

interested in wax cloth, but also for those interested in its long-standing role in patterning relations between women, market and nation.

T. Tu Huynh
Jinan University, Guangzhou
huynh.2.t@gmail.com
doi:10.1017/S0001972018000591

Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go: African mobility in the age of motor transportation*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press (hb US\$85 – 978 0 253 02277 6; pb US\$35 – 978 0 253 02307 0). 2016, 266 pp.

Ghana on the Go presents fascinating insights into some of the connectivities that have shaped twentieth- and early twenty-first-century urban Ghana. It is not simply a history of motor transportation, but rather an exploration into the shaping of motor mobility practices and associated legislation within a broader web of economic, social, political and technological changes. For the most part, it focuses on commercial transport, and encompasses a sweep of history extending from struggles between road and rail in the early colonial period, through the rise of the mammy wagon, to the emergence of transport unions and the expansion of trotros (converted cargo trucks) in urban centres in the 1950s, then onwards to private car ownership at the turn of this century and finally to debates over the likely impact of BRT (bus rapid transit) in contemporary Accra.

Drivers occupy centre stage in this story: we learn how skilful, entrepreneurial driver-owners in the 1930s and 1940s found their passengers and suitable apprentices and developed forms of expertise that went beyond driving to mechanical and social skills. For apprentices, the driving test was a rite of passage through which they could become a ‘master’ in their own right and confirm their status as respectable modern men, both sophisticated and metropolitan. It was also lucrative, through the ‘quick money’ of daily earnings. Gendered expectations meant that women were largely excluded from this work: driving was perceived as an essentially masculine enterprise, because it was said to require not only the physical strength to drive a vehicle lacking power steering, and to load and unload goods, but also the mechanical knowledge to maintain and repair vehicles as well as the confidence to enforce good behaviour among potentially unruly passengers. Long-distance cargo drivers received particular respect, because their work entailed even more specialized training and knowledge.

Hart directly links the change in attitudes, and the status of drivers, to the national crisis that beset Ghana as cocoa prices declined. This occurred gradually from the late 1950s. The increasing intrusion of political authoritarianism and the manipulation of legal structures that resulted, as regime after regime engaged in ‘scapegoating’, severely impacted on the social and economic lives of drivers. Events such as the union strike instigated by a new government requirement for drivers to have third-party insurance in 1957 led to drivers being vilified as public enemies and cheats. They were able to survive this long period of decline that extended through the mid-1980s due to their entrepreneurial skills and mutual support, despite the decline of union power in that period. The structural adjustment programme introduced in 1983 saw little relief for these men because increased imports of vehicles after the neoliberal reforms brought a massive expansion in car ownership and thus further reduced the occupational status of commercial drivers. With fewer barriers to entry, driver numbers expanded and men now worked longer hours for less income. Even the growing alliance

between the main transport union, the GPRTU (Ghana Private Road Transport Union, which Hart reports as being the largest union, representing about 85 per cent of Ghana's drivers), and the ruling PNDC party could not shield commercial drivers from the deregulation and privatization required by World Bank/IMF policy. Indeed, Hart suggests that commercial driving degenerated into a tool for survival in the 1980s, and became an occupation of refuge and last resort, not a path to prosperity. Hart further suggests that this trajectory continues to this day due to persistently high rates of unemployment and limited access to education. Yet Hart may be overstating her argument: certainly, for many of the boys and young men I have interviewed in research focusing on mobility over the last two decades in Ghana, including in urban areas, commercial driving is still seen as a very desirable occupation. There are some occupations of last resort in the West African transport sector for both genders, but these are most commonly centred around head-porterage, on-loading and off-loading of vehicles, and (for males only) the manual operation of push-trucks and handcarts in market areas. From the standpoint of many young men in poor communities, where employment prospects are so limited, driving is still perceived as far preferable to the alternatives.

The book draws on substantial archival research, some telling photographs, and an impressive set of in-depth interviews, especially with older men from Accra and Kumasi who are able to reflect on their driving experiences over many decades. Historical and anthropological literature is referenced extensively, although I was surprised to find no reference to Grieco *et al.*'s 1996 study of transport, travel and trade in Accra, which has much detail regarding women's experiences of informal public transport and thus provides some complementary perspectives. Transport rarely sits at the centre of texts about sub-Saharan Africa in the twenty-first century, despite its crucial place in the past and future of the continent. There is much here for readers across a wide range of disciplines to learn and enjoy.

Gina Porter

Durham University

r.e.porter@durham.ac.uk

doi:10.1017/S0001972018000608

Filip De Boeck and Sammy Baloji, *Suturing the City: living together in Congo's urban worlds*. London: Autograph ABP (hb £30 – 978 1 899282 19 7). 2016, 328 pp.

This brilliant collaboration between an anthropologist and a photographer has resulted in not only a handsome volume that does justice to word and image alike, but also something far more important – a beautifully successful balance between thoughtful ethnography, thought-provoking and appropriate theory, and a visual essay that sensitively and imaginatively investigates its themes rather than just illustrating them.

'What this book aims to capture and understand,' writes De Boeck, 'is how urban residents ... read potential, promise and prospect into the blackness of the hole: how they throw themselves – their words and their own bodies – into this daily struggle with the city's madness.' The suturing or stitching together of the gaps and holes, both infrastructural and more figurative, in a city such as Kinshasa involves a shifting set of social strategies and new forms of collective life, if residents are to successfully navigate living together in such urban environments. The 'urban acupuncture' that the authors undertake throughout the book