for a description of his church, he says:

*“You see, our church, we have 7 key result areas, or Departments. We have the Department of Evangelism, those who share the word of God. When they bring the souls in, we have a Department which takes charge, the Church Life & Nurturing Department. Then since we are in a community, we liaise with the community and we have a department which is in charge of that. (...) Then we have Finance. We also have a department which caters for Secular Education, or General Education, and Development and Social Services. And finally, we have those who manage our statistics, our human resources, the staff we have. We call it Administration and Human Resources Management. (...)”*

The first thing that stands out from the Reverend's descriptions of his church is how systematic it all is. Only at the end does he mention traditionally bureaucratic areas like statistics and human resources, but in fact that rationalised spirit runs through the whole story. The Department of Evangelism goes out and brings in the souls. The freshly gathered converts are then taken over by the CL&N department, and counted and filed away by the AHRM department. Relations with external organisations are maintained by yet another department, and internal conditions are managed by Development and Social Services. God's work must be done, and it must be done with care. But in the Presbyterian church, this does not seem to require any rapturous devotion. Quite the contrary: in interviews, the cheerful leaders of these departments were more reminiscent of civil servants, cracking cynical jokes while getting on with today's business.

Nobody stands outside this gently humming machine: even Reverend Akey himself and his colleagues are regularly transferred by the church's national leadership. An administrative rotation process sends them to other stations of duty every five years, just like the Local Government Service does with municipal officers. The purpose of this is to keep them from getting complacent and to keep the churches from being dominated by any locally grown 'big men'. This calibrated structure and sober attitude make the church a highly effective organisation. They have managed to erect and maintain the biggest building in the Sebrepor area, they have a well-oiled internal machinery which keeps the Sunday services and other programs running smoothly. They have some strong internal welfare programs, effective internal communication channels, and they have managed to set up a number of community services which are discussed later in this chapter.

The fact that it is organised in a tight and somewhat bureaucratic way does not mean there is no enthusiasm or commitment to these practices. Most of these Departments are run by volunteers, some receiving small allowances and others receiving no compensation at all. As Akey describes the financial arrangements for the people keeping the church running:

*"We have employees only in the administration. Then some people, we give them some allowances. But to be honest, I can't call it an allowance, it's just a token to buy phone credit and transport wherever they are going. We also have a small minibus which takes people around. People willingly volunteer to do it. If the commitment is not there, you can't do it. You need real commitment."*

Again, this is an example, purely set out here to provide substance to an otherwise abstract ideal type, positioned at the orthodox end of the spectrum described above. Such bureaucratic structures are not limited to Ghana's former mission churches, but they are nearly only found in churches which entered the field before the 1960s. This includes the Pentecostal Churches (the specific denomination with that name, not the broader category). As Rev. Abloma, head pastor of the Sebrepur Pentecostal Church, describes:

*"At the beginning of the year, the national HQ sends us their calendar, the things they want to do, and they bring us a theme that they want us to work on throughout the year. The calendar says they will do ABCD [specific events] on this date of this month. Then the Area also brings their calendar. Then the District, we will also develop a calendar for ourselves. Then we work it out here at the district, and let them have the program of the district, so the local churches can also have their local program."*

Like Reverend Akey, he too is rotated on a five-year basis to other locations throughout Ghana. I ask him whether that isn't a shame, to waste all the built-up contacts and local knowledge, but he just laughs, and answers:

*"Yes, perhaps. You didn't start the congregation though, somebody else started it, so you can't claim it for yourself. In fact, in our system, we have multiple churches for one pastor. I'm here as a district minister, which means I have several churches under my care. Apart from that,*

*there are elders for the churches, I'm supposed to be the minister, coordinating all the affairs of the churches. The minister is not for one particular assembly, no, the minister is for several churches."*

In short, Ghana's orthodox churches were designed as single bodies, with many moving parts. Their head pastors, who have gone through a lengthy education to qualify for this position, are more administrators than spiritual leaders, fulfilling clear-cut functions in a consciously designed larger institution. They are balanced out by long-serving local elders, stabilising the churches while head pastors move around on a 5-year rotational regime, similar to that of the local government bureaucrats. This notion of a deep rooting in a larger whole is also reflected in the financial flows within the church: large parts of the collected donations are appropriated by the national headquarters, to be used in structural nation-wide programs.

### **A doctrine of community building**

In Europe, the churches had over the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century risen to be the main organisers of social services.

*"Priests, in their role of 'charitable entrepreneurs', promulgated a uniform rule of distribution which could serve as a focal point for coordinating almsgiving. They also manipulated reciprocal expectations among the established families and created a public setting for ostentatious giving and mutual inspection of each one's contributions. Collective charitable action in turn contributed to the emergence of the parish as a collectivity. In the context of this emerging parish community, 'public order' as a collective good acquired increasing social relevance."*  
(Swaan, 1988, p. 218)

While churches often carry an association of social conservatism, preserving the socio-political status quo, and while the missionaries had been invited for just this purpose by the colonial powers, the missionaries themselves often had more progressive ideas. Many of the Methodists and other missionaries coming to Ghana had been strongly influenced by evangelical and philanthropic ideas, which were spreading in the churches of Western Europe at the time (Swaan, 1988, p. 218). These movements "stressed personal spiritual growth and the humanitarian improvement of institutions, advocating education as a means for both." (ibid).

The Basel Mission, which founded the Presbyterian Evangelical Church in Ghana, worked by taking promising young men from artisanal and peasant backgrounds, and give them a chance to move up in the world through training and discipline (Graham, 1971). This philosophy of social mobility through hard work was carried to the missions, among which Ghana. De Swaan, in his fundamental work on the growth of the Western European welfare states, emphasises that such a spirit of reform, of humanitarian ideals in education and their other work, was a historical rarity in churches. But in 19th century Europe, it was an important current.

### **Welfare system**

The idea of mutual funds, which was really developing in a big way in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe by working class associations and guilds (Swaan, 1988, pp. 143-151) was brought into Ghana by churches, and spread from there to the broader population. In Europe, this was superseded by statewide insurance programs (Swaan, 1988, p. 148) but in Ghana, the church welfare fund is still the only insurance for many people. Whether church members get married or have children, fall ill, are bereaved or pass away themselves, a financial safety net is always in place. Reverend Akey describes how welfare is organised in his church.

*“For the welfare, we come out with by-laws to guide them so that they will not discriminate. We want to guard against discrimination. So we have by-laws which regularise how the welfare should be operating, the way we operate the welfare. And every few years we update the Welfare Constitution. A constitution that helps us in that manner.”*

The church members and leadership find it important not to discriminate, to treat everyone by the same standards. The Constitution mentioned by Akey is a 7-page document, which spells out in great detail the rules in case of “(a) Wedding (b) Sickness (c) Old age (d) Incapacitation (e) Unemployment (f) Transfer (g) Death (h) Birth (i) Disaster/Accident (j) Widowhood (k) Scholarship (l) Sponsorship”. It goes on to describe the beneficiaries of this system: official congregation members, who have filled out the required Membership Declaration Forms (with two passport pictures) and have ensured regular fulfilment of all required Tithes, Dues and Pledges. Finally, this constitution sets out the exact amounts receivable, stipulating also that all congregation members are required to attend each other’s funerals and that “the Welfare Committee shall pay regular visits to every sick member”.

In other words, the church comes as close to being a bureaucratic welfare state as it can, caring for its members from the cradle to the grave. And this system is not limited to the local churches. On each university campus, there is a chapter of the National Union of Presbyterian Students of Ghana. Its members go around campus, knocking on every door to see whether there is a Presbyterian student in that room and to ensure that he or she is well cared for. And when congregation members move to another area, they receive a transfer letter from the church, which allows them to automatically enroll in the membership base of the Presbyterian church in their new area of residence.

Again, such systematic coverage is not limited to the Presbyterian churches. Rather, they are associated with churches which came of age in the era before competition among churches was an important aspect of Ghana's religious field. All old mission churches have similar welfare systems in place, and most old-style Pentecostal churches have similar systems. Many institutionalised Pentecostal churches have the same, often going even further, being even more centralised financially.

### **A 'secular' school**

As one of the first churches that was erected in the area, the Presbyterian church has also built a school. As Reverend Akey explains:

*"Then we have a school also, because we have a community we cater for. A secular school. It ranges from the nursery level, including primary and junior high level. So in our area, this is the only public secondary school. The others are a little far off. So, if you go to the class right now, you will find them overcrowded. The highest in a class is about 91. So we need to expand our facilities.*

*For that we are liaising with the District Assembly to find another place. It's not a private school, it's a public school, to serve the community. So we have a department which caters for Secular Education, or General Education. So for this we liaise with the District Assembly, the Regional Director and up to the national level. So the minister in charge, he is the local manager, he manages the school with his leadership."*

Three things stand out from this quote. First, this is the only public secondary school in the area. There are some (very small) private schools, but those are prohibitively expensive for most children. Second, in many respects this school is a shared project between



government and the church. It is run on a daily basis by the church, but its teachers are provided by the central government. The church sees it as its responsibility to expand the school, but the District Assembly, that is the municipality, is actively searching for a location. Such cooperation arrangements between churches and local government in areas of public service are very common (Interview Ofori, 2015). Third, this is an explicitly secular project. It is still tied to the church community, so church members' children are prioritised, Christian holidays are celebrated, and teachers who attend the Presbyterian church are strongly preferred. But children from other denominations and religions are also welcomed and do in fact attend in serious numbers, and the teaching is not strongly religious in nature. This orientation is born out in the fact that the school is run by the church's Department for Secular Education. Although largely secular education organised by a church may at first sight seem like a contradiction in terms, for this church it is a natural consequence of their social mission.

It is important to note that for many orthodox churches, this kind of project is as much official church policy as it is part of the *spirit* of the church. For example, Methodist churches often do not organise the building of the school as an explicit church project, but their morality does emphasise its importance, and the church provides an effective forum for the required logistical organisation. As one church member explains:

*"We are a Methodist church, and the school here was built by the members of the church. But it wasn't built by the Methodist church per se. Every fund which was used to build that school was raised in this church, and it is known under the name of Methodist school. So that's what you see in most places. You'll see a Methodist church, which wasn't funded by the central Methodist organisation in Ghana. I mean, it's quite natural: once the church is established, the next project will be a school. For who is the school? Well, actually, we built the school for the area. So our member's children come there, but also others. We even have Muslims who come to attend that school. It's open to anybody. If you can pay the fees, you can come."*

Apart from this school, the church also runs a Department of Development, which focuses on the economic aspect of its adult members' lives. This Department provides training and rental equipment for so-called 'small scale technology', like fitting, welding and other such crafts. They target industries which are not capital-intensive, but which do require some investment and mainly training to be successful, and which therefore allow the church members to make a dependable living. Apart from providing equipment and training themselves, and perhaps even more importantly, the

Department functions as a hub connecting church members to potential employers and customers in the area.

Finally, the church also has a Department of Social Relations and Ecumenism Department. As its chairman explains:

*"We liaise with the political authorities, we liaise with chiefs, we liaise with the other denominations and the other faiths. We are like the Foreign Affairs of the church. Sometimes, as a church, we want to do a program that will not be on religious basis. For example, we were having an event here which we call 'Assembly Forum'. The purpose is to establish strong contact between the Assembly (municipality) and the people of this area, to push the development of the community. We invited the District Assembly to come here, with all the Assemblymen, to discuss with the community. You know, sometimes it is difficult. The Assembly, they are hard to reach, they will make excuses. But when you press on them, we can usually manage to get them to the community. I have their contact, and even if the DCE (mayor) himself can't come, he will send somebody."*

In short, the church has both an internal welfare system, and a broad spectrum of activities directed at the structural development of its surrounding area. These systems are supported by its internal form of organisation, a bureaucracy which during observations appeared to be largely free of the lethargy which so often accompanies this form of organisation. The church runs as a well-oiled bureaucratic organisation, yet it is more than a task-based bureaucratic system: the whole enterprise is motivated by a sense of inspiration on the part of the 'bureaucrats', the church workers, to build up society and carry out 'good works'.

In Ghana, the orthodox churches often play this role, providing public amenities like schools and clinics. 19 out of the 20 highest ranking secondary schools in the country are run by orthodox churches (AB Review, 2017). The Roman Catholic church is particularly active in the field of medical clinics and hospitals, running 41% of all clinics in Ghana (Gifford, 2004, pp. 20-22). Many of the larger universities, too, are run by orthodox churches, and several larger foreign (sometimes religious-based) aid institutions work through their local counterparts, bringing in large amounts of aid money. See for example the Catholic Relief Services, but also organisations like USAid. Apart from the Catholic Church, these orthodox churches, including the Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, Salvation Army, Presbyterian and many others, are organised in the Christian Council of Ghana.

Many of the older Pentecostal churches are similar to the orthodox churches, both in terms of their social development activities and in terms of their internal culture. The Pentecostal Church of Ghana, for instance, has a highly centralised leadership structure, and its ministers rotate to a different posting every five years, like municipal bureaucrats. 75% of the church's tithe is sent straight to its national headquarters, which spends the money on a large university and several secondary schools throughout the country, as well as a number of smaller projects (see Church of Pentecost website, 2018).

To be clear, not only the orthodox churches do this kind of structural social work. The Latter Day Saints church has a very active program through the Church Relief Society. The International Central Gospel Church has the Central Aid program, and has built one of the country's best universities. And charismatic churches of various hues have built up countless schools throughout the country. The point here is not to say that they are not providing any social services, but rather to describe a structural, general difference between charismatic and orthodox churches.

In short, the orthodox churches have historically played a large part in state building. Their internal organisation is that of a parastatal institution, with similar bureaucratic structures, employee rotation systems, and sense of (bureaucratic) civil service duty. They have erected many of the country's schools, universities and clinics, and played a role as its civil society more general, working with the state to develop local areas. They continue to do so today, despite diminishing attendance numbers and graying congregations.

## 6.5 Charismatic churches: a case study

*"You see, when you are in the market to sell, you package your goods, you suit the market. So I think the charismatic churches have done that very well."* – Seth Quaynor, Sebrepur resident

In the 1970s, a new religious movement arose: the charismatic churches. Based on the template of Pentecostal megachurches in the US, this movement arrived first in Anglophone West-African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria, before spreading to their Francophone neighbours (Meyer, 2004, p. 453). The movement is also known as charismatic Pentecostalism, new or neo-Pentecostalism. These so-called 'Charismatic churches' took Ghana's religious landscape by storm.

In Ghana's orthodox churches, the doctrine is a core concern. Without the right beliefs and education, the Presbyterian Church will only let you in after six months of Bible School. But interestingly, in such churches, the *strength* of one's belief is not really probed. It is rather the *knowledge* of the beliefs that matters. This is a broader theme: the Bible reading sessions have a rather relaxed atmosphere, and the sermons, although well composed and holding a clear message, are delivered with little more energy than a routine speech by a politician. Clearly, the Word of God must be heard clearly and digested well. But always in a dignified and relatively calm manner.

### **Maximal effervescence**

In the Charismatic churches, it is exactly the other way around. This is first and foremost visible in the atmosphere of their services. As one Baptist (orthodox) church member told me: "In the orthodox churches, fasting is not as vigorous as in the charismatic churches. Those charismatics, they are praying harder, they are fasting harder."

This becomes immediately clear, the first time I visit a Sunday service in the Freedom Chapel. From several streets away, the bass of its sound system is audible. Once I reach the building, the atmosphere is palpably different from that in the Presbyterian church. Here, too, women dominate the scene, but the crowd is markedly younger, much less family-oriented. Small groups stand everywhere, people greeting their friends as they trickle in. Inside, many people are pacing around nervously, or sitting in the pews, eyes closed, rocking from side to side and praying fervently. The energy level is high, even feverish: fast-paced electronic music booms through the hall, big LCD-screens flash with animations of Jesus and scripture quotations written in neon, and colourful lights flash on and off.

During the walk-in period, we are first warmed up by a junior preacher. Dressed in a fluorescent yellow suit, he jumps up and down in the pulpit, driving home his devotion to Jesus with pumping fists, his voice rising to a highly pitched crescendo as he intones the name of the Saviour, again and again and again. Often, the same sentence is repeated 3-5 times, with voices from the public chiming in louder every time. "Jesus will protect me, Jesus shall help me prosper, Jesus will strike down my enemies, Jesus I invoke you, in your name Jesus!" As he is gathering steam, tremors spread throughout the audience. We start to move with him, in little movements at first, the right hand raised in devotion, to dispel any unwanted spirits and strengthen those that would support us.

Finally, after many such groundswells, the wall of sound seems to die down for a moment. The audience grows quiet and expectantly tense. The previous preacher comes onto the stage one more time, whips the audience into a frenzy using slogans, asks us: “Do you want to hear him?” “Yes!” “Will you hear him?” “Yes!” “Finally, are you ready?” “Yes!!” And at last, he makes his appearance. The man we’ve all been waiting for, Apostle Francis. His name is written everywhere in the church. His picture, larger-than-life, is on the touring busses which brought in so many worshippers, and on banners hanging to either side of the stage, which bear his slogan: “I am a Fountain of Blessings”. In a neon-pink three piece glitter suit, microphone in hand, he bounds onto the stage with large steps. A superstar. People come from everywhere, traveling hours every Sunday to see him. The audience goes wild, and his first few sentences drown in thunderous applause and shouting.

These services have an almighty power, as anyone who has attended one will attest. This power is realised not so much in stories, but in images and above all, in sound (Sackey, 1996). As one aspiring preacher put it this way (Interview Mawuna, 2014):

*“If you are called to preach, nobody can stop you, because it is the Word of God that you speak. It is not your own choice, you have to acknowledge that Higher Power. So yes, people are building soundproofed churches now. But inside, the sound still has to be loud. Here, sound is not a medium to carry a message of words. Here, it is an experience!”*

### **A liberal, materialistic doctrine**

In contrast with the orthodox church services, there is little Bible reading. There is far less attention for interpreting the Bible, and for deducing behavioural rules from it (Gifford, 2004, p. 40). Some church services go completely without any reading. Instead, the Bible is used like a source of inspiring quotes. As one orthodox preacher indignantly put it: “they are playing loose and fast with theology!”

The material culture of these churches, too, is quite open and freestyle. Again, the energetic vibe that is created appears to be prioritised over strict adherence to the Christian roots. National flags of all countries hang from the ceiling. Video screens are playing psychedelic loops of colourful animations. A picture of a beautiful garden is used as the stage décor: the Jerusalem gardens of the Baha’i, a holistic religion originating in 19th century Iran. The image is completed by a couple of real palm trees, flanking the stage.

The preaching is not only less Bible-based. It is also far less focused on telling people how to behave. One element of this is a rejection of the morality of obedience which the Directors of the Danish Guinea Company so shamelessly invited the missionaries to spread (Gifford, 2004, p. 46). As Archbishop Duncan-Williams, perhaps Ghana's most influential charismatic preacher, put it: "The orthodox churches (...) preach a doctrine which says in essence – poverty promotes humility. But you all know this is not true. The missionaries erred tragically, by not teaching the Africans God's Word and laws regarding sowing and reaping." (ibid)

The relaxed material culture goes along with a loosening of the strict dress codes and the conservative European idea of family composition and gender relations. Where orthodox churches have a fairly strict adherence to long dresses and suits, and Pentecostal churches mostly add African touches to these but otherwise keep the pattern intact, the Charismatic church audience looks subtly different. Like in the orthodox churches, colourful dresses and suits dominate, but there is a larger variety of dress styles here. Some dress up even more, look ready for a Hollywood catwalk, a gala or a millionaire's cocktail party. Others, including some of the church workers, dress down, wearing jeans and a T-shirt. There is more visible skin, cleavage, even some backless dresses. In the preaching, too, there is less emphasis on 'wholesome dress' and 'decency', and more free discussion of sensitive topics such as specific bedroom activities and (short-/long-term) sexual relations. In informal conversations, Freedom Chapel members appreciatively described the style of their church as "less tight", "more relaxed", "less strict and boxing-me-in" and simply "more free".

As Mr. Seth, an elder of the local Methodist church, explains:

*"When you watch the people on Sunday morning, you can see which church they went, just by the way they've dressed. The orthodox churches for instance, they expect the women to be decently dressed. So under normal circumstances, to wear above the knee is not well done. However, when the charismatic churches came, they didn't care. And honestly, it's also one of the reasons why you have the youth pulling to those ones. Because there you have the freedom to wear anything. You see them dressing like African-Americans. Even to the way they speak, including the reverend ministers. Because many of them stayed there and studied there. And when they came, many of them were funded from there. So they are drawing to that side.*

These churches are not about telling people how to live. Instead, they offer guidance and seemingly practical help, now. This help is mainly of two kinds: spiritual, and material.

In spiritual terms, the charismatics largely leave out heaven and hell, punishment or reward in the afterlife. Instead, they focus on the current world. That does not lead, as might be expected, to simple materialism; this world is seen as highly spiritual. Indeed, the charismatic church movement has allowed the resurfacing of many elements of the spiritual world as it had been conceptualised by the pre-Christian spiritual traditions in Ghana. Main among these: a dualistic worldview of good and evil, various forms of witchcraft, and omnipresent spirits, not in the next world but in this one (D. J. Smith, 2001). This is expressed in slogans like “No attack can harm me”, “No evil spirit will strike me”, “No blocking will affect me” and “I have a very Big God, he is always on my Side”. In this world, the Holy Spirit is the most powerful spiritual entity of all. As Mr Seth, who has regularly visited a number of different churches in the past years in his duties as an inter-church liaison, explains:

*“The other thing too is that the Orthodox churches weren’t interested in the working of the Holy Spirit. But then these other people came, and they were propounding the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can do this, can do that, you see? And we are all coming from a very superstitious background. We say in Accra that there is a witch in every house. And all our problems are caused by the witches. So if you come to tell me that you can exorcise the witches in my house, then naturally I’ll follow you. So when they came to reveal the Holy Spirit and its powers, we started following them.”*

In material terms, the charismatic churches exploit the mental insecurity originating in the economic inequality of the newly growing urban world in which their audience finds itself. Cities like Accra contain the full spectrum of economic possibilities: from shining SUVs and air-conditioned malls with expensive fashion accessories, to twenty people living packed inside a single shack, paying by the week, and large numbers of homeless and destitute migrants. Since Ghana’s economy is highly skewed, rapidly changing and highly intransparent, most of this material wealth seems to fall, more or less randomly distributed, out of thin air. This situation creates in many (new) urbanites both a sense of (relative) deprivation and a sense of hope, the idea that untold material riches are within reach. Thus, it is understandable that many Ghanaians appear to be looking for the magic switch. Many of the charismatic churches pander to this sentiment in a highly effective manner.



As Mrs Quarpong, a secondary school teacher in Sebrepor, explained the powerful draw of the charismatic churches:

*“Why do people flock to these charismatic churches in such numbers? Well, I can say that poverty is a main reason. Because you see, the charismatics, they appear to be doing much. Now, if you listen to the radio, what they will tell you is almost always what the Holy Spirit can do for you to get work and prosper. So if the Holy Spirit can do all this, why shouldn't I go there and try it? So that is where the problem is. In the orthodox churches, they would aim you at heaven. In the charismatics, they are aiming at here. And I am here, and I am not going to heaven. I am suffering here, and someone is offering me a relief. The heaven, I don't know whether it's there. But once I'm gone, I'm gone.”*

The charismatic churches promise economic prosperity and material support. In fact, their 'healing' activities have a quite broad material range. As Sackey (2001) explains:

*“...healing, in African terms generally, is a blanket term that denotes a change or improvement in a person's former situation in life, be it health, economic, political or social wellbeing through the intervention of religion. For example a cure from a headache, infertility, making profits in commercial activities, defeating an opponent in any event such as litigation, winning political elections, passing an examination or improving human relationships are described as healing. These ailments/misfortune are believed to have spiritual causality and hence need spiritual treatment but traditional Christianity does not support the spiritual causal theory of illness and misfortune.”*

Finally, the charismatic churches have a far more individualistic outlook on life. Where the rise of the Pentecostal movement supplied newly wealthy urbanites with a theological justification to cut their ties with needy relatives back in the village, the charismatic movement focuses almost completely on the individual level (Engelke, 2004; Meyer, 1998). All its slogans are in the singular, “I am a Product of the Covenant, I am Smelling Success”, “My year of Double Portion” and so on. This individualism, though, does not translate to loneliness. It rather forms an attraction for people fleeing the oppressive social conservatism of the orthodox and older Pentecostal churches.

Summing up: as opposed to the orthodox churches, the charismatics are hardly preoccupied with doctrine. Nor do they put much emphasis on the traditionality of dress or decoration; rather, the focus is on exuberance. They invest in an overwhelming, emotionally thrilling experience, carefully built around a central charismatic figure, to reach a well-orchestrated crescendo of energy. The Bible is relegated to a very small supporting part. In social and behavioural terms, the charismatics have thrown off the shackles of the missionary morality. Theologically speaking, the spiritual world of heaven and hell is replaced by a dualistic, spiritual world here and now. These churches have a far more individualistic outlook on life than their orthodox and older Pentecostal counterparts. Finally, these churches promise economic deliverance, here and now.

### **Growth and prosperity**

Where the orthodox churches are quite complacent, perhaps owing to their original role as tamers of the population, perhaps due to their previously secure position as regional monopolists. This stands in stark contrast to the charismatic churches, which seem to be permanently geared up for the fight. From a dualist worldview they depict the world as a battlefield between good and evil, and act accordingly. Many of their slogans have an almost war-like feel to them (see figures 6.2 and 6.3 below).

And in this war, the charismatic churches are permanently on the offensive, carrying out the Great Commission, that Biblical imperative to evangelise and expand. As sister Mary of the Living Waters church in Sebrepor explains: “Our church was founded based on the purpose of missions. So that means, most of our programs for the year are geared towards evangelising.” This drive for expansion is a constant among charismatics, all of whom have grown up in a Ghana of intense religious voluntarism and the accompanying competition for worshippers. In interview after interview, the church leaders or their junior pastors worked to impress upon me how fast their congregation was growing, and described in detail the vast network of churches they were aiming to create. Many of these church founders pose on their Facebook profile pictures at building sites, showing how fast their church is expanding.



Figure 6.2: Advertisements for the events of the charismatic churches frequently involve language derived from the vocabulary of armed conflict, such as “invasion”, “strategic ambushment” or “Operation Kill your enemies”.

Clearly, the competition is stiff. As one pastor explains:

*“There are some one-man churches which are quite big. But you see, and you know, they are big, because of the one man. And the one man is connected to the Holy Spirit and can do wonders. Those wonders he can do is what attracts people. So if his powers seem to be less, his church may collapse. But there are always others. In fact, people move from one to the other. So it depends on what you can do at a particular time. You don’t have to die, you can just be less inspiring, and they will start leaving you.”*

As described at the beginning of this chapter, to grow in this fiercely competitive environment, the churches advertise relentlessly. Driving and walking around Accra, it is striking to see that the most-advertised product is not fashion, cars or personal care products, but church services. The biggest churches are able to afford giant billboards, towering over the roundabouts, or touring cars with the face of their charismatic founder covering the side. But smaller churches as just as active, (illegally) pasting posters for their events on any flat surface where they will not be immediately removed. Bumper stickers are everywhere. Many preachers act as human advertisements, standing on busy crossings with a megaphone and a Bible, or even riding along on the long-distance minibus lines to preach there, inviting the passengers to their service the following weekend.

*Figure 6.3: Advertisement for the church events often show the religious leaders like rock stars, such as this billboard for the “Supernatural Empowerment Summit”.*



These marketing campaigns are by no means limited to the roads; they use all kinds of modern technology (Meyer, 2011). As the junior pastor of Living Waters explains:

*“Now when you turn on your TV set, all you will see is churches ministering on every station. As of now, we cannot stay behind in this. We as a church have a slot on the Focus FM radio station where we share the word. That program is called “Living bread”. Also we organise crusades [open-air festivals], church outreaches and also door to door sessions. With the advent of younger pastors in the congregation, we have been able to also use social media in the propagation of the gospel. Finally, we have provided Wi-Fi hotspots in our church and as such we attract lots of the youth who not only come here on Sundays but on weekdays also, this brings them closer to us.”*

Those who cannot afford to use radio and TV find other creative methods to spread the gospel. The Living Waters Chapel has created two innovative programs. To attract the poor, they do Tea Evangelism, serving tea and bread to the people in their area, while preaching.<sup>38</sup> They found it harder to get their message out to the wealthier parts of society. As Kwesi Gyampong, the head of the church’s Prayer Warriors, put it: “those people are always driving, and its quiet difficult to stop someone in other to preach to the person”. So, they created the Car Wash Evangelism Program. The church website describes it as follows:

*“The church is always looking for exciting ways of reaching out to the lost souls. Car Wash Evangelism is organised twice a year. The aim is to share Jesus with the Community. During Car Wash Evangelism, the entire congregation go for an outreach in a different form. We set up temporal washing bays and wash people’s cars for free. While the cars are being washed, a team will seize the opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the Drivers. Their contacts are taken for follow-ups. Another team also stand by the road side holding placards with scriptural inscriptions on them, still sharing the gospel of Jesus.”*

The above quote reads like a page out of a modern sales manager’s manual. Indeed,

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38 This raises an important point, although it is not directly related to the thesis set out in this chapter: the charismatic churches may be very focused on money, but that does not mean they only cater to the wealthy. The Great Commission appears to be quite acutely felt by most charismatic church leaders, as applying to all souls, not just wealthy ones.

the charismatic churches appear to see themselves as market actors. This represents a fundamental shift in the nature of the religious landscape. Only one century before, orthodox mission churches had held regional monopolies on religious organisation. Now, orthodox, Pentecostal and charismatic churches had all become equal, in the eyes of a new, powerful, 'consumer'.

A religious landscape organised as a marketplace has advantages for the 'consumers'. It liberates people from potential tyranny, it liberates them from a fixed, often petty morality. It forces church leaders to listen more actively, and adapt to the needs of their congregation. But a market where switching 'product' (church) is easy also means that the focus of 'suppliers' (church leaders) shifts to the short term. It makes churches spend much more time on marketing, and less time on building long-term institutions and civil society. This appears to be what happens in Ghana. Additionally, many respondents complained to me, this environment can also drive the church leaders to manipulate their congregation into psychological dependency relations, in order to make them stay in the church, and spending on donations as quickly as possible, because they might be gone soon.

It also narrows the focus of church leaders to the immediate needs of their congregation, rather than the development of the broader community around it. "...in the end, the church is for society", as Reverend Akey put it, is not something a charismatic church leader is likely to say. These churches are simply much less involved in the world around them. Generally, the orthodox churches imagine themselves as quasi-statal institutions, providing collective amenities such as schools and medical services, as well as creating a social level between state and individual.

The self-image of most charismatic churches is quite different. Having emerged in a time when the religious field was already marked by a high degree of competition, they see themselves as market players competing for a share of the audience, not as builders of collective goods. What is more, the strategies for institutional continuity have shifted. As competition in the religious field became more fierce and turnover rates faster, churches no longer had sufficient time to establish schools and wait for the children to grow up in order to ensure a continuous following. No new church adopting this tactic would survive long enough to reap the fruits of their investment. This means the state-church connection unravels over time.

Worldwide, these churches are united by what is called the *prosperity gospel* (see Bowler, 2013). Related to the broader dictum “give, and ye shall receive”, the prosperity gospel is somewhat more specific: the giving must be to the church, personified in the charismatic head pastor.

This giving, too, takes a very different form from donating in the orthodox churches. These mostly have a single moment in their service to donate, when the congregation forms a long line to move, singing and dancing, past a simple jar placed in front of the pulpit. Welfare happens through fixed donations of 5 or 10 cedi per person per week, and is distributed according to a fixed set of rules.

The charismatic churches take a different approach; they make donating flexible and urgent, exciting, visible and competitive.

They make it flexible and urgent, rather than asking for fixed contributions to welfare every week. Instead, as one worshiper of the Heavenly Gate charismatic church in Sebrepur put it: “Those people, if something happens, they put the bowl down. They tell you, this man, he has such and such problem, so let’s help him! And to be honest, that way of collection is much more suitable to the way people want to be giving.” They make it exciting. At several points in the service, everyone is asked to rush forward, dropping to their knees at the stage, leaving it covered in crumpled bank notes upon returning to their seats. They make it visible. Donation envelopes for special fasting services are auctioned off publicly, with the highest bidders eminently visible to the rest of the congregation. During music performances, it is completely normal to just walk up to the stage, alone, and stuff a 50 cedi note in the singer’s hand. Finally, they make it competitive. To encourage more donations, churches also create makeshift competitions, between, let’s say, the left side and the right side of the church, or the green donation jar and the red donation jar – anything to make the process more exciting and encourage giving.

Not only the contributions are organised in a far more flexible manner; the payouts are too. They are generally determined at the discretion of the church leadership, and visibility is an important factor in their decisions. That is, the importance of being seen as giving generously often detracts from the purpose of providing an effective safety net. This may seem counter-intuitive; wouldn’t a reputation of generosity require supporting all those in need? The problem is, especially in larger churches, there are always several people who have an urgent financial need. And the most visible action is to give a larger sum to one person, and make this a public event. That means the



others, whose need was perceived as less urgent, or whose case was not as fit for the limelight, remain in the cold. This practice does, however, enable a vigorous drive for donations, for the one selected 'urgent case of the week'.

This urgency is transferred to other aspects of church life as well. The daughter of a Pentecostal church elder, Adjoa has switched to the charismatic Freedom Chapel to escape the social conservatism of her father's Pentecostal church. But after some time, she left the Freedom Chapel as well, because as she explained she prefers a more laid-back churchgoing. "I try to be invisible in church, but the charismatic churches make that impossible. Yes they are more liberal in many ways, and I like that. But they are always pressuring me to join groups and activities, and to conform to their doctrine of giving, giving, giving."

The prosperity gospel is an extraordinarily positive gospel, with little patience for the economic constraints of daily life. Of course, the outcomes of this approach with respect to one's personal finances inevitably vary. But the PR problems this might result in have been solved by making *testimony* a fixed part of the Sunday services of most charismatic churches. In this time slot, those church members who have indeed recently come into material wealth get to share their story of blessings with the congregation. Some churches go very far in this regard; Winners Chapel, a charismatic church with Nigerian roots, reserves about a quarter of its entire Sunday service for a series of 'Testimony and Miracles'. This unrelenting positivity has also led to the strange result that death is hardly talked about in many of these churches. This is a strange aberration in Ghana, where most people spend their Saturdays at lavish funerals, the main type of social event apart from church services (Gifford, 2004, p. 52).

### **Internal organisation**

The institutional form of the charismatic churches, too, is somewhat different from the orthodox or older Pentecostal churches. They are less quasi-statal institutions, and more private enterprises. This is enabled by the prosperity gospel, and has created an unusually enterprising religious sector. The main institutional differences between the charismatic churches and the orthodox churches are best summarised in two labels frequently applied to the charismatic churches: 'business churches' and 'one-man churches'. Both of these are pejorative terms, applied to the churches by non-members.

As for the invective 'business churches', the prosperity gospel is a theology of personal gain. Through voluntary gifts, but still, personal gain. This not only makes it possible for preachers to gather and flaunt large amounts of personal wealth, it all but forces

them to. In the logic of the prosperity gospel: 'follow my lead, and you shall be rich like me.' The pastors and their followers, then, subscribe to the notion that the spiritual power of a preacher is reflected in his earthly wealth, and will in turn benefit his followers. Thus, they see little wrong with such self-enrichment by church leaders, as they expect the wealth to naturally spread. As Agata Mresi of the Beautiful Gate charismatic church put it: "It means that he [our pastor] is favored, and if you follow someone who is blessed with power like that, their favor will be your favor."

But this view is rejected by many Ghanaians who do not believe in the prosperity gospel. As one bitter Sebrepor resident, whose wife had recently started going to a charismatic church, told me: "You know that in Ghana, the church has become a business? Pastors are always enriching themselves. Their shoes can cost more than your entire outfit. And the rest of their clothing is also very expensive!" A frequently heard complaint is also that this gospel is making the youth lazy. As one local politician put it, who had been on the path to becoming a charismatic preacher himself: "These days, the boys, you can't get them to contribute to communal labour. You can't get them to do any serious work. You can't! All they want is to get rich quick. So they all try to become preachers. Yes. Yes, that is what I see happening. It's bad!"

The prosperity gospel and the associated 'giving' drives are the main way these churches gather money. But they use other techniques, too. In a technique known as *akwanchele*, meaning 'direction', the dualist spiritual worldview is exploited by preachers for material gain. As Assemblyman Dubin explains:

*"They will first frighten you. Your mother, your father, they are witch, they are wizard. Then, they will direct you. These preachers, because they need cash, they will tell you, "use this anointing oil, use this candle, use that thing". They are selling those things. "Then," they will tell you, "go and do A, B, C, D, travel to your hometown, and nobody can touch you. If you do ABCD, you will be protected." Some of these people, they have a mouth, they can talk, to convince you. Is it not a trade? Yes! They are traders. And getting a lot of money for it. But this is the problem, it is growing.*

*So when they convince you, definitely, you can even go and bring your money, and give it to him. Because he has spoken about exactly that, which you were thinking about."*

As for the pejorative label ‘one-man churches,’ this is based on the fact that these churches generally center around a single charismatic leader. The church sometimes even carries his name, but more often, they are personal brands in the sense that he is the face of the church, and his trademark style of preaching, as well as his personal reputation for performing miracles, are what attracts people to the church.

Sometimes, this notion of personal ownership of the church turns into a family affair. Churches often pass from parents to children, as personal property which can be inherited. This creates situations of conflict and instability, as the community aspect of the church is often subverted to the financial and status interests of the ‘inheritors’. In a way, these pastors are the quintessential new ‘big men’ (Sahlins, 1963). They are both spiritual and worldly leaders, highly respected and untouchable in their own domain. They hold together a larger social group around their person. They build religious social networks in which they concentrate and subsequently distribute wealth, in a highly public fashion. Finally, their movements create patronage-like payoff structures, which replicate the exchange of resources for loyalty central to big man rule (McCauley, 2013). They train junior pastors, in whom they try to instill a fierce loyalty, to speak in their church, to attract new members, and to share in the rewards.

In terms of institutional structure, these new churches create their internal organisation by picking and choosing from existing templates. Many of them do so quite consciously. One charismatic pastor I interviewed had created four “levels of maturity” in his church, from newcomer to church elder. Those on the higher levels were required to coach and teach the newer members. As he explained: “In churches where this structure is not present, the management of the flock is too much work for the preacher. This way, it frees my time to concentrate on more important affairs, like growing the church.”

Being centered around a single preacher does not prevent the churches from expanding. Successful charismatics generally use a franchise model, a somewhat more loose organisational model than the orthodox churches. As Junior Pastor Kwame Johnson explains:

*“If I belong to the Christian Action Faith Ministries [a charismatic church], and I'm in this area, I've been ordained a pastor, then it is up to me to build a church here. So I will go out in this area, find a place which is suitable for a church. Then I tell my bosses there, they come and inspect, yes, it's okay, build your church. So when the church is established, they will only*

*be interested in 10-20% of the collection I get. The rest is for me. So the harder I work, the more money I get.”*

### **Production of collective amenities**

These churches are innovative and grow quickly, they produce a serious turnover, their services create large and concentrated amounts of energy and often euphoria in the congregation. But the material results they produce for their flock are generally less impressive. Partly, this is because they focus on other things, like creating a spectacular Sunday service, and keeping energy high throughout the week with additional nightly and even all-night services (which congregants are often pressured to attend). Another part is because the internal structures of such churches often is not very developed and quite fickle, dependent as they are on the whims of the lead pastor. There is very little systematic effort at building up social services, in the way that almost all orthodox churches do.

It is important to note here that, like all other churches in Ghana, the charismatics have a wide variety of active internal social groups. There are choirs, music bands, Prayer Warriors, Bible study groups, various ethnically based groups, sports groups, and specific groups for every age group: the Children’s Movement, the Young People’s Guild, the Men’s Fellowship, which is always much smaller and less active than the Women’s Fellowship. I have not put much emphasis on these, as they occur in both charismatic and orthodox churches with comparable frequency. In terms of neighbourhood build-up, these groups create a large amount of social ties, enabling self-organisation among the members. There are also welfare groups, organised by the church members, and there are sporadic, highly visible donations made by the church leadership to particularly needy church members.

With respect to welfare, it is also important to make a distinction within the charismatic movement: between the single one-man churches and those who have built up a larger network, around preachers like Reverend Steve Mensah, Bishop Dag Heward-Mills and Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams. As Mr Frempong, a Sebrepur resident who has repeatedly switched churches, explains:

*“Well, here, if you think of the one-man churches, then you can say the welfare is rather for the one man himself. They are extracting the wealth, and then that’s it. But if you look at the bigger ones, the orthodox, charismatic and Pentecostals, then they are looking at the welfare, yes, primarily of the founder, but they also look at the entire congregation at*

*the same time. Still, maybe they extract more than they should. Some of these founders are incredibly rich. And they are proud about it. They feel very proud. So they make you look stupid. But they also have a welfare system, which to some extent encompasses the congregation. So at least, they are better than the one-man churches.”*

They do have welfare. It is the systematic part which is lacking. If we look at the churches whose heads were the chairmen of Ghana’s National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches (NACCC), the council of which most charismatic churches are members, a clear pattern emerges. Steve Mensah’s Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry, despite having reached a size of 15+ churches in Ghana and establishments in five other countries, has constructed no collective amenities besides its own church structures and a limited amount of schooling for its own junior pastors (Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry, 2018). Dag Heward Mills, who boasts having built over 400 churches of his Lighthouse Chapel group (now split up in a variety of brands) worldwide, makes several contributions: an orphanage for 23 children, several well-publicised operations for blind children, support for some homeless, and a fertility clinic (Heward-Mills).<sup>39</sup> Nicholas Duncan-Williams, one of the wealthiest citizens of Ghana, whose Action Chapel International currently has some , has some more substantive collective amenities: an orphanage housing some 220 children, a detox clinic serving with space for some 45 patients, and several borehole projects (Action Chapel International, 2018).

Although laudable accomplishments, work of this scale is not comparable to the sustained and systematic building work the orthodox churches engage in. In general, the tendency for charismatic churches appears to be to focus on mediagenic projects like one-off donations and child-related projects. A project description from the Action Chapel International website is typical in this regard:

*“We also take on special projects that are much needed in our community. One of our special projects was to help a little girl receive critical heart surgery by fund-raising. To date she has recovered from heart surgery and is happy, and healthy.”*

These churches do not have a doctrine of having a social mission to create collective amenities, as they came of age in a time when the state was actively engaged in such

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<sup>39</sup> It is called a Hospital, but has almost no online presence, with the only few references being made to the fertility clinic, so this seemed a more fitting term.

work, and when churches were competing fiercely for a slice of the 'market', which left no time for sustained nation-building initiatives.

This doctrine shines through in other matters as well, such as the way the welfare fund is managed. In orthodox churches, this is generally treated as a form of social insurance, managed through the church. But in charismatic churches, it is treated and described as a business just like any other. As Kwame Johnson (of the charismatic Freedom Chapel) explains: "There is no constitution specifying who qualifies for welfare. Other churches have constitutions for that but we do not. We are a church and not an investment firm." This lack of support from the church, however, does not mean that charismatic church members have no welfare. Many church-goers do organise their own welfare circles, so that even in charismatic churches, most people are members of one or more welfare circles. When we did a series of 50 resident interviews in the Sebrepor neighbourhood, 92% of the respondents indicated that they were members of a church welfare group, many of which were compulsory for all church members. 12% of the respondents indicated that they were (also) members of a secular welfare group.

However, in the charismatic churches, these circles have to manage by peer pressure only, without the stable administrative backing of the church leadership. This means that payouts are more based on personal affinity, which means less popular members cannot count on the system very much. Such welfare systems do help, but they do not form as stable a financial safety net as the orthodox church welfare systems, which are generally based on fixed contributions, a constitution and fixed pay-outs in the case of life events or emergencies.

Where the Presbyterian church has a Department of Social Services working to create jobs for the youth and a Department of Health Services keeping up an informal clinic for members, I have found very few charismatic churches that even attempted to work on such projects. They do proclaim that they are working on health care, but this is generally in terms of a one-off donation to an existing hospital. Even more unthinkable, in these feverishly spiritual churches, would be a Department of Secular Education, patiently gathering resources to construct a school, which would be run ecumenically, in close cooperation with the municipality.

Some of the larger charismatic churches do have a small school, although this is mostly an internal training ground for new junior pastors. Some authors contend that this is a contributing factor to the rapid expansion of the charismatic movement (Sackey,

2001). Many charismatic church leaders are very much focused on expanding their church. To this end they train a large number of potential successors. But since the expansion of their church does not go as fast as hoped for, those junior pastors find themselves without work, and start their own church instead. At any rate, it should be clear that most of the schools run by charismatic churches are not secular schools, but training facilities for junior pastors.

### **Overview**

All in all, these charismatic churches are far more growth-driven, fluid, agile and individualistic than their orthodox counterparts, with an emphasis on energy rather than diligence, a focus on spectacle rather than substance, and a reliance on miracles rather than on organisation. Other authors have argued that their worldview generally does not attribute worldly accomplishments or (mis)fortune to hard work, as much as to spiritual factors (cf Marshall, 1991). As Hunt (2000) puts it, in many charismatic churches, “health and wealth can be demanded and enjoyed immediately through the ‘currency’ of faith”. But as I have shown in this chapter, these organisations also lack the capacity for collective action towards local development, which is generated so effectively in the mission churches. In their worldview, community service has been replaced by a business outlook, an unquenchable thirst for growth, and the prosperity gospel.

## **6.6 Transition from orthodox to charismatic in the suburbs**

The introduction to this chapter has shown at the macro-level that the market share of charismatic churches is steadily increasing, to the detriment of orthodox churches. The previous two sections provided a detailed description of the two types of churches, and analysed what such a shift means for the production of collective amenities by churches. Building on the church profiles set out in the two case studies, this section further describes the dynamics of the shift from orthodox to charismatic. Subsequently, it goes specifically into the dynamics of this shift in newly developing neighbourhoods. In those areas, the shift is stronger than average and the consequences for the production of collective amenities are therefore more dire than in Ghana on average, because in the newly developing areas the orthodox churches are not entrenched in physical buildings and social networks. Finally, it describes a third, more subtle aspect of the transition: the internal culture of the orthodox churches is pressed to adapt, and is now incorporating charismatic practices.



### **Charismatics capture the population growth**

A major driving force in the shift from orthodox to charismatic churches is the prosperity gospel. This particularly draws in younger generations. As Mr Quarshie, a member of the local Baptist Living Grace church, explains:

*“When you come to my church, the members are more...elderly. You know, 50 years and above. If you go to a Charismatic church, the congregation is younger. Twenty-something, thirty-something. People around 50-60, you find one or two. But the point is, the younger ones have just started life. They want everything in life. They want success, they want promotion, they want big, big cars, houses, they want these things. So if you are preaching prosperity to him, it makes sense. Because that’s what he wants! So the Charismatics, they are growing, they are exploding! But if you come to tell me this prosperity nonsense, when my life is already over, what am I going to do with that?”*

Apart from the arguments presented above, one possible additional factor driving this shift may be the fact that church congregations consist overwhelmingly of women today. In colonial times this appears to have been exactly the reverse (Meyer, 1999, p. 13). It is hard to precisely pinpoint the transition. But it certainly did happen. It was surprisingly hard to find good reasons for this, and I have found no literature on the phenomenon. Many of my respondents came no further than explaining that Ghana’s population, in fact, consists mainly of women, which they really seemed to believe. Some put it down to women being more emotional and more susceptible to superstition.

Another reason might be that church membership no longer confers the same institutional advantages as it did in colonial times, which has driven out the often more career-focused men (Meyer, 1999, p. 11). The charismatic churches generally have a culture emphasising personal independence and either preach gender equality or completely leave the topic open, whereas many of the orthodox churches continue to reproduce the highly unequal gender roles that were common in 19th century Europe. One other possibility is that the culture of near-worship for the big men leading these churches may be off-putting for men, who might perceive themselves as being emasculated in such a spectacle. The final, and most convincing reason I have heard is that women simply run the organisations of this country, just as they run the families, and the church is still one of the best avenues to provide the social relations relevant to the well-being of a family. As one pastor put it: “Every sector, every organisation, every society, everywhere women are more. In my

church, there are about 3 times more female members than men. If you go to Pentecost, the same. If you go to Presbyterian, the same.’

But whatever its cause, this dominance of women may well be a factor driving the shift from conservative (orthodox) to open and liberal (charismatic), because in the orthodox churches, women are quite repressed.<sup>40</sup> They generally cannot serve as pastors, they have to wear long skirts and are quickly censured for ‘dressing inappropriately’, they are told that they are naturally subservient to men in the marriage and they should keep to their position in society. In most of the orthodox churches, women are very much the second sex (De Beauvoir, 1949). In many charismatic churches, on the other hand, traditional gender roles are routinely attacked. During a service we attended in the charismatic Royal House Church, the preacher encouraged his audience to resist the image of women as “baby machines” and to cut their ties with the village, renouncing family obligations.

### **Charismatics benefit from move to the suburbs**

In newly growing urban areas like Sebrepor, the first thing settlers will build, after their own houses, is often a church. Mrs. Ayele, the mother of one of the first families that settled in the area, tells how it all started in Sebrepor. Now at the respectable age of 74 and nearly blind, she spends her days sitting with the TV, in the family house. This stands in the center of a messy plot without a compound wall, surrounded by small shacks, long-time sub-renters who have built their own structures. The house is a remnant of the chaotic settling process of the area, and feels old - 40 years is a long time in neighbourhoods like this, and the walls show their age.

Mrs. Ayele’s story provides a glimpse into what the settler life must have been like. It started, she tells, with a Pentecost elder gathering some people. At first it was really only seven or eight settlers, who simply started praying on a field somewhere, to mark the Sundays and to bring a first glimpse of community to the new, unsettled land. As more people joined them, collections were started, and the funds were used to build a small wooden structure. This became the first church of Sebrepor. Later, there were enough people to form separate congregations, and as people got their ‘original’ churches built up in the new land, they left the Pentecostal for those. But the first one was a cooperative effort – no town without a church.

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40 It should be noted that this difference in terms of gender roles between orthodox and charismatic churches is not universal either. In the methodist church of Accra New Town, the head pastor was a woman. I have not found the same situation in any other orthodox church, but it does indicate that none of the ideal-type differences described in this paper should be interpreted as absolute differences.

In such suburbs, the charismatic movement is gaining ground even more quickly than in other areas. The orthodox churches do also appear here, as described above, but their congregation consists mostly of people who were already in that church and simply decided to build or join it again when they moved to the new suburb. In fact, the growth of the charismatic movement is even stronger in these new suburbs than among the population in general. In these previously empty areas, the orthodox churches do not have the advantage of being pre-established, having buildings and social networks in place already, as they do in the older parts of the city.

In addition, the charismatic churches have a different expansion model. One enterprising person is enough to start a new church. This person needs to be affiliated with the mother church, but this does not necessarily require an in-house training of years, like in the orthodox churches. In fact, many charismatic churches are started from scratch, not as offshoots from existing churches. In such cases, the 'entry costs' are really limited to almost nothing, as preachers can start under a tree somewhere, or rent a building by the week. For instance, in the heart of the Sebrepor neighbourhood stands a long, whitewashed wooden building, which once housed the first (Presbyterian) church in the neighbourhood. Since that church moved out to a more permanent location, the building has become somewhat of a religious incubator. New religious entrepreneurs come in every year, with some keeping their lease for no more than two weeks. At most times, several starting preachers use the building in parallel, each preaching in different time slots alongside each other throughout the week. Orthodox churches have a much more centralised expansion model, and there are no grass orthodox churches springing up out of nowhere in these new neighbourhoods.

In Sebrepor, on the three kilometre long thoroughfare road from Michel Camp Gate to Barrier, there are 93 different churches. Only five of these churches were identifiable by name as orthodox churches. Of course, one stretch of road is quite a limited sample, but it does provide an indication of the degree to which the religious field of Accra's suburbs is dominated by the new wave of charismatic churches. Although our data is really too limited to say anything definite in this regard, the same appears to go, to a lesser degree, for Muslims. These too appear to regularly switch to charismatic Christian churches, and the reverse also occurs. Though a change between Islam and Christianity may seem like a big step, Ghana's ecumenical and highly tolerant religious landscape is not forbidding in this sense, and the theology of the charismatic churches is sufficiently relaxed for people with very different backgrounds to feel at home.

The interviews we have done with Sebrepur's residents indicate that a large majority of them has changed their church at least once in their life, most of these moving from an orthodox church to a charismatic one. Those who have spent their entire life in a single church are generally orthodox believers, whilst among the charismatic churchgoers, there seems to be a limited degree of loyalty to any single church. But once people have switched from an orthodox or older Pentecostal church to a charismatic one, they rarely go back.

Such switches occur most frequently at the time when people move house, making the suburbs even more of a religious switchboard. In many of our resident interviews, people indicated that at the time of their move to a new neighbourhood, they had taken the opportunity to try out a different church, especially when their previous church did not have a franchise in Sebrepur. That means that here in the newly growing suburbs, the orthodox churches are even more effectively out-competed by the charismatics, whose culture, theology and promises seem to resonate so much more with most of Ghana's population.

### **Orthodox churches adopt charismatic practices**

The third dimension of the shift from orthodox to charismatic churches is that orthodox churches are changing their ways, becoming more like the charismatics: establishing prayer groups and organising internal charismatic renewal in other ways (Gifford, 2004, pp. 38-39; Meyer, 2004; Omenyo, 2005). This happens in almost every orthodox and AIC/older Pentecostal church (Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, 1997; Sackey, 1996). As Mr Achampong, a member of the Baptist Living Grace Church, explains:

*"In fact, what worries me nowadays is that some of the orthodox churches are starting to copy them. Yes! We used to hold what we call revival crusades. In those days, when we were holding revivals, we don't even advertise them. We only advertise them to our members. We are holding a crusade here, or there. When the Pentecostals came, and then the charismatics, they would advertise it, even in the radio. They would have billboards all over the place, and then posters of their leaders. Serious marketing. Now our people have started doing that too. So even in our own things, we are following their ways now."*

The fixed and stable welfare systems, too, are coming under pressure. In Sebrepur's Methodist church, Pastor Akyele explains that they have had to change the welfare system.

*“There used to be a welfare fund that people paid into. But if somebody contributes to a fund, usually he expects returns. And the returns are sometimes not very very adequate. So we changed that. So now we have been told that, from time to time, we should take an offering, and keep it. We put it all together, so that the fund can be bigger, so that when there is a special need, we go and meet that bill, rather than letting them pay small-small. As for the amount people receive in such cases, there used to be a constitution to determine that. But that constitution has been dissolved. Now the leaders of the church simply sit down and decide it case by case on its merits.”*

Their welfare system used to be based on a constitution similar to the Presbyterian one, but this was leading to disappointments. These days, the collection happens through regular offering sessions where the contributions are not fixed. The pay-out, too, is now done ad hoc. If any particularly needy church members are identified, the Presbytery, which governs the church, will decide on a charitable donation.

Finally, the relentless drive for growth, that fundamental tenet of a market economy, is also gripping the orthodox churches, as well as the accompanying tendency towards ballooning pay for the top brass. As Mr Quarshie, member of the local Methodist church in Accra New Town, complains:

*“So you see, here, I was saying that, eh, even the orthodox churches, the reverend ministers are not working for the pay they earn. They earn far more, and they are doing far less. And that is why I was telling you about the statistics of our church membership. If my own reverend minister is working hard, then the question is, why is the membership not growing? And then also, if you look at it carefully too, her work as a reverend minister, her number 1, key task, is evangelism. What does she do to evangelise? I don't see it. Not much. That's why the number is even going down. But every day, her salary, her allowances are going up. And now, if you attend a meeting, where you have reverend ministers attending, if you look at the cars they use, they are all driving four-wheel drives. They are extremely highly compensated, compared to the work they do. Even in the orthodox churches.”*

But shifting in the direction of the charismatics does not appear to help the orthodox churches much to increase the size of their congregation. As the comparison between

the two below billboards in figure 6.4 shows, they are only doing it halfway. Where the Charismatic poster has the look and feel of a Hollywood poster, complete with a vision of a utopian city and a threatening devil in the background, a title exuding the urgency of impending doom or great bliss, and a picture of the head preacher with what looks like an aureola of holiness around his head, the Orthodox poster simply shows two friendly, if somewhat complacent church functionaries in their uniforms. Apparently, the doctrine of these churches is not easily shifted, even if their survival depends on it. Their identity depends on their internal culture, their discipline, their commitment to Scripture as it was interpreted by the missionaries. While severely irritating their older membership, the steps Orthodox churches take towards the Charismatic movement are thus only managing to slow the hemorrhage of their congregations, not to stop it.

Figure 6.4: Comparison of the visual styles of charismatic and orthodox churches. On the left, a poster advertising a charismatic (Spiritlife Revival Ministries) church event, on the right, a poster advertising an orthodox (Methodist) church.



## 6.7 Conclusion

Ghana's religious landscape evolved with the formation of the Ghanaian state. The first missionaries were invited by the colonial regime. Their function, in the colonial state, was to pacify, and to make the natives more obedient and more fit to work in the colonial project. As the state formation progressed, church membership increasingly became an entrance pass to the higher spectrum of positions natives could attain in the colonial regime. At the same time, the churches brought an ethos of community service and development, constructing schools, hospitals and boreholes throughout the country, and setting up sturdy welfare systems for their congregations.

Abram de Swaan (1988) describes the process of creating a welfare state in western European countries, which has some notable parallels with what happened in Ghana. The same churches which had sent missionaries to Ghana had, in their European origin regions, built up a patchwork of local collective action regimes, creating welfare systems and other collective amenities. In Ghana, the churches were able to impose their local regimes of collective action because that at the time, they possessed sufficient coercive powers to do so, being regional monopolist gatekeepers for the access to the world of colonial administrative positions.

With the general African independence movement of the early- and mid-20th century came a religious independence movement, the AICs, and Pentecostalism. Together with the increasing geographic and social mobility of Ghanaians, this opened up the religious field to voluntarism. From the 1980s, the religious landscape was shaken up by a second revolution, in the form of charismatic churches. This movement was distinguished by its focus on growth and expansion, its loose theological foundations, its individualism, its focus on material wealth, its expansionary tendency, its dualistic spiritual outlook and the energy of its services. Within 40 years, the charismatic movement has managed to become the dominant religious sector in seven out of Ghana's ten regions, and it is still rapidly growing, especially in the major cities (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014).

A religious landscape organised as a marketplace has advantages for the 'consumers'. It liberates people from potential tyranny, it liberates them from a fixed, often petty morality. It forces church leaders to listen more actively, and adapt to the needs of their congregation. But a market where switching 'product' (church) is easy also means that the focus of 'suppliers' (church leaders) shifts to the short term. It makes churches spend much more time on marketing, and less time on building long-term institutions



and civil society. This environment can also drive the church leaders to manipulate their congregation into psychological dependency relations, in order to make them stay in the church, and spending on donations as quickly as possible, because they might be gone soon.

It also narrows the focus of church leaders to the immediate needs of their congregation, rather than the development of the broader community around it. Where the orthodox churches have a self-image as a quasi-statal institution, providing collective amenities such as schools and medical services, as well as creating an effective organisational level between state and individual, most charismatic churches do not feel obliged to take on such functions. To be clear, charismatic churches may often create a strong local social fabric, or an intense religious experience for individuals. But they put little energy into creating further collective amenities, and have less potential for sustained collective action. In other words, for the purposes of this chapter, it does not matter that people spend a lot of time in churches, experiencing collective effervescence and creating intense bonds, if it does not cause them to create collective resources.

The orthodox churches are more like unified ideological and material bodies, which strengthens their potential for collective action, but at the same time makes them more culturally rigid and socially oppressive. The charismatic churches form far more loose webs of connection, and are far more agile. As institutions, religious voluntarism was their habitat from birth, and their leaders are sharply attuned to the desires of their potential flock. As these churches experiment, grow and shrink, replacing each other in rapid succession, an evolutionary selection process akin to institutional Darwinism makes sure of their fitness in the religious marketplace.

Nonetheless, church remains, as in so many societies, a natural avenue of social organisation. It is one of the few places where people meet more or less regularly and more or less without a very clear pre-existing motive (such as work - making money, keeping a job), which creates a potential community setting. This allows for all kinds of social organisation to spring up much more easily than out of a vacuum or as a self-sustaining activity. As one resident put it: "Churches in Ghana are basically self-help societies."

But where the orthodox churches fulfilled a quasi-statal function in several ways, the charismatic churches are less focused on the 'help' part, and more on the 'self'. They are more focused on marketing and growth, spending less attention and resources on building schools, hospitals and other public amenities. Their internal welfare systems are more ad-hoc, less of a social safety net. They are more self-focused, less focused on

building a broader civil society and playing a role in the state and semi-state figuration. Finally, their individualist ideology and internal organisation is less suitable for the collective action required to produce public goods. These are the disadvantages of a free marketplace for religious institutions, as compared to the prior, semi-coercive situation, which allowed for trajectories akin to local state formation.

In Western Europe, the state formation process continued, and slowly the state took over many of the social functions of the churches.

*“By the turn of the century, only the state appeared to possess the administrative potential, the scope and the robustness over time to accomplish the task. It alone could overcome the dilemmas of voluntary action by its coercive powers to levy taxes and impose membership.”*  
(Swaan, 1988, p. 217).

This takeover from the churches did not happen without a struggle, as churches were reluctant to release their societal functions to the state. In particular, they were reluctant to relinquish their hold on education, seeing the mental and moral shaping of every next generation as the best single way to safeguard their institutional continuity.

In Ghana, the state developed much less administrative potential, and is still leaving large gaps in providing collective amenities, especially in medical and educational terms. Nonetheless, the orthodox churches are losing their grip on the religious landscape. Having lost their basis of power as gatekeepers to much desired positions, and being overtaken by a new religious movement, more attuned to the desires of the Ghanaian public, their potential for collective action has begun to unravel. Slowly but surely, they start to become more like the charismatic churches. This shift is perhaps necessary for survival, but it takes them even further away from their previous position as quasi-statal providers of public amenities. The decline of the orthodox churches also means the breakdown of a system of intergenerational solidarity, which used to be implicit in their welfare arrangements.

Today, very few orthodox churches emerge in the newly growing suburbs of cities like Accra. Their established networks of schools, hospitals and other amenities will not disappear, especially as it still forms a conduit for substantial sums of western aid money. But they are no longer growing, while the population is exploding in size. The 21<sup>st</sup> century appears to be the century of the charismatic churches, which bring people together in fundamentally different ways, with different moral foundations.

A final note. Although they do not focus it on building collective amenities at present, the charismatic churches do create and bundle a lot of energy. In Nigeria, some of the charismatic pastors leading these churches have concentrated sufficient material means to build entrepreneurial empires, sometimes the size of small cities (Ukah, 2016). At this scale, public services do seem to emerge again from the charismatic churches. It remains to be seen whether something similar will happen in Ghana's cities.



























7

# Water:

## Expansion patterns of connective goods

**T**his chapter describes the interaction between grassroots and centralized organization in the development of Accra's water pipe network. Section 7.1 provides an exposition of the theory, methodology and data sources. Section 7.2 sets out the historical and contemporary collectivisation dynamics in the network. In 7.3, we see how the rapid and increasingly decentralized expansion of the network led to shortages and breakdowns, and how the Ghana Water Company responds to its predicament.

Section 7.4 shows how these dynamics of rapid collectivisation evoke their counterpart, individualisation dynamics, by tracing the development of various alternative water provision industries that have sprung up as a response to the poor performance of the collective network. This provides us with a system-wide picture of the collectivisation and individualisation dynamics of the sector. Section 7.5 provides a robustness and generalisation check on the entire analysis, by adding the electricity sector as a minor comparative case study.

I conclude that there are indeed important generalisable dynamics across the two sectors. However, the ways these dynamics work out are importantly mediated by the technological circumstances in the respective sectors





## 7.1 Introduction

*On the morning of 28 January 2018, large excavators were cutting up and leveling the ground at Sebrepor, a neighbourhood to the north of Ghana's port city, Tema. The excavator crews were building the new railroad from Tema to Akosombo. As they plowed the machine through the dusty red soil, it suddenly crashed through a PVC water distribution pipeline, causing serious leakages. How could this have happened? The construction crew was hardly to blame for this. As there is no map of the water pipe network in this area, they had no way of knowing they would burst through pipes here. Nevertheless, some 7.000 people had suddenly been cut off from their water supply. There was a crisis to be resolved.*

*Nearby residents quickly noticed the water gushing out of the building site. Strikingly, their first calls did not go to the Ghana Water Company (GWC) but to a fellow resident, Jacob Milehu (see figure 7.1). Known to all as 'Mr Jacob', Milehu is a local plumber who had founded the Sebrepor Water Committee some 40 years ago, extending the first water pipeline to the area as it was being settled by farmers and retired soldiers. From there, he had gone on to build the water network for three adjacent neighbourhoods, with only the help of neighbours and the local chief. Rushed to the railroad construction site, he quickly closed a number of valves at crucial nodes throughout the neighbourhood, taking care to close only the ones that were vital to stop the water spillage and leaving as many valves as possible open. After all, the residents in Sebrepor already complained plenty about their water flow being inconsistent. When finally the team from the Ghana Water Company also arrived on the scene, they asked Mr Jacob to stay on and help them in planning the repairs of the network. In fact, it would have been nearly impossible to do this without him. As he explained to us: "The network in this entire area, we never mapped it. We did the construction ourselves. So the lay-out is in my head, that's all."*

*Several kilometres north from Sebrepor, people didn't have such worries. In the wealthy neighbourhood of Bulasu, the newly settled civil servants and wealthy businessmen have plenty of other means to get their water. Although several residents of this area had initially connected to the GWC pipe network, they soon got annoyed by the inconsistent supply and the lack of reliability. So they drilled private boreholes, installed giant polyester water tanks in their backyard, and ordered tankers to regularly bring water to refill them. Yes, Mrs Angela admitted, it did cost a little more. "We probably spend some 300 cedi (€60) per month on water. But we're not complaining, we can easily afford this, so we've been doing it for years. It works just fine for us."*



*Figure 7.1: Mr Jacob, a local plumber who drummed up a neighbourhood initiative to get piped water into the community. Without having any formal affiliation to the Ghana Water Company, he ended up building and managing a complex system of water distribution lines supplying some 3 km<sup>2</sup> of dense urban area.*

As in other cities around the world, the piped water network in Accra has grown tremendously since its inception at the beginning of World War I, trailing the continuous growth of the city's geographical footprint and its population. However, the growth of Accra is and has been so rapid that state operations have been grossly incapable of laying all the required infrastructure at a pace even approaching the growth of the residential footprint. As the above vignettes illustrate, this leads to system weaknesses and incoherent network development, potentially resulting in elite abandonment of the system. I investigate how such dynamics function, through tracing the development of the network, its challenges and responses of various institutional levels and analysis of the alternative industries springing up in the wake of its failures.

The central research question for this chapter is: what dynamics of collectivisation and individualisation are at play in Ghana's urban piped water network today? Analysing

a single collective amenity (tap water) in this way helps us to shed light on larger themes of this thesis. For instance: how, in such a context of rapid urbanisation, does infrastructure get built? What roles do residents play, what dynamics emerge between the central and the local level, what tensions emerge?

### **Theory and analytical framework**

The institutional and political settlement in Greater Accra has undergone several (r) evolutions over the past century, driven by large demographic and political changes. Other big shifts have been in terms of the technology available in both the piped water network and in its potential (more individually based) replacement industries, which has progressed tremendously over the past century. Finally, the network is not simply built by the state utility company. Individual residents and local collectives play a large role in the development of the network, both in the form of physical construction initiatives, and as a political force working through the democratically accountable elements in the state apparatus. Specifically, I found that there has been a consistent struggle between forces pushing for rapid extension of the network and forces pulling towards limitation of growth and consolidation of the network.

We thus require a process sociological perspective, which incorporates technological change and its effects on the figuration of human organisation. The perspective should also accommodate and analyse the tensions and interdependencies inherent in any figuration, from the grassroots level to the headquarters of companies and state. The figurational sociology of Elias (1978a, 1978b) provides such a perspective. This perspective is based on change, focusing its analytical lens on shifts in institutional structure and in the interdependency relations between the various groups involved. In this perspective, local dynamics are directly connected to the developments in the central elements of the networks, a historical perspective is assumed, and the dynamics between centralised and local or grassroots elements are core elements of the analysis. Finally, the state of the available technology plays an important role in this frame of analysis (Elias, 1995).

The core process under analysis in this chapter is the growth of Accra's piped water network. I conceptualise the piped water network itself as consisting of three types of components: backbone components, formally constructed service lines and informally constructed service lines. The term backbone refers to the water purification facilities and the major distribution lines from there towards and throughout the city. Formal service lines are smaller water pipes laid by the GWC or its subcontractors, in coherent projects or as paid extensions to individual homes. Informal service lines are auto-

constructed extensions of the service lines, built by residents without the permission or indeed the knowledge of the GWC. In practice, the division between formal and informal service lines is not always clear, but it is a useful analytical point of departure.

The most important driver of the network growth consists of more or less coordinated initiatives by residents of newly developing areas to stretch the network to their locality and to create further subdivisions to serve individual households. I term such initiatives ‘resident-driven network expansion’. As this drive tends to stretch the network beyond its carrying capacity, it stands in constant tension with the drive by the GWC’s bureaucrats to control and consolidate the piped water network, in order to keep up the quality of service. This is coupled with our use of the term ‘institutionalisation’, by which I mean the development of more structured and formalised processes, practices and roles, largely at the neighbourhood level. The figurational framework again serves well here, as it allows us to show the connection between local network growth, the ensuing stresses on the citywide backbone system, GWC’s incorporation and control of these local expansion processes and their resulting institutionalisation, changing local behaviours and norms with regard to the construction of new pipe network extensions.

To understand the GWC, the concept of ‘figuration’ provides a useful lens. We should not see the GWC as a discrete organisation, but rather as a set of components in a larger figuration, which also includes residents, formal government and its political institutions, and international donors. There is a constant effort by various elements of the GWC, especially the bureaucrats at its headquarters, to limit the amount of the network that is outside their control. They do so by working to preclude and discourage informal extensions, by incorporating them into their network or at least institutionalising them in some form or other, and by mapping the network through various technologies. This is part of a larger dynamic of long-term planning. I find that the planning horizon of the central and city government are important factors in the quality of upkeep and expansion of the backbone infrastructure. Figure 7.2 below is an attempt to pin down the current figuration.

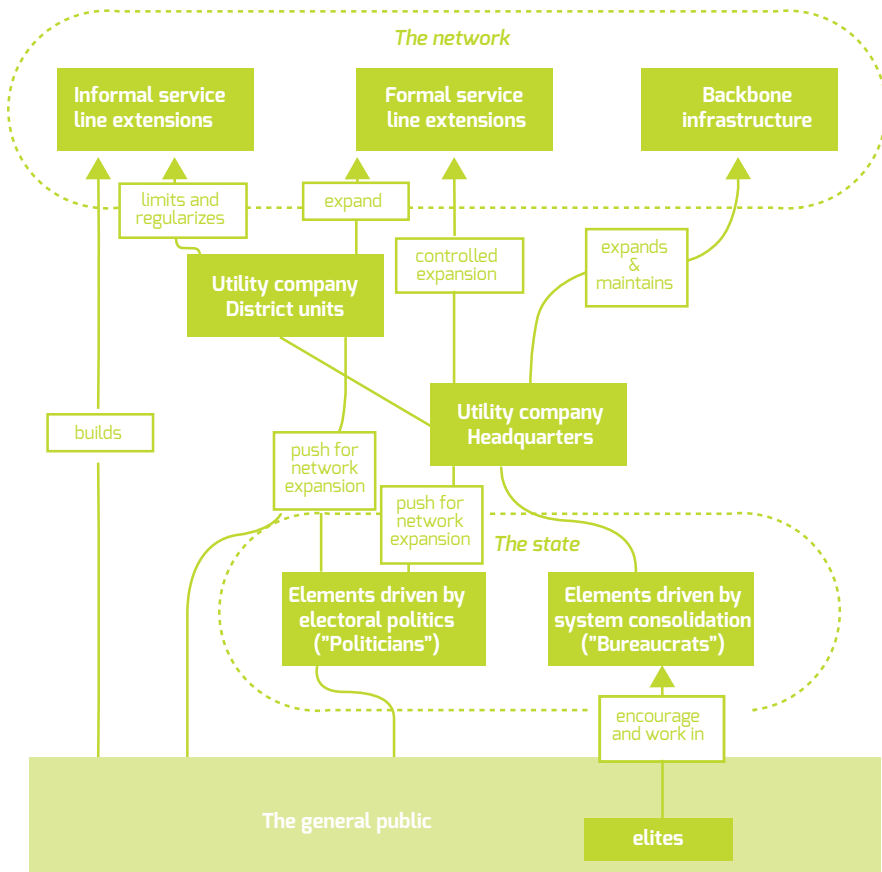


Figure 7.2: a theoretical model of the GWC and wider figuration around the expanding piped water network.

As the GWC has not managed to adequately keep pace with the expanding urban fabric, a number of alternative water provision industries have cropped up, supplying residents with more individualised water solutions. The interaction between the collective network and the individualised sectors, which can be roughly characterised as ‘communicating vessels’ is set out in figure 7.3 below. Throughout the chapter, I use the piped water system as a lens to identify the ways in which dependency relations between various residential, political and bureaucratic groups shift. I continuously interlink these interdependencies with the state of the collective and individual supply systems.

I find that the dynamics of the piped water system are more or less stable, both across the historical period under analysis and across the two sectors I investigate.

However, how such dynamics play out is mediated importantly by the state of available technology. The state of the available technology is a driving factor behind structural shifts in the ways people are dependent on one another (Elias, 1995). This applies both to the purposes of individualisation and to support drives towards collectivisation. I therefore pay attention to the role of technologies in my analysis of the data and in my interviews. Figure 7.3 below provides a schematic representation of the dynamics I find. Figures 7.9 and 7.14 later in the chapter work out this basic theoretical model for the water and the electricity respectively.

### General framework

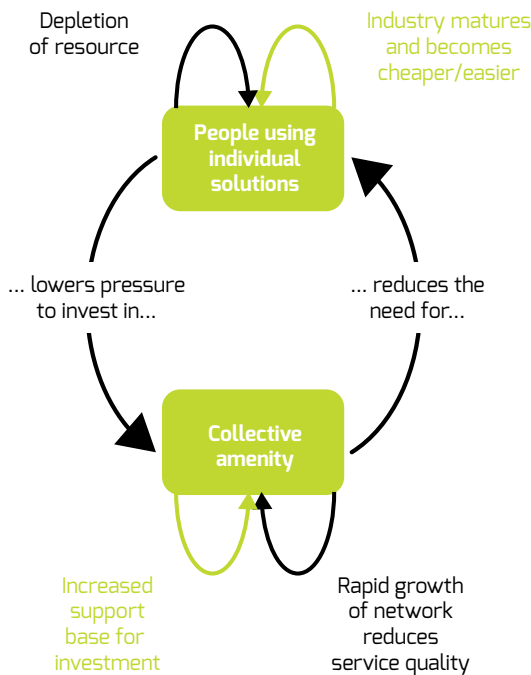


Figure 7.3: a theoretical model of the dynamics of collectivisation and individualisation analysed in this chapter.



## **Methodology and overview**

Below, I set out the chapter structure in brief in a single paragraph and subsequently in more detail. The chapter is built on a variety of empirical material, gathered during fieldwork in 2015-2018. As the chapter rests on a wide range of different data points, I including the data sources used in each section and the analytical lens applied to them in the summary of that specific section, rather than discussing data sources in a separate paragraph.

As a prelude, two notes on the empirical strategy, which perhaps seems somewhat eclectic. First, on the wide range of data sources. Since this chapter spans a wide range of (water and other) sectors and technologies, as well as a long time period, it was not expedient to work towards a systematic overview from a single data source. Data from a variety of sources were collated and where possible checked against each other, to form a necessarily complex and incomplete whole. In theory, it would have been possible to center the research on a single, standardised data source, such as the GSS census or the GWC customer file, but that would not have allowed our current focus on the wider historical patterns.

Second, on the equally wide range of analytical geographic levels. The analysis of this chapter moves from the resident-driven network expansion at the neighbourhood level to the local and city-wide utility companies, and even up to the state-level historical governance situation. Such scale-jumping is somewhat unusual, but in the end, these levels are strongly interconnected. Working from figurational sociology, I do not assume the primacy of any single level. And in fact, our analysis finds that each of these levels is crucial to understanding the functioning of the whole system, as figures 7.2 and 7.3 above show.

## **Structure, data sources and core variables of the analysis**

Section 7.2, the first empirical section, looks at network expansion dynamics. That is, processes of collectivisation of water provision. It starts by setting out the historical background of the piped water network development, from its colonial origins until today. Historical documentation on the colonial and earlier post-colonial period was drawn from the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD). For the period from the 1960s forward, GWC officials were kind enough to supply us with a number of historical master plans and reports, highlighting the change in the water supply network over time. These historical records allowed us to understand the differences between the modes of network expansion that prevailed in various periods. I combine this material with other sources to understand how different types of regimes produced different network expansion dynamics.

I understand these partly as a result of the GWCs technological and organisational capacity. An additional factor in the analysis is the time horizon of the dominant actors within the state, which is largely determined by the stability of the state figuration itself. This determines the state's priorities in terms of utilities such as water or electricity: does the focus lie on rapid extension of the service lines, to quickly serve as large a population as possible, or is there more attention for consolidating the system and strengthening the backbone? I also look at the prevalent means of network expansion: does this happen under strict central control, or is citizen initiative allowed, perhaps even encouraged? What forms of decentralisation are there in practice, and how are these institutionalised?

I then come to the empirical fieldwork core of the chapter: a neighbourhood-level study of the water pipe network's development trajectory. This section is primarily built on a single long-term, historically grounded project tracing the development of the piped water network in an area called Sebrepur, where I gathered data between 2015 and 2018. The Sebrepur case is contrasted and supplemented with research in eight other neighbourhoods. In studying these neighbourhoods, I tried to figure out the ways in which locals cooperated to work towards collective amenities, the way they interact with utility companies and politicians, and to identify other modes of network expansion. As set out in the theoretical chapter of this thesis, starting from the neighbourhood perspective allows us to see forms of local organisation which would remain invisible in a view starting from centralised, formalised institutions.

Sebrepur is an extreme case in terms of citizen initiative: its piped water network is entirely self-built, with minimal involvement of the state utility company. This makes it a strategic case to analyse: the self-organisation which plays an important role in the development of the network is highly visible and relatively easy to analyse in this neighbourhood. Sebrepur provided the central case study for this entire thesis, and chapter 3 details the full fieldwork methods applied there. For this chapter, I mostly used interviews with residents on their water supply, interviews with neighbourhood activists involved in the expansion of the piped water network and field observations. Letters and meeting notes regarding the developments of Sebrepur's water network were drawn from the archive of the Divisional Council of the Sebrepur chief, who is the main traditional authority in the area and a focal point for residents' self-organisation efforts. I contrast and augment the extreme case study offered by Sebrepur with examples from other neighbourhoods.

In section 7.3, I turn to the consequences of this rapid expansion. In a fast-growing city, there easily arises a discrepancy between the growth of the service lines network and the development and maintenance of the backbone infrastructure. This can result in capacity and delivery problems, which in Accra's contemporary water sector have become quite severe. The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) provided much-needed census and other quantitative data, which enabled us to show several tables and maps highlighting the spatially uneven city-wide patterns of water provision and the way this is currently evolving. To better understand the driving forces behind these challenges rapid network expansion in terms of technical issues, supply capacity and network deterioration, I conducted a study of the GWC organisation itself. The company graciously allowed us to interview employees at all levels throughout the organisation, and to study their internal reports from the past 20 years.

We then turn to the various responses of the GWC to these challenges. Our material here consists of the same set of interviews and reports, coupled with field observations from the neighbourhoods and additional interviews with (Ghanaian and Dutch) employees of Witteveen & Bos, a water sector engineering firm with extensive experience in Greater Accra. Additional data for this section are drawn from GWC and national archives. These interviews served to clarify the capacities and organisational structure of the GWC, to illuminate the internal logics of the GWC, the way they view the various modes of expansion, to understand the power relations and conflicts of interest within the GWC between political appointees, long-term employees and the GWC district managers, as well as the dynamics between GWC district management and residents. In this, I pay particular attention to the GWC's internal relations of power and control, the role of changing technology, and to the variety of ways the GWC tries to preclude, discipline and incorporate informally constructed parts of the network, as these processes provide a clear lens on the tension between center and periphery.

In section 7.4, I contrast our account of collectivisation dynamics (section 7.2-7.3) with an overview of the counter-movement: individualisation dynamics. As a response to the poor delivery of the piped water system, a plethora of alternative water provision industries has developed in Greater Accra. I study the main three of these industries: sachet water, tanker water and private boreholes. For each of these sectors, I provide a brief overview of its historical development and its current status. The empirical material for this section is drawn from our neighbourhood profiles, coupled with interviews with actors in these sectors and secondary literature.

A particular focus of this section is how technological progress has changed the viability of these various alternative water sectors over the years. For instance, the pre-packaged water industry took off in a major way once heat-sealing machinery began to be imported from China. A secondary focus is their political dynamics: which socio-economic segments of society are served by the various replacement industries, and what implications does that have for the development of the network as a whole, through the political pressure applied by the various population segments? This section allows us to complete the overview of collectivisation/individualisation dynamics for the water sector.

To facilitate further generalisation of the findings on the water network and its collective-individual dynamics, section 7.5 adds a minor secondary case study: the electricity sector. This sector is comparable to the water sector in terms of having large advantages of scale, requiring a physical distribution network and having a collective utility company competing with individualised alternatives. However, its technological aspects are very different. This makes it an ideal candidate for a comparative case study. The electricity case study is based on a set of interviews with Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) officials, including both headquarters staff and officials at the Region/District levels, conducted between 2016 and 2018. This material is supplemented with the same set of neighbourhood studies as I used for the water sector analysis, and supported by archival materials and secondary literature. However, it was much more limited in terms of interviewing, both at the neighbourhood level and at the state utility company level. I apply the same analytical model as I applied to the water sector, in order to see in what ways it can be generalised. This comparative case study helps us to understand how the different technological circumstances lead to different outcomes in terms of network growth dynamics, degree of central control over the network, and ultimately collectivisation dynamics.

## 7.2 History and modes of expansion

This section provides an overview of historical and contemporary dynamics of growth in Accra's piped water network. The historical analysis focuses on two regime-specific variables. First, the time horizon of regimes determined their investment in the backbone infrastructure. Regimes which did not expect to stay in place for long did not invest make this kind of long-term investments. Second, the degree of populism determined to what degree they grew the distribution network, either by constructing new service lines or by simply allowing people to extend these on their own. The

section then zooms in on the main phenomenon that makes the distribution side of the network grow these days: resident-driven service line expansion. Here, it sets out the main processes by which residents extend the network, showing the dominant role of auto-construction in the contemporary network extension.

### **Historical background of network expansion as a whole**

The first public water supply system in Accra, and in fact all of Ghana, was established just before World War I (GWC, 2016, p. 1). In subsequent years, the network was expanded at a steady pace. By the 1920s, there were functioning systems in several cities, including the colonial capital of Cape Coast, missionary center Winneba, and Kumasi, capital city of the powerful Ashanti tribe. These pipe-borne water networks were small but reliable, limited to the colonial quarters and selected indigenous areas. Every resident in such areas was required to pay a water tax, and residents expected to have a good and functioning water connection (PRAAD, 1931).

These were the high days of the colonial regime. Although the groundwork for the independence movement was laid in these days, it was very much underground, and it appeared that colonial rule would be around for a very long time indeed. Thus, the time horizon was long, as we can see in archival materials. Plans were laid for projects like the Akosombo Dam, and the accompanying expansion of the Kpone Water Works, the largest water purification plant of Ghana.

The following decades would show markedly less such long-term focused activity. As the Great Depression ravaged European economies, the authorities in London decided to economise on all financial and material flows to the colonies. When World War II broke out, this effect became even more pronounced; wartime rationing led to a bare-bones maintenance regime for both the pipe network and the water treatment plants. When it became clear after the war that there was a serious struggle for independence, the time horizon of the colonial regime became far shorter. No more master plans were produced, no more major maintenance was undertaken, and only the most urgent repairs were carried out (Director of Public Works, 1939).

After Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African country to gain its independence in 1957, the time horizon for infrastructure development again changed completely. As Nkrumah's nationalist regime geared up in a highly ambitious effort to modernise the nation, several of the major projects which had been planned in the 1920s and 1930s were built. The Akosombo Dam was constructed, with as primary purpose to provide power for an aluminum factory. The Tema harbor city was built from scratch, with a

full water pipe distribution system which was completed even before residents moved in. However, the Kpone Water Works lagged behind. Perhaps it was not industrial enough to be high on the list of priorities, perhaps there were other reasons.

Whatever lay behind it, in 1959 the newly independent Ghana found itself in a water crisis. Severe droughts had drained many of the surface waters, and several decades of neglect had led to a deterioration of the water supply and distribution network. The World Health Organisation came in and helped the new government to draft a Masterplan for its water sector (WHO/UNDP/GoG, 1963). Large investments were made, with donor money flowing in from a number of countries and the World Bank. And this time, the geographical scale was radically different. Especially the network coverage continued to be expanded at breakneck speed. While the colonial government had concentrated its infrastructural efforts in a number of colonial centers, developing a total of 35 pipe-borne water supply systems throughout Ghana, the nationalist regime and its successors increased this to 194 pipe-borne systems, and added 2.500 hand-pumped borehole systems for the rural areas (GWC, 2016, p. 3). Ghana's new leaders wanted to show the people of their newly independent country that wealth and amenities were now for everyone, not just for the (colonial) elite.

In 1966, Nkrumah was ousted during a visit to Vietnam. Over the fifteen years that followed, Ghana would see a total of six different regimes, in an increasingly rapid alternation of military and civil rule. This was followed by twelve years of military rule under Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings' Provisional National Defense Council during the 1980s. All this time, the water distribution network continued to grow, as many of these regimes had grand ambitions of nation-building, and often also had to placate their supporters with amenities. Some, especially Acheampong's and Rawlings' regimes, were mostly focused on the rural areas. In Operation Feed Yourself (OFY) Acheampong encouraged people to move out and farm, extending electricity and water pipes to farming areas (Lemmenmeier, 2012). Rawlings' Provisional National Defense Council, in a push to develop the countryside, added 3.000 rural boreholes during his first few years in power (GWC, 2016, p. 3).

Taking an overview, the following picture emerges. The first nationalist governments were focused on distributing access to public utilities. However, their structure was still highly centralist, an organisational heritage from a colonial state which was really only present in a small number of cities, leaving the rest of the country to the rule of local chiefs. Subsequent governments started to slowly decentralise more and more responsibilities. An important transition in this respect occurred under Rawlings'

regime. Although his Provisional National Defense Council was autocratic in nature, it took practical shape as a decentralised structure of local Peoples' Defense Committees and Workers' Defense Committees. This government also explicitly aimed to shift the popular attitude from a 'government will provide'-position to a proactive stance in nation-building, based on local initiative by the people themselves (Danso-Boafo, 2014). The formal institutionalisation of local government in the form of Assemblies (municipalities) was followed several years later by a comparable decentralisation in the water-sector. This meant that the de facto de-central expansion of the network was now also formally sanctioned and institutionalised.

### **Resident-driven service line expansion**

Through what modalities does the pipe-borne water network expand these days? The processes vary, but the driver is nearly always the same: citizen initiative among the pioneer residents. Electricity and water are important for the quality of life in an area, and as such are big attractors for potential new residents looking for a plot of land to build their own home. More people, in turn, attract more shops, more services and form a bigger group to share initial costs of other amenities. Additional settlers also provide safety in numbers against robbers, *land guards* and other dangers of the urban frontier.<sup>41</sup> This means that first movers in a newly settled area are often eager to connect to utility networks not only for their own use, but also as a way to get more people in. As Auntie Yaa put it in the introduction chapter: "Now we have water, now we have lights. Come and live here!"

One way citizens can get water in their area is by lobbying their elected representatives and the local GWC District office. These offices have a limited amount of internally generated funds at their disposal, to do small distribution line extensions. They sometimes get additional money allotted from the central GWC coffers, but this too is not much against the rate of spatial expansion of the built environment. However, since the head of the GWC and his two deputies are political appointees, there is a constant struggle in the GWC head office between the financial department (which periodically comes under pressure from the IMF to economise and fully balance the books) and the company leadership. The political pressure causes the GWC to build extensions well beyond what both their backbone infrastructure and their budget can carry, leaving debts outstanding to the national electricity company and other suppliers (Musah, 2018).

41 Land guards are thugs employed by land speculators, chiefs and others trying to claim a portion of unoccupied land. They tend to be particularly present in the early stages of a settlement, when population density is low. At this stage, intimidation of those few individuals who have moved in can be quite profitable, as it can potentially win an entire stretch of land for the land guards' unscrupulous employers.



Still, it appears from our field research that people in most neighbourhoods had to do more than lobby to get their water: they had to act for themselves. Sebrepur, the main case study area of this research project, provides an extreme example of such resident-driven service line expansion. The first residents settled there in the 1970s as farmers, encouraged by Operation Feed Yourself. One of them was a retired army plumber, Jacob Milehu, locally known as “Mr Jacob” (who appeared in the introduction to this chapter). His last job before retirement had been to construct the water distribution network in much of the new port city, Tema. Using his connections in the military and the GWC, he got permission to connect the newly growing hamlet of Sebrepur to the water network of the nearby army base, Michel Camp. The GWC drew a pipeline under the busy road separating Michel Camp and Sebrepur, and connected a standpipe there, at the roadside.

Dissatisfied with a mere standpipe, several kilometres walking distance from his home, Mr Jacob enlisted the help of the local chief and a number of active neighbours and got to work. Through the incipient Sebrepur Settler Society, they collected money, bought pipes and put the area’s boys to work digging trenches, and extended the pipeline the first few hundred meters, into the village. From this point onward, everyone who wanted a personal connection to the GWC network had to literally *pay it forward*. The price of a home connection: material for his personal service connection, labour costs of Mr Jacob, and four additional lengths of pipeline (about 120 meters), which were used to expand the distribution network. Under Mr Jacob’s energetic supervision and shepherding, the network was thus extended, branched out, upgraded to bigger pipelines and even stretched to include neighbouring neighbouring villages. Today, the self-help pipeline network of Mr Jacob’s Water Committee includes Sebrepur, Mlitsakpo, Saki Uptown, Bediako and even parts of neighbouring Golf City. All in all, this comprises an area of around three square kilometres of dense urban neighbourhoods.

In organisational terms, Sebrepur’s water network started with solo initiative from Mr Jacob and an initial connection granted by the GWC. From here, it quickly spun into informal group formation, when Mr Jacob enlisted the help of his neighbours. This led to the successful autoconstruction of the first part of the network. The affiliation with the chief provided the group with an additional measure of legitimacy, both among local residents (who had all gotten their land grant from that chief, a highly significant relationship in Ghana) and towards outside organisations, who tend to see the chief as the natural head of the neighbourhood community. As Mr Jacob standardised the cost of a connection, got official stationary, and got local big men together in the Sebrepur

Water Committee to oversee the local group, the drive was further institutionalised. When the work started to become too much for one person, he enlisted local young men to help build and maintain the network, professionalising the division of labour, which enabled them to cover a large area of urban fabric.

It should be noted here that Sebrepor's case is not quite standard. It required the confluence of several factors. First, a usable mainline at the nearby army base. Second, a public-spirited, well-connected plumber with a lot of time and energy on his hands. Third, a well-organised community of retired soldiers, willing and able to support his efforts. And fourth, a strong spirit of self-help. This spirit, laudable as it is, was mainly a deeply practical one, grounded in the community's certain knowledge that while the GWC might help them across that road and grant them a standpipe, "government will not come and build your water for you" (McKenzie, 2015).

Clearly, Sebrepor's case is exceptional. However, the same principles form the basis of most pipe-borne water networks in neighbourhoods being built still today. Table 7.1 below summarises the development process of the piped water network in eight other Greater Accra neighbourhoods which were started in the last 50 years. In each of these neighbourhoods, we interviewed several elders about the development history of the area and systematically noted the physical state of amenities like water, electricity, street lights, street paving and drainage systems (see Appendix 2). These data do not form a qualitative comparative analysis. Rather, they are exploratory and shed more light on the diversity of pathways towards a piped water network, as well as identifying some potentially core variables.

| Neighborhood             | Description   | Socio-economic profile | Resident Association active | Est. | Water pipe network            | Electricity network |
|--------------------------|---|------------------------|-----------------------------|------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Afienea</b>           | Village core on the northern edge of the urban fringe area.                 | Lower middle class     | Yes                         | 1998 | Self-built                    | Self-funded         |
| <b>Bulasu</b>            | Relatively new neighborhood, clearly delineated plots.                      | Upper middle class     | Yes                         | 2013 | Self-funded                   | Self-funded         |
| <b>Christian Village</b> | Part of the older Ashiaan agglomeration, no pre-existing village.           | Middle class           | Yes                         | 1995 | Self-built                    | Self-funded         |
| <b>Community 25</b>      | Relatively new neighborhood, clearly delineated plots.                      | Middle class           | Yes                         | 2010 | Self-built                    | Self-funded         |
| <b>Dawhenya</b>          | Older village on the urban fringe, established in 1970s for farming.        | Lower middle class     | No                          | 1960 | Government-built              | Government-built    |
| <b>Gbetsile</b>          | Dense neighborhood within the urban fabric.                                 | Poor                   | No                          | 1985 | Government-funded, self-built | Government-built    |
| <b>Golf City</b>         | Older, but organized, quite centrally positioned neighborhood.              | Middle class           | No                          | 2000 | Self-built                    | Government-built    |
| <b>Kpone</b>             | Old village core, dense, messy, a lot of communal housing.                  | Lower middle class     | Yes                         | 1950 | Self-built                    | Self-built          |
| <b>Sbrepur</b>           | Mixed buildings, somewhat older than surrounding neighborhoods, no village. | Middle class           | Yes                         | 1975 | Self-built                    | Self-built          |

*Table 7.1: The eight other neighbourhoods included as additional case studies, besides the main case study of Sebrepur. For each neighbourhood, we denoted whether water, electricity and street lights were funded and constructed by the locals or through a government project. Self-built indicates that locals did both the funding and construction themselves. Self-funded means locals gathered money and asked the ECG/GWC to construct the network.*

An almost universal factor in the neighbourhoods which successfully got a water pipe network appears to be local organisation of some kind. However, there is quite some diversity in the *type* of organisation that residents form. In Sebrepur, a single, determined group dedicated specifically to the water network created a way to progressively fund expansion, and built the entire network bit by bit. Grassroots organisation in other areas was more general-purpose, frequently taking the form of a Residents Association (RA, see also chapter 4). Where in Sebrepur, the process happened very slowly because the residents were relatively poor farmers but was made possible by dogged local organising and strong networking, villa residential area Bulasu represents the other end of the self-help scale. Here, the RA is extremely effective and well-funded, and has paid for the connection towards their area and the full distribution network inside it. However, our interlocutors reported that the area has little internal social cohesion: this RA is purely functional.

While such wealth is rare, resident contributions do form the driver in the majority of the neighbourhoods we investigated. In outlying Afienya, residents contributed money for the pipes to be drawn up to the border of their settlement, but that's where the organisation ran out of money and steam. From that point on, everyone had to pay their own extensions. This is also a more frequently observed pattern: initial connections generally get the pipe network only just far enough to provide water to the first few dwellings of a settlement. From here, most neighbourhood's developmental trajectory runs a little bit different from Sebrepor's, as there is generally no Water Committee and no planned network extension. Instead, individual households subsequently arrange their own connections from the settlement's edge. Others build forward from those connections, and so on. In streets where nobody can afford this investment, residents wait for a 'big man' on the other side of the neighbourhood to pay for a connection which will pass near enough to their own houses for them to finally connect as well.

Community 25, on the other hand, represents the ideal-typical successful RA in a middle class neighbourhood. The community was helped by the fact that a farmer in the area had already gotten a connection, decades ago, so they only had to do the distribution within the neighbourhood. Over a number of years, a few women and men organised monthly RA meetings, gathered contributions and spread the network along the streets throughout the area, with individuals building their personal connections and buying the water meters when they could afford it.

Political networks, too, often play a role in this development. In Gbetsile, a dense and relatively poor area, the local NDC party leader played a central role, acquiring funding for the materials, pushing and paying the local youth to provide labour for digging the trenches and so on. However, the area lies uphill and water does not flow reliably. What is more, most residents cannot afford to get a personal connection as the cost of a water meter and the required plumbing is still prohibitively high for most residents in Accra. But in more affluent areas such as Golf City, government provision of distribution lines does work. The Member of Parliament for the area secured funding to lay distribution lines along all the streets of the area, and a large majority of the households then installed their own connection.

We also know of other neighbourhoods, not included in this dataset, which were connected through international development projects, generally channeled through the local Assemblies (municipalities).<sup>42</sup> In some cases, real estate developers building 'estates' or gated communities directly strike a deal with the local GWC District Manager to connect them, with or without the explicit permission of his superiors. Chiefs and early settlers are often especially motivated to get such infrastructure projects off the ground. They want to quickly draw more people into the settlement, so as to collectively decrease the risk of robbery, speed up the development of the area and allow for the densification necessary for more advanced amenities to arrive.

In short, we see a broad spectrum of grassroots organisation forms working to establish piped water networks, some more specialised than others, in various configurations with political networks, various configurations with the GWC citywide network, and with various degrees of affluence and social cohesion. Quite notable throughout the data is the dogged incrementalism and the degree to which residents manage to build (parts of) the network for themselves. However, it should also be clear that this does not happen in every area: Dawhenya and Mataheko do not have access to the piped water network. Dawhenya has had standpipes for the past 40 years, since the area became a farming hub under president Acheampong's Operation Feed Yourself, and no effective grassroots organising has managed to transform these to a network of household water connections. Mataheko has simply not yet gotten the grassroots organisation or sufficient funding off the ground to construct a local network.

Not unlike the process of growing tree roots, the network thus slowly expands throughout the neighbourhood in a decentralised growth process that is quite frankly a miracle to behold (in slow motion). However, there are some important differences with the growth process of tree roots. Trees naturally develop an efficient system, optimising the width of their branches for the circulation of water and nutrition. Decentrally built pipe networks like Accra's water network do not necessarily lead to an optimal structure, and often include strange twists, large and demanding networks built onto narrow initial pipe connections, and all sorts of bottlenecks. In addition, they are not self-sustaining and self-upgrading, like organic tissues such as tree roots are, and thus require constant maintenance and frequent upgrading of size and quality.

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42 A recent example is the World Bank GAMA project, currently being implemented, which will lay 150 km of new distribution network, creating some 5.000 new connections and standpipes, improving water supply to 143.000 households (World Bank, 2018). This project is not only exceptional in its magnitude, but also in the fact that it includes considerations of the backbone infrastructure and includes investments there. Most NGO connection projects are not that system-minded.

Since independence, the expansion of the water network has increasingly originated in the neighbourhoods, not as design from a headquarter. Whether expansions happen for political reasons, or more frequently, through the independent constructive labour of many, many communities each slowly overcoming the challenges of collective action in different ways, the network is expanded in ever further offshoots. This process and the resulting network structure can hardly be said to be planned, except on a very general level. This is an effective, relatively rapid and rather locally autonomous method of expansion. But as the next section shows, it also leads to some severe practical problems and weaknesses.

### 7.3 Failure to deliver and GWC response

The previous section set out the process of resident-driven expansion of the piped water network at the local level, which is a very effective process of network expansion in contemporary Accra. One might expect such successful self-help to be celebrated by the state and the utility company. However, this is far from the case, and there are in fact good reasons for this. This section sets out the consequences of such distribution line expansion for the backbone infrastructure. It then turns to the response of the GWC. This is also a matter of collective action or collectivity, but at a different level. GWC is effectively the main agent representing a larger collective than all these neighbourhood activists: Greater Accra as a whole.

The section first zooms in on the interconnection between the development of the distribution network and the backbone infrastructure over the past half-century, focusing on the institutional reforms that were implemented as a response. It then sets out the current backbone-distribution interconnection and its practical consequences, before going into a detailed overview of the way the contemporary GWC is responding to its challenges. When studying this response, it mainly looks at the narratives used by GWC employees to understand their perspective on the collectivisation process, and the practical challenges accompanying rapid large-scale network expansion. Thus, this section seeks to understand how local collective action for network expansion affects the central collective, and the accompanying array of responses (and their effectiveness) of the central collective.

#### **Discrepancy between network growth and backbone development**

Throughout our investigation of Accra's newly grown suburban area, one nearly constant finding was problems with the water flow. In five out of the nine neighbourhoods we

profiled, water pressure in the pipes was either low or irregular, or simply nonexistent. The same pattern appeared from anecdotal evidence in other neighbourhoods throughout the city. The major reason for this is that the network was simply stretched far beyond the carrying capacity of its backbone systems, and in many places is also quite ill-designed, causing further local shortages.

Several years after independence in 1957, major investments were made in the treatment plants. It is very hard to trace when exactly this happened. But while capacity in 1939 stood at some 5.000 m<sup>3</sup> per day (Director of Public Works, 1939), a report from 1981 shows a daily capacity of 85.000 m<sup>3</sup> (Engineers, 1981). However, although the first decade after independence clearly produced substantial increases in the water capacity, in the following decades very little expansion or even major maintenance would be done on the water treatment plants and the major distribution lines. As a World Bank report from 1998 noted: “The water supply systems in Ghana deteriorated rapidly during the economic crises of the 1970s and early 1980s when Government’s ability to adequately operate and maintain essential services was severely constrained.” (World Bank, 1998). Various batches of donor money in 1970, 1981 and 1988 brought some relief, but not much (GWC, 2016, p. 3). In 1997, a report found that water production capacity had remained practically unchanged since the year 1980 (OTUI, 1997, p. 71). Eight years later, there was still only a capacity increase of altogether some 20% (Denys N.V. & The GIS Company, 2012, p. 16).

Meanwhile the urban population had explosively increased in that same period. Between 1980 and 2003, Accra’s population grew by 172%, from 1,1 million to nearly 3 million people (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). And the pipe network had grown alongside, at breakneck speed. Although there are no exact data on the growth of the network in this period, an indication can be found in the increase of water usage meters. In the chaotic years of alternating governments leading up to Rawlings’ second coup, the amount of new domestic connections had shown a growth rate of 8,6% per year (OTUI, 1997, p. 71). Within just those five years between 1975 and 1980, that amounted to an increase in the number of water customers of more than 50%, “corresponding to 400 new connections every month”. Although this was an extraordinary episode, the growth of GWC’s customer base did not exactly abate afterwards. The number of registered GWC customers in Greater Accra would continue to keep pace with the metropolis’ population growth, going from roughly 80.000 in 1980 (calculation based on Tahal (1981)) to more than 250.000 in 2015 (GWC, 2015).

The backbone infrastructure (water treatment plants, mainline infrastructure and booster stations) had in no way kept pace with this rapid development of the



distribution network and the user base. In fact, the first major overhaul of the backbone system since the 1960s would not occur until the late 2000s and early 2010s, when additional capacity was installed roughly doubling the capacity of the network (Denys N.V. & The GIS Company, 2012, p. 15).

In response to this prolonged crisis, the institutional structure of water delivery was thoroughly reformed in the 1990s, based on the Water Sector Restructuring Project (WSRP), supported by \$140 million of international donor money (around \$210 million in today's terms). Through this program, the organisational structure of the GWSC (Ghana Water and Sanitation Company) was revamped. Started as a local colonial utility company, with a small area of operation, it had grown to cover the country, following the independence and the accompanying notion that not only certain (white) elite quarters must be served, but the whole country. However, its organisational structure had never been updated to reflect this new widely expanded role.

Now, the GWC was split into the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) and the Ghana Water Company Limited (GWC). The GWC would provide water to urban population centers of at least 50,000 people, supervised on quality and tariff setting by the newly established Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC). The CWSA took over coverage in the rest of the country, mainly running one-off borehole striking and water supply improvement programs through the local District Assemblies. To safeguard the increasingly scarce water resources, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Water Resources Commission (WRC) were established, with the WRC receiving authority to manage all of Ghana's natural water resources and overseeing (GWC and other) extraction practices. The division between the CWSA and the GWC left the peri-urban areas in a difficult spot, in between the responsibility of these two organisations.

Internally, the now purely urban GWC was also revamped, as it was found increasingly unable to cope with the growing demand for new extensions. In 1997, only two offices with a combined staff of 26 people (Accra Central District Office and Tema Central District Office) were responsible for the establishment of all new connections throughout the Accra-Tema metropolitan area. Able to connect just over 1,000 households a year, they had accumulated an estimated backlog of 30,000 households (OTUI, 1997, p. xiv). To improve this situation, the GWC was decentralised into 3 regions, each containing a number of districts. Furthermore, the workforce was rationalised, the technical knowledge base increased by hiring more professionals and providing training for staff. Finally, a program was started for the reduction of water leakages and illegal connections.

Today, the water governance and provision organisational structure implemented in the 1990s under Rawlings is still in place<sup>43</sup> The Accra-Tema metropolitan area is covered through the regions Accra East, Accra West and Tema, and the expansion of the network is now managed by teams in all 25 districts. This has enabled the company to mostly catch up with the demand for new connections.<sup>44</sup>

Despite all these reforms, water delivery today is not stable in many parts of Greater Accra, and an enormous amount of connected customers receive almost no water at all. If anything, the increased local office effectiveness resulting from the GWC's decentralisation has exacerbated the problem of its network being stretched in an unplanned fashion, beyond its central control and beyond its backbone systems' capacity to deliver. Figures 7.4 and 7.5 below show the scale of the problem in April 2012. On figure 7.4, green areas receive water 70-100% of the time, yellow/orange areas 30-70% of the time, and the red areas have water flow during 0-30% of the time. However, a green or yellow indication on figure 7.4 does not indicate that the quantities received are adequate. Figure 7.5 depicts the flow rate, showing that some 60% of Accra has a flow rate (when water flows at all) of less than 10 m<sup>3</sup>/hour. In particular the supply to the south-eastern and northern parts of Accra, that is, the areas where most newly developing neighbourhoods are, is woefully inadequate.

The contrast with the early days of the network is striking. In 1931, a disruption of water supply to some customers of 'up to four hours a day' was seen a good reason for complaint. It was found important enough to be mentioned in a letter by the Gold Coast Governor to the UK, urgently asking for additional funds and materials to resolve the situation (Slater, 1931). Today, a large number of GWC customers have flow interruptions which continue for several days, sometimes even months. Even when water does flow, the pressure is often inadequate. The most recent estimates indicate that slightly over 50% of GWC's customers receive significantly less water than they need (Denys N.V. & The GIS Company, 2012).

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43 In 2006-2011, a World Bank-led consortium organized the privatization of Ghana's water supply, in attempt to improve reliability, financial sustainability and customer service. After five years, the new management was judged to be a failure on nearly every evaluation criterion, and the GWC was re-nationalized. In the 2010s, a series of internal shake-ups and strict performance-based monitoring of GWC management has been organized to achieve the same goals.

44 GWC also has operations in other urban areas throughout Ghana, but 62% of its customers live in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (Nunoo, 2018).

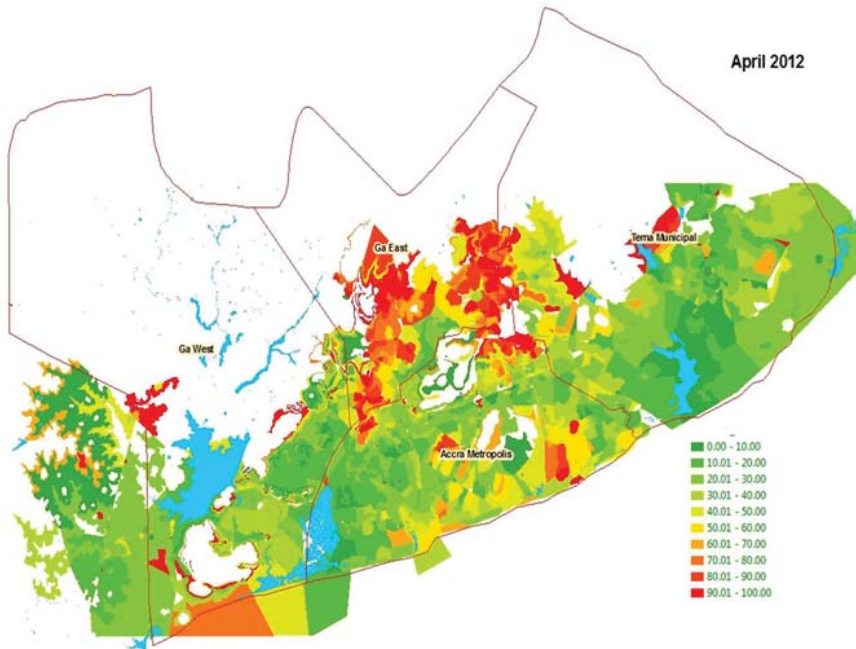


Figure 7.4: An overview of the percentage of time that taps flow in each part of Greater Accra. Dark green means constant flow, dark red means almost never (Denys N.V. & The GIS Company, 2012).

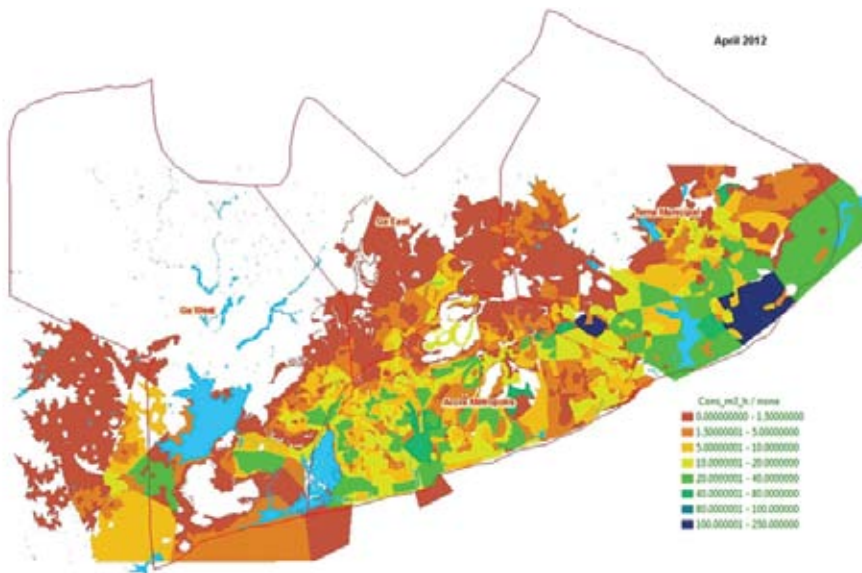


Figure 7.5: An overview of the rate of flow in each area. Blue and green areas have sufficient pressure, orange and red areas have insufficient pressure (Denys N.V. & The GIS Company, 2012).

## **GWC response**

How is GWC responding to this predicament? One method is rationing. In colonial times, rationing was used on a racist and extremely unequal basis. During a wartime meeting in 1942, J. Balfour Kirk, President of the Gold Coast Central Board of Health, noting the severity of the water crisis, determined the following rations. For the European population, 300-500 UK imperial gallons (1.300-2.200 liter) per compound per day (Director of Public Works, 1945). For the African population, 7-10 gallons (31-45 liter) per head per day. In the 1980s, this method was reintroduced (Stoler, Fink, et al., 2012), this time on a rotation basis. In this system first neighbourhood A receives water for a day, then neighbourhood B, and so on, until it's A's turn again. Since increasingly many people have 5.000-20.000 liter polytanks in their backyard, the intermittent dry spells can be coped with. Unfortunately this also means that those living at the end of a pipeline frequently find that water never reaches them, as during their neighbourhood's turn, the flow is continuously diverted into the polytanks of their preceding neighbours. These often take all day to fill up, at which point the flow turns away again, to the next neighbourhood in line.

But rationing, of course, is merely a method of coping. It neither improves the level of knowledge and control the GWC has over the existing network, nor does it stop further uncontrolled expansion and dilution of the network's carrying capacity. So how does the GWC respond to their root predicament, the cause of the problem, which is the uncontrolled expansion of their network? At first, generally, with flat-out denial. When we asked GWC personnel at several levels throughout the organisation about the frequent, nearly standard practice of house-to-house network expansion through citizen initiative, the response was always the same: denial. As a District Manager firmly put it:

*"It is the sole mandate of GWC to lay lines to customers premises. Of course, I will not rule out the fact that there are some of them who will want do their own things. But when they come to our notice, we don't take it friendly. We don't entertain it at all, you can trust me for that".*  
(Interview Amoatuy, 2018)

While the District Manager noted that network expansion through unsanctioned citizen initiative does happen, he made it a point to show he was on top of such 'illegal efforts'. In this effort, he stretches his limited resources to the limit, using the company car to drive around on weekends to spot the construction of unsanctioned extensions. To discourage such activity further, he seizes culprits' equipment whenever

possible. As he proudly noted: "...most of them don't come to get it back, because they know very well what they were doing." He also uses his private phone as a hotline for anonymous tips of illegal pipe construction activity. "I don't need to know who you are, I don't need to see you, it's just about the information. I don't disclose where I get my information from". "You have to put fear into the system." As he noted, the means to keep the quality up during the rapid network expansion, and to instill discipline into the process, are still highly inadequate. "The management they don't look at resources, they want results. (...) If you don't strategise, you die."

The vignette at the start of this chapter makes very clear to which degree this projected level of control over the network is a goal rather than a reality. The GWC has no detailed overview of their network, and often relies on local leaders to assist in running the network. As Mr Jacob later explained, the GWC field team frequently calls him to find out how exactly the pipe network runs in certain parts of Sebrepur, and how to best improve the flow. I had several conversations with Mr Jacob over the course of 2015-2018 and he always said that he had been in the process of handing over the management to Ghana Water but so far that had not happened. Instead, he was training a new cohort of plumbers – "my boys" – who worked on the pipes in the neighbourhood next to their regular work for individual households. It is clear that Mr Jacobs' case may be an extreme example, but it is by no means unique, and in many ways stands for a larger pattern. In many places, the GWC have no idea how exactly their network looks, making it very difficult to manage water flows and ensure equal spreading, or indeed any preferred distribution pattern at all. However, the GWC has begun to effectively use social media platforms to gather information on bursts and leaks directly from citizens.

In areas where residents are less organised with regard to the water pipe network than in Sebrepur, the GWC also finds ways to bring the practice of connecting to neighbours into their system. In fact, they have developed a specific procedure for it. Anyone coming to register a new connection is asked to submit a written permission note from the owner of the pipeline from which he wants to connect his own house (see figure 7.6 below). In most neighbourhoods, this is simply one's neighbour. In Sebrepur, the formal owner of the water network is the Sebrepur Water Committee, although this Committee does not have any legal status or formal existence otherwise. For the neighbouring towns of Golf City and Mlitsakpo, Mr Jacob has delegated that responsibility to the respective chiefs.

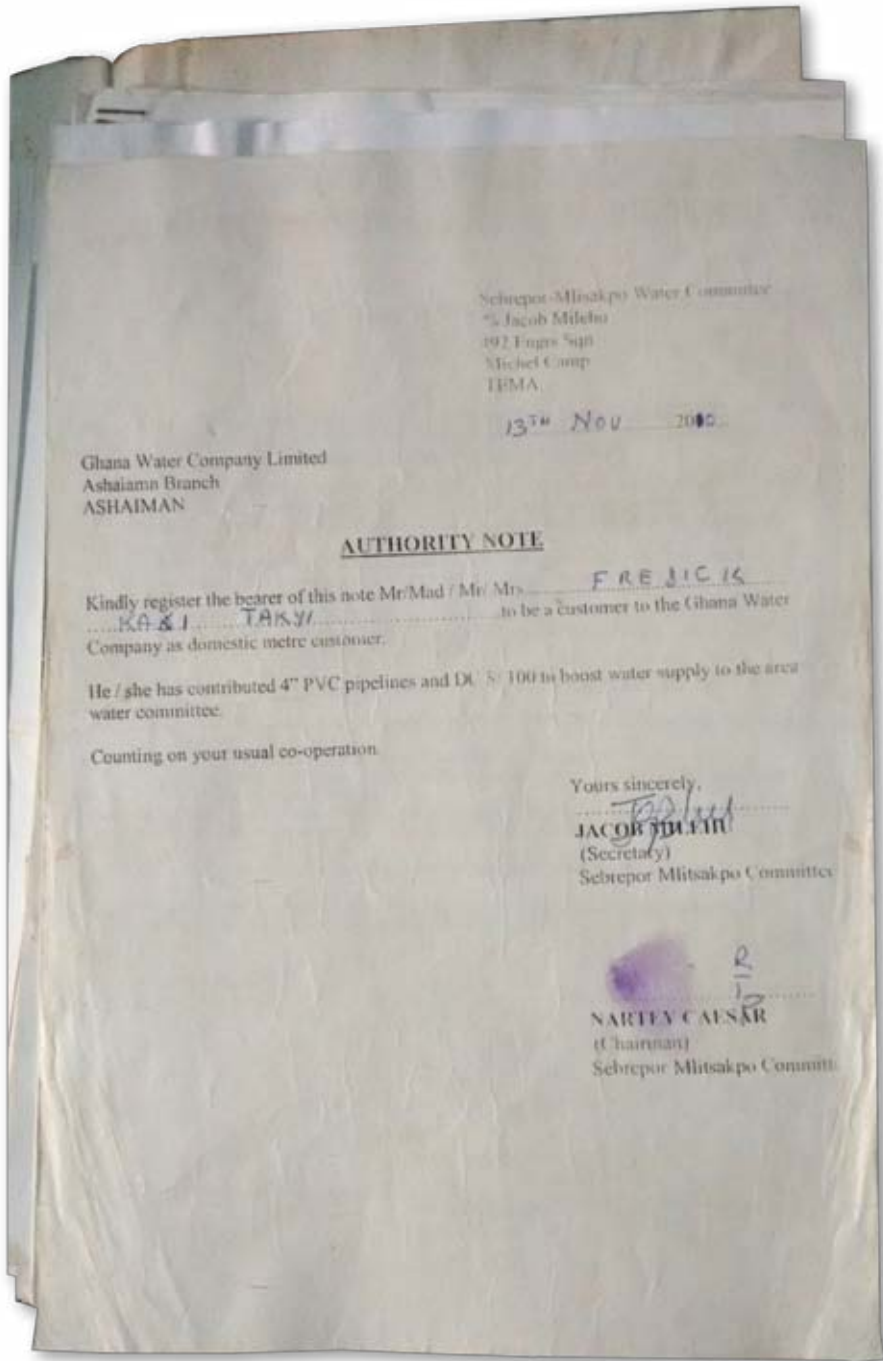


Figure 7.6: An 'Authority Note' signed by Mr Jacob Milehu, founder of the Sebrepot Water Committee, and Nartey Caesar, representative of Sebrepot's chief and formal chairman of the Sebrepot Water Committee. The GWC requires customers to bring such a note if they want to connect to the water network via an existing customer service line.

In analytical terms, what is the relationship between the residents' organisation around water and the GWC? Sebrepor's piped water network has grown historically through auto-construction. Along with that process the local organisation around water institutionalised and professionalised itself. We can read this as a response to the continued absence of effective action on the part of the GWC. But the GWC is not completely absent; it does set the institutional framework. That is, it precludes the Sebrepor Water Committee from formalising completely, since the GWC does not admit that residents play a serious role in building and maintaining the network. That would presumably undermine the GWC's status too much and amount to an open admission that they do not have control over the network. But since the GWC does not have the capacity to keep track of everything that happens at the neighbourhood level, they have established the system of permission notes for connecting to one's neighbour's pipeline. For the Sebrepor Water Committee, this provides a partial formalisation of their control over the local pipe network, and they have locally further formalised the permission note system (see figure 6). Where it mostly amounts to a handwritten note from a neighbour, they have created a standardised form which must be signed by the entrepreneurial resident who set up the system, Mr Jacob, and by the chief, who thus further strengthens his authority over the residents (see also chapter 5).

In order to get back control over their network and flows, GWC is taking a number of other steps. As the last comprehensive map of Accra's water pipe network was drawn up almost half a century before, through the WHO project in 1966, their first step now is to create an up-to-date map of the network. In 2012, a first version was completed, although it was limited to transmission lines of 150mm and larger. As the digital information officer explains, they would prefer to map everything, but practical problems preclude this.

*"For asset management, we ideally want [to map] everything, but we will probably go for 75mm and bigger. (...) When you have these small pipes, they may run through the community without any properly planned route. They just move through, and people just connect from them. So we only want to measure the ones we can easily control."  
(Interview Nunoo, 2018)*

In terms of the larger pipes, this map covers 80-90% of the network, omitting for instance all of Sebrepor (see figure 7.7 below). Hence, the railroad builders had no way to know that they would break through the water pipe network with their excavators.



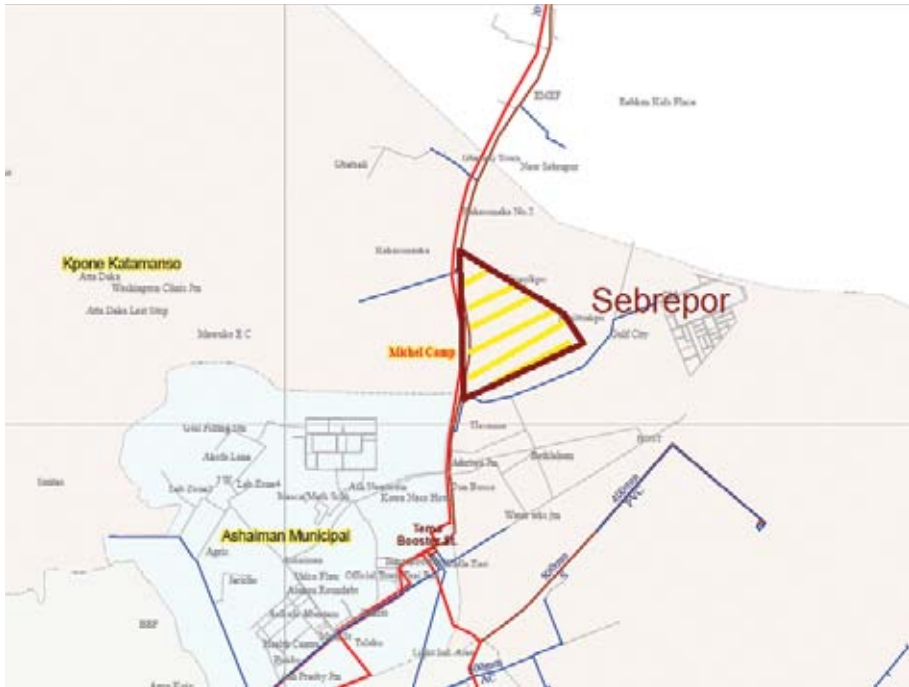


Figure 7.7: the GIS map of the GWC network. Source: GWC data team, 2018. According to the GWC data team, this map omits most of the service lines below 150mm thickness, including not only all 4-inch distribution lines in Sebrepur, but all such lines throughout almost the entire city. In addition, some of the transmission lines in Tema West are not yet included. However, the geographic extent of the network is accurately represented.

Other predicaments of the citywide collective level have little to do with the informal extension method, and more with the rapid urban growth and basic level of technology in general. Until recently, the GWC had only a rudimentary overview of who their customers were, where their customers were, and how much water their customers used. A big reason behind this is that until recently, most of this knowledge was not well stored, or even storable. As the digital information officer explains:

*“Let’s say, if I am the new billing representative in an area where there are 100 people on the books, but my predecessor has passed away or fallen sick, there is no way to trace where he was going to collect bills from. So I may only be able to find about 60 or 70 of them. The rest are somewhere I can’t find, or don’t exist anymore.” (Interview Akosa-Kusi, 2018)*

The other customers might never get billed again, despite the fact that of course, they continue to use water. To solve this, one of the current programs is to add a geotag to all customers in the database. Especially in rapidly developing countries like Ghana, where street naming frequently happens several decades after the initial construction of a settlement, having the exact coordinates of your customers is not an unnecessary luxury.

In order to improve the financial situation, the GWC is also trying to better track and accurately bill customer's water use. Currently, only 74% of active customers have a functioning meter, and the others are billed on (generally quite low) estimates, based on their last water bill. Why are so many customers without meters? Although every new customer connection starts with a meter, over time, the meters wear out, get stolen (they contain a brass element which is melted and sold on), are tampered with by customers in a Latourian cat and mouse game to reduce the water bill, or simply break down (Akosa-Kusi, 2018a). The new meters installed today are especially designed to solve such problems. They are made of otherwise worthless plastic, so theft is pointless. They are readable at a distance, to improve billing practices. Finally, they have a one-way flow channel, to prevent people from flipping the meter around during part of the month to reverse the flow, lowering the meter reading and their subsequent bill.

A final response to the inability of the network to deliver a constant flow is strengthening the backbone itself, and planning for future development. This is happening, but the pace is still below par. In 2003, the water supply stood at 320.000 m<sup>3</sup>/day, against a demand of 450.000, meaning that 71% of demand was being met (Adank et al., 2011; Denys N.V. & The GIS Company, 2012, p. 15). In 2012, the available supply had increased to 420.000, but demand had risen faster, to 640.000, pushing the demand-supply ratio down to 66%. A further 100% increase in the demand is estimated to occur within 15 years. If supply continues to expand at the same rate as it has in the past 10 years, the ratio of supply to demand will further deteriorate, and Accra's available water supply will be less than 50% of what is required.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, it is not only the production of clean water which is falling behind the need. The distribution mains and pumping installations are also starting to crack under the strain of delivering ever more water through a network designed for a smaller city and a smaller population. As the GWC's most recent evaluation report stated:

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45 Notably absent from such estimates is the fact that distribution problems further lower the amount of water that effectively reaches customers, as well as making an equitable distribution of the available water almost impossible.

*"From the various scenarios discussed, it was identified that the system suffers from inadequate pumping, bottlenecks within distribution, lack of pressure separation in addition to growing demand. Any attempt to increase production capacity must as a matter of necessity consider solving these hurdles as a foremost attempt. (...) In the distribution network, a lot of the DN 200 [200mm diameter] lines and below have become bottlenecks." (Denys N.V. & The GIS Company, 2012, p. 36)*

An additional factor in this may be the geographic location of Ghana's industrial base, in Tema Industrial Area: that area does receive adequate water, so there is no industrial lobby for better water provision (see figure 5). Despite the fact that Ghana's industry has not historically enjoyed a particularly strong lobbying influence (Whitfield, 2011), this may well have further lessened the pressure on the government to improve water supply.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile planning, as and when it is attempted, remains very difficult (Sedafor, 2018). Spatial urban expansion patterns are hard to predict and too quick to follow or adapt to. And the haphazard expansion patterns of the water pipe network in Accra's environment of urban sprawl, driven at the meso-level by impatient politicians and at the granular level by house-to-house self-help, continue to stretch the network.

After noting all these problems with their service, I feel it is important to note that the GWC crews are doing their utmost in a highly challenging environment, quite apart from the rapid and uncoordinated expansion that is taking place. They really do work in a rough environment. Even the mainlines are susceptible to public interference and plundering. As one staff officer explains, discussing the main transmission line from the Kpone Water Works to the Tema urban areas:

*"We have installed a parallel one to serve the communities along that line, because otherwise, they will sabotage our main [line]. That's how it goes all throughout Ghana. Anywhere we have a big pipe or catchment area, we try to satisfy the communities around it as well." (Interview Akosa-Kusi, 2018).*

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46 Notably, there are also important interactions between the electricity and the water sector. The erratic power supply affects the water treatment plants, interrupting service for up to 20 hours a day (Denys N.V. & The GIS Company, 2012, p. 24). This points to a subtle difference between the two amenities: while water supply is arguably more vital to the functioning of human life than electricity, uninterrupted electricity supply is clearly more important than uninterrupted water supply, as electricity cannot effectively be stored at this point. This was also one of the major sources of complaint of the infamous Dumsor Report, which infamously ranked neighborhoods on who had the most "disco lights" (on-off continuously).

## 7.4 Alternative water technologies

The previous two sections have set out respective the dynamics of collectivisation at the local and the citywide level, the accompanying technical and organisational difficulties and the resulting weak service at the citywide level. This section analyses how these circumstances have propelled the development of several alternative water provision systems, as more and more residents choose (and can afford to) arrange their water provision through more privatised means. The main technologies here are water tanker trucks, borehole drilling companies, sachet water providers, polytank water selling points and other informal business lines. This includes many residents who are in fact connected to the GWC network but do not wish to depend on it. I use these sectors as a lens to understand the dialectic between collective and individual systems, moderated through technology, and to gauge its current development.

Data from 2014 (see table 7.2 below) show the following pattern of water usage. Although 71% of residents are still connected to the GWC network, sachets have mostly replaced this as a source of drinking water, and are now the primary source of drinking water for the majority (70.9%) of Accra's residents. Especially in Greater Accra, the tanker and vendor industry is making increasing inroads, providing 17.4% of households with their regular water supply. Unfortunately this is a tricky category, which lumps two very different supply technologies together. Vendors often operate their own borehole and sell part of its produce to their neighbours, which makes them a very different enterprise from tankers.

|   | 1996     | 2000     | 2010     | 2010  | 2014     | 2014  |
|---|----------|----------|----------|-------|----------|-------|
|   | drinking | drinking | drinking | other | drinking | other |
| <b>Pipe-borne water connection</b>        | 49%      | 48%      | 55%      | 72%   | 14%      | 35%   |
| Pipe-borne water private conne            | 50%      | 51%      | 10%      | 12%   | 13%      | 37%   |
| Pipe-borne water standpipe/bou            | 0%       | 0%       | 0%       | 0%    | 0%       | 0%    |
| <b>Private bulk sources</b>               | 0%       | 0%       | 3%       | 8%    | 1%       | 7%    |
| Private borehole or well                  | 1%       | 0%       | 3%       | 0%    | 1%       | 17%   |
| Tanker supply<br>("Vendor" for 2010/2014) | 0%       | 0%       | 0%       | 0%    | 0%       | 0%    |
| <b>Private packaged sources</b>           | 0%       | 0%       | 1%       | 7%    | 1%       | 0%    |
| Bottled water                             | 0%       | 0%       | 26%      | 1%    | 71%      | 2%    |
| Sachet water                              | 0%       | 0%       | 0%       | 0%    | 0%       | 0%    |
| <b>Other</b>                              | 0%       | 0%       | 0%       | 0%    | 0%       | 0%    |

*Table 7.2: Sources of residents' drinking water and other water, from the 2000 and 2010 census for the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area, including Tema and its surrounding urban areas. Results for 1996 and 2014 for the same area except for Tema and its surrounding urban areas. (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000, 2013; 2014, pp. 89-92; OTUI, 1997, pp. 53-54).*

Other urban areas in Ghana do not have such a dominant sachet water industry, seeing instead an expanding use of wells, with over 1/3 of people now relying on those for their non-drinking water supply, and 20.2% for their drinking water. Notably, in Accra wells are hardly used for drinking water, because the groundwater so near the ocean is generally somewhat salty.

In short, the dominant or rising alternative water industries are boreholes, tankers and sachets. In fact, the most recent dominant trend appears to be the replacement of both pipe-borne and well water by sachets, at least for drinking purposes. How do these auxiliary industries work, and what characteristics have made especially these solutions rise so steeply recently? In the next section, I go into each one briefly.

The Greater Accra urban area has a serious industry of boreholes. This is a technology that has advanced in large strides over the past decades. Where in the past, relatively rudimentary technologies were used to dig boreholes, first Chinese and later Indian machinery was brought in which pushed Ghana's borehole industry forward (Agbeka, 2018). Today Ghana's borehole drilling industry is dominated by Indian entrepreneurs, who own most of the productive capital. Through technological advances, the costs for a simple but professionally built borehole for domestic use have fallen to 8.000-13.500 cedi (€1.500 - 2.500) (Agbeka, 2018).<sup>47</sup> In comparison, a connection to the GWC network comes in at around 700 cedi (€140) on average (Musah, 2018), but the price steeply rises depending on one's distance to the network, with a cost around 10.000 (€1.800) and beyond for distances from 100 meters upwards (Akosa-Kusi, 2018a). Coupled with the unreliability of the GWC network pressure, this has severely changed the calculus for individual homeowners.

Although the cost calculus between boreholes and GWC connections is shifting, this option still remains quite restricted to the wealthy and the well-established. Civil servants make up a large part of the industry's customer base, in addition to politicians who often get the borehole for a sachet water production plant. Other customers are wealthy businesspeople and gated communities or 'estates' (Agbeka, 2018). Especially in the wealthier communities now developing in Accra's outskirts, this is increasingly becoming an alternative to the GWC network. In our research, we encountered areas where almost every single house had its own borehole, such as Bulasu.

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47 An unrelated note: our interviewee indicated that for a government tender, he would charge 3-4 that amount. Most likely the additional money would go to a politician's front company. The engineering company itself would receive roughly the same price as they would for a private drilling job.

However, it is clear that the borehole industry does not provide a reliable and sustainable option for water provisioning. For one, the groundwater in much of Accra's urban area is too salty (Agbeka, 2018). Additionally, ground water levels do not replenish quickly enough. Estimated water demand in 2012 stood at 234 million m<sup>3</sup> per year, and was expected to double before 2030. Meanwhile, calculations from Switch (Adank et al., 2011, p. 15) estimate the replenishing capacity of Accra's groundwater reservoirs to be around 38 million m<sup>3</sup>/year. The infiltration rate (rainwater filtering down to become groundwater) is also falling as more and more of the city is covered in concrete (Interview Schut, 2018). This means that around the year 2020, only 10% of Greater Accra's water supply could sustainably be drawn from the groundwater (assuming this to be optimally distributed throughout the city, which it is not), and this number would continue to fall. Coupled with the fact that much of this groundwater is salty, this makes boreholes at best a partial replacement for the collective water provision network.

Another prominent alternative water supply system is the water tanker industry. This term refers to a truck with a water tank mounted on it, generally with a capacity of 5,000-20,000 liters. Although the option has been around for as long as motorised transport was available, a drastic expansion in use of tanker water took place in late '80s and early '90s. At first, these tankers got their water by tapping the GWCL fire hydrants illegally (Odai & Andam, 2002, p. 3), but as the industry grew, this was not a tenable practice. So in 1992, government pushed the tanker operators to get organised in order for them to be regulated effectively. The tanker owner-operators formed the Private Water Tanker Owners Association (PWTOA), and special depots were created to supply these tankers.

At the time of formation of the PWTOA around 1990 (sources differ on the exact year), some 30-40 tanker wagons were active (Odai & Andam, 2002). However, the industry quickly took off at a larger scale. In 1996, Accra had ten hydrants filling points (so-called 'giraffes') for water service trucks (OTUI, 1997, p. 102). One of these was GWC-owned, but the others were run by private associations, either within the PWTOA or within similar structures. A 2002 investigation found some 1,000 tanker wagons to be active throughout Greater Accra (Odai & Andam, 2002, p. 4). At the time, 5 depots were designated especially for this work in Greater Accra. Since then, the industry appears to have decreased somewhat again (though estimates differ wildly), but membership of the PWTOA still stood at 400 in 2009 (GWP, 2009, p. 6). It should be noted that these members are generally owners, not driver-owners, so they may well own more than one truck each (Sarpong & Abrampah, 2006, p. 57). It is

unclear how many tankers are in operation today. GWC personnel estimated that the industry is not a growing one (Akosa-Kusi, 2018b).

These tankers serve an important role in bringing treated water to those residents who are living outside the GWC network range and who cannot afford boreholes, or whose area has salty groundwater. However, the business is a rather informally structured one, and as such the tankers are often seen as a nuisance, especially by those who are connected to the GWC mainlines. Tanker companies are depicted as leeches who take scarce water from the mainlines, caused taps to run dry even sooner. In times of scarcity, this has led to political pressure on GWC to temporarily disconnect vendors and trucks from the network (Sarpong & Abrampah, 2006, p. 83), in effect rationing in favor of those holding a physical connection rather than a resale connection. First reported by Odai and Andam (2002), we also find later instances of this in Sarpong and Abrampah (2006, p. 83) and Rouse (2013). Private ownership of the water company appeared to have no significant impact on this tug-of-war, as the same occurred again under the management of AquaVitens, in 2010 (GNA, 2010).

The tanker owners and operators naturally resist this frame. As one driver put it: “We are not mere charlatans selling water to unfortunate needy households for money. Far from that, we are performing a critical social role of giving access to water to needy communities and helping the government to meet a critical social responsibility.” (Sarpong & Abrampah, 2006, p. 46) On this, the tankers receive support from water governance expert Rouse (2013, pp. 175-176), who notes that Ghana’s management of water tankering operations through the structure of the PWTOA (Agyemang-Mensah, 2015) and other such associations, coupled with a system of dedicated filling hydrants, “could have provided a model for the world”. As he notes: “Tankers will be necessary to reach the un-served until the distribution systems have been refurbished and extended.” It should be noted that this system of filling hydrants, even when it was fully active, was quite insufficient to supply all tankers. Wagons had to wait for up to 6 hours, in order to be served (Sarpong & Abrampah, 2006, p. 58)

Who are the primary customer base for these tankers? There is a popular perception that they mainly serve the wealthier strata. This is also what we found in our fieldwork of Accra’s newly developing suburbs, where we found several upper-class communities which had been disappointed by the GWC’s ability to deliver, and had opted to source their water from tankering operations instead. On the other hand, the rich are certainly not their only customer base. It should be noted that piped water is still not ubiquitous, and not readily available to the urban poor. A 2005 report found that only 15% of the



poor have access to piped water either directly or via yard taps (Sarpong & Abrampah, 2006).

How do these groups deal with the high price of tanker water? They simply buy less. The research found that the poorer residents without connections consumed around 25% of the amount that pipe-connected citizens receive, (PURC, 2005, p. 8) but pay approximately the same total monthly amount of money for their water supply (PURC, 2005, p. 18). Tankered water was found to be, on average, nine times more expensive than piped water (PURC, 2005, p. 18). It is unlikely that this has changed radically since then. During fieldwork, we found that wealthier households paid around 300 cedi (€60) per month for their tankered water, which with the average consumption of a well-off household would come down to approximately 10x the water price of pipe-borne water.

In general though it appears that even for the poor, the price of a liter of water is less of an issue than its availability. Research consistently finds that connecting is the prohibitory cost (Akosa-Kusi, 2018a; Sarpong & Abrampah, 2006, p. 37; World Bank, 2018), and that the water bill itself is a relatively small expenditure in every household (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014, p. 143). However, this finding is not undisputed either. Sarpong and Abrampah (2006, p. 41) find from focus group that poor households in non-GWC-networked areas frequently spend >20% of their income on water. And in all likelihood, this is still the majority of poor households. As a recent EU report found: “Because of the legal and financial barriers faced by the poor, it is mostly the wealthier strata of the population that is connected to the GWCL network, which enables them to profit from the considerably lower rates per unit of water than people who are not able to connect. The majority of people in the GAMA (Greater Accra Metropolitan Area), especially the poor, depend on alternative water service providers.” (Adank et al., 2011, p. 44)

In short, the tankering industry is part of a rich tapestry of alternative water supply systems, an industry which is rapidly maturing, certainly in Greater Accra.

A final alternative to pipe-borne water is the sachet water industry. This technology has emerged from the practice during the 1970s and 1980s to sell water by the cup along the road, which in the 1990s developed into little plastic bags, tied up by hand. In the late 1990s, the industry got another technological upgrade when the Chinese brought in heat-sealing machines (Stoler, Weeks, & Fink, 2012). Nowadays, sachets typically consist of 500 ml plastic bags, heat-sealed on either end, and sold in batches of 20 for

home use or individually along the road. In fact, the sachet industry has spawned an entire new line of employment for low-skilled women, who sell refrigerated sachet water directly to car drivers and passengers at traffic lights for 0,20 cedi (€0,04) from plastic bowls carried on their heads.

These sachets are cheap to produce, extremely easy to transport and perfectly suitable for sale in bulk or as individual packages. Colloquially known as ‘pure water’, they are also generally perceived as higher quality than pipe-borne water and borehole water (Stoler, Fink, et al., 2012). This has caused the consumption of water sachets to rise exponentially in Greater Accra over the past years. Estimates of the percentage of Accra’s population using this as their primary source of drinking water range from 26% to 71% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013, 2014).

In Accra’s popular discourse, sachets are primarily discussed in terms of their negative environmental impact, as they constitute a major part of Accra’s enormous plastic waste problem. Discarded everywhere by its users throughout the year, these little plastic bags lump together to clog Accra’s water ways and drains by the millions, through which these hygienic water storage tools ironically causes water-borne diseases. During the rainy season these blockages often lead to flooding, in particular in the lower-lying areas of the city such as the extremely dense Old Fadama slum area next to Jamestown. However, they have potential health benefits as well, as they interrupt the bacterial chain of infection. Stoler et al. (2012) find that sachet use is associated with higher levels of self-reported overall health in women, and lower likelihood of diarrhea in children.

In short, there is a proliferation of alternatives to the GWC network. See figure 7.8 below for an overview of the current system.

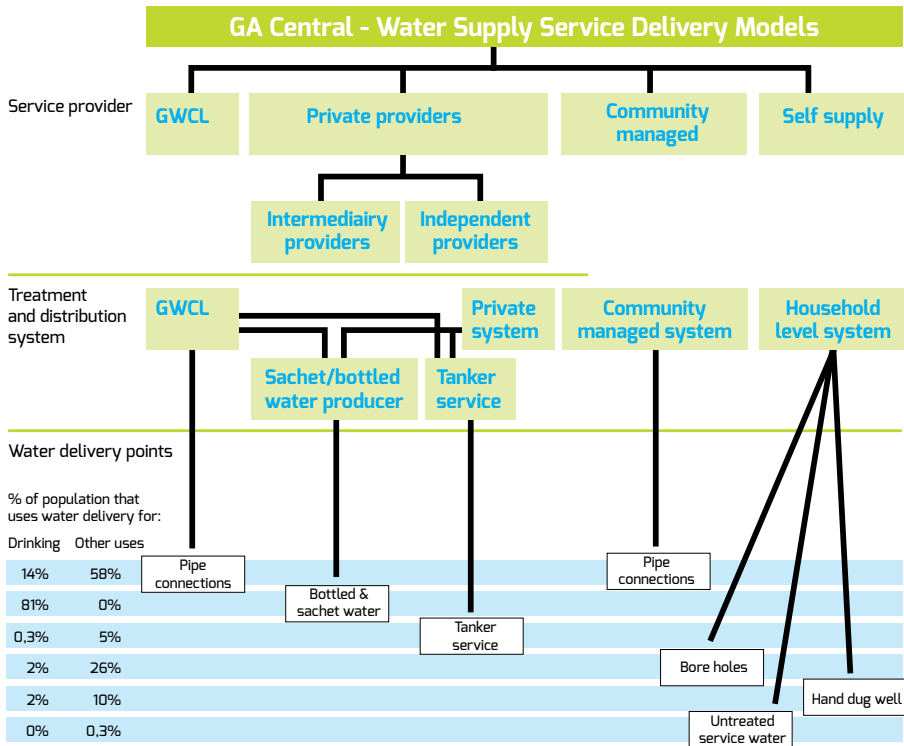


Figure 7.8: An overview of the patchwork of water sources used by Greater Accra's residents. (WASH coalition, 2014, p. 35). N.B.: the numbers given here are for a single municipality in Greater Accra. For a better numerical overview of the system, see table 7.2 above, at the start of empirical section 4.

What does the growth of these sectors of individualised water provision mean for the dynamics in and around the collective sector? Until recently, there was no question that the GWC pipe network was the dominant and indeed universally preferred option of water supply. In 2005, a survey found that the near universal reply to “What is your preferred water source?” was: GWC (PURC, 2005, p. 13). Today, people still like to get GWC water, as this water source is still safer than borehole and protected well water (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014, p. 98).<sup>48</sup> However, the balance is shifting. Whilst in

48 It should be noted that, while the relative quality of water is shifting, customers may not immediately pick up on this. Research on user perceptions of drinking water quality showed that people mostly assess water by looking at its color (80%), smelling for chlorine (10%) or simply tasting the water (10%) (Sarpong & Abrampah, 2006, p. 44).

2006, it was still the case that sachet water was generally inferior to pipe-borne water (Sarpong & Abrampah, 2006), today sachet and bottled water is generally of far better quality than piped water. So the question arises: for how long will the GWC network be the generally preferred option? For drinking water, people have already switched massively to other sources. And certainly in the suburbs, residents are increasingly using tankers and wells for other water needs as well.

One clue to the future of the network may be provided by a neighbourhood meeting I attended during the most recent fieldwork round. The meeting in question was the Residents Association of Okatabanman, a neighbourhood located about halfway between the Accra city center and the northern urban fringe. The topic of debate was whether the neighbourhood should attempt to secure a connection to the GWC water network. Like in most of the newly growing neighbourhoods in the outer parts of Greater Accra, Okatabanman's residents had largely been left to its own devices in terms of connecting to utility networks. In general, the enthusiasm for the proposal was sub-par, as the costs were seen as very high, and participants saw no reliable way to transcend the inevitable collective action problems associated with the funding and construction of such a piece of infrastructure.

At that point, unexpectedly two of the most prominent association members stepped forward, saying:

*"Even though we ourselves already have boreholes ourselves, we feel that treated water should be available for all. This is a civilised neighbourhood. So we are putting up 1,000 cedi each as a seed investment, to be repaid once other contributions are added."*

Such citizen initiative is laudable, and I have heard of similar actions in other neighbourhoods. But in the larger scheme of things, it appears to be rather the exception than the rule. More and more of those settling on Accra's outskirts appear to decide that a pipe-borne water connection, nice as it would be to have, is just not worth the trouble, and rely on boreholes and tankers instead.

It remains to be seen where this will end. Is piped water going to go the way of telephone landlines, a technological relic of physical connectedness replaced by a web of individual solutions? All in all, we have seen over the past century a historical reversal in the water sector. While pipe-borne water used to be a provision for a small (colonial) elite, with boreholes serving the *hoi polloi*, the situation is now largely reversed. More

than half of Accra's 5 million residents are in one way or another connected to the GWC pipe network. This rapid and on-going expansion of the user base has caused its service to become rather unreliable and increasingly sparse. Consequently the wealthier strata, especially in Accra's burgeoning peri-urban areas, are opting out of the GWC network as a primary water supply, constructing private boreholes and using tanker water instead.

### Framework applied to water

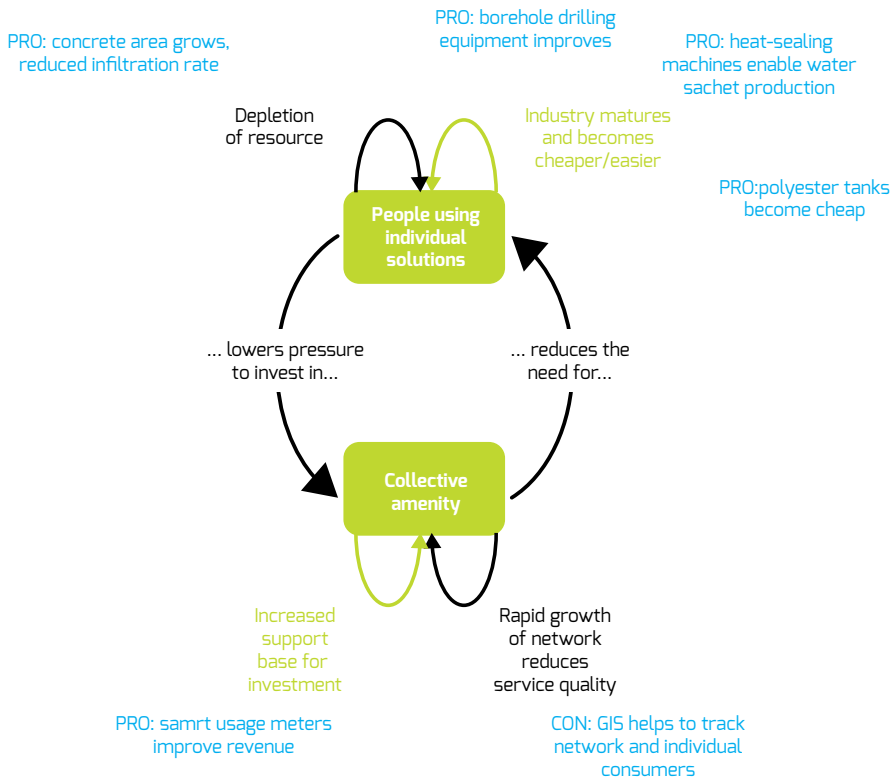


Figure 7.9: an analytical view on the collectivisation and individualisation dynamics in the water sector.

Figure 7.9 above shows this dynamic in an analytical framework. Its basic dynamics are positive feedback loops within both the collectivisation and the individualisation sectors. As the collective amenity grows, more and more people are included in it,

strengthening it with their money and their political support. But the same dynamic works for the individual provision sectors: as more and more people opt for a borehole, the drilling industry matures, becomes cheaper and more omnipresent, etc., with the same dynamics applying to sachets, water tankers and other privatised solutions. Throughout this entire dynamic, we see the effects of changing technology shifting the balance. As the technologies for private solutions improve, they rise. But as smart meters, online payment systems and GIS monitoring systems help the GWC to track its customers and its network, the collective solution becomes more feasible.

## 7.5 Comparison with electricity

To better understand the decentralising expansion dynamics of the water network and its associated challenges for the backbone, as well as its social consequences, it is instructive to make the comparison with a somewhat similar utility: electricity. In this section, I briefly set out the expansion dynamics of the electricity network, following the same analytical pathway as in the preceding three sections for the water sector. It is important to note here that this is a minor comparative case, with fewer interviews, fewer field observations, and therefore a briefer treatment in this chapter. It is, in fact, a kind of ‘robustness check’ of the theory established in the previous sections. Time-strapped readers could therefore elect to skip this section and get straight to the conclusions.

The first electricity supply in Ghana appeared during the colonial era (Kumi, 2017). The Gold Coast Railway Administration established the first public electricity generation system in 1914, to supply electricity for the operations of the railway sector in Sekondi (ISSER, 2005). Subsequently, other spots appeared, as factories, hospitals and schools installed the first diesel generators. At first, the network grew in a slow, measured manner, with the governor giving specific permission for every extension to the network as late as the 1940s (Director of Prisons, 1947).

Just before independence, electricity had been extended to major population centers including Kumasi, Tema, Accra, Nsawam, Tamale and Bolgatanga under the auspices of the Public Works Department (PWD) (Kumi, 2017). However, at this juncture the reach of electricity networks was still very limited. Archival files of the Ministry of Works and Housing show that in the early 1960s, the electricity mains were only just being extended into much of central Accra, let alone the (then) outskirts of the city. A major juncture occurred in 1972, when the Akosombo Dam came online, bringing

massive new capacity (912 MW) to the network. Several decades later, the network had grown much in the urban area, but almost the entire countryside was still off-grid (Kumi, 2017). In 1989, Rawlings' government committed to achieve universal access to electricity, at a time when only 15-20% of the population was connected.

How can we couple this back to the analysis of the water network expansion in terms of regime type, political time horizon and the accompanying investment interconnection between investment in the backbone or in the distribution network? The regime type is the same for both utilities, and we see roughly the same pattern of expansion: regimes which did not expect to stay in place for long did not make this kind of long-term investments, and their degree of populism determined to what degree they grew the distribution network, either by constructing new service lines or by simply allowing people to extend these on their own.

Today, Ghana's electricity networks are run by an independent state company: the Electricity Company of Ghana. Unlike water, there is a single company which runs electricity throughout the country, both in urban and in rural areas. As it is relatively cheap and straightforward to extend power lines compared to water or roads, electricity is often one of the first amenities to reach a newly developing neighbourhood. In most cases, the electricity lines arrive in newly developing areas ahead of the water pipe network. In fact, the two are closely related: GWC managers generally try to lay their mainlines along the exact same routes as the electricity wiring to ease planning (Interview Amoatuy, 2018). The main reason behind this is that it is far simpler and cheaper to build new electricity lines. A 100-meter stretch costs around 2.500 cedi, compared to 10.000 cedi for 100 meters of water piping, which costs far more material, and requires digging and burying at a meter depth along the entire length.

### **Recent modalities of network expansion**

So by what processes does the network expand? Much like in the water sector, the main driving force is citizen initiative. But this manifests itself in very different ways, in different configurations with other parties. I found four main ways: organised development projects, legal private initiative, illegal private initiative, and politically driven expansions. I discuss each of these in turn.

The first one, directly mentioned by ECG officers in interviews, is in the form of a planned Development Project. Every district manager has funding for a limited amount of ECG-funded geographical expansion, which is planned year by year. This is generally funded through local taxes, through the government budgets like



Rural Electrification Program, the Urban Electrification Program, and using money from international donors. Such projects are run through the Regional and Head offices, which assist with the planning and procurement of materials. These are the Development projects, where an entire new area is connected, and residents afterward only have to pay for the connection to their front door.

There are, however, several other methods of expansion, since the pace of Development projects is generally too slow for many residents. The first one of these, like in the water sector, is by resident initiative, which can take several different forms. Those with enough impatience and money can apply to the ECG District office to get a self-funded extension to their home, where the main cost is adding a few electricity poles (including all the wiring) to the end of the line, to reach their home. As Mary Liabor, Maintenance Engineer in the ECG Afienya District, explains: “Community members come together, write to us, “we need power in this area”. Then quickly the District Engineer takes it up, write a proposal, does drawings for approval, and then gives them a quote. In these cases, customers pay for the full cost of the extension to their home.” Within neighbourhoods, I found that the most common method is the same as in the water sector: residents organise through an RA, pool their resources, and build the network bit by bit.

Every new extension benefits others around that house, who can also connect once their neighbour has paid for the poles to be set up, without paying such a prohibitive cost. This often also happens by citizen initiative. In 6 out of the 9 neighbourhoods we studied, the electricity network came in through lobbying and funds collection by a Residents Association. In 7 out of those 9 neighbourhoods, residents subsequently also funded and put up streetlights themselves, to prevent break-ins and robberies during the otherwise pitch-black nights.

However, not all communities follow such proper procedures. Liabor continues:

*“In some places without network, the community decides to extend it without coming to the ECG. They call the so-called goro boys, people who have just a little knowledge of electricity. These guys find an area which has no electricity, and tell people: oh, we work for ECG, we can extend power to you. That is why you see the users getting just any [type of] pole at all, to pull it in from far away, and then they extend low voltage to them. Which is dangerous.” (Interview Liabor, 2018)*

Often, these connections go unnoticed for long periods, as there may be some distance or thick vegetation between the known urban area and the newly developing settlement. These illegal connections often also happen without the full awareness of the residents in question. Although this seems rather incredible, our interlocutors at the ECG explained how it might happen. Many of the so-called *goro boys*, who illegally connect people, also work for bona fide companies. In their spare time, they go door-to-door, wearing their uniforms, and offer to connect people to the network. When the power then dysfunctions, or voltage is too low, residents actually go to the ECG to complain about poor service. The ECG discovers many newly connected households this way.

As electric wires are far cheaper than water pipes, extensions to the ECG network are frequently also built by the very poor, who often occupy uncompleted structures in the peri-urban areas. The construction of a new dwelling in Ghana's suburbs is often a process of several years, as the owner slowly scrapes the funds together for each next step. In the meantime, he will generally ask a poor relative or acquaintance to live in the structure, rent-free, as a caretaker. Often, though, these caretakers get friends or relatives in without the owner's knowledge, often even catching rent from them. In many other cases, structures are simply squatted, especially in urban fringe districts where building density is low and social control is limited. Polythene bags are used to cover the windows, to avoid visibility, and any number of people might be staying inside an uncompleted structure. Such squatters or semi-squatters often cannot afford a regularised connection, so they just reconnect illegally whenever possible.

A final way of network growth is through politically driven projects. Where the Development Projects are planned by the ECG District itself, politicians often have personal budgets which they use to connect additional communities to electricity. This often happens especially close to election time, and in a haphazard fashion. With limited budgets, politicians push the ECG personnel to connect as many people as possible. This leads to a poorly planned network structure, and inadequate materials for the larger network, such as 10-meter wooden poles, leading through a thickly grown forest where trees touch the lines. As soon as there is a storm, the network breaks down. But the alternative, using taller metal pylons, is doubly as expensive, which means that the politician only gets to boast half as much community service for the same money. And while engineers rush out to connect as many communities as possible, the backbone infrastructure is neglected. Untreated poles are used for the connection lines, which in Ghana's tropical climate get rotten within a few years. Under-sized conductors are installed, hampering further extension of the network.

At a smaller scale, such politically driven expansion happens in purely illegal fashions as well. Often, the local Assembly Member will use electricity as a campaigning issue. In Liabor's words:

*"He can tell them [the residents] anything. 'I will give you power, I will pay your bills.' Meanwhile, he is simply getting goro boys to connect them and nobody is paying at all. But the people don't realise this. Because the Assemblyman is from government, they think it's correct, and then they are angry when we come to disconnect them. Because the hinterlands, the villages, most of them are not enlightened [educated]. They think you can just get power [without paying]."*

As election time draws nearer, there is an additional dynamic which complicates the ECG manager's work. Although the most expensive part of getting electricity is extending the mains, getting a metered private connection is also not cheap, even once the lines are near enough. Through the Rural Electrification projects, government provides free meters to those who cannot afford their own. However, in election time these are handed out at a crash pace, leading to more chaos in the system. Eduful explains, from his experience in a peri-urban district:

*"...election is very close. So you get meters all over the place. They call some of them "political meters". They just install them, install them, around elections. (...) you don't even know where those are, who are holding those political meters. At the end of the day, we are supposed to go and capture [register] them. They are normally supplied by the government. We have our meters, but if it is the Rural Electrification project, then government supports and supplies their own meters. Those ones, the meters are all free. But because of the chaos when the meters are distributed, it takes a loooong time to go around and find out who actually got the meters. So in my view, these are some of the reasons why power is very unstable sometimes. Because, no mistake, the communities deserve it! But we should also look at the reliability of the network. And then it's on and off, on and off, that kind of thing."<sup>49</sup>*

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49 These "political meters", produced and distributed as part of the rural electrification project, are also frequently traded on the black market (Interview Tweneboah-Kodua, 2016)

### Problems resulting from a sprawled-out network

This wide diversity of network expansion dynamics has led to a network which is even more sprawled-out than GWC’s water pipe network. In Greater Accra, it is estimated that a full 93% of residences are now connected to the electricity network (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014, p. xix). Obviously, this has led to a number of problems.

The most visible of these problems is a very simple backbone problem: there is not enough electricity to serve all those connected to the network. As I first visited Ghana in 2014, the very first local word I learned was *dumsor*.<sup>50</sup> Composed of the Twi words *dum* and *so*, meaning ‘off’ and ‘on’, ‘*dumsor dumsor*’ is generally used to refer to the recurrent phenomenon of power outages and load shedding. Ghana suffered severe power rationing in the years 1983–1984, 1997–1998, 2003, 2006–2007 and from 2011 to date (Kumi, 2017). The phenomenon has been getting more severe since 2001, when lower water levels at the Akosombo Dam caused its electricity generation capacity to drop drastically. The energy crisis was particularly severe in the years around 2010, and was used extensively in political campaigning at the time. At the time of writing, the issue was still unresolved.

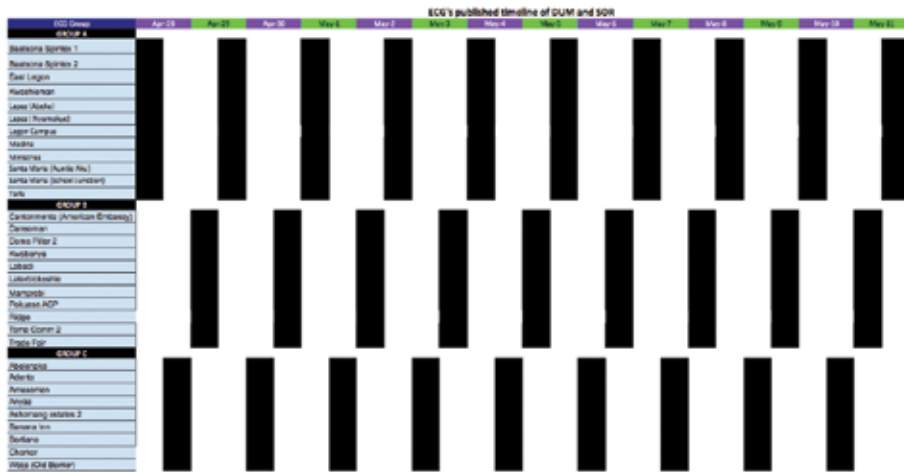


Figure 7.10: The ECG’s published schedule of rolling blackouts, grouping Greater Accra into three zones which should receive power by rotation. (Aidoo, 2015)

Although the outages were planned as a rolling blackout, with equal allocations for all neighbourhoods (see figure 7.10 above), research clearly showed that this was not the

50 Far from being an obscure piece of local jargon, the word has its own Wikipedia page and is used in official documents. The word also provided a rallying flag for several high-profile citizen initiatives, including the detailed and well-researched Dumsor Report (Aidoo, 2015).

case (see figure 7.11 below). A combination of routing problems, network failures and corruption meant that the delivery to Ministries, for instance, was 95% of the time, and even the scheduled rolling blackouts did not happen.

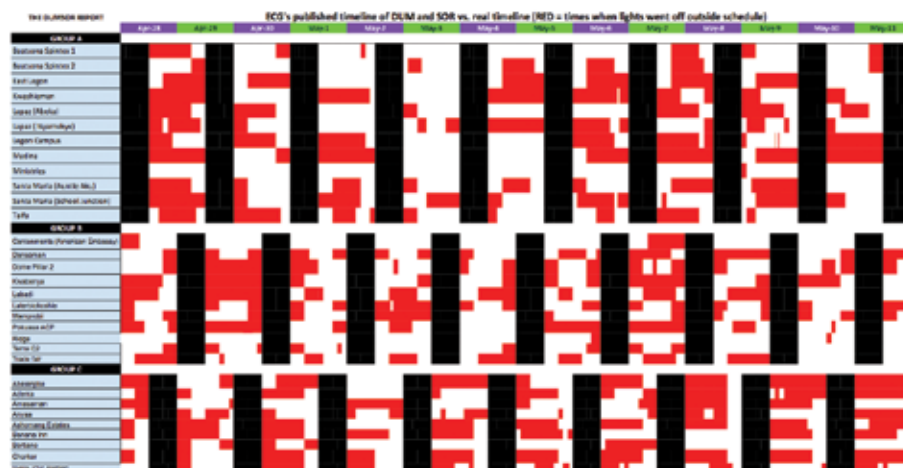


Figure 7.11: The actual power supply schedule (Aidoo, 2015). Note that several areas received more than the allotted power, such as the Ministries neighbourhood.

Some suggested commercial motivations for the unequal delivery patterns. For instance, industry expert dr. Charles Wereko-Brobby said that: “the only schedule that matters is where ECG thinks it will get paid.” (quoted in Aidoo, 2015) However, this seems unlikely to be the main driver. Given that we know from ECG District managers (Interviews Liabor, Eduful, 2018) that the wealthy are often among the most difficult to convince to pay, it seems unlikely that the ECG coffers benefit much from serving Ridge better than Odorkor. And given that we know from officers at the GWC (Interview Musah, 2018) that state and semi-state organisations frequently do not pay each other, it seems far more likely that corruption is the main driver of this unequal delivery.

A final challenge the ECG faces is that of cost recovery. As is the case for the GWC, many of its clients are connected illegally. Many others were once connected legally but have slipped out of the books, one way or another. In addition, much power is simply lost in transmission, because of the poor construction and outdated materials used in many parts of the network. Currently, transmission and distribution losses account for some 22% of total electricity consumption annually (Kumi, 2017).

## ECG Response

So how does the ECG work to keep control over its network, to keep the massively sprawled-out network more or less functioning, and to prevent it from over-stretching the backbone infrastructure too much?

The initial narrative the organisation projects, just like the GWC, is one of strict control: from the district over its geographical area, and from the head office control over the district units. George Eduful, former District Manager and current Research Manager in the ECG's R&D Division, described to us how the ECG Districts are kept on a short leash. "The Region, they oversee the Districts. So the Districts handle the minor-minor things, but even for those the Region has to give them approval. If somebody says that they want a power line extended to his house, then the District can handle it only up to 2 poles." The Regions, in turn, are overseen by the organisation's national headquarters, where Eduful himself works.

But although HQ insists on tight control of the regions, the network appears to be in fact quite decentralised. In fact, there is not even a central map of the whole network at HQ. The only network maps exist in local District offices, which in case of larger projects are pieced together to form an overview picture. And while it seems likely that ECG district managers have a tighter control over their supply lines and distribution patterns, because everything is above-ground and flows can be easily and precisely measured, this did not appear to be the case. As Mrs Liabor explained, it can take years to find an illegal connection, and often involves stumbling upon entire new settlements.

Another major difference with the water sector is found in how the ECG handles resident-built connections to their network. Recapitulating, the GWC *de facto* leaves ownership and management of resident-built distribution lines to those residents themselves, demanding only that people get permission from their neighbours when they connect onward from their previous self-built lines. The ECG takes a different approach, quite a pragmatic one. When they find improvised or illegal connections to their network, they generally try to legalise these and straighten them out. Often, people might not be fined for connecting illegally, although in high-profile cases the ECG may take a stricter approach. This is a major dynamic of urban electricity network expansion: the ECG simply adopts resident-built extensions into their own network. In the process, they upgrading the quality of the lines, poles and conductors to their own standards. From that point forward the extension forms an integral part of the network.

This forms a sharp contrast with the water sector, where the GWC is faced with similarly resident-built extensions. The best the GWC can do to institutionalise these, is to require permission notes and try to enforce quality standards. In general, it is much harder for the GWC to keep its network in hand than for the ECG, quite simply because water pipes are buried. This makes it harder to observe wear and tear, to check their quality more generally, to measure flow rates, and to even just observe new connections. Put more bluntly, the GWC is stuck with an enormous jumble of (often low quality) resident-constructed and resident-managed distribution lines everywhere in the city, especially in the rapidly sprawling outskirts. Now, after decades of barely-controlled network expansion, they are at least regaining an overview of the entire network and its quality. But the ECG situation, of owning and effectively controlling the entire network, is a distant dream.

Notably, some residents do not accept the regularisation, and simply reconnect their illegal line as soon as the ECG officials have walked away. This does not only apply to the very poor, who simply cannot afford a proper connection and an electricity bill. It also applies to a group of very wealthy electricity users. As Liabor explains, in a surprisingly gentle manner:

*“There are places, you serve them a document, disconnect them, and the very next day, they are connected again. They don’t care, they are not prepared to regularise anything. (...) Many of these people feel that whenever anyone might take them to court, they can simply pay their way out.”*

In such cases, the ECG eventually does scale up its response.

*“The ones who refuse us, who don’t want to do business, the really stubborn ones, we make an example of them. So those people, you go there, and they release their dog to you. Sometimes they can bring out guards with guns to chase you. Some of them are very rough. (...) [For such situations] we have a Directorate of Legal Services. Because I’m thinking, the way the city grows, and if a lot of people are doing this through tricky means... We tend to prefer to regularise them, though.”*

To further counter the illegal expansion through *goro boys* and other illicit means, the ECG also puts significant resources into public education through posters, social media and outdoor campaigns, urging people not to connect through middle men, but



always to communicate directly with the ECG District Office (see figure 7.12 below).



*Figure 7.12: A poster in the ECG District Office of Afienya, an agglomeration on the northeastern fringe of Greate Accra, encouraging residents to only do business with the ECG directly.*

Unfortunately, I do not have sufficient insight into the ECG organisation to know exactly what measures they are taking at the central level to improve their overview of the network<sup>51</sup>. It was our impression that this overview does not exist at a highly centralised level, but rather at the district level, where digitised AutoCAD images of the local network are kept. However, two important technological factors make it easier for the ECG to control their network. First, electricity flow throughout the network is far more easily monitored than water flow, so the ECG does not have to worry about where their electricity is going: they can read the usage and/or loss of each district, and leave the internal monitoring to that district's management. Second, as the ECG actually incorporates resident-built connections into their network, they

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<sup>51</sup> We found it harder to access the ECG than to conduct interviews at the GWC, where we were welcomed with open arms. Then again, the ECG is a much bigger organization.

have a far more complete overview of their network than the GWC. That is not to say the ECG has a complete grip on their network; one district operative told us that it sometimes takes years before illegal connections are discovered. But they do not have the problem of controlling a structurally unknowable underground pipe network, laid in many cases primarily by residents and invisible ever after.

Besides countering illegal network extensions, improving cost recovery and limiting the unplanned and uncontrolled growth of the network, the ECG has also worked very hard in recent years to expand the capacity of the network's backbone. In a crash project initiated in 2009 and finished in 2013, a major hydro-electric dam came online at the Bui national park in the north-east of the country. Various other smaller electricity plants were installed during the same period, in a bid to catch up with the rapidly growing demand.

Heavy political pressure and the accompanying funds also led the ECG to use several less conventional, and less sustainable, ways to quickly raise their power generating capacity. In a last-ditch effort to shore up electricity supply before the 2016 election, the ruling government rented several Turkish vessels with massive power generators installed on them. This effort did not tip the scales; the opposition won. But these vessels, shown in figure 7.13, continue to float offshore and provide Ghana with the requisite additional power, at considerable expense. In the same package of emergency measures was a modular mobile power generating station from the Texan company Ameri, which is also still running, and still causing political rifts (Daily Graphic, 2018).



*Figure 7.13: The Osman Khan, one of the Turkish generator ships which has been temporarily relieving Ghana's power crisis since 2015.*

Finally, the ECG is currently being partially privatised. Following a contested and politically troubled bidding process (Gadugah, 2018; Ghanaweb, 2018), a consortium including the Philippine and Angolese state electricity companies has taken over 49% of the ECG, for a period of 20 years. Such a privatisation effort also occurred in the water sector, when management of the GWC was handed over to Aqua Vitens Rand Ltd., a consortium of Dutch and South African companies. In that instance, the outcomes were below par on almost every metric, and the experiment was blown off after five years. As for the prospects in the ECG case, that remains a big question mark. Our interlocutors at the company itself were skeptical.

### **Privatisation dynamics**

Section 4 of this chapter described a widespread proliferation of alternative industries for water provision. In the electricity sector, there are certainly alternatives available, but they are not nearly as widespread. The latest census showed that in no region of the country more than 1% of the households had their own generator. That does not mean that everyone is connected to the electricity network, but in Greater Accra, 87% of households use electricity from the ECG mains as their primary source of lighting. Electricity is still seen as somewhat expensive: many people use the ECG pre-payment system to keep control over their electricity bills, and cooking happens predominantly using charcoal or gas. But we do not see the kind of widespread proliferation of alternative industries as in the water provision sector.

Why? Apparently, the alternative is simply not attractive at this point. One solution is to use a generator, but that is expensive and requires constant spending on fuel, not to mention the noise and the fact that these machines are often stolen. Other technologies such as solar or wind are simply not strong enough yet. A final problematic factor is the lack of storage options for electricity. For water, it is possible to store enough water for a week or more in a ubiquitous available 10.000-liter polytank. But there are no affordable batteries on the market yet, in which one can store enough electricity for a few days of residential use.

## Framework applied to electricity



Figure 7.14: an analytical overview of the collectivisation and individualisation dynamics in the electricity sector.

Summing up, the electricity network expands in a fashion which is at least as haphazard as the water network. And compared to water, there is an equal amount of citizen initiative. Similarly, both the legal and the illegal connections are often laid in a haphazard fashion, putting pressure on the mainline, drawing power as well as causing leakages and transformer overloads. These dynamics are moderated importantly by the different technology for the two sectors. It is easier to monitor an electricity network than a water network, because electricity is transported above ground and flows are easily measured. Hence, the ECG is able to keep almost their entire network in their own hands. However, there is an important difference in terms of privatisation

dynamics. For water, wealthy residents are increasingly finding their own, off-grid solutions. In electricity, this is not happening, because the technology for private supply (including storage) is not affordable and effective enough compared to drawing electricity from the grid. This also changes the political dynamic, shown in figure 7.14 above: where improvement of the water backbone infrastructure is lagging behind, the electricity sector is getting serious emergency funding for capacity expansion, because it is impossible to do without the collective amenity.

## 7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the collectivisation-individualisation dynamics which are at work in the Greater Accra water provision sector. The analysis is based in a figurational sociology perspective, with a focus on the historical shifting of interdependency relations between various groups within the larger urban figuration, and the consequences this has for the development of the drinking water infrastructure. In this analysis, there is a conceptual separation within the piped water network between the distribution network, formally or informally constructed and managed, and the backbone infrastructure. I especially pay attention to the ways these interdependency relations are moderated by technological progress, driving individualisation by making groups less dependent on each other for their water provision, or in the reverse direction, making larger-scale collective schemes more feasible.

The analysis consists of five parts. First an overview of the historical expansion patterns of the networks, which are understood through the regime types and degree of grassroots activity of the residents. Second, an exposition of the contemporary expansion patterns, seen from the neighbourhood perspective, in order to effectively highlight the central role of residents in the network expansion. Third, an overview of the challenges this local collective action produces at the central level, and the responses to these of the central collective, the GWC. Fourth, an analysis of the alternative water provision sectors that sprung up to supplement the defective water provision, which also threaten to undermine the broad support for the collective network. Fifth, a comparative study of the electricity sector, to test the robustness of our theoretical model of collectivisation-individualisation dynamics.

We find that initially, pipe-borne water was a luxury in Accra and other major population centers, available only to the colonial elite and select indigenous neighbourhoods. The rest of the population was served, at best, with boreholes. The subsequent expansion

of the GWC network happened within a relatively short period of time, going in a few decades from a handful of local utility networks to coverage of an ever-expanding city of millions, under difficult economic circumstances. The expansion of the collective network happened in an ever more democratised and decentralised way. First, after independence, there was a wave of rapid expansions more or less organised by the government. Following this, water coverage expansion became a politically driven issue, as various parties attempted to gain the upper hand by providing more benefits for their followers. As Accra's growth really started to go strong, citizens increasingly started to build their own networks, as happened in Sebrepor. Finally, in the 1990s, the GWC was formally decentralised, which enabled even more rapid expansion under the auspices of each local district. From this point onward, expansion was again driven by political motivations, but now also increasingly by citizen initiative.

With some delay, this caused a historical reversion. These decades of rapid and decentralised expansion stretched the Ghana Water Company (GWC) far beyond its carrying capacity, both as an organisational entity and as a physical network. The result was a network which is not only sprawled too widely for the control and quality assurance of the GWC head office, but which is also very hard to trace and map, and therefore to manage. A connection to pipe-borne water became less and less exclusive, and consequently less reliable as the user base and geographical scope increased drastically. Meanwhile, the elite strata of the user base turned to more individualised supply technologies, such as boreholes and tanker water supply. The main drivers of this process were forces outside the purview and power of the GWC's leadership and engineering team.

Analysing the GWC figuration, what patterns emerge? GWC's headquarters (HQ) is most concerned with keeping up the quality of service, focusing on factors like the treatment plants and the main transmission lines. As the GWC has never in its history been financially independent, it negotiates with government and international donors to get the required funds. Meanwhile, HQ tries to keep a grip on the decentralised parts of the organisation. That is, the Districts and the physical distribution network.

At the end of the distribution network are Accra's residents, who as they move into an ever expanding geographic area struggle to expand the network along with the inhabited space. The residents use whatever means they have available to promote this expansion, including pressure on politicians up for election, pressure on their local GWC District, and private initiative in physically expanding the network. This tends to stretch the network beyond its carrying capacity, both at the meso- and the

micro-level. At the meso-level, as wealthy developers or Residents' Associations get new distribution lines laid with their own or central government money. And at the micro-level, as the local residents near-independently subdivide every sanctioned connection several times more. The GWC Districts, then, are caught in the crossfire between on one side their HQ, which tries to control and limit the network and to keep a clear sight on customers, and on the other side the residents, who demand and force network expansion.

The Ghanaian state apparatus turns out to take a very particular position in this figuration. In principle, it is even more 'central' and removed from the field than the GWC HQ, concerned with the bigger picture. However, Ghana is a functioning democracy with vigorously contested elections, and this makes all the difference. Around election time, the politicians holding sway over that central government apparatus use their influence to push GWC's management to extend coverage to as many areas and residents as they possibly can, even to the point of creating a situation of financial insolvency, and to the neglect of the backbone infrastructure. Finally, the whole issue is complicated one more stroke by the fact that both backbone infrastructure and the smaller offshoots of the network cannot be reliably planned, since nobody knows where the next decade of urban expansion will take place. So far, the pattern has been rather erratic (Doan & Oduro, 2012).

Coupled with the rise of borehole, tanker and water storage technology, this has resulted in a historical reversal in the sector. Pipe-borne water used to be a provision for a small (colonial) elite, with boreholes serving the *hoi polloi*. Today, however, more than half of Accra's 5 million residents are in one way or another connected to the GWC pipe network. This rapid and on-going expansion of the user base has caused its service to become rather unreliable and increasingly sparse. Consequently the wealthier strata, especially in Accra's burgeoning peri-urban areas, are opting out of the GWC network as a primary water supply, constructing private boreholes and using tanker water instead. As wealth and political influence are very much aligned in Ghana, this means that the politically influential class is decreasingly personally invested in the GWC network, which may be one of the reasons why the pace of improvement in the company has been halting at best.

The GWC leadership is well aware of the challenges posed by the unrelenting stretching of their network. It employs several lines of defense, both against the public perception of problems, and against the problems themselves. This starts with a public projection of control, emanating both from HQ and from the districts. Additional



measures include the creation of a detailed map of their pipe network, upgrading metering technology, digitising, cleaning and geo-tagging their customer database to improve traceability and revenues, commercialising standpipes and cutting off non-paying customers, reducing leakages and upgrading water quality. Finally, measures also include upgrading the backbone infrastructure whenever possible, preferably with international donor money, which is generally more reliable than GoG funds. Despite their best efforts, the forces working against collectivisation of the water sector are powerful, and alternative industries proliferate.

All in all, we find strong feedback loops both in the collectivisation dynamic and in the individualisation dynamics. The dialectic between these is not just dependent on the time horizon and degree of populism in the government of that time, but also crucially moderated by the availability of technologies of individual amenity provision.<sup>52</sup>

Here, the comparison with electricity proves illuminating. The electricity is like the water sector in a number of important aspects. First, like clean water, the production of electricity is also characterised by large advantages of scale, making it a natural candidate for being a collective amenity. Second, electricity as a collective amenity also depends on the presence of a physical distribution network. Third, in both of these sectors, we find a collective utility competing with a number of more individualised alternatives. All in all, the two sectors are quite comparable, and we find that the same core analytical model applies to its collectivisation/individualisation dynamics (see figure 7.15 below).<sup>53</sup>

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52 For instance, the colonial regime would undoubtedly have used bottled water if it had been practicable at the time, leaving the locals to their own devices. Indeed, this is what many in the current expat community do, including private boreholes and filtering machines.

53 Several interesting puzzles remain unanswered in this framework, such as: why is there no ethnic profiling in the routing of service delivery, such as we find in India and other developing nations where demands on the public network are greater than the available supply? The fact that GWC has such poor control over their systems due to their uncontrolled expansion patterns may be one reason: they simply cannot effectively discriminate, because they don't know exact enough how the water flows. However, here the comparison with electricity again proves illuminating. Electricity networks are above-ground, and though small extra connections are often tacked on illegally, the main lines, nodes and connections can be easily traced. This makes it possible for an active District Manager to keep track of the network in his District and to manage distribution in a way that is far more active and targeted than would be possible in the water network. Yet even during the "dumsor dumsor" times of erratic and sparse delivery in the 2000s and early 2010s, there were few complains of ethnic favoritism. The only complaint we heard in that regard was that government ministers make good neighbors, as their lights were always on, as well as similar complaints about wealthy neighborhoods being treated better (Aidoo, 2015). This is most likely a consequence of the personal political connections of their inhabitants, as well as their ability to pay. But no party or other group picture emerged.

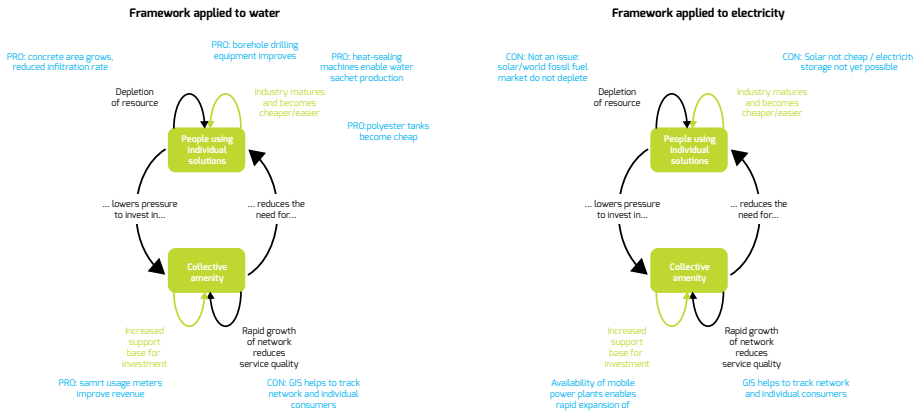


Figure 7.15: a comparison between the water and electricity sector in terms of collectivisation-individualisation dynamics.

However, in terms of technology, electricity is a very different sector. The technology for the production and storage of electricity, both at large scale and in a private home operation, is very different from that for water. Furthermore, the electricity network is far easier to build, since it requires less material, at least for its service lines, and in addition is completely above-ground, making digging unnecessary. This also makes it easier to track the network, especially since electricity flows are easier to monitor than water flows, granting the electricity utility company a greater degree of control over its network. Hence, we find that the pressures towards collectivisation or individualisation in the electricity sector end up completely different from the water sector, leading to more political support coupled with a higher degree of collectivisation.

The electricity network is, if anything, even more sprawled out than the water network, and delivery was severely hampered for over a decade starting around 2001. Still residents did not, as a rule, go off-grid, because in electricity, off-grid is still a far poorer option than connecting to the network. Both diesel-fueled generators and solar panels are expensive and prone to breakdowns, and large-capacity storage of electricity is all but impossible. This technological calculus and the resulting dynamics of individualisation create a feedback effect in the residents-utility-state figuration. Because in the electricity sector, it was nearly impossible to bypass the collective good, pressure on the government to improve the situation was far greater than the same in

the water sector. As a consequence, the Ghanaian state organised rapid expansion of electricity generation capacity. Meanwhile, capacity issues and delivery bottlenecks in the water sector were left languishing.

Technological advances may help to drive elites off-grid, but they are certainly not a one-way street to more individualism in utilities. As the use of GPS and GIS technology at GWC mature, company engineers will increasingly be able to trace and thus manage their own network, reducing losses and pollution during transmission, as well as quickly tracing leaks and illegal taps. Additionally, a clear and geo-referenced customer file and automatic measure-taking and billing, coupled with electronic payments, is currently strengthening their financial position, since it eliminates a large amount of practical hurdles towards billing and invoicing, as well as many opportunities for arbitrage and corruption from the system.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the available technology moderates the social developments in both directions, enabling on the one hand effective collectivisation and on the other hand detachment from the collective amenity.

Finally, a (speculative) note on the future. Currently, the water sector is individualising, while the electricity sector remains almost completely collectivised. However, if we follow this analytical framework into the future, it looks like this trend may well be reversed completely. Private water solutions either depend on the collective network (sachets are largely filled with piped water, tanker trucks load up at GWC loading points), or on groundwater. And Accra's groundwater aquifers are quite likely to be depleted in the near future, both because of increasing drainage through private boreholes and because of decreasing infiltration of rain water in a city covered with concrete. This would make boreholes a less likely source of water. As for electricity, the biggest hurdles for further individualisation are private energy production and private energy storage. But solar panel prices have been dropping like a stone over the past decade, and are likely to continue doing so. Similarly, home electricity storage systems are currently arriving at the mass-market stage. Once those two technologies mature, support among the wealthy and powerful for the collective electricity provision may well start declining rapidly.

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54 Still, this effect should not be overestimated. Maintenance does not happen automatically, and sources both inside and outside the company agree that GWC has a rather poor maintenance culture (Interviews GWC employees, Schut, Sedafor). The same goes for electricity. For both of these utilities, the poor maintenance culture surrounding the collective amenity is also an important factor in driving individualization.













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8

# Conclusion

**T**his chapter concludes. Section 8.1 summarises and comments on the methodology developed through this thesis. Section 8.2 then lays out the findings per empirical chapter, accompanied by a description of how this specific methodology was necessary to reach those conclusions. Section 8.3 answers the main research question, as well as setting out the more theoretical findings of the study with regard to forms of organization for collective amenities. Section 8.4 provides some suggestions for further research.

In addition, Appendix 1 provides a number of suggestions for development workers, policy makers and other practitioners. These are based on this research, but build also on my personal impressions of ten months of fieldwork in Accra. As practical recommendations, they lack the safe, careful wording and hedging that is an inherent and necessary aspect of academic research. Rather, they are expressed bluntly and formulated somewhat provocatively, in order to come across clearly and provoke discussion. Hence, they are not part of this conclusion, but stand outside the research thesis itself, in an appendix.





*We are currently in the midst of an unprecedented growth of urban areas worldwide, with the highest rates of growth being in Sub-Saharan African cities. The new urban fabric is coming into being in a rather haphazard way, with residents moving far ahead of government planners and infrastructure. Hence, resident activity in creating roads, water, electricity and other collective amenities is a crucial formative factor for these new stretches of urban fabric. Their successes and failures in developing infrastructure in the early days of settlement in these areas will lock in the future development path for quality of life in these cities. In this thesis, I have attempted to shed light on that development process of new urban fabric, through the lens of grassroots organization for collective amenities. This chapter brings together the results of the research project and suggests ways forward.*

## 8.1 Methodology: mapping the city from below

As noted in the introduction, the vantage points one takes during research greatly affects what one can see. Interviews with civil servants produce a totally different image of reality than interviews with residents, even if the topic is the same. Ethnographic fieldwork produces another image still, and quantitative work can add or solidify insights in completely different ways again. Together, such activities (or ‘methods’) form a larger approach: a methodology. And though this is generally the most enthusiastically skipped chapter of a research report, it is quite vital to understand where findings come from. In the below section, I briefly discuss the methodology that was developed through this thesis, and the way it affects the findings and conclusions of the project.

*One day during fieldwork in early 2018, as we woke up in the outskirts of Accra, we found our water taps dry and our toilet flush tank empty<sup>55</sup> This was not an extraordinary event, in and of itself. But as a brief inquiry revealed, this time the issue was not with our household plumbing. A construction crew had accidentally crashed their bulldozer through some underground 4” distribution pipes, and the entire neighborhood had been affected. Only those with large polyester tanks in their backyard still had water; everyone else was buying from them by the bucket.*

*We asked our hosts whether the state utility Ghana Water Company (GWC) had been called in. They said no, that this would take too long or, that they might not come at all. Instead, a local plumber had been called out of bed: Jacob Milehu, known to all as*

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55 At the time I was conducting fieldwork together with my supervisor, dr. Uitermark.

*Mr Jacob. We had interviewed him before, because he had played a large role in the construction of the local piped water distribution network during the previous decades. During that interview, he had also explained that he was still the main person maintaining the network in the neighborhood. But such claims are hard to verify, until this kind of practical experience proves them to be true.*

*We quickly organized an appointment with the GWC district manager and asked him to tell us about the origins of the water pipe network in the area. He responded enthusiastically and went into various technical explanations. When we pushed a little and asked whether citizens might also have been involved in the construction of the network, he vehemently denied this. Perhaps a few illicit lengths of pipe here and there, he said, but nothing more. And could any citizens still be involved in the upkeep of the network? No, that was all his job, and his team was extremely efficient- one of the fastest district teams in the city, he was proud to tell us.*

*Later that day, we passed by Mr Jacob's house again. We found him sitting in his garden, surrounded by lengths of the broken 4" pipes which he had salvaged from the construction site. He patiently explained to us how he had been called out of bed to hear of the wreckage, quickly closed valves at strategic points throughout the neighborhood to limit spillage, while keeping the water flowing in as much of the network as possible, and set in some new material to at least keep the network operational. For the GWC, he only had kind words: without them, no drinking water. When asked why they would paint such a different picture of the situation, he shrugged. "Perhaps they don't like to talk about it too much," he said, "it's a big district after all. They have a hard job, but we are in good contact."*

*After these neighborhood-level interviews, we also went all the way up the GWC hierarchy, interviewing regional managers and various officials at the GWC national headquarters. These, too, were very productive interviews, which produced a host of new insights. But an important part of the reason that they were so productive is that we had arrived there with a practical knowledge from our experience on the ground. If we had gone in the other direction, from top-to-bottom, we would have never arrived at Mr Jacob, and we would have never learned that most of the neighborhood's water network was built by its residents and is still being maintained by its residents, today.*

The everyday events described above occurred in Sebrepor, an unremarkable neighbourhood on the outskirts of Accra, which is the empirical core and analytical point of departure of this research project. What is the point of this story? It is not

to claim that formal institutions fail, or lie, and that grassroots organizations are the real deal. Quite the opposite. This story shows that the two are complementary, and the district manager had good reasons to portray the situation as he did (see section 2 below). The main point, though, is rather a methodological one: if you start an inquiry from 'below', from the neighborhood level, the practical level, you will see different things than if you start from 'above', with statistics, government documents and officials, or NGO workers.

What does this approach entail, starting an inquiry from below? It starts with an ethnographic lens on grassroots organization, asking what residents themselves do for the development of their neighborhood, and tries to understand the factors driving or hampering such local organization. The pioneers who form the new urban fabric are faced with a host of challenges: how to connect to the piped water network and electricity lines, to stay safe from robbers, to prevent their houses from flooding and to have a school for the kids. Especially in such a situation of weak collective institutions – both organizational and cultural – it is the local relations that make all the difference. 'Neighborhood' is the most effective term to refer to this local level of analysis, a level where social bonds between non-professionals, in general, form to improve physical and social infrastructure and where local power relations play an important role.

Starting at this neighborhood level is beneficial as it allows for an analysis of the social structures which enable resident collaboration to gather contributions, apply political pressure to formal organizations, and to do all those other things that are needed to get the necessary collective amenities. Using a relatively small and geographically specific sliver of space as an entry point into relations has the advantage that the focus is not limited to the (formal) institutions, but starts with the practically existing relations and organization on the ground. Since these larger structures do appear more often in research and have their own dedicated officials, making them much more visible and straightforward to work from, they would too easily come to overshadow the intricacies of the social network explored in this work and so, I do not use them as a starting point.

This investigation of the social relations in the neighborhood took place over a total period of 10 months of fieldwork, spread over four separate visits to Accra between 2014 and 2018. I investigate these neighborhood relations primarily through interviews with: ethnic leaders, civil servants, church workers, local politicians, a variety of organizers and of course, a good many ordinary residents. These interviews consist of open questions and are informed by my personal experiences and observations in these areas.

From there, the methodology branches out in scope. It explores more formal institutions, larger geographical scales and takes on an historical perspective. The range of sources expands to include the study of government documents and archives, adding in quantitative data, interviews with a broader spectrum of officials and other larger-scale actors, and drawing on secondary sources regarding the history of the city and country. The methodology developed in this thesis is thus a cross between, on the one hand, a relational ethnography which draws on the methodological registers of anthropologists and human geographers, and on the other hand, the type of historical, large-scale perspective typically taken by figurational sociologists. I believe this to be a fruitful approach, as I set out below.<sup>56</sup>

### **Topics emerging throughout the research project**

Having developed this methodology, how and why was it used? In other words, how were the concrete subtopics of this research project carved out from the wide scope covered by its central question? The general technique for finding research topics used in this project could be summarized as follows: ask suburban residents what they considered infrastructural deficits in their environment, then ask them “who should fix that” or “who does fix that” and then find those people or institutions. This relatively simple inquiry yielded surprisingly productive results: it led to several important questions and topics which were not previously covered well in the literature. Below, I briefly describe the literature gaps addressed by each of the analytical chapters.

Residents Associations (RAs) are one of the groups that are underrepresented in the literature. Although they drive the development of a vast amount of urban infrastructure every year, and are an important factor in making sure government and externally funded development projects have the intended effect, they have hardly been discussed in the literature (with the notable exception of Gough, 1999). I have found no research on the question of when and whether RAs successfully manage to further development, and when and why they falter. This work is, therefore, an important contribution to the body of work on urban development which addresses the role of RAs.

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56 To be clear, this is not to say that all research subjects are best addressed through the relational ethnography. Many larger-scale research subjects, such as states, large corporations, dynamics of globalization etc. benefit from an approach which starts at the large-scale level of those dynamics. Rather, the methodology is a fruitful technique for so-called 'bottom-up' research, which is all the more productive since it extends from that mundane, contemporary, directly observable 'bottom' all the way to the larger geographical scales and longer historical timeframes, thus allowing for a welding of the various scale perspectives which are so often artificially separated in research projects.

The picture is similarly incomplete for traditional authorities. Although there is a substantial body of literature on chiefs in Ghana (Odotei & Awedoba, 2006), there is little to no material about chiefs' positions in the urban fabric, or urban chiefs more generally. This again is a serious omission: chiefs have a highly respected and influential position in Ghanaian society. In addition, chiefs are economically powerful; they are important conduits in the allocation of development funds (Ubink, 2008) and control the most important resource of a city: the land. Furthermore, they are middle men between a variety of government agencies and the local population, making them indispensable to an investigation such as this one.

Churches have been central factors in building up education and medical infrastructure in Ghana but the literature ignores their role in the process of development. Religious communities are among the first and most important drivers of collective amenities, and there is a large and well-developed body of research on Ghana's religious field (Meyer, 2004). The literature has, however, by and large neglected the question why, how, and under what conditions religious communities develop amenities and how they function internally in an economic sense (Iannaccone, 1995; Ukah, 2007). These are important questions considered in this work which add depth to the body of research on development.

This work importantly addresses the gaps in the literature by providing a new framework for investigation. The chapter on water provision infrastructure creates a bridge between two separate strands of research. In the literature, currently, on the one hand are theoretical approaches focusing on grassroots infrastructure production, the insurgent, the self-empowered, the incremental (Silver, 2014) and the improvised (Cleaver, 2017). On the other hand are more traditional top-down development theories, such as Rouse (2013) and Adank et al. (2011). The reality, as this work shows, is more complex than just a combination of the two opposing approaches: it is in the interactions of their subjects of study that important effects are produced. These effects are currently being ignored by research, to the detriment of development work and policy making more broadly.

## 8.2 Answer to sub-research questions

This section provides the empirical findings of the four empirical chapters. For each of these chapters, I provide the following. First, a brief re-introduction of the topic and question of that chapter. Secondly, the empirical findings of the chapter. Thirdly, a brief exposition of why the methodology developed through this thesis was specifically helpful in uncovering these findings. Finally, an indication of the more general theoretical fields to which the chapter's findings contribute.

### **Chapter 4: The rise and fall of resident organizations**

Chapter 4 starts with the most local relations; those between neighbors. It analyzes the way in which purely local grassroots organization leads to concrete collective amenities, such as roads, water pipe networks and public security. It centers on Residents Associations; secular, task-specific organizations at the neighborhood level that work to organize local infrastructure development. More generally, the chapter investigates how residents organize themselves in the early stages of neighborhood development and how this changes as thicker strands of organizational connection develop between the neighborhood and the wider urban fabric. These bodies form the platform through which a surprising amount of neighborhood-level amenities are developed. The chapter's contribution to the larger project is threefold. It starts by introducing the central case study neighborhood: Sebrepur. Following on, it provides a rare empirical case study of evolving resident organization in a newly growing neighborhood, from the start. To continue, this chapter helps us to understand the conditions under which Residents Associations and similar organizations flourish and break down.

The chapter finds that residents actively organized themselves from the very beginnings of the neighborhood, quickly forming a developmental association and constructing initial infrastructure. This started when the first settlers found themselves confronted with shared material hardship and threats of expulsion, to which they responded by organizing in a Settler Society. This society became instrumental in gradually building up basic infrastructure in the neighborhood. This is the first finding of the chapter: purely local residential organization can build up vital infrastructure, with very little support from government organizations (see also chapter 7). Since most of the residents were far from wealthy, however; the networks for electricity and water spread through the area haltingly. A complicating factor here, was that the neighborhood was in a legal gray zone, on land that had been expropriated by government but was again being sold by its traditional owners. Such land ownership issues are common



in neighborhood build-up histories and are further analyzed in chapter 5. Hence, the residents did not want to be too visible, which complicated their efforts to create infrastructure in the area. Therefore, while it may seem that little was achieved, it does not follow that residents were passive.

In the face of risk, residents sought active partnerships and collaborations to move towards a common goal. As inhabitation of the area had sufficiently densified to risk 'opening up' in the early 1990s, co-production with a distant but responsive local government provided the impetus for a further build-up of local infrastructure. The municipality supplied the machinery for street grading, while residents fueled the machine and guided its operator through their area. Similar patterns of co-financing and co-production resulted in the first secondary school, the piped water network, the area's streetlights and its first electricity network. Residents built the first two-classroom blocks of the Ebenezer Hill Secondary School and ran it during the first year, while the state supplied a teacher and picked the project up afterward. The Ghana Water Company put out the initial standpipe, for residents to build out its network into the area. The Tema Assembly provided bulldozers for road clearances, but residents had to buy the fuel. Streetlights are still mostly bought and home-mounted by residents, while the electricity to light them is provided by government.

These instances show local organization in its most effective constellation: rooted and strongly networked. Independent local organizing enables residents to effectively harness government resources to further local development (cf. Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016). This is a broader phenomenon: it is very common that infrastructure is built in cooperative projects between residents and government agencies. Often, residents will supply the simple physical labor, supply part of the funding through contributions, or even completely kick-start the project, while the state comes in to complete the project. In fact, the co-production approach is built into the local government bureaucracy. Municipal planning officers also expect residents to help with monitoring the contractors working on municipal projects and will often provide them with the technical specifics required to do so (Interview Ofori, 2015).

As the neighborhood grew, these successful and organic means of cooperation between residents and government bodies became harder to maintain. As the population further densified and became more heterogeneous, its relations with formal state institutions intensified and the general-purpose, solidarity-based Residents Associations dwindled. Political parties started to form local branches in the area, which brought in a wave of mutual suspicions among erstwhile cooperating residents. Being more

closely connected to government institutions and its resources, residents started organizing to have a municipality established locally, and to have the administrative area of the Assembly Member split up, since many government resources are divided by administrative areas. They succeeded but the arrival of more formal government organizations did precipitate a further decline in independent local organization.

There appears to be a 'sweet spot' of highly effective infrastructure production at the time when government resources become available but local networks are not yet undermined by the anonymization of the community and politicization and formalization of local organization. Some politicization is not necessarily harmful, as this allows residents to demand resources from politicians who compete for election. It appears, however, that as political networks become more densely developed and government organizations increasingly promise/appear to take up the development and maintenance of infrastructure development and upkeep, independent local organizational efforts like the Residents Associations fall apart. A similar pattern can be noticed when it comes to neighborhood security; residents tried to organize their own watchdog and vigilante organizations, but as the police became more present, such projects started to crumble. In the years following the establishment of the municipality, neighborhood involvement of local government agencies continuously increased. Meanwhile, resident organization gradually died down, to a point where it was nearly non-existent. It appears, therefore, that the sweet spot of effective co-production between residents and government agencies could only last so long.

In what ways has the specific methodology of a historical relational ethnography, as developed in this thesis, contributed to reaching these findings? The ethnographic aspect was central to this study. Grassroots organization in a neighborhood like Sebrepor is not easily visible from the outside, as it is generally not grounded in formally registered organizations, and thus is best explored through spending a lot of time in the area and interacting with as many people as possible. The relational aspect, too, was essential. Local organization in Sebrepor cannot be understood separate from the area's relations with, and spatial location within, the larger urban area. Both the rise and the fall of local grassroots organization in the area were precipitated by the approach of the urban frontier and all its institutional offshoots. The historical aspect, which looks at historical precursors of the involved organizations and plays a large role in the other three chapters, was not very relevant for this chapter. The simple method of historical analysis, however, tracing 50 years of local organization and development, was crucial to see how the arc of grassroots organization unfolded over the decades, as conditions within and related to the neighborhood shifted.

In summary, this chapter analyzes the dynamics of the relationship between grassroots organizational efforts and government provision of infrastructure in more detail. Looking from a perspective of local organization, it shows how government can both supplement and undermine such organizational efforts. More generally, it shows how through processes of anonymization, politicization and establishment of formal institutions in the area, the autonomous forms of local organization were being overshadowed. Beyond providing empirical understanding of local phenomena in urbanizing Ghana, the findings of this chapter might form a contribution to several more general theoretical fields. First, it adds to the study of resident organization in (informal) neighborhoods growing on the urban fringe worldwide (Holston, 2009; Karpat, 1976). This chapter of the thesis also contributes to the field of study of co-production of collective amenities or club goods, between citizens or residents and the state. As such, it feeds into research on the emergence and forms of collective organization more generally (E. Ostrom, 1990; Elinor Ostrom, 2010; Swaan, 1988).

### **Chapter 5: Traditional authorities in the city**

Chapter 5 analyzes how the deeply embedded, yet strangely undefined institution of chieftaincy has gained strength in the urban neighborhood network through the process of state formation. This topic was included not because all chiefs necessarily contribute to the organization of local development, but because theirs is almost always a central position in the web of local power relations, and therefore, it affects the extent to which organization can occur in the neighborhood. The chapter serves two purposes. Firstly, it empirically analyzes the change in position of a chief whose area is urbanizing by tracing how his role evolves as areas on the urban fringe settle, densify and become part of the urban fabric. Secondly, the chapter takes a more historical and large-scale figurational tack to analyze how the (contemporary, urban) institution of chieftaincy was shaped through Ghana's historical process of state formation. Besides Elias, the chapter builds on Weberian notions of authority (Weber, 1968, p. 215) and Ananya Roy's work regarding informality and the state (Roy, 2009b).

To begin, the chapter analyzes the shifting role of a chief whose area is urbanizing. This analysis is based on the various roles of the chief: as traditional leader, as lower-level bureaucrat plugged into the formal state, and as landlord. His prominence in the various roles associated with original chieftaincy weakened over time. His traditional leadership role declined, most notably its cultural and 'soft leadership' components, as did his position as a local strongman and as a clientelist patron. At the same time, however, new bureaucratic roles emerged through the expansion of the formal state in its initially informal arrangement of government, where bureaucratic relations are

still mediated by the chief. The chieftaincies, therefore, are increasingly embraced by a state-sponsored fabric of bureaucratic organization, changing the nature of their position. While their discretion is circumscribed, the chiefs also derive a new power and security from their immersion into the expanding state.

The chiefs are no longer all-powerful in any one domain, but this is compensated by the fact that their position is now undergirded by laws, vested in institutions, and recognized by the array of organizations that have expanded their operations in areas that were virtually unpopulated until recently. In the process, while the chief's claim to the land is decreasingly sustained through his reputation and relations within the neighborhood, the expanding bureaucratic and legal apparatus casts him into a key position as land manager and furnishes him with entitlements to individual and tradeable plots. As a consequence, the chief is increasingly able to extract resources from the neighborhood, as his *traditional* authority is buttressed with *legal-rational* authority. The commodification and registration of land are thus transforming the role of the chief from that of a conflict manager into that of a gentry. The chiefs are circumscribed and domesticated, confined but strengthened.

Having described the trajectory of the chief's position during the urbanization of his area, this chapter raises a series of puzzling questions concerning the chief. Sebrepur's chief is pointed out by residents as the most powerful figure in the area, held responsible for (lack of) local development and, despite his apparent failure in this respect, he is criticized by most only with careful hesitance. No grassroots organization of any significance flourishes in the area without his seal of approval. Yet for the last ten years, this man has lived in another part of the city, more than an hour drive away from Sebrepur. He rarely appears there, even though he is chief of only this one neighborhood and has no other work. It transpires that he is an exile - driven out of Sebrepur by a conflict with his extended family. This leads us to a set of larger questions about the institution of chieftaincy. For one, how is it possible that this man is still considered Sebrepur's chief, and so retains such a significant influence on the area's grassroots organizational figuration? And more widely, why are all chiefs in Greater Accra of the Ga-Dangbe ethnicity, when many of its areas have majority populations from other ethnicities (Sebrepur, for instance, is approximately 60% Ewe)? In fact, why do all of Accra's neighborhoods have chiefs in the first place? After all, there is no pre-existing community in the localities of most new neighborhoods, no traditional roots. So, why is there a traditional authority tied to each part of that land, which prior to its urbanization was largely empty?

A complete understanding of the chieftaincy-government figuration requires a foray into the history of Ghana's state formation process, and the historical interdependency between chiefs and the formal state. Chiefs were woven into the nation's fabric at a formative stage. When the British first brought together the current Ghana as a colony, they did so through indirect rule, relying on a web of traditional authorities stretching across the country, whom they endowed with a high degree of local autonomous rule.<sup>57</sup> It is true that their position was subservient to British authority. In other respects, however, their power was often far more absolute than what chiefs had previously enjoyed. In the late 19th and early 20th century, this arrangement hardened into law, making chiefs the de facto 'informal' spokespeople for their areas and granting them the formal custodianship over the land they ruled. This arrangement remained in place, with minor changes and power tussles, throughout Ghana's struggle for independence and the democratization process of the 20th and 21st century, until today. This helps to explain the continued significance of the role of the chief.

The chieftaincy system is still deeply ingrained in the state, through an old deal: the original 'locals' were granted everlasting control over their land, represented by their chief. This also explains why it is possible that Sebrepor's chief is absent, does not live in his area, or appear there with any regularity, and yet is granted formal control over all its land by government agencies like the Lands Commission (cadastre). In short, the historical aspect is vital to understand the position of the chiefs. Not only do they play a large role in structuring a neighborhood during the early stages of urbanization, when the state is still far away, they are permanently interwoven with the state apparatus and in fact, with the very idea of 'Ghana' (B. Anderson, 1983). And while many of the chiefs may fail to play their role effectively, especially in the areas where they are not rooted in a pre-existing community, the institution of chieftaincy continues to survive, and therefore, it survives nation-wide. Since the entire chieftaincy system is co-dependent, existing in an asymmetrical figuration with the state, the continuing prominence of some more effective Ghanaian chiefs ensures that the weaker ones remain in place as well. This also means that in the continuing urbanization of the country, empty chieftaincy stools will continue to be created in all new neighborhoods. After all, the various local-level forms of chieftaincy are all folded into the same national-level state.

To summarize: firmly institutionalized as traditional local leaders, with roots in the pre-colonial and colonial era, the chiefs hold sway over the land and often also have

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57 As chapter 5 sets out, many of Ghana's original ethnic groups were not governed by chiefs prior to the arrival of the European colonists. These were the so-called acephalous, or 'head-less' groups (Abotchie et al., 2006). They too were squeezed into the mold of chiefly rule by the British colonial regime.

a powerful position within the political arena. Appointed as the default custodians of all land that is not otherwise registered in the cadastral system, that is some 80% of Ghana's land, the chiefs have a central position in the process of settlement and area development. This includes planning of zoning and infrastructure, and the transition from a complex and largely informal system of land rights to a modern structure of freehold ownership. In addition, they are widely seen, addressed and expected to speak as the natural leaders of (assumed) local communities at the neighborhood scale, to keep the peace and to lead local organizational efforts. As such, they have great influence on the grassroots organizational patterns that can grow in such neighborhoods, on the shape of the local 'civil society', and on the amenities that are developed, campaigned for, realized and maintained.

A note on methodology: our faith in the developed research methodology was repeatedly affirmed by the fact that these findings turned out to be highly counterintuitive insights. In most settings where we presented this research, a common response was: 'Surely, that man would not remain chief if he did not somehow earn or fight for that position; if he depended on the state for his power, government could replace him.' Such a response, logical as it seems, fundamentally misunderstands the nature of traditional authority embedded in a modern state structure. As the above shows, the chieftaincy position is not crucially based on a position of natural leadership (although it is very often accompanied by such), nor is it a position that can easily be locally abolished.

Like European monarchs today, Ghanaian chiefs can hardly be expelled from their position, even if they turn out to be less than capable. Yet, even more so than for European monarchs, this does not mean that their position is a purely ceremonial one. In traditional institutions embedded in legal-rational nation-states, you can hold a traditional position of power without having to work or fight for it, while still enjoying a serious amount of power from that position. This discovery was only made possible by a relational focus and an understanding of the historical roots which stabilize chieftaincy as a national institution. The ethnographic element, finally, was essential in understanding his contemporary role, his importance as neighborhood-level 'informal leader' and the multiplicity of that role.

To conclude, this chapter builds on Weberian ideal types of bureaucratic and traditional authority embedded in the figurational perspective. It shows how these state formation and urbanization processes have led to a more complex figuration, where traditional authority (chieftaincy) is embedded in a larger legal-rational authority (the modern state). It also illustrates where traditional authorities across the country mutually

benefit each other by becoming more embedded in the state (see also Baldwin, 2015; Vaughan, 2006). Apart from providing a rich empirical study of the role of a traditional authority in contemporary Accra, this chapter thus contributes to research on the position of royalty and nobility in modern (democratic) constitutional states. It also contributes to larger debates about the interweaving of various forms of Weberian authority in a single, stable figuration, and to our understanding of state formation processes, more generally (cf. Gorski, 2003; Scott, 1998).

### **Chapter 6: Collective effervescence, collective amenities?**

Chapter 6 discusses churches in their role as developers of neighborhood infrastructure. Churches are collective amenities in their own right; providing a structure for community building and spiritual purposes. But beyond that, they are a special type of collective amenity: they also spawn the development of further collective amenities. Ghana's churches historically channeled the energies of residents quite effectively towards infrastructure development, particular in medical and educational fields. This function, though, appears to be dwindling in recent years. This chapter asks, what factors determine whether churches successfully channel the collective energy gathered in their services and their congregations into durable collective amenities? It locates, as crucial variables, the internal organisation and doctrine of the churches. These, in turn, are shaped by the form of the religious field and its relations to the larger state figuration in the era when the church developed (Swaan, 1988). Besides building on work of De Swaan (1988), the chapter makes use of the *religious marketplace* metaphor (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987), to illustrate the role of the church within its societal context

The landscape of Ghana's organised religion co-evolved with the formation of the Ghanaian state. The first missionaries were invited by the colonial regime. Their function in the colonial state was to pacify the newly colonized subjects; to make them more obedient and fit to work in the colonial project. As the state began to take shape, church membership increasingly became an entrance pass to the higher spectrum of positions natives could attain in the colonial regime. Abram de Swaan (1988) describes the creation process of welfare states in western European countries, which has some interesting parallels with what happened in Ghana. The same churches that sent missionaries to Ghana had, in their European origins, built up a patchwork of local collective action regimes, creating welfare systems and other collective amenities. In Ghana, the churches imposed local regimes of collective action in order to concretise and enforce their ethos of community service and development. They possessed sufficient coercive powers to do so because at that time, they were effectively the regional gatekeepers to the world of colonial administration. Through



coercive regimes of collective action, they constructed schools, hospitals and boreholes throughout the country, and set up sturdy welfare systems for their congregations. So, these sorts of recognizable stately institutions began to take form, as a result of European religious organisation becoming more firmly established in Ghana.

In the early 20th century, the first cracks began to appear in the patchwork of religious monopolies of colonial missionary churches, with the rise of a new religious movement. The arrival of the Pentecostal movement in Ghana, at this time, precipitated the rise of the African Independent Churches (AICs), which quickly gathered momentum. Concurrent with their growth, Ghana became increasingly oriented towards the more enterprising religious field of the USA. This Pentecostal movement eventually evolved into the *charismatic pentecostal* movement, which was further propelled by the prosperity gospel (Bowler, 2013). To this day, this vibrant movement has not only taken West Africa by storm but also the rest of the world, gathering over 300 million followers worldwide by 2010 (cf. Meyer, 2004; Pew, 2011; Sweeney, 2005, p. 150). Within 40 years, this charismatic movement has managed to become the dominant religious sector in seven out of Ghana's ten regions, overshadowing the following of earlier, colonial religious organisations. It is still rapidly growing, especially in the major cities (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014).

The chapter uses a unique framework to illustrate how the charismatic churches, which increasingly dominate Ghana's religious landscape, play a much smaller role in the provision of material collective amenities than the orthodox churches did and still do. This market competition analytic approach takes into consideration the larger story of state formation and the accompanying church-state relationship, which is necessary to understand the emerging dynamics in the religious field between churches with different types of internal organisation and doctrine. This framework helps describe the atmosphere of religious competition in present-day Ghana. A sharp increase in religious voluntarism has radically shifted the conditions for survival and expansion of churches, which was previously based on coercion. Under these new conditions, the charismatic church movement, a growing religious group whose doctrines and internal organisation differ radically from the previous generation of churches, is taking over the field.

The novel structure of these charismatic churches resembles business enterprises, organised for survival, expansion and financial profit in a competitive religious marketplace. This becomes apparent in the discourse of the church leaders, both in personal conversations and in preaching, and in the large branding and event

campaigns that take place in the public space. Organisationally, these churches are geared toward rapid expansion, using a wide range of franchising structures and a strongly internalised start-up culture. They work on a much shorter time-scale, with a strong focus on the competition for potential believers. Their internal welfare systems are more ad-hoc, providing less of a structural social safety net. They are seldom focused on building a broader civil society and playing a role in the state and semi-state figuration. Finally, their individualist ideology is less suitable for the collective action required to produce public goods. In short, they are remarkably different to their predecessors and are more aptly considered as part of a marketplace.

How has the historical relational ethnographic approach, developed in this thesis, helped reach these findings? Once again, ethnography is required to understand the detailed workings of these churches; one simply needs to get up close to properly see what happens. Furthermore, the relational aspect is quite important here. We need to see the churches as part of a religious field at the level of the city, not just the neighbourhood. This larger perspective is necessary because well-established churches in the existing city send their entrepreneurs to start new churches in budding neighbourhoods, seeing fertile ground there to grow, and this affects the religious composition of these new neighborhoods. It is the entrepreneurial churches that gain ground, in these cases. This, in turn, has a large effect on the infrastructure that develops in those neighbourhoods. The faster and more entrepreneurial churches are the Charismatics, which quickly gain ground but are far less involved in educational and health infrastructure than the so-called Orthodox churches, the descendants of the old mission churches. Finally, the historical analysis of the interweaving between church and colonial state helped to understand why the orthodox churches historically had such a strong position and were able to construct so much, as well as why they have been losing ground since independence. Without this framework, it would be impossible to truly appreciate the varying roles of churches in the development of Ghanaian neighborhoods.

What does this new business-like structure look like? Abstracting from the Ghanaian case, we find the following: A religious landscape organised as a marketplace has advantages for the 'consumers' (congregants), since it liberates people from potential tyranny and from a fixed, often petty morality. This new structure forces church leaders to listen more actively and adapt to the needs of their congregation. The highly competitive market where switching 'product' (church) is easy, however, also means that the focus of 'suppliers' (church leaders) shifts to the short-term. It makes churches spend much more time on short-term and the visible goals, which hinders the type

of sustained energy, resource and organisational investments required to construct and maintain schools, clinics, and the type of dense local institutional network which is conducive to neighbourhood development. This competitive environment can also drive the church leaders to use manipulation strategies with their congregation, creating psychological dependency relations in order to make members stay in the church, and donate as quickly as possible, in fear that they might soon move on to the next church.

Besides shifting the focus of the church to the short-term, this new structure also narrows it to the immediate needs of the church and its congregation, rather than the development of the broader community around it. Whereas the orthodox churches have a self-image as a quasi-state institution, providing collective amenities such as schools and medical services, as well as creating an effective organisational level between state and individual, most charismatic churches do not feel obliged to take on such functions. In short, an overly active free marketplace for religious institutions does not appear to lead to the provision of more and higher quality collective amenities (cf. Gallego & Woodberry, 2010; Lankina & Getachew, 2013; Trejo, 2009). This also supplements De Swaan's (1988) analysis, showing that the state and the religious field are not necessarily communicating vessels. In the Western European case the rise of state schools and hospitals swallowed up or crowded out church initiative against active resistance from churches. In Ghana, the churches are moving away from the provision of collective amenities despite the lack of such an active state, because of an overly competitive religious field.

### **Chapter 7: Expansion patterns of connective goods**

Chapter 7 takes on a different form from the other three, in that it does not focus on an organizational form, but rather on a particular amenity: water. It interrogates the assumption of *collectiveness* of amenities, by providing an analysis of how the water supply of Accra's neighbourhoods moves between processes of individualisation and collectivisation. Specifically, it focuses on the dynamics of that infrastructure between local, more or less informal, collective action, and the larger, citywide collective represented by the Ghana Water Company. This chapter is also unique in that it not only investigates the conditions that affect neighborhood level resident organisation but also explicitly asks how this ultimately impacts on the citywide conditions for collectivisation.

This chapter takes the piped water network as a window to explore the way that infrastructure is developed in such a context of rapid urbanisation. The urban fabric consists not only of organisations and broader social figurations, it is also held together by physical networks for the transportation of people and goods. As Accra's spatial extent has become 50 times bigger than it was during World War I, its physical network infrastructure has also progressively expanded and diffused, connecting ever greater numbers of people and adding layers of complexity and interrelation to the urban fabric that binds them. This chapter provides a broader lens on the development of this new urban fabric, by bridging the literature gap that exists between descriptions of development through "incremental infrastructure" (Silver, 2014) and more traditional theory of development which focuses on centrally organised expansion of such facilities (Rouse, 2013). The reality, as shown here, is in a combination of these two, and it is in the investigation of their interplay that this chapter makes its largest contribution.

On a local level, the investigation revealed that Sebrepor is a clear-cut case of 'self-help' development, whereby residents built the entire neighborhood water network with very little involvement of the state utility company. Zooming out from the local empirical case, this chapter develops an analysis of the larger socio-political figuration surrounding the piped water system. It importantly maps how various parties interact in the production of the same amenity, both on a collective and individualized level. It specifically addresses the role of local residents, the state, utility companies and the political class, in this process. There is a dialectic of collectivization and individualization here. Shifting political and organizational dimensions, as well as technological progress affect the form and dissemination of collective amenities. While, at the same time, individualized solutions arise and change the degree to which various groups within the city are interdependent in terms of this network and amenity. Broadening the scope, here, provides a more nuanced appreciation of the various players involved in this process.

Water provisions for different groups of residents in Accra seem to have turned upside down over the past century. Initially, pipe-borne water was a luxury in Accra and other major population centres, available only to the colonial elite and select indigenous neighborhoods. The rest of the population was served, at best, with boreholes. Over the subsequent decades, with a drastic increase at the time of independence, the mechanisms for network expansion became more and more democratised. With some delay, this caused a historical reversion. The drastic increase in users and geographic scope caused systemic weaknesses in Accra's piped water network. I show how the state utility company responds to the uncontrolled expansion of the system; it attempts

to combat the public perception of uncontrolled sprawl, to control the network, to prohibit or incorporate informal extensions, and work to expand the backbone. However, the poor service could potentially lead to an abandonment of the system by the wealthier elite, who can afford to choose individual provision technologies such as boreholes, tankers and sachet water. These means of access to water that were once the only option for non-elites, are now a privatized luxury for the wealthier residents.

The process is mediated by the technological advances and to a degree, by natural circumstances such as the availability of drinkable groundwater. In terms of technological advances, I find that as individualised solutions become more available, affordable and reliable, elites increasingly turn away from the network. I find that in collectivisation-individualisation dynamics, such as this one, technology plays a particularly large role. On the one hand, modern technology such as PVC pipes, better water treatment systems and improved GIS technology significantly aid the effectiveness of the piped water distribution network in a rapidly sprawling urban area. On the other hand, technological progress in the borehole industry and in individually packaged water solutions invites elites to abandon the overstretched communal provisions, in favor of individual solutions. Thus, these technological developments have important consequences for the dynamics of collectivisation-individualisation, which has further important feedback effects in the residents-utility-state figuration, as we will see.

To further explore these dynamics, I add a comparative case study of the electricity network. This network is even more expansive and unreliable than the water network. Successful delivery of electricity was severely hampered for over a decade starting around 2001. Still, whereas in the water sector, a large supply chain for individual solutions has grown, in electricity, the available individualised solutions are not yet preferred over a network connection. This is partly because the latter is far more affordable than in the water sector, and because the technology for home-based energy generation and storage is simply not yet at the stage of mass-market production. Both diesel-fueled generators and solar panels are expensive and prone to breakdowns, while storage of electricity is all but impossible. As both solar capture and electricity storage are rapidly becoming more affordable and practical, this calculus may well change in the near future, shifting the dynamics in the electricity network as well.

Contrasting dynamics of collectivization-individualization and technologies between the water and electricity sectors are the main factors impacting state investment in these infrastructures. In the electricity sector, it is nearly impossible to bypass the

collective good, so pressure on the government to improve the situation is far greater than in the water sector. As a consequence, the Ghanaian state organized rapid (and expensive) expansion of electricity generation capacity. Meanwhile, capacity issues and delivery bottlenecks in the water sector are more or less left to languish. Thus, the available technology moderates the social developments in both directions, enabling on one side, an effective collectivisation and, on the other, a detachment from the collective amenity.

It is only once we look at the neighborhood as a relational entity, embedded in a wider context, that we understand these puzzles, such as the behaviour of the district manager in the vignette that started this chapter. He has been given the near impossible assignment of controlling the rapid expansion of the water network, from his regional headquarters and to stay on top of any developments in the area. In light of this assignment, it would not look good if he were to depend on a composite and somewhat messy model of cooperation, with a rag-tag network of local residents and plumbers for the upkeep of his section of the water distribution network. Still, he does depend on them and he does cooperate with them. In this context, starting the analysis from the 'bottom' of the system provided important clues: starting from residents like Mr Jacob, we get a picture of the practical situation of water provisions on the ground and were directed towards to the Ghana Water Company. If we had started from the Ghana Water Company, however, we would have never found out about Mr Jacob and so, would have had a warped view of the whole situation.

In short, chapter 7 provides a broader lens on the development patterns of infrastructural development in the suburbs, by tracing a single network amenity from the household to the national level. There are two main schools of thought that appear the literature. On the one hand, theoretical approaches focus on the grassroots, the insurgent, the self-empowered and the improvised, such as *development through bricolage* (Cleaver, 2017) and *incremental infrastructure* (Silver, 2014). On the other hand, more traditional top-down development theories are provided by Rouse (2013) and Adank et al. (2011). The reality, as this work shows, is a combination of the two. But it is more than just the sum of them.

It is in the *interaction between bottom-up and top-down* that important dynamics are currently ignored, to the detriment of development work. Development through bricolage is frequent, substantial and highly effective but it never stands alone and has important effects on the network as a whole. Thus, the chapter also provides a counterpoint to larger debates about elite capture (cf. Matous, 2013; Özerol, Tacer, &

Islar, 2013), showing a case where the decline of elitism in a collective amenity may lead to declining investment in the network's backbone infrastructure. To reiterate, as this work illustrates, these dynamics only become visible if we start off our investigation at the grassroots levels, and carefully work our way up to a birds-eye historical perspective from there.

### 8.3 Main research question and theoretical findings

After discussing the results of this thesis in the various separate chapters, we can now consider the work, as a whole and see how it addresses the central research question. The central question was: *how do residents of Accra's newly developing neighbourhoods organise to create collective amenities for their area?*

This section of the conclusion discusses four larger themes which emerge from asking that central question. It first reviews the most important condition affecting each form of collective organisation at the grassroots level: the form and degree of activity of the formal state. Second, the focus turns to the overlapping of collectivities, each having different rules, geographical scales and driving forces. Third, the urban growth process, described in the most abstract terms of subdivision and boundary struggles, is considered. Fourth and finally, this section explores the institutional drift that occurs when institutions extend themselves to the suburbs and how they, themselves, are also changed in the process.

#### **Interdependence with the formal state**

Anderson (1983) provides the first anchoring point for theoretical conclusions: the fact and belief that there is a central state enormously shapes the organisational landscape as a whole. Even in a relatively weak state like Ghana, the fate of all types of organisation working for collective amenities, however informal they may be, is strongly intertwined with the form of the formal state. The form of interdependence, though, varies widely which impacts on their survival. Some organisations are like communicating vessels, becoming weaker as the state becomes stronger. Other groups rise and fall together with the state; while many are tied to the state in yet more complex ways. In fact, if we look closely, in nearly every case the relationship is a combination of these.

As chapter 4 shows, the grassroots and purely local Residents Associations (RAs) flourish only in a situation of weak state capacity. They reach their peak effectiveness



at the beginnings of state involvement when co-production takes place. The RAs subsequently decline as the state gets a firmer footing in the area in the form of political parties, municipalities and other state bodies. These bodies function as a kind of quasi-statal agency in the practical realms of physical infrastructure and security, while also providing a social safety net. There appears to be little tension between the formal state and the RAs, as the two do not compete for any sort of power. But although there is a brief period of fruitful co-production, eventually government crowds out local grassroots organisation. As the state starts taxing Sebrepor, for example, contributions to the RAs dried up. As political parties started organising in the area, moreover, RA meetings withered. Thus, as state involvement grew here, these local organizations lost their place.

The traditional chiefs that are described in chapter 5, have a different relationship with the formal state. There were chiefs in Ghana before there was a central state, and they were woven into the state form as informal rulers from its colonial inception. Present-day chiefs also have a quasi-statal role, especially in the rural areas and in the early stages of urban development, but also in fully urbanised areas due to their custodianship over the land. Again, however, the situation is more complex than it appears. Especially in areas like Sebrepor, where there was no pre-existing local community (just like in the majority of Accra's newly growing neighbourhoods), the chief's power very much depends on that of the state and moves along with it. The chiefs' constitutional hold over the land is transformed by the shift from traditional, unspecific communal land ownership to private, state-registered freehold, in ways that provide the chief with great local power, quite independent from the strength of his ties to the residents. So, the chief's role is evolutionary, changing shape along with the formation of the state.

The churches, described in chapter 6, have a different relationship with the formal state yet again. Brought -or, allowed- in by colonial powers as complements to their military- and trade-focused outposts, they set up much of the medical and educational facilities in the early days of Ghana's state formation. In this, they were aided by their strong cultural and institutional connections with the colonial state: their schools and places of worship were positioned as gatekeepers of the colonial apparatus of power. Later, as the post-colonial state renounced this intimate connection with the churches, briefly bringing the educational apparatus under its own watch, and as the religious field diversified, the churches' ability to provide these collective amenities dwindled. The growth of the state, therefore, lead to a decline in the role of the church as a provider of amenities in its original, colonial form.

The focus of chapter 7, finally, is not centred on a single collective, instead covering a range of local bodies in their roles in the provision of water. From local figurations of neighbours getting together to fix a bit of pipeline, to well-organised but unrecognised neighbourhood collectives, to the state utility company and the larger political formations in which it is embedded. It shows how resident organisation interacts with the formal state on the very local level: residents do more for themselves, if they expect the state to do less. At the same time, they latch on to nearby state agencies for help, whether it is a municipality, an army barracks or, simply a water pipe from the mainline of the state utility company.

This chapter also shows the reverse relationship: how micro-level resident actions affect large-scale state structures. In the water and electricity networks, both the uncontrolled self-help extension of the network at the street level and the decisions of individual households to drop out of the collective system, have systemic effects on the quality of the state network as a whole. There is no straightforward relationship when it comes to the state, residents and amenities. Rather, there exists a complex and interactive web of relationships which is constantly in transformation.

Hence, although the formal state is in no way a single entity and might also best be conceived of as a figuration of organisational forms, rules and entities, separating it as an analytical construct is certainly useful, as it provides much insight into the way non-state organisations have developed historically, and behave today.

### **Clashing levels of collectivity**

If we step away for a moment from the state/non-state dichotomy, a bewildering array of different organisations and collectives comes into view, which Ostrom disentangles in her work (2010). Some of these groups are highly formalised, such as state utility companies or District Assemblies. Others, such as the neighbors who get together to construct a shared drain, are completely informal and never even write anything down. Some have the legal power to claim contributions from a certain sector of the population, although this 'hard' legal power must always be enforced and involves a staggering amount of human interaction, too. Others depend on solidarity, a shared ethos, or on informal enforcement techniques, such as the threat of ostracism or even violence. Ostrom notes that all depend to some degree on the public-spiritedness of their central organisers. In this scenario, who is the public, and which collectivity is the relevant level for an organisation? Some organisations understand the public in a broad scope: the entire urban area of Greater Accra, and sometimes even its future inhabitants. For other providers of collective amenities, the public consists of fellow

loyal party members, their direct neighbours, their church congregation members, or their ethnicity. This book shows how such different forms and logics of collective organisation both interlink and compete as the context changes.

Each of these collectives carry with them a set of different logics and moralities, which co-exist in the same space: co-producing, contradicting or replacing one another or, sometimes simply overlapping. This is true for the religious sphere but also in the domain of land ownership, where traditionally flexible relations have been squeezed into a more formalised, ethnically based custodianship held by the chiefs. This, in turn, is being replaced hand over fist by freehold private land ownership, as the urban frontier moves outward from the city centre. The advent of freehold land ownership does not make the traditional ethnic claims on the land disappear. Rather, it layers on top of them. Such co-existence of norms and logics is also a highly complicating factor in the organisation of collective amenities, where voluntary residential, political party-based and bureaucratic organising conspire to form complex figurations. Chapter 4 shows how clashing norms are even visible within resident organisation, as the relatively horizontal social norms of early settler solidarity are confronted with a more hierarchical logic of 'big men' dominating local structures. So, the reality of collectives of any kind is fluid and can only truly be appreciated within its specific context.

### **Growth: subdivision and boundary struggles**

Clashes between collectives are part of the process of deepening and diversifying ties between the newly growing area and the rest of the city. In a sense, they provide a clear window onto the various strands of the urban fabric and the way these enter such newly developing spaces. For many of Accra's organisations, subdivision and upgrading is the most common mode of spreading geographically. Church members, who used to live in central Accra and find themselves in a new suburb without their church, get together and found a new church, first in a backyard or unfinished building and later by building their own structure. Similarly, formal democratic structures start with a local Assembly member, whose electoral area is subdivided as the population grows. Later, the area gets its own municipality. Police stations, water and electricity district offices and all sorts of other government structures grow in the same way: their spatial units swell in population, are subdivided and then upgraded. Chieftaincies, too, expand through this logic. As a fallow area receives its first settlers, the nearest chieftaincy sends over a representative to act as caretaker chief. Later, when the settlement balloons, this new position is cemented and formalised as a divisional chieftaincy. Subdivision and upgrading, subdivision and upgrading.

Thus, the new urban fabric is woven, as strands of the existing organisations extending outward to this densifying space on the fringes of the city. Elegant as this process may sound, the creation and demarcation of new space is marked by extensive conflicts. As is often the case, the majority of these conflicts are between organisations, or people of the same grouping. Chieftaincy candidates fight over the new chief's stools, for example; established chiefs fight each other over the boundaries between their traditional areas, while districts conduct legal battles over their tax base. The process is far from peaceful and streamlined.

Competition in one arena often has far-reaching consequences for other areas. Chapter 6 shows how the orthodox churches, which were based on lifelong membership and a strict and unchanging morality of self-discipline and community loyalty, are being pushed out by a new type of church. These are based on personal liberation, spiritual faith healing and have commercial-like expansion dynamics. These developments in the religious field are highly relevant for local infrastructure development, as these processes are causing the partial breakdown of the churches' role in educational and medical infrastructure development, in the newly growing neighbourhoods. So, developments in one field cannot be isolated from those in another.

At the more local level, residents fight over their plot boundaries, often indeed over the entire plot, as pieces of land are sold twice or thrice, often by different 'chiefs'. These kinds of conflicts are very hard to prevent, as there is no historical 'just' or even commonly accepted distribution. The space is new. The resources in it are largely new: although the land was always there, it was not valuable, accessible land. Even the agencies who should guide this process are to a large degree also newly established, themselves, and are jousting with each other over their sphere of influence. Such are the struggles of a society that is rapidly expanding and becoming more complex, both geographically and institutionally.

### **Institutional drift**

The collectivity-related churches, chiefs, political parties and other organisations that fill this new space originate from the existing urban fabric, but they are not simple copies of earlier iterations, nor do they remain unchanged over time (see also Hacker et al., 2015). The chiefs are perhaps the most striking example here: their institution is by definition not transferable in space, as its entire *raison d'être* is the chiefs' local rootedness in the land and the local people. Yet, the institution does travel. It is extended into newly settled areas, where newly appointed chiefs from a nearby village try to govern urban migrants from far away, even though they speak a different language

and have different traditional customs. Naturally, these chiefs end up having a rather different position in the community than do the locally 'rooted' chiefs, as chapter 5 sets out. The strange position of these chiefs shows how an institution that seems purely local and deeply rooted may in fact be quite mobile.

The religious institutions are changed by their spatial travel, in a different way. They are more easily copied and franchised in newly growing urban fabric. In this shift, though, many people change their church. In an area where everything is built from scratch, it is easier to try something different. Thus, the growth of the suburbs allows new religious models to increasingly break through the old gridlock of the religious field, through outright replacement and more subtle emulation. Again, the institution changes in the process of transplantation.

As chapter 7 shows, sometimes the change in spatial scale drives a change in the form of the network or institution itself. As the city expands, the water and electricity networks become ever harder to manage. As their inherited structure becomes untenable, they are forced to reorganise. Such internal reorganisations of collectivities are not exclusively caused by their extension into the suburbs but they are accelerated by it. In summary, the institutions and organisations that are re-created in these new neighbourhoods may seem like simple extensions or copies of existing organisations, but they are in fact frequently transformed through their travel to the newly emerging space that these growing suburbs constitute.

## 8.4 Looking forward: suggested research

This section offers suggestions for further research, building on this thesis and beyond. To begin, I briefly recapitulate the method developed in this thesis to locate research topics, to serve researchers looking for relevant research topics. I then discuss a number of areas which are relatively clearly defined research topics already and I believe warrant further research. These are organised in several research categories: the general urban social fabric, collective amenities, organisations for collective amenities, quantitative and/or GIS work, and intra-urban trajectories of social emancipation.

### **Methodology**

First, a brief note on methodology. The general technique for finding fruitful research topics used in this project could be summarised as follows: first, ask people what they considered infrastructural deficits in their environment, then ask them "who *should*

fix that” or “who *does* fix that”. Following this, find those people or institutions. If they indeed appear to play an important role, the analysis would then consist of tracing the network of social connections, historical roots and other lines flowing outward from these people or institutions, slowly working towards larger geographical and historical scales. Find out how they tick, what the figuration around them looks like, what their power or ability to act rests on and what moral or social obligations or desires drive them.

In my view, the kind of approach described above is not used as frequently as it might be in research. Perhaps, this is because the end results tend to look somewhat messy and do not have clear boundaries – to some, it may feel and look like unfinished work. Even so, having several such charts of understanding that originate from several different small starting points, can provide more understanding of a city, or other system, than any amount of systematic mapping of that system. Having said that, even such open-ended research methodology requires distinct and bounded research *methods*. In the methodology chapter of this book, I described the methods used, which I believe form a good set of tools to start from. With the benefit of hindsight, here, I only reiterate my favourite among these: the systematic block of house-to-house interviews which I conducted to inquire about people’s social networks, basic world view issues, and mundane issues in the neighbourhood and among neighbours. Such interviews form an excellent starting point for locating relevant research themes and for conducting subsequent historical relational ethnographies, as they give you access to real life situations as case studies.

### **General urban social fabric research**

In this section, I will make two suggestions for starting points to better understand the general social fabric of the city, especially tailored to Ghanaian (and possibly other West-African) cities: welfare or savings circles, and WhatsApp networks.

In the first place, welfare funds or savings clubs are the key to understanding more deeply how Ghana’s contemporary urban society is organised. Such groups exist at every socio-economic level, with contributions ranging from 1 cedi per week to 1000 cedi per week. Pay-outs correspondingly range from a package of soft drinks to celebrate a newborn, to a raffle of a new V8 SUV among the members every month, or even collective holiday trips to Dubai. These clubs are interesting in the narrow economic sense of providing a ‘safety net’ for resident, as the vast majority of them are small-scale and provide modest payouts in the face of adversity. They also carry more general interest as a social networking phenomenon, forming the social networks that determine the social fabric of the city. As such, these could be part of a broader look

at Old School groups and other social networks under the question: how do Accra's citizens network, attain jobs, contracts and valuable information?

Secondly, a way to investigate this broader question would be to conduct a WhatsApp network analysis. This would provide enormous insight; if one could see what WhatsApp groups people are in and further still, spend some time in these groups as a fly on the wall. As a rather open-ended research method, this could provide insights into political organisation, the overlap of social circles, organisation for development at a neighbourhood-level as well as information relevant for many other questions, some of which are discussed below.

### **Collective amenities**

With regards to collective amenities, in this section, I make four suggestions. The first one directly builds on chapter 7 of this thesis. The second and third proposals are for investigating two other collective amenities. The last one is to investigate the conspicuous lack of collectivity in the housing market.

To begin with, there is valuable work to be done in directly building on the findings of chapter 7 of this thesis regarding the water and electricity networks. A central question could explore whether the exit of the wealthy residents from collective networks leads to a decrease of government investments in them. This would involve taking a closer look at how 'Bourdieu-ian' mechanisms function in water supply sources, differentiating social classes from one another. The sort of trend exemplified in the following attitude: if everyone drinks tap water, then we prefer bottled water; if everyone drinks bottled water, we prefer a particular brand of bottled water, and so on. What effect does this have on the more basic forms of water supply that are 'left behind', such as sachet water and pipe water? Does it erode support for them, and does this lead to a quality decrease, therefore? Or, is it merely a harmless game of one-upmanship? Historical state budgets and comments from ministerial officials would be fruitful sources here, as well as interviews with parliamentarians. This kind of research would give a greater insight into the relationship web that exists between amenities, the population and the state, surrounding sub-urban development.

To follow, in an analysis of neighbourhood-level amenities, garbage collection and sewage infrastructure are promising candidates for comparative analysis with water and electricity. Sewage infrastructure is interesting as a collective action problem at street level, since it is expensive to construct drains but it is also highly network-dependent, which means it would be ineffective to construct drains if they are not



continued down the line. Garbage collection has several other fascinating dimensions to it. The collection system is a complex mixture of private and public operators. On a local level, it is run by individually owned and operated tricycle *aboboyaas*. Contracts for larger areas are awarded to operators like Zoomlion, which was described to me by one respondent as an effective monopolist throughout West Africa. In addition, it would be interesting to note where and how this system fares, both geographically and in terms of types of waste. Finally, there is the moral aspect of trash collection: in most places, people are expected pay *per bag* to have their trash picked up, which they do. What social pressures make people pay to have their trash picked up, rather than disposing it nightly in a drain somewhere? How do these pressures arise and what form do they take? And in what contexts do they fail to arise? The answers to these questions would say something more general about social organisation and attitudes of responsibility for order and development in an area.

Thirdly, physical security is another collective amenity which would provide a promising window into study of local development. To a large degree, this amenity is again created from the ground up, in a co-production between eyes on the street, local vigilantes and formal state agencies. In several areas, we found that residents paid police officers and sometimes even soldiers from a nearby army base to patrol. In other cases, such as the vignette at the start of the introduction chapter, police officers were quartered in with residents, or residents gave away (part of) their house to create a police station. Vigilante or watchdog groups also appear to play a large role but they face challenges. On the one hand, they need to remain somewhat secret, to create the illusion of omnipresence and to evade detection by potential thieves. On the other hand, they need to be very visible, to encourage residents to donate money towards their upkeep. Such co-production of a complex amenity like security also warrants further investigation, to understand the dynamics of the growing neighborhood and its services.

Fourth, a lack of collectivity in housing would be another important area of development research. Accra is sprawling at breakneck speed, causing all sorts of transportation and environmental problems, among others. A major reason for this appears to be that everyone wants to have their own piece of land, build a house on this, and keep it in the family forever. This kind of horizontal, single-family sprawl is not a sustainable way of life for the urban system as a whole and is passionately argued against by agencies like UN Habitat, the World Bank and many government officials. If we want to make the city healthier in this regard, however, we need to understand *why* people are so attached to having their own land and sitting on it, and then try to see whether anything can be done

about those root causes. I do not know of any research that investigates this question, thus far, but I believe it would be a provide fruitful results concerning development.

### **Organizations that produce collective amenities**

Building on the work in chapters 4-6 of this thesis, additional research on organisations that produce collective amenities would also provide a valuable contribution to the knowledge on the subject . What follows, here, are suggestions to further probe the positions of churches and politicians.

From the research, it is clear that orthodox churches are being replaced by charismatic churches. Whereas chapter 6 of this thesis pits these two against each other in a dichotomy, it would be valuable to investigate the conditions under which the new churches also organise the production of structural, as opposed to one-off, collective amenities. More concretely, such research could build upon the framework set out in chapter 6, and ask: to what extent are strands of the community service morality, characteristic of orthodox churches, present in these new churches? And, how might they have evolved? It would be highly valuable, in terms of research findings, to develop an effective research instrument to somehow ‘measure’ the morality and worldview of such churches, both of their staff and of their congregants., Such an enterprise is fraught with risks, however; and will almost certainly be accused of ethnocentrism, or worse. Churches, nonetheless, provide a unique insight into community values and neighborhood workings and are, therefore, worthy subjects of further study.

As well as churches, the Assembly member as part of the local political apparatus, is a topic of interest for greater research. The position was introduced in the local government reforms by Rawlings’ government in the early 1990s, as a middle man between residents and the municipality. In a sense, the position was designed as the modern and more democratic replacement for the chief; not party-aligned, he would simply be a local, grassroots leader. As such, Assembly members are generally overworked and underpaid. They are held accountable for their efforts through elections every four years and yet, are also expected to play a patron-like role by appearing at funerals and weddings, as well as making small donations all around them. Since this is hard to afford for an independent citizen, the Assembly members are increasingly, in many municipalities now exclusively, party-backed, and the position has become a stepping stone in a political career. Yet, at the same time, they form a crucial node in the development of neighbourhoods, throughout the city. It would be worthwhile to investigate this position further, as it could lead to valuable practical policy recommendations.

### **Quantitative and GIS work**

I also have two suggestions in terms of quantitative and/or GIS studies, which could serve to anchor much of the work suggested above and much of the work in this thesis as well, by providing a more robust basis for extrapolation of conclusions and uncovering broader patterns in the city's growth process. For the first, *stages of urbanisation*, half the research paper was already written for this project. It focuses on the growth patterns of physical urban fabric, trying to find patterns of sequentiality. What comes first, paved roads or water pipes? Does it take a certain density of population, before electricity lines are extended? In Ghana's cities, as quite possibly in many other Sub-Saharan urban areas, such basic infrastructure is built and expanded without much central planning, evolving organically. It often only comes to areas long after the processes of settlement and densification have begun. The question is, in what order do these various components of infrastructure development emerge, and what connection do they have to each other?

A suitable basis of data for this project could be found in the 2010 census and in a variety of other sources, as well as raw satellite imagery. My suggestion is that the methodology could be a spatial regression, for which I have already worked out a proposal, available on request. Such quantitative work can form an important addition to existing work on the emergence of civil society organisation, neighbourhood development and the growth process of public amenities in a decentralised and organically evolving urban environment. The work can also enable comparative urban studies, and furthermore, provide insight to policy makers and development workers to help them set priorities in their urban development policies.

Additionally, in a more basic sense: a good GIS-based mapping of the degree of social, ethnic and religious mixing in Accra's neighbourhoods also does not currently exist, to my knowledge. This could be done on the basis of the census, which is very fine-grained, geographically speaking. This would serve as a solid quantitative basis to determine how the mechanisms found through the kind of qualitative work described above could be generalised and tested in studies elsewhere.

### **Arrival city**

Finally, building upon the point raised in the previous section on 'slum improvement,' it would be valuable to gain a better understanding of the way people flow through the city throughout their lives. That question has been one of the main purposes of this project, from the beginning, which, sadly, also fell by the wayside due to capacity constraints. 'Stepping stone migration,' which investigates how people arrive from

villages into cities, used to be a central focus for research. But this should be an intra-urban topic as well. My understanding is that villagers, especially from Northern Ghana, generally start out by renting a mattress in Old Fadama or Madina and working as day labourer or hawker. They then make the step up to a slightly more fixed labour position and perhaps share a room with a few friends. Next, they move into a bigger 'hall & chamber', and continue upgrading, until the final goal of owning their own plot of land and building a house on it. That is just a sketch of the scenario, based on the impressions I gathered while focusing on other topics. If we truly want to understand how the city works, and certainly if we want to intervene in it, we need to understand these types of flows.

In general, such research on population flow through cities would look at economic factors in terms of infrastructure, financial and other resources, organisations which effectively use these, as well as elements in the urban figuration which affect this space by wielding power in it. It would look at these elements neither as constituting an 'economy' that needs to be 'grown,' nor as possible resources for 'community development programs' by the state or external NGOs, but rather in their own right. We need to first understand the city as it is, as it currently works, *and accept it as such*, before we can effectively intervene for the better. I believe this type of academic research can do much to inform the work of all those who work so hard to make Accra a better place to live.











**THE APOSTOLIC  
CHURCH-GHANA**  
ADENTA DISTRICT  
NEW SITE ASSEMBLY

←

CHILDREN OF GOD  
COMMUNITY SCHOOL

OF CHRIST  
WORSHIP  
SINGING  
MIRACLE SERM  
ALL NIGHT PRAY

POWER HAND OF CHRIST CHURCH  
presents  
**2015 BREAKING  
UNFAVORABLE LAWS**  
Numbers 27:1-11

Watch  
Night

Worship  
Singing  
Miracle Sermon  
All Night Prayer

Adenta New Site (Church Hall)  
**Date: 31st Dec 2015**  
Come and Experience the power of God!

**MEETING**

KUMOLE  
RICE  
AKALE  
BUNKA  
FATA













SAMENVATTING

We bevinden ons middenin een eeuw van ongekeerde stedelijke groei. Volgens de VN zal tussen 1950 en 2045 de wereldwijde stedelijke bevolking acht maal zo groot worden, tot uiteindelijk een totaal van zes miljard stedelingen. Afrika is het minst verstedelijkte continent, maar haar steden groeien het hardst. Sub-Sahara Afrika heeft momenteel zo'n 424 miljoen stedelingen; naar verwachting is dat aantal over twintig jaar verdubbeld. Ghana loopt voorop in deze ontwikkeling. Daarbinnen is de Accra-Tema agglomeratie de voornaamste groeikern; zijn bevolking groeit jaarlijks met vier procent, zijn oppervlakte met vijf procent.

Er is een rijke academische literatuur over het Afrikaanse urbanisatieproces. Grotendeels richt die literatuur zich op de meest spectaculaire aspecten: de hogedrukpan van centraal gelegen sloppenwijken, de ultra-rijken in hun luxe wijken, wiens hoge veiligheidsmuren de stad doorsnijden, en de langzaam ontrafelende sociale verbanden in de oude dorpskernen waar de stad overheen groeide. Het buitengebied, de uitgestrekte, eentonige laagbouw van Afrika's buitenwijken, heeft beduidend minder aandacht gekregen.

Deze gebieden vormen geen centraal element in de grote theorieën, noch in het publieke debat. Toch is dit waar de meerderheid van Afrika's nieuwe stedelingen woont. De huidige urbanisatiegolf is vooral *sub*-urbanisatie. Per jaar begint zo'n vijftig vierkante kilometer aan ruraal gebied rondom Accra aan de decennia durende transformatie tot stedelijk gebied. Deze vorm van stedelijk gebied vormt het onderzoeksobject van dit proefschrift.

Specifieker kijkt dit proefschrift naar de bewoners van deze gebieden, en vraagt hoe zij omgaan met het feit dat hun wijken vanaf de grond moeten worden opgebouwd, in de context van een zwakke overheid.

De centrale onderzoeksvraag is:

*Hoe organiseren bewoners van Accra's nieuw groeiende buitenwijken zich, om collectieve voorzieningen te creëren voor hun wijk?*

Met andere woorden, dit boek bestudeert vormen van lokale organisatie voor collectieve voorzieningen, in het ontstaansproces van stedelijk weefsel. Om te begrijpen hoe mensen in deze context van elkaar afhankelijk zijn gebruik ik de figuratiesociologie, opgericht door Norbert Elias. Zijn relationele en procesmatige benadering maakt het makkelijker om te zien hoe het stedelijk weefsel groeit, om te begrijpen wat voor sociale verbanden bepaalde vormen van lokale organisatie mogelijk maken, en om



te voorzien via welke relaties met de rest van de stad de bewoners erin slagen om voorzieningen te realiseren. Zo maakt bijvoorbeeld het concept van de 'figuratie' het mogelijk om verbanden te zien voorbij het spectrum van afgebakende organisaties: tussen bewoners, (delen van) formele instanties, politieke netwerken, en allerlei elementen van het maatschappelijk middenveld.

De methodologie van dit proefschrift is de historische relationele etnografie. Daarbij wordt een lokale casus onderzocht, als vertrekpunt voor een bredere institutionele en historische analyse. De etnografie draait om een wijk genaamd Sebepor, die ik voornamelijk onderzoek via semi-gestructureerde en open interviews: met etnische en religieuze leiders, ambtenaren, lokale politici, activisten en gewone wijkbewoners. Deze interviews zijn aangevuld met informele gesprekken en observaties, over een totale periode van tien maanden veldwerk. De wijkstudie is gecontextualiseerd met onderzoek naar historische ontwikkelingen en (staats-)instituten en andere elementen van het stedelijk weefsel, die de wijk mede vormgeven. Zo gebruik ik de wijk als een lens op grotere figuraties en lange termijnontwikkelingen.

De vier empirische hoofdstukken van het proefschrift gaan respectievelijk in op buurtverenigingen, stamhoofden, kerken en de waterleiding.

Het eerste van de vier empirische hoofdstukken richt zich op wijkverenigingen. Dit zijn seculiere, praktisch georiënteerde organisaties op wijkniveau, gevormd door vrijwilligers uit de wijk, die werken aan concrete collectieve voorzieningen zoals straten, waterleidingen en veiligheid. Met de wijkverenigingen als focus onderzoek ik hoe bewoners zich organiseren in de vroege stadia van wijkontwikkeling, en hoe dit verandert naarmate grotere organisaties als kerken, politieke partijen en overheidsinstanties actiever worden in de wijk. Hierbij besteed ik specifiek aandacht aan de dynamische relatie tussen enerzijds organisatie van onderaf, en anderzijds inspanningen van de overheid, om infrastructuur te realiseren.

Ik concludeer dat wijkverenigingen een substantieel aandeel van de collectieve voorzieningen organiseren. Vooral in de vroege stadia van wijkontwikkeling zijn er maar weinig andere organisaties aanwezig in het gebied. Bewoners moeten dan wel het heft in eigen handen nemen. In latere stadia kan de gemeente hun opbouwwerkzaamheden versterken met geld en zware machinerie, maar de bulk van het werk blijft op de schouders van de wijkvereniging liggen. Vervolgens, als de lokale overheid meer gevestigd raakt, worden door ambtenaren en politici steeds meer beloftes gedaan over ontwikkelingsprojecten, en wordt de lokale belastingheffing opgezet. Dit leidt vaak tot de ondergang van burgerorganisaties zoals de wijkverenigingen.

Naarmate de wijk anoniemer wordt, de partij-politieke organisatiegraad stijgt en de overheidsinstanties binnenkomen, ontrafelen de autonome burgerorganisatievormen zoals wijkverenigingen.

De bevindingen van dit hoofdstuk dragen bij aan verscheidene onderzoeksterreinen. Ten eerste, de studie van bewonersorganisatie in (informele) wijken die aangroeien aan de stedelijke buitenrand, wereldwijd. Ten tweede, de studie van co-productie van collectieve voorzieningen tussen bewoners en de overheid. En ten derde, de studie van het ontstaan en de verschillende verschijningsvormen van collectieve organisatie in het algemeen.

Het tweede empirische hoofdstuk onderzoekt traditionele stamhoofden. Het traceert de veranderingen in de rol van een stamhoofd, naarmate zijn gebied de eerste stedelijk georiënteerde bewoners ontvangt, verdicht en zodoende langzaam van ruraal naar stedelijk transformeert. Hoewel er een substantiële hoeveelheid onderzoek is naar stamhoofden in Ghana is er weinig tot geen materiaal over hun positie in steden. Dit is een omissie, want de stamhoofden zijn cruciale factoren in stedelijke ontwikkelingsvraagstukken. Niet omdat alle stamhoofden per se actief bijdragen aan de ontwikkeling van hun wijk, maar omdat ze meestal een centrale machtspositie in de wijk hebben, en daarom grote invloed hebben op elke vorm van (burger-)organisatie die binnen de wijk plaatsvindt.

Ik concludeer dat de positie van stamhoofden in de loop van Ghana's historische staatsvormingsproces is geëvolueerd tot een punt waar de stamhoofden, los van hun persoonlijke capaciteiten en sociale leiderschapspositie, standaard een sterke machtspositie in de wijken hebben. Ze werden door de koloniale autoriteiten ingezet als tussenpersonen, en hebben veel van die rol weten te behouden onder de post-koloniale regimes. Vanuit hun positie als traditionele, lokaal gewortelde leiders controleren zij het meest waardevolle goed van de stad: het land. Formeel vanuit een positie van rentmeesterschap, maar in de praktijk vaak als privébezit. Daarnaast hebben ze een rol als tussenpersoon tussen een verscheidenheid aan overheidsorganisaties en de lokale bevolking. In het bijzonder tijdens de fase waar overheidsinstanties zich nog in de wijk aan het vestigen zijn is dit een cruciale spilfunctie.

Dit hoofdstuk is gebaseerd op een Weberiaanse benadering van autoriteit; het laat zien hoe het traditionele gezag van de stamhoofden historische verweven is geraakt met het legaal-rationele gezag van de staat. Het biedt daarmee niet alleen een empirische studie van de rol van een traditionele autoriteit in hedendaags Accra, maar draagt ook bij aan het onderzoek naar de positie van adel en koningshuizen in hedendaagse constitutionele monarchieën.

Het derde empirische hoofdstuk gaat in op de rol van kerken in de wijkopbouw; specifiek, het verband tussen de interne structuur van kerken en hun bijdrage aan publieke voorzieningen. Kerken hebben historisch een centrale rol gespeeld in het opbouwen van onderwijs- en medische infrastructuur in Ghana. Er is een grote hoeveelheid onderzoek naar Ghana's religieuze instellingen, maar er is tot nog toe weinig aandacht besteed aan de vraag waarom, hoe en onder welke voorwaarden religieuze gemeenschappen collectieve voorzieningen ontwikkelen, en hoe ze intern functioneren in economische zin.

De interne organisatie en denkwijze van kerken blijken hier cruciale variabelen te zijn. Deze worden op hun beurt gevormd door het religieuze veld en de relaties van dat veld met de bredere staatsfiguratie, op het moment dat die specifieke kerk ontstond. Een scherpe toename van keuzevrijheid en diversiteit in het religieuze landschap sinds de tweede helft van de twintigste eeuw heeft de context voor kerken veranderd, en geleid tot een andere logica wat betreft overleven, continuïteit en expansie van het instituut. De 'charismatische' kerken, een groeiende groep religieuze instellingen wiens doctrines en interne organisatie radicaal afwijkt van de voorgaande generatie, de missiekerken, neemt in hoog tempo het veld over.

Deze charismatische kerken lijken veel meer op commerciële bedrijven, georganiseerd om te overleven, te groeien en financiële winst te boeken in een competitieve religieuze marktplaats. Hun interne zorgstructuren zijn meer ad-hoc, waardoor ze minder een betrouwbaar vangnet kunnen bieden. In tegenstelling tot de missiekerken zijn ze nauwelijks gericht op het opbouwen van een breder maatschappelijk middenveld en het spelen van een rol in de (semi-)staatsfiguratie, in scholing en gezondheidszorg. Bovendien is hun individualistische ideologie minder geschikt voor de collectieve actie die is vereist voor het opbouwen van publieke goederen. Kortom, in tegenstelling tot wat veel van de literatuur stelt: een actievere 'religieuze marktplaats' leidt niet automatisch tot meer en betere collectieve voorzieningen.

Het vierde empirische hoofdstuk onderzoekt niet een vorm van organisatie maar een specifieke voorziening: drinkwater. Ik bevestig hierbij de aanname van *collectiviteit* van voorzieningen, door een analyse van hoe de watervoorzieningsmechanismen van Accra's wijken zich bewegen tussen processen van individualisering en processen van collectivisering. Specifiek kijk ik naar de dynamiek tussen lokale, min of meer informele, collectieve actie, en het grotere, stadsbrede collectief dat wordt gerepresenteerd door de Ghana Water Company.

In de eerste helft van de twintigste eeuw was Ghana's water-infrastructuur beperkt tot enkele centrale stadsdelen, en strikt in handen van het waterleidingbedrijf. In de decennia na onafhankelijkheid groeide het netwerk steeds sneller. Dat gebeurde eerst primair door overheidsprojecten van bovenaf, maar in toenemende mate door (al dan niet legale) zelfhulpprojecten van burgers. De halsbrekend snelle expansie leidde tot systemische zwakke plekken in Accra's waterleidingnetwerk. Er ontstonden fyieke bottlenecks door gebrekkige planning, de productie schoot tekort, en de GWC verloor het overzicht over haar eigen leidingnetwerk - dat ze nu voor het eerst in decennia weer integraal in kaart brengt.

Het waterleidingbedrijf reageert op de ongecontroleerde expansie met repressie jegens doe-het-zelf-projecten van burgers, een narratief van controle, pogingen om de informeel gebouwde extensies te incorporeren, en werk aan de centrale infrastructuur van zuiveringsinstallaties en grote leidingen. Desondanks leidt de slechtere service ertoe dat rijkere bewoners het systeem verlaten wanneer ze kunnen. Zij kiezen voor individuele voorzieningen: eigen putten, watertrucks, flessen en plastic zakjes met gezuiverd water. Zo wordt de politieke en financiële basis van deze publieke voorziening ondergraven.

Dit hoofdstuk slaat een brug tussen twee literatuurstromingen: enerzijds theoretische benaderingen die zich richten op burgerinitiatieven in de bouw van infrastructuur, en anderzijds de meer traditionele top-down ontwikkelingstheorie.

Welke bredere conclusies kunnen worden getrokken uit dit proefschrift als geheel, met betrekking tot de centrale vraag *Hoe organiseren bewoners van Accra's nieuw groeiende buitenwijken zich, om collectieve voorzieningen te creëren voor hun wijk?* Eén belangrijke bevinding is dat elke vorm van organisatie voor collectieve voorzieningen, hoe informeel ook, sterk wordt gevormd door de overheid. Dit geldt zelfs in een relatief zwakke staat als Ghana. Echter, de vorm van verwevenheid varieert sterk. Sommigen zijn als communicerende vaten, die zwakker worden als de staat sterker wordt. Anderen, zoals de stamhoofden, rusten voor hun macht deels op de staat, hoewel ze er tegelijkertijd mee concurreren voor macht en hulpmiddelen.

Een tweede bevinding gaat over de manier waarom veel collectieven zijn georganiseerd in Accra's groeiende buitenwijken. Voor veel van de organisaties daar is splitsing en promotie het standaardproces. Politiebureau's, water- en elektriciteitsdistrictkantoren, en allerhande instanties groeien op dezelfde manier: hun ruimtelijke eenheden groeien, krijgen een steeds grotere populatie, en worden gesplitst en gepromoveerd tot een

hogere rang. Dit geldt ook voor kerken en politieke partijen, voor wijkverenigingen, en zelfs voor gemeentes.

Een derde bevinding gaat over institutionele verandering. Veel bestaande instituties krijgen deels opnieuw vorm als ze arriveren in de nieuw groeiende wijken. De kerken zijn een goed voorbeeld hiervan. Veel mensen die naar de buitenwijken verhuizen, worden gedwongen om van denominatie te veranderen; even zoveel pakken de kans zelf met beide handen aan. Dit maakt deze nieuwe wijken een bijzonder vruchtbare grond voor opkomende vormen van religieuze organisatie, zoals de charismatische kerken. In een gebied waar alles van de grond af aan moet worden opgebouwd is het makkelijker om iets echt nieuws op te zetten. Zo voedt de groei van de buitenwijken de ontwikkeling van nieuwe religieuze ondernemingen en praktijken, en stelt ze in staat het religieuze veld te betreden, waar ze de oude kerken vervangen of hun kant op trekken.

Tot slot biedt de conclusie van het proefschrift nog enkele aanbevelingen voor verder onderzoek. Beleidsaanbevelingen staan in Appendix 1, niet in de tekst van het proefschrift zelf, omdat ze verder strekken dan de academische bevindingen van het proefschrift.



# APPENDICES



**A**ppendix 1 provides policy recommendations and other practical applications based on this thesis. Appendix 2 contains the data sheet used to profile the additional case study neighborhoods, beyond Sebrepur, as described in section 3.3 of the methodology. Appendix 3 provides a sample door-to-door interview. Appendix 4 provides two examples of expert interview questionnaires. Appendix 5 provides information on the author.



## Appendix 1: Practical applications of the research findings

Is the rather abstract approach developed in this thesis also useful for development work, policy makers or other practitioners? I believe so, and hope to show that it is, by drawing a number of concrete recommendations from the different chapters.

First, a more general note. Coming from a European perspective, as I did and as I expect the majority of my readers to do, it is important to realise that many institutions in Ghana have the same names and superficial structures as they do in Europe, but quite different roles in practice. Churches are perhaps the most extreme example in this regard. While in Ghana ‘churches’ may be buildings where people come together on Sunday to listen to a speaker discussing the divine, they can also be almost anything else, from a spontaneous spiritual gathering in a wooden shed or under a tree, to a hard-core business or even a money-laundering operation (Ukah, 2016). Political parties are hardly policy-based; they mostly create private or club goods on an ad-hoc basis instead. Ethnic groups or ‘tribes’ (an offensive, essentialist term) are hardly organised, yet do importantly organise social life through the cultural and linguistic ties they provide, as well as through the old system of ‘traditional authorities,’ which in today’s cities largely rests on constitutional law, rather than on tradition. Sport clubs might actually serve as political muscle crews, while what looks like a rowdy demonstration may well be a harmless ‘keep-fit club.’ And so on, and so forth. That does not mean that Ghanaian institutions are all fundamentally different from Western institutions. It simply means that it pays to look more closely, because things might not be what they appear at first sight, often in subtle ways.

### **Chapter 4: The rise and fall of resident organizations**

I start with three suggestions drawn from chapter 4, about Residents Associations and other such grassroots resident activism.

First, Residents Associations are among the most democratic, grassroots and therefore actively citizen-monitored development institutions out there. They exist at a very small- scale level and are, by definition, run by people who personally live in the area, whose door people can knock on to discuss issues or question spending patterns. This makes them very effective and makes corruption far less likely than in more formal and distant organisations. So, they should be supported. If it is possible to strengthen their ability to levy contributions, whether by providing them with police assistance or with legal aid, that should be done. If NGOs want to work with grassroots organisations, these are very suitable partners. Cooperating with Residents Associations would also

make NGOs less likely to be tricked by fraudsters with fake ‘grassroots organisations’ (something I saw happening quite frequently during my fieldwork), as a single neighborhood generally has only one such organisation and everyone will know who is on the board. However, it should also be realised that these organisations are not administratively strong. They are volunteer-led and much of the time overworked. And it requires a very fine-grained local distribution and communication network to effectively work with them. But in my view, it would be worth the hassle and cost-effective to try this.

Second, co-production is a very effective mechanism and one that is implicitly built into Ghana’s local government institutions. This should be made more explicit and drawn upon more actively. I can imagine two ways to do so. One is to simply demand that residents co-pay for amenities, that a school will not be built until half of the money is gathered by the residents (for instance, through the Residents Association), and so forth. Co-payment amounts could be scaled based on an assessment of the level of wealth in an area. The other is to make even more use of the ‘eyes in the community’ for government projects. That would be done by obliging local government to paste posters with clear information on the contract and the financial amounts on construction projects in the community, so that everyone can keep an eye on them. There is systematic corruption around local government projects: as people from both major parties repeatedly told me (also about their own party), the constituency chairman has to front much of the money for the campaign, and gets paid back through overpriced construction projects later. This costly dynamic could be partially undermined by putting financial figures literally out in the community, instead of forcing citizens to come to the municipal assembly for information.

Third, local government should not be rolled out in an area if it cannot yet deliver. This requires some explanation. The chapter found that Residents Associations and similar informal networks play an important role both in independently producing collective amenities and in making sure that politically driven or administratively ordered development projects actually ‘land’ effectively and get finished. At the same time, once local government gets rolled out into an area, grassroots organizations do not have much longer to live: they crumble as residents are told by civil servants and politicians that ‘government’ will fix things. Hence, the establishment of a dense local government fabric, especially one that cannot yet deliver, can actually slow down development of an area by undermining effective collective action.

## Chapter 5: Traditional authorities in the city

Then, from the chapter on chiefs, one recommendation about chiefs themselves and two about land.

First, a practical recommendation for organizations which frequently work with local communities: create background material on the chieftaincy system, and build connections at the chieftaincy ministry. It is important to quickly understand who is the chief of an area (or if there are competing chiefs, who stands where) and to understand something about their position. And make sure your fieldwork officers realize the amount of power chiefs have in a community: primarily blocking power, but also constructive power. If the chief sends someone to beat the *gongon* in his community, people will come out.

Second, a recommendation to Ghana's national government: find a way to effectively tax land sales. The value of urban land is a giant resource which provides much of the development budget in cities worldwide. Currently, this resource is just spilling away to traditional authorities and their families. This is neither fair nor conducive to the development of Ghana's cities. It is not fair, because the royal families did not make that land valuable; the entire city around it did. And it is not productive, because very little of that money gets spent on development. The laws for chiefs to pay tax on their sales are already there. Now enforce them, for all Ghanaians.

Third, again to Ghana's government: legal cases about land are a drain on Ghana's coffers and on the time, energy and money of its residents. They drag on for years, often decades, and in the end only enrich the lawyers and judges. This has to be limited. Of course, going from traditional communal land ownership to private freehold is an enormous transition for any society, so it is only natural that there are frequent disputes and attempts at land-grabbing. But nobody gains from the length of these disputes. I am not a legal scholar, but if a way could be found to change the legal system so that cases around land are decided sooner, this might spare people a great amount of tedious effort and suffering. The strange thing is, often times these cases are not fair anyway, so it might feel more satisfying to think that at least, we've gone to the bottom of a case, including all possible appeals to higher courts, etc.. But in fact, that just means the one with the longest staying power or the deepest pockets wins. Whereas, the sooner the cases are over, regardless of who wins, the sooner everyone can just continue with their lives. So, put your state lawyers on it, and find ways to systematically shorten those cases. You will relieve the country of a massive burden, and push people to get on with their lives rather than be stuck in an everlasting struggle.

## Chapter 6: Collective effervescence, collective amenities?

From the chapter on churches, two practical development work recommendations for NGOs and other development agencies.

First, if you want to work with ‘the community’, then work with the orthodox churches. Although shrinking in relative size and with an ageing congregation, they are still likely to be one of the best conduits to get money well spent in urban Ghana. They will multiply the effectiveness of your donation because they have a strong network of volunteers, and the moral orientations of their leadership and membership will be much closer to something *obruni* (Europeans/Americans) will easily understand.

It is important to note that that is not a value judgment of those moral orientations, although it may seem so. Indeed, my personal morality, as I come from (North-Western) Europe, is also much more closely aligned with those of orthodox church members, so I often found it easier to communicate with them than with other Ghanaians. We share more of a wavelength of ideas and thought patterns. But at the same time, those times that I managed to really listen, I learned much from members of all types of churches and believe that there is much value to be found in moral orientations which are significantly different from my own mindset. So, why do I recommend Western NGOs to cooperate specifically with these churches? Because I do believe that if you try to cooperate with someone whose values and thought patterns are aligned with yours, you will have a far more productive cooperation.

Second, it might be worthwhile if NGOs were to sponsor investigative journalism into phony pastors. There is an enormous eruption of religious enterprise in Ghana at the moment, and many of these new preachers and prophets provide spiritual liberation and a lot of positive energy for their congregants. That is great. But too many of the new churches are set up by skilled manipulators and tricksters, crossovers between a short-term capitalist operation and a quasi-spiritual puppet show. The fact that these places call themselves churches is offensive both to older, established organization religion and to the true Pentecostals, mystics and other movements that form the spiritually alive fringe. They are tricksters who skillfully give poor people hope (or worse, fear) only to then drain them of their money. That bubble should be popped as soon as possible, and while the state should not get involved in regulating spirituality, exposure through journalism is an effective way to do so.

## **Chapter 7: Expansion patterns of connective goods**

From the chapter on the water and electricity infrastructure, two points: one general advice to major donors and one more detailed remark about pro-poor policies.

Major donors: invest in the backbone infrastructure. That is, the production facilities and main transmission lines throughout the city, and the organizational capacity of the state utility companies. Much of the rest of the network ‘builds itself’, in the sense that the distribution lines at the local level are far more affordable for local politicians and wealthy residents, and the residents build much of the final stretch of distribution infrastructure. It is the backbone infrastructure that is underfunded and ever more overstretched. In addition, those parts are the most technically complex components of the system. So they could really use the expertise that nearly automatically comes along with most development aid projects, since these contracts are in practice mostly granted to firms from the donor countries themselves. In those contracts, an explicit cost component for skills transmission and training should be included, to facilitate knowledge transfer to the local utility companies. Finally, support projects that allow the state utility companies to get a better control over their systems, such as the GIS mapping project of the GWC. In the end, such projects are highly cost-effective.

In terms of pro-poor policies, a direct approach does not seem warranted to me. It is very costly to provide water supply infrastructure for the poorest residents of the city. Local redistribution of water through home-based polytank sales operations and standpipes is a far more effective means for this end, and should be allowed to self-organize. Another way to do this is to better facilitate the water tanker trucks. In the end, this is pipe water that manages to reach those who are not yet connected, and which is used quite efficiently and sparingly, because it is so expensive.

### **Arrival city**

Finally, a piece of more general policy advice that I feel is most important of all, about Accra more in general and its position in Ghanaian society at large. The function of an arrival city (Saunders, 2011) is vital. But how can we ensure that pathways for poor villagers to enter the city remain open? Currently, the messy fringes of the city are the only places where they can go. Buffer zones around highways and waterways, spaces like Old Fadama and other, smaller squatter zones. These are the campsites of the city, and we should tacitly recognize that function. That is not to say that they should be permanent campsites: a highway buffer is there for a reason, and government should be able to use it when necessary. In fact, should there be no more eviction threat, that would drive the value of that land up dramatically and it would no longer be available



to the arrivals. Similarly, slum improvement projects don't work. That is to say, they upgrade the neighborhood, not the residents' lives.

It is as simple as this: a city like Accra, with a migratory function for those living in deprived rural areas, needs arrival spaces. And those arrival spaces are going to be ugly, otherwise they wouldn't be left for the arrivals.

So, my advice is: leave the messy places in the city. Tolerate them. They are vital stepping stones on the road to a better life, for many, many people.

## Appendix 2: Data sheet neighborhood profile

Neighborhood: ...

Date: ...

Area description...

### Block 1

Residential Buildings found in the block

| Building type                            | Amount of this type found in the are |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Wooden shack                             |                                      |
| Rental hall & chamber row building, clay |                                      |
| Family luxury home, unfinished           |                                      |
| Family luxury home, finished             |                                      |
| Family standard home, unfinished         |                                      |
| Family standard home, finished           |                                      |
| Rental block building, unfinished        |                                      |
| Rental block building, finished          |                                      |
| Farm or open space                       |                                      |
| Other...                                 |                                      |

Non-residential buildings found in the block

| Business      | Building type & material* | Comments (optional) |
|---------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Lotto         |                           |                     |
| Provisions    |                           |                     |
| MTN credit    |                           |                     |
| Hairdresser   |                           |                     |
| Water depot   |                           |                     |
| Tailor        |                           |                     |
| Public toilet |                           |                     |
| Other...      |                           |                     |

## COMMENTS:

### Amenities and other area characteristics

#### Street lights *(choose the best fitting category, provide comments below)*

- (a) none (b) main street only (c) some side streets also  
(d) most side streets (e) almost everywhere in the community

#### Comments:

#### Drains & sewerage *(choose the best fitting category, provide comments below)*

- (a) no drains at all (b) main street only (c) some side streets also  
(d) most side streets (e) almost everywhere in the community

#### Comments:

#### Power *(choose the best fitting category, provide comments below)*

- (a) no power lines (b) power lines only along main street  
(c) power lines going into a few side streets (d) power lines in many parts of the block  
(e) power in almost every house

#### Comments:

#### Building density *(choose the best fitting category, provide comments below)*

- (a) scattered structures (b) about half of all plots have at least some structures  
(c) majority of plots used (d) majority of plots used intensively, at least some structures...  
...on almost every plot (e) almost all plots are fully used

#### Comments:

**Street quality** (choose the best fitting category, provide comments below)

- (a) unmarked dirt roads                      (b) demarcated dirt roads                      (c) gravel roads  
(d) some tarred roads                      (e) all roads tarred

**Comments:**

## Interview

### Historical questions

1. When did you arrive in this area? How did the place look, when you first came here?
2. When and how did the **first people settle** in this area? Details?
3. When and how was the first **church** built? Details?
4. When and how was the first **school** built? Details?
5. When and how did you get **water** in this area? Self-help, by Assembly/MP project, in another way? Details?
6. When and how did you get **electricity** in this area? Self-help, by Assembly/MP project, in another way? Details?
7. When and how did you get the first **street lights** in this area? Self-help, by Assembly/MP project, in another way? Details?
8. When and how did you get **open roads** (suitable for car) in this area? Self-help, by Assembly/MP project, in another way? Details?
9. When and how did you get the first **tarred roads** (suitable for car) in this area? Self-help, by Assembly/MP project, in another way? Details?
10. **Who contributed to pay** for all these things? [only if the person has not explained this already, otherwise, you may skip this question]
11. Is there any **Residents Association** in this area? Is it active? Why (not)? Which projects is/was it most concerned with?
12. When was the moment that there were **too many residents** in the area for you **to know all** of them? Details? When did people really start flooding in here?
13. What were the **major challenges** during the development of this area so far?
14. ...is there **anything else** you can teach me about the history of this town?

### **Current situation in the area**

1. What are the **water sources for residents** in this community? Standpipe, mainline, tanker, boreholes? Which ones do **most people** use?
2. Where is the **nearest police station**? When was it built?
3. What **District/Municipal Assembly** are you part of? Do you think they have **enough time and attention** for this community?
4. Where is the **nearest bank**? When was it built?
5. Is there any **public toilet** in this area? When was it built?
6. Are the various plots of **land legally and securely owned** by the residents? **Or is there a conflict** about the original ownership of the land somehow, between chiefs, government authorities, or others?
7. In what ways did **the chief contribute** to the development of the area?
8. What **development is most needed** now, at the moment, and what is holding it back?

**N.B. Describe the person you conducted the interview with:**

## Appendix 3: Sample door-to-door interview

### General questions

What is your name?

*(Name removed for privacy reasons)*

How long have you lived in this area?

*I moved in here 6 months ago.*

Do you own the structure or do you rent? What about the land? What is the rent?

*I rent the self-contained apartment (hall, chamber, kitchen, toilet and bath) from the landowner on 2 year pre-paid contract. The price is 120 cedi per month, and the rent is paid up front. So I paid 4800 cedi when moving in.*

Where did you live before?

*I was staying in a different part of this same community, but that house was too small.*

Where is your hometown?

*Offankor on the Hsawam Road by Pokuase. That means I'm from around here.*

Who are part of your household here?

*[all subsequent questions are asked about the entire household]*

*I am staying here with my wife and two children.*

How old are you?

*Myself, I am 56 years old. As for my wife I am not too sure. My children, one is now graduated from secondary school, one is still in that school.*

What job do you do?

*Formerly, I used to be a sealer for Shell petroleum. Now I'm retired since some few years.*

What is your highest level of education?

*Form 4, that is, secondary school. My wife has also finished Form 4. As I said, my daughter has completed Senior High School. My son is still schooling.*

Which church do you attend?

*I'm attending Anglican Church, in Tema near my former home. That one is a bit far from here, but I still travel there because I like it. It's known to me and I have my friends there. As for my wife, she does the same but for Catholic church. My children, I don't see them going to church honestly.*

Do you have any place where you go to spend some free time and relax small?

*In fact, there is a bar nearby, where I like to go. There are some usual friends of mine there, I can rely on them [laughs]. But it's not only the bar. Some days I would rather go to Tema to visit some of my relatives. My wife, she doesn't like to go anywhere. She just stays at home to take care of our grandchild. That is the child of our daughter.*

If you need to borrow some household item, who do you borrow it from?

*Oh, me, I don't borrow anything. If you borrow in this community people may be willing to lend stuff to you, but then they will talk about you behind your back. If I am in need of anything, no problem, I will just buy my own stuff.*

If you need to borrow money, who do you borrow it from?

*Like I said, I wouldn't borrow from people around. If anything I would borrow money from a bank rather than from my friends or neighbours.*

Do you have your own electricity meter?

*Well, I share one with the two other rental apartments in the block. Everyone puts money together to pay the prepaid electricity meter. So we don't really run into any trouble there.*

Do you have your own water connection / pipe?

*Again, we are sharing one connection. That works just fine.*

### Group questions

- 1 Are you part of any welfare groups, in church or otherwise?  
*Every member of my church is automatically member of the church welfare group, for this we each pay 1 cedi (€0,20) every Sunday. This money is used for when people have a funeral or birth or sickness. We can be pretty sure who should get money from that welfare fund, because it has a clear constitution. I also have my copy. Then apart from this there is my tithe, that one is rather meant for costs related to the church. I pay 12 cedi per month for that (€2,40). As for my wife, she has something similar in her church. Also a welfare system. We are both not part of any community welfare group.*
- 2 Are you part of any sports or game group, or is there a sport or game which you like to play – and do you play it with the same people or always different people?



*Yes! I am part of a keep-fit club. It's just people going to a certain place to exercise, men and women together. Not based on any tribal what-what, or religious basis. Just people going to do some exercise and stay fit. As of now, we are not formally organised. But we are planning to get organised and get a welfare system in place, starting September. Then we are just going to start small. Maybe a monthly contribution of 1 cedi per person. If that turns out well, then we can tax ourselves a bit more. Apart from that club, I also like to play some handball, netball and volleyball. My wife? No, she does not join my group. But I have to say, she does sometimes go for games, sports, exercise within her church.*

3 Are you part of any Old School group? [alumni]

*Oh, you know. Some people from my school started one and I even came to the first meeting. But there were only two other people there. After that I just gave up on it, even though they are telling me now that there are many people so I should come again. Well, maybe I will, we'll see. My wife, she used to go for Old School meetings of her own place too. But she stopped all that when she gave birth.*

4 Are you part of any reading/studying/educational group?

*No, nothing like that. Nor is my wife.*

5 Are you part of any political group, party member, or pressure group?

*Yes, he has a membership card for a political party, Which one? That is up to me, frankly. But I'm really not active in that party. I don't go to their meetings, whether they are private or public. You know what, I probably won't even go to vote next year for the president. Honestly, is there anything I can gain from supporting either party?*

6 Are you part of any trade association?

*Definitely, I used to be part of the union at my previous job. In fact, I was an executive of that union. The main function of the union was to press for better salaries and secondary benefits. My wife too. Formerly, she used to work as a hairdresser. She stopped that because of the grandchild she takes care of. But at the time when she was working, she was an active member of the Beautician's Association, going for meetings too!*

- 7 Are you part of any other kind of group?  
*No, no. In fact, let me tell you. There are many different groups out there and I'm sure I could join them, but as for me, I prefer to stay out of trouble.*
- 8 Is there a group of which you previously were a member, which you have left or which has disbanded?  
*No.*

### Area questions

- 1 When you arrived here, did anyone introduce you to the community?  
*Well, I came here because I heard through a friend that there was an apartment for rent here. So I hopped across and met the landowner. Of course he greeted me, I am renting his house. But apart from that, nobody welcomed me into the area or anything like that.*
- 2 Is there anything else you can teach me about how people form groups here or why some people like to join groups while others don't?  
*Well, I know that a lot of people may not want to join groups around here. All it causes is gossiping and strife. To be honest I agree with them.*
- 3 What is the biggest problem in this area and who should work to fix it?  
*In this area? The place is fine ooh. The real problem is dumsor [power cuts]. But that one, the problem is national. So it should be the president and parliament who should work to fix it. As for this here area, there are no problems. I like the place.*

## Appendix 4: Examples of questionnaires

In this Appendix I show two examples of the questionnaires I used to conduct semi-structured interviews with opinion leaders, neighbourhood activists, government workers and others who take up relevant positions in or related to the social of the neighbourhoods I investigated. I provide two examples: Hon. Allenge and Rev. Akey.

### **Example 1: Honorable Samuelson Allenge, former Assembly member**

*Mr. Allenge was the first Assembly member of the electoral area under which Sebrepor fell at the time. Apart from this, I asked him about his past and the past of the area, and about the ways he and other prominent locals organised to achieve more numerous representation in democratic bodies.*

1. Can you tell me something about yourself, your personal story? Where did you come from, how did you come here? Why? What church do you go to, why that one?
2. What is it like to work as Assembly member?
3. Before you became Assemblyman for this area, there was no Assembly member here. Who worked for that, who pushed for that, how was that achieved?
4. You were the first Assembly member in the area. As such, what were your functions?
5. What are you most proud of? Your biggest achievement as Assembly member?
6. Is there anything you regret, where you should have acted differently?
7. How did the Kpone-Katamanso Assembly come into being? Who pushed for that? I know in Ashaiman they really had to fight for it, and people do, because it helps to have your own assembly. So how was that achieved here?
8. How did you work to push for your electoral area to be split into five smaller ones?
9. Who worked with you on that project? Youth clubs? And do you have any experience of how this normally happens, perhaps from other areas?
10. You now have a new role, as zonal chairman. What does that role involve?
11. Youth clubs, what's their function? What do they look like, always hanger-on's or also clubs in their own right? And who else pushes?
12. I did some interviews during elections, and people said the new Assembly member is very suitable for the job, because he has powerful sponsors, he can get things done. So what kind of things will be easier for him compared to his predecessor?
13. Is there any other way you can help me to understand how people organise in these new urban areas?

## **Example 2: Reverend Francis Akey, church leader**

*Mr Akey is the head of one of the biggest churches in Sebrepor. This is the questionnaire for the first interview I conducted with him and with anybody at his church in general. As in every other interview, I started by asking him to tell me about himself, and ended with an open invitation to explain anything that I might have overlooked. Apart from this, I asked him about his church's internal organisation and their relations with local government, and about the development trajectory and power relations of the neighbourhood more generally.*

1. Can you tell me something about yourself, your personal story? Where did you come from, how did you come here? Why?
2. Please tell me something about your church: its age, its congregation, its character.
3. What organised groups exist within your church, and what do they do?
4. How are your church departments run? Employees full-time, or volunteers?
5. There is also a school founded and run by your church. As for that school, how do you liaise and work together with the District?
6. The church welfare system seems to be a very important element for a lot of people. Can you go into detail about it?
7. How do new members come into your church?
8. In what languages do you preach, and why?
9. When you came to Sebrepor, what was there? And then, how did you see it grow?
10. Who are the powerful actors in this area, what kind of people are they? Political leaders, business leaders, church leaders, youth clubs, residents associations?
11. When there is a need for better schools, water/power/roads, or security, who can work to establish those?
12. I have heard that the chieftaincy palace is closed, and it is unknown when it will open again. How do you see this?
13. Is there any other way you can help me to understand how people organise in these new urban areas?



# CV Joris Tieleman

Surinameplein 35  
1058GM Amsterdam  
E-Mail: joris.tieleman@gmail.com  
Phone: +31 6 128 821 82  
Nationality: Dutch  
Date of birth: 15 November 1987

## EDUCATION

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- 11/2014 – 04/2020      **PhD Candidate, Sociology Department, Erasmus University, Rotterdam.** Project: “*Mapping the city from below*”, combining GIS and sociology, in collaboration with the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS).
- 09/2012 – 08/2013      **M.Sc. Human Geography, Universiteit van Amsterdam.**  
Thesis: *The Shifting Cityscape of Amsterdam (poster) – a quantitative analysis of the spatial expansion patterns of gentrification.* Av. 7.9, ESRI Young Scholar Award and NVM Thesis of the Year Award.
- 09/2011 - 08/2012      **M.Sc. Spatial, Transport & Environmental Economics, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.**  
Thesis: *Bilateral Investment Treaties in South America – a quantitative analysis of costs and benefits.* Av. 8.1, *Cum Laude.*
- 09/2007 – 08/2011      **B.A. Liberal Arts & Sciences, Universiteit Utrecht, The Netherlands.** Major: Economics, Minors: Entrepreneurship and Urban Geography. Av. 7.3
- 09/2000 – 06/2006      **Christelijk Gymnasium Utrecht.**  
Majors: *Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry.*  
Final grade: 7.8

## WORKING EXPERIENCE

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- 10/2013 – 09/2014      **GIS Developer, VDP Research, Berlin.** VDP is the Association of German mortgage banks. Tasks: digital mapping, real estate research using GIS, development of interactive GIS services for real-time valuation of objects.
- 01/2011 – 09/2013      **Freelance Researcher, SOMO, Amsterdam.** SOMO is a socio-economic research institute. Tasks: research on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy and practice of multinational corporations. Average two days/week. Methods: Data banks, surveys, literature research.
- 05/2008 - 04/2009      **Board of the Atlas Student Union, Universiteit Utrecht, Treasurer.** Tasks: budget preparation and oversight, coordination of several working groups.
- 2007 – 2010              **Atlas Student Union, Universiteit Utrecht.** Tasks: Organisation of group travel to St. Petersburg and Strassburg, Organisation of an open air festival (as chairman), other organisational tasks.

## SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

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- 01/2007-08/2007      **Teacher, Phwezi Boys Secondary School, Malawi.** Tasks: voluntary work as teacher for Math and English, teaching (solo) three classes of about 60 boys each, coaching the school football team.
- 01/2014-12/2016      **Co-founder and national chairman, Rethinking Economics NL.** Tasks: campaigning for a modernized, pluralist curriculum in economics education. 20 hr/week. ([www.rethinkingeconomics.nl](http://www.rethinkingeconomics.nl))



## AWARDS

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|         |  |
|---------|--|
| 09/2013 | Winner of the <b>NVM Thesis of the Year Award 2013</b> . Presentation of Master's Thesis at the Dutch Real Estate Broker Conference (main stage).            |
| 07/2013 | Winner of the <b>ESRI Young Scholar Award 2013</b> . Presentation of Master's Thesis at ESRI Conference 2013, San Diego, USA.                                |
| 04/2009 | <b>Rotary Young Leaders Program</b> , The Netherlands  |
| 03/2004 | <b>Mathematics Olympiad</b> , The Netherlands. Winner of the national schools contest with the CGU school team, top 10 nationwide in the individual contest. |

## OTHER

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|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <i>Languages</i> | <b>Dutch:</b> Mother tongue<br><b>English:</b> Fluent (Studies were completely in English)<br><b>German:</b> Fluent (C2 level, Goethe Institute)<br><b>French:</b> Basic knowledge, sufficient for reading<br><b>Spanish:</b> Basic knowledge, sufficient for reading |
| <i>Travel</i>    | Malawi, Ghana, Zambia, India, Australia, South-east-Asia, Morocco, Canada, U.S., Mexico, Israel, Jordan.  |
| <i>Software</i>  | ArcGIS, Word, Excel, Stata, SPSS.   |



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We are experiencing a century of unprecedented urban growth. While Africa is still the least urbanised continent, its cities grow fastest of all. Accra, the capital of Ghana, is a frontrunner. Given the limited capacity of government, the growth of all these new neighborhoods is a rough and chaotic process. How do the residents of these areas organise to create collective amenities, such as water, electricity, security and roads?

This thesis traces the development of a single neighborhood, from bush to city. In particular, it zooms in on residents associations, traditional chiefs, churches and the water infrastructure. It shows how deeply the early pioneers leave their marks in the urban shape, how contemporary institutions such as chieftaincy and the churches were shaped by their history, and how all these forces combine to weave the new urban fabric of a rapidly expanding city.