

**Some basic observations of, and hopefully substantive reflections on,
the Greater Accra Region in 2016**

Jean-Germain Gros



A Changing Landscape for the Nouveaux Riches

The Greater Accra Region in mid-2016 is a bustling metropolis of over 4 million people. What jumps at the visitor, even from the air, is the number of construction cranes pullulating the city. Accra is almost literally one huge construction site. The boom in commodity prices in recent years and direct foreign investment (DFI) by China have transformed urban Africa into a mishmash of office building mini-skyscrapers, luxury apartment blocs, new roads, and monstrous traffic jams. The most impressive display of this building renaissance in Accra is in Airport City, a strip of hitherto vacant and wildly vegetated land, public housing, and shacks tucked between Kotoka International Airport and Liberation Road, the main artery running on the North-South coordinate. Airport City currently hosts office buildings, some high-end restaurants and hotels (President Barack Obama stayed at the Holiday Inn when he visited in 2009), and the curiously named Marina Mall (there is not a puddle of water to be found anywhere near the place). Airport City will soon welcome its first redevelopment residents, for a significant portion of the land from the Big Six roundabout at the main airport exit to the old Polo Ground is slated for what the artist rendering suggests will be scores of apartment blocs interconnected by courtyards, walkways, pedestrian bridges, etc. This is likely to be Accra's new sleeping quarter and playpen for the upwardly mobile, sandwiched between two paragons of urban consumerism—Marina Mall (already mentioned) and Accra Mall—and opposite of a soon-to-be expanded international airport.

New luxury apartment buildings and townhouses are sprouting up elsewhere: e.g., in Labone, Cantonments, and Airport Residential. The architecture of these communities displays diversity, but there is a discernible preference for a variation on the *Immeuble Villa* style once championed by Le Corbusier: multi-storied square and rectangular structures with cell-like individual apartments stacked one on top of another, with plans that combine living and dining rooms, master bedrooms with separate bathrooms, kitchens with all of the amenities, and, in some cases, garden terraces and balconies. The picture below is typical of this style.



Here functions take precedence over forms, and practicality trumps aesthetics. As shown in the next picture, all of the developments are walled and gated, thus off limit to non-residents, underscoring security concerns and perhaps subliminal guilt.



Because of Africa's fungible class structure, one of the inescapable realities of urban life, from Cairo to Cape Town, Accra to Nairobi, is the intimate juxtaposition of wealth and poverty, which of course produces contrasting vistas. Ghana's upper middle class resident must often share space with the more modest living quarters of the worker right next door or the kiosks of the street vendor in front; the opulent driver of the latest town car (sedan) must contain her anger at the squeegee man, who shows up unexpectedly during traffic stops to "clean" the windshield; the chauffeured entrepreneur must display similar magnanimity toward the hordes of hawkers, who peddle everything from batteries to puppies, impeding circulation in the process. These survival strategies on the major streets of Ghana's capital, called *débrouillardisme* in Francophone Africa, are easy to explain. The train of "development" has yet to pick up most passengers in Ghana; it has only accommodated those who can afford to travel first-class. None the less, it may be a reflection of the basic decency of Ghanaians that the urban poor are seldom harassed on a sustained basis, in spite of the untidiness of their activities.

Accra is generally expensive. But housing and land prices are getting out of hand. Evidently, Greater Accra either suffers from a severe shortage of housing suitable for the well-to-do, to which real estate developers are correctly responding, or irrational exuberance has reached African shores, setting the housing market for an unwelcome correction (i.e., crash). Time will tell which one, but there is no question that the luxury housing stock is being increased in Greater Accra. The question is, for whom? The answer is almost certainly: not for ordinary Ghanaians. New housing units in Accra are often priced

in the six-figure range in U.S. dollars—in most cases well above 100,000 in the American currency—while per capita GDP in 2014 was recorded at 775.36 U.S. dollars. The low purchasing power implied in per capita GDP means that most Ghanaians cannot afford the new housing units. This is exacerbated by the scarcity of credit. Ghanaian banks are notoriously risk averse when it comes to lending money.

I visited an apartment complex in Labone in early June: a rather compact two-bedroom, two-bath unit on the first floor of a three-story building tagged at 290,000 USD. The “penthouse” on the top floor, which the real estate agent insisted (unconvincingly) offers a view of the Atlantic Ocean on a sunny day, had an equal number of bedrooms but they were even smaller than those at the bottom floor. Still, it was being sold for 315,000 USD. In the less affluent community of Dzorwulo, another two-bedroom apartment was available for 190,000 USD. On the day of my guided tour Accra was being pounded by a torrential rain. Puddles of water had formed around the elevator of the building, with more seeping through the floor-to-ceiling glass windows, raising questions about the quality of construction not only at this site but throughout Greater Accra. The Friday downpour was the capstone to a very wet week during which parts of the city had flooded (e.g., Kwame Nkrumah Circle), officially killing three people and stranding many more.

Two common problems in Third World cities are the lack of adequate government oversight of construction projects and poor drainage. Accra definitely suffers from the latter; it is a fool’s errand to bet against the former. Accra also experienced at least one tremor in recent years. It is not clear its buildings, old and new, meet the seismic requirements for minimizing the loss of lives in the event of an earthquake. What passes for “development” in much of urban Africa is really mimicry of the outward signs of modernity without the concomitant (and generally public) investment in the basic infrastructure that supports modernity: e.g., drainage/sewer systems, electrical power grids, tap water, water treatment plants, waste disposal, fire and police stations, etc. This is tantamount to building on quicksand; the net result is that the rich ends up experiencing the same risks as the poor, in spite of overt differences in lifestyle. Builders and hotel owners also incorporate the costs of providing these services privately, which are then passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices. A standard room in an unremarkable hotel in Greater Accra can easily cost upward of 150.00 USD per night, but the irate guest must remember that the owner may have purchased a truck of water earlier in the day, and the humming

generator that keeps the stifling heat of West Africa at bay in her room, because of incessant load shedding (*dumsor*) by the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG), is an unapologetic fuel glutton.

Roads

There is one exception to what was said at the end of the previous section. A discernible sign of progress in the Greater Accra Region in 2016 concerns roads. New tarred roads have been built in many parts of the city, while existing ones have been enlarged. In peripheral areas, too, earth movers, tractors, bulldozers, and steamrollers are rumbling (at least some of the time). In Aboasa, the last town before crossing into the Eastern Region, there are visible signs that the hilly, rocky, main road that wreaks havoc on shock absorbers will soon be more user-friendly. Central Accra is connected to Aburi by a multiple lane highway. (The picture below was taken just south of the University of Ghana).



I remember distinctly when these two points were joined mostly by a single-lane road each way snaking through some of the most heavily populated parts of the Accra metropolitan area (Legon, Madina). The new interchange at Kwame Nkrumah Circle promises to rival any similar feat of transportation engineering in Los Angeles (drainage problems, and, with them, the threat of flood notwithstanding). However, everything has a price. The wage of infrastructural improvement in Accra is an exponential increase in the number of vehicles on the city's streets, which reduces traffic to a crawl seemingly during most hours of the day. To avoid this, some workers either leave home very early in the morning or depart their workplace well after working hours. Productivity loss due to traffic jam is probably

considerable in Greater Accra, not to mention the health consequences of spending long hours in a car each day in an aggravated state. In rebuilding its road network, Accra has not corrected two longstanding deficiencies: the open gutter and lack of sidewalks, both of which make walking and jogging very difficult, if not to say downright dangerous. In 1954 Richard Wright wrote about the visibility of Accra's drainage in *Black Power*. More than 60 years later, the evacuation of "waste" water in Accra has yet to be granted some privacy. The streets are also unfriendly to the wheel-chair bound, as there are very few off-ramps for the physically challenged; government buildings and private housing units similarly overlook that in most countries at least 10 percent of the population need special accommodation of one type or another.

Work

Work in Greater Accra remains overwhelmingly labor intensive, although there are some industries (construction) where heavy machineries are widely in use. The machete, the pickaxe, and the shovel are ubiquitous instruments of production in urban Ghana in 2016. Over a four-day period, I witnessed the befalling of about half a dozen coconut trees by machetes in the upscale neighborhood of Labone, a task that might have taken half that time with chainsaws. The work felt arduous, just by observing it. A worker repeatedly struck the bottom of the tree, while a rope is tied around the top with ends hanging on two sides. When the machete had cut sufficiently into the trunk, two workers pulled down the tree with the rope, producing a thunderous "thump" once it hit the ground (In the picture below, the rope can clearly be seen at the top of the tree, as can be the laceration of the machete nearly midway in the painted section at the bottom).



Parking in Accra often generates self-appointed parking “specialists” seemingly out of nowhere. Labor intensity is good and bad. Unemployment rates in Ghana averaged nearly 9 percent between 2001-2016, reaching its highest level in 2005 at nearly 13 percent and an all-time low of 5.2 percent in 2013 (<http://www.tradingeconomics.com/ghana/unemployment-rate>). If it is assumed that the unemployment rate accounts for people who are unemployed but actively seeking work, as opposed to those who are unemployed but discouraged or ill, it can be conjectured that Ghana’s official unemployment rate is less than the real unemployment rate, upon which, it has to be conceded, the informal economy probably has a moderating influence. Whatever the case, in a country where many people may be unemployed, it makes sense for work to be labor intensive, as well as for it to be even “make shift” work. At least some people who might otherwise be unemployed are working. At the same time, much labor intensive work tends to involve low-skilled workers earning low wages, while capital intensive work, though requiring fewer workers, tends to generate higher wages (assuming of course that employers are willing to share productivity gains with workers, a fact that labor economics theory seldom acknowledges). Ideally, Ghana needs to reduce its unemployment rate while upgrading its human capital stock, so that the jobs generated are of the high-wage types, thereby increasing purchasing power and internally stimulating economic growth. This entails, as it does in most countries,

investing in education. Office workers in Greater Accra (e.g., bank tellers, secretaries, etc.) and service workers in general (e.g., waiters and waitresses, security guards, etc.) are extremely lackadaisical. There is a creeping incompetence that permeates through all the nooks and crannies of the Ghanaian bureaucracy, public and private, challenging the patience of the most sympathetic visitor.

Waakye, “Rubber,” and the Environment

Ghanaian food is delicious, but heavy in starch (carbohydrate) and oil (fat). The restaurant scene in Greater Accra is also increasingly cosmopolitan. There are Thai, Chinese, Indian, Turkish, Jamaican, and continental restaurants. It is perhaps a testimony to continued cultural subjugation that here in this corner of the continent of Africa continental means European! It is almost unimaginable that the same word could be used in a European capital in reference to African cuisine, if such could be found at all! Two traditional Ghanaian breakfast dishes are Hausa Koko, a porridge made from either millet or maize, and *waakye* (pronounced waa-chay), a somewhat incongruous mixture of rice and beans, vermicelli, hard boiled egg, fried chicken or fish, and thick pepper sauce (*shito*). Originally from northern Ghana, *waakye* is delicious, nutritious, cheap, and, if generously consumed, can sustain the average person for an entire day (including this writer). But it is also mainly a takeout street food, which is served in small black plastic bags (“rubber”), many of which end up in the open gutters and canals of Greater Accra, along with plastic bottles and all manner of non-biodegradable materials. The picture below was taken just past Kwame Nkrumah Circle on June 30, 2016.



As of the time of writing, there is no large scale recycling initiative in Greater Accra, which needs to be urgently started and can conceivably be profitable (any entrepreneur reading this?). Nor is there any serious effort of which I am aware to replace non-biodegradable synthetics with biodegradable materials, which are plentiful in Ghana. It is no accident that Kigali is one of the cleanest (if not the cleanest) city in sub-Saharan Africa. The ban on plastic bags is not unrelated to this outcome. The lack of conservation efforts of significance has consequences for the environment. A good portion of the seaside of Accra, e.g., the area around the Artists Alliance Gallery, is not a sight to behold. Yet, this is prime real estate, a potential South Beach (Miami) on this side of the Atlantic.

Transportation

Pedestrian life in Greater Accra requires pulmonary fortitude. There is really no mass transit system, which might have reduced air pollution and traffic congestion. Cars, trucks, and buses tend to use heavy fuel (*foo-wal*, as most Ghanaians seem hell-bent in pronouncing the word), which emits a strong odor and thick black smoke in the tailpipes of the less than road worthy vehicles (e.g., *trotros*). Less polluting and more rapid forms of private transportation should be encouraged. I have never noticed signs of bike lanes on the streets of Accra. The bicycle is a commons means of transportation in the Sahel and probably in northern Ghana. It is somewhat surprising it has not made its way south en masse. The taxi moto is perhaps more controversial, but it is ubiquitous in parts of urban Africa (e.g., Kigali). Properly regulated, with safety helmets required of both driver and passenger, it can be a viable means of

transportation in Accra: i.e., faster, less polluting, and cheaper than the conventional taxi. In the longer term, Greater Accra needs a public transportation system consisting of buses, light rails, which are being constructed in at least one African capital city (Addis Ababa), and, why not, subways.

People and Church

The most interesting aspects of any city are its people and the social institutions in which they are embedded. Accra residents are not gregariously friendly, but they are courteous toward and respectful of foreigners. In more than 20 years of regular, sometimes annual, visits to the city, I have not one experience of harassment, much less physical aggression. I have never been robbed, swindled, and “out-hustled.” It is possible to walk in parts of central Accra (e.g., the area around the U.S. embassy) during late evening without encountering a soul, until, that is, one reaches the traffic circle near the Togo embassy where members of the world’s oldest profession ply their trade. It is a curious choice of location, as it is not heavily travelled, but the ladies of the night must know something that most of us do not. (Politicians have been identified as the world’s second oldest professionals. If so, does that make political scientists pimps and madams?) Accra male residents generally prefer Western attire, although the traditional smock (*fuugu* or *batakari*), made famous by that picture of President Kwame Nkrumah and his closest aides on Ghana’s Independence Day, has not totally disappeared. Traditional clothing tends to reclaim its dominance during Sunday church services and funerals, and among women.

In 2016 religion is probably the most important social institution in Ghana, after the family. Ghanaians are among the most religious people on earth, and they are not bashful at expressing their faith. I had the privilege of attending church services on two occasions, as part of a nascent book project on magic, religion, democracy, and state making in Africa. One experience, was, to say the least, very interesting. When I arrived for the 11:00AM Sunday service in early June, the sprawling church on one of Accra’s busiest roads was only half full, as two services had been conducted in the hours prior. The architecture projected no particular style and seemed to be entirely the product of the imagination of the head pastor (formally he is called archbishop). Church service began with some announcements by what must have been the deacon. One congregant had sent news that he had been the victim of an armed robbery but his life had been spared, thanks to God, to which the deacon asked for and obtained: Amen! Another announcement informed that a member of the flock had passed away, but, not surprisingly, God

was given no credit for this development, and there was no solemn agreement (Amen). Then came the church choir and band, both led by the church lead singer.

She was a rather gaunt woman, seemingly in her late 40s, but she had a powerful voice, which easily drowned out that of the choir. The songs were strongly reminiscent of African-American spirituals and R & Bs, but there was also a “classical” tune performed solo by the church organist, which seemed out of kilter with the cadence of the more animated African rhythms. Cheikh Anta Diop was correct: there is fundamental cultural unity among African peoples, and, I would argue, religion, or more broadly spirituality, is its centerpiece. The mistake made by African Marxists, and the Left in general, in the 1970s was in not recognizing this reality. Religion is in Africa to stay, regardless of what scholars might wish. The challenge is to find points of convergence between religion and secular projects, so mutual suspicions can be dissipated and coalitions built. One issue area might be social justice, another climate change.

Next came the *pièce de résistance*, the rhetorical crescendo: the pastoral sermon. By this time, the church was full and rocking! Clapping, dancing, and swaying, few people remained in their seats. The congregants seemed eager to hear the archbishop, in spite of the fact that they must have heard him countless times before, some probably that very morning. He was a stocky, sixty-something fellow with a thick gold chain that descended just above his protruding belly, the accoutrement recalling the profile of an ageing American rapper. He was exquisitely good at his craft. He delivered the homily with passion and conviction, but without the theatrical excesses that characterize the liturgy of many a Protestant denomination. There was no glossolalia (speaking in tongues), which I had secretly wished to witness (perhaps I had gone to the wrong church). He bent and closed his eyes when invoking a particularly weighty biblical passage; for emphasis, he kicked into the air with one fist clinched. Stepping away from the pew every once in while, with microphone in hand, the archbishop paced the stage with a gait that clearly suggests he knew he was basically an entertainer, but one with a serious message and specific goal: to collect as much contribution as possible. And collect he did!

At the beginning of the service each attendee was given a program and an envelope. The former was kind of a map to what would be said, the latter the vessel for the expression of generosity. To his credit, the archbishop, unlike some of his American counterparts, never asked for money directly, at

least not on that day, but he did not have to. By the time he had finished his spiritual soliloquy, he had the congregants in the palms of his hands. With envelopes in ample supply, some made multiple donations, which were also increased by the constant passing of donation boxes. The music, singing and dancing were at their peak when the donations were proffered; they seemed designed to elicit the spiritual orgasm or ecstasy described by the German sociologist, Max Weber, thereby lowering the resistance of potential donors. Very interestingly, the service was broadcast live to other African countries and the rest of the world through the church's 24-hour cable TV channel and the Internet. Religion, that most ancient of institutions, has made at least limited peace with that contemporary symbol of modernity: information and communication technology (ICT). Is there a lesson for more "modern" African institutions: e.g., the state?

I left with a nagging feeling of what ifs. What if Africa in general and Ghana in particular had an ideology of development that could give religious ideology a strong run for its money? What if the donations of the congregants, many of whom seemed to be ordinary Ghanaians, were put into a pooled savings fund, from which they could borrow at low or no interest rates to start new businesses (capital formation), build houses, invest in education (human capital), and purchase healthcare? What if the donations were earmarked for specific projects, with costs and dates of completion being part of the public record, to foster accountability? Instead of surreptitiously encouraging profligacy in contribution with no stated purpose, what if the archbishop had preached frugality in spending, which, though anathema to Church financial interest, strongly comports to Christian teaching (i.e., living modestly)? What if? What if? Encore what if? (In fairness, it is very possible that, in one form or another, the church does at least some of the things that are being suggested here. That they were not mentioned on the day of my visit makes the speculations more forgiving, but I concede a certain rush to judgment here.)

Funeral

Funerals are important social events in Ghana. Greater Accra is no exception. I attended a funeral in late June 2016 in the Jamestown section of the city. This was a daylong event on one of the hottest days of the month. The male deceased had joined the ancestors at the relatively young age of 33. He had apparently fallen sick for a brief period before his demise. The prevailing conjecture seems to have been otherworldly foul play (*juju*), which was not abetted by the inability of the family to order a full autopsy.

This might have confirmed a more ordinary cause of death. The service took place on the street where the young man's parents lived. Tents were erected in the middle of it and naturally vehicular traffic was not allowed. Ghanaian funerals may take months to prepare, as they can be expensive and faraway relatives must be accommodated. This particular funeral was relatively modest and the number of attendees "small" (probably around 75, if that). Relatives were dressed in black and (or) red. The father of the deceased wore a cloth. Service began in late morning with the body inside a casket lying "in state" on the sidewalk near the front door of the parental house. A Christian preacher pronounced the eulogy. At around 1:00PM the body was transported for burial at Awodome cemetery. The cortège drove past the infamous slum of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The burial ceremony was brief and simple, presided over by the same preacher who led the eulogy earlier, with the number of attendees, standing either atop of tombstones or in between, being much smaller. There was a theatricality to the event that took me back to my childhood years in the Caribbean (Haiti). Just before the casket was interred and covered with dust, people started crying, with at least one woman wailing and seemingly talking to the deceased, perhaps cursing whoever had (ostensibly) done him in. An older man stood right behind me, inconsolable, tears streaming like a river down his face. All of this came to an abrupt stop as soon as the signal was given that it was time to return to the house for the post-burial phase. Inside the mini-bus (*trotro*), not a single tear was shed; the attendees had displayed an uncanny ability to switch between mourning and normalcy. Are there "professional" mourners? Is there a certain amount of play acting—in other words, dramaturgy—to grieving, or is the line between sadness and its obverse a thin one, enabling people to switch effortlessly and honestly between the two? Ample food and drinks were provided at the post-funeral reception. And then it was time to do the tally. In the house backyard, a group of men, including the father of the deceased, sat around a table to calculate spending and donations. A spokesperson read out loud the figures. Evidently, spending had been higher than donations. Efforts were underway to align the two, when I decided it was time to hail a taxi back to the faculty guesthouse.

Why do Ghanaians spend so much resources on funerals? I am a trained political scientist, not an anthropologist. Hence, I must profess limited cognitive competence ("bounded rationality," to borrow from Herbert Simon) on a matter that requires years of study. But, as a social scientist, I am also paid to provide at least educated guesses and plausible explanations ("theories") of social phenomena that can

be (in)validated. As an institution, the African funeral is inextricably linked, I believe, to African mythological cosmology, which ties together the dead, the living, and the unborn. In this outlook, the dead continues to live, thus remaining a subject of enduring preoccupation. Here I cannot help but extensively reproduce the poem of the Senegalese Birago Diop (1906-1989): *Les Morts ne sont pas morts* (The Dead are not dead).

....Ceux qui sont morts ne sont jamais partis :
 Ils sont dans l'Ombre qui s'éclaire
 Et dans l'ombre qui s'épaissit.
 Les Morts ne sont pas sous la Terre:
 Ils sont dans l'Arbre qui frémit,
 Ils sont dans le Bois qui gémit,
 Ils sont dans l'Eau qui coule,
 Ils sont dans l'Eau qui dort,
 Ils sont dans la Case, ils sont dans la Foule :
 Les Morts ne sont pas morts...

Ceux qui sont morts ne sont jamais partis :
 Ils sont dans le Sein de la Femme,
 Ils sont dans l'Enfant qui vagit
 Et dans le Tison qui s'enflamme.
 Les Morts ne sont pas sous la Terre :
 Ils sont dans le Feu qui s'éteint,
 Ils sont dans les Herbes qui pleurent,
 Ils sont dans le Rocher qui geint,
 Ils sont dans la Forêt, ils sont dans la Demeure,
 Les Morts ne sont pas morts.

Since death is merely a passage from one existential form to another, the newly dead has to be sent back to the ancestors properly, lest (s)he and they come after the living with a vengeance. Africa is also experiencing an important demographic shift. According to the World Bank, a majority of Africans are about to become urbanites. The ties that bind are usually weaker among city dwellers. Could the Ghanaian funeral be performing a triple entendre, so to speak? Specifically, could it be a way to assuage the guilt of the upwardly mobile uprooted by urbanization and emigration, who are generally expected to do the heavy financial lifting at funerals? Could it also be a last-ditch attempt by a besieged African institution (i.e., the extended family) to maintain its saliency? Finally, could the African funeral perform a function similar to the institution of the godfather and godmother in Latin America and southern Europe, that is to say, transmogrifying dying kinship ties into classic patronage? Of course, the

conjectures are not mutually exclusive. All three could be true. Belief (cosmology) and practice (functionalism) may be the best partners of the dead in the African setting.

Closing Remarks

Experiences do not have meanings. These come from the reflections we bring to bear on our experiences. In other words, meanings are subjective but they can be informed by objective factors (assuming this dichotomy can be sustained in a world of constant motion and fluidity). I have sketched out a picture of Greater Accra based on personal experiences and reflections over an eight-week period (May 13—July 11, 2016). Since I did not experience everything, the tableau is necessarily limited. For example, Greater Accra faces very serious power outages, which have gone on for years (*dumsor*). Fortunately, I had electricity continuously during my stay, except at very brief intervals. The importance of electricity can be expressed in a simple aphorism: no light: no development (*point de développement sans lumière*).

In the final analysis, Greater Accra is unlikely to reach its full potential without reliable and affordable energy, but there are other pressing challenges, as my musing tries to show. I deliberately committed sacrilege by shying away from politics, in line with the lightheartedness of the travelogue genre. Professional training and personal passion compel atoning for this “sin” in this closing section. Ghana’s democracy is likely to be severely tested in late 2016, when presidential elections are scheduled. One of the factors sustaining democracy is the expectation that challengers will *someday* succeed at dislodging incumbents from power, as long as electoral processes are above reproach. This necessarily implies that challengers cannot be out of power for too long, nor can the processes that underwrite election outcomes give rise to suspicion, lest the belief be found unrealizable, in which case challengers may start questioning democracy itself. Could the New Patriotic Party’s legal and peaceful challenge of the 2012 presidential election result, which took 8 agonizing months to adjudicate, be a harbinger of contrarian things to come in 2016, should the party, once again, loses in the fog of electoral malfeasance real or imagined? Ghana cannot go the way of Ivory Coast in 2012, Kenya in 2007, and the other democratic elections in Africa that ended in bloodshed. This year could decide whether Ghana remains an oasis of peace, stability, and democracy, or join the rank of fragile African states under threat of terrorism, secular and religious.

One missing link in African studies is the lack of focus on sub-national or sub-state institutions of governance. Africanists tend to emphasize elements of macro-politics: e.g., state, democracy, development, ethnic conflicts, peace, etc. But what about where the proverbial rubber meets the road, that is to say, where ordinary Africans come in routine contact with local government officials, whether to secure their driver's license, pay their utility bills (where utility has not been privatized), contest a traffic ticket, et cetera? What form of government might work better in large African cities: the executive or strong mayoral system, the collective or city council system, or the city manager system? Do African local governments have the power and resources to manage increasingly large urban agglomerations or megalopolises that, in fact, combine several cities in which traditional authorities still hold important sway, especially as regards land tenure and use? Accra's challenges, or for that matter Lagos' and Kinshasa's, are not unrelated to the way these cities are locally governed and the (often fuzzy) relationship among local and central governments and traditional authorities. Urban politics needs to be more visible in African studies, especially as a majority of Africans are trading the countryside for the city, although mostly in the absence of formal job creation (urbanization without industrialization or modernization).

Ghana's largest metropolitan area is changing. I am glad to have been a witness in mid-2016. May this land of gold, cocoa, and more recently, petroleum, of which Greater Accra is the political and demographic epicenter, take its rightful place in Africa and the world. Ghanaians would then have every reason to proudly say: *Akwaaba!*