'We built this city': Mobilities, livelihoods and social infrastructure in the lives of ageing Ghanaians

Ross Wignall

Katie McQuaid

Katherine V. Gough

James Esson

Abstract

This article examines the experiences of an often-neglected population group in geographical scholarship, namely, elderly people living in African cities. Using qualitative research conducted in the Ghanaian cities of Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi, we demonstrate how investigating older people's mobilities, and examining how they influence social and economic processes, has important implications for how agency in urban contexts is conceptualized. We do so using a novel analytical framework that combines mobilities and social infrastructure approaches to generate empirical insights that are more attuned to the spontaneity, heterogeneity, and informality of African urbanism as encountered by older residents. Our findings extend scholarship on ageing and urban studies in two key ways. First, we reveal the dispositions, practices and strategies older residents deploy as part of their efforts to navigate the urban terrain. Through doing so we qualify popular narratives in geography, and allied disciplines, of older people as either care givers or care receivers. Second, we further scholarship in urban studies which, while more considerate of insights from the majority world, especially the experiences of children and youth, has overlooked how older people are shaping urban dynamics in Africa.

1. Introduction

Interviewer: How old are you?

Enoch: The age I have been keeping a secret and you want me to disclose it? It is for this reason I don't respond to questionnaires!

Interviewer: What is your highest level of education?

Enoch: All these things are worrying! If I tell you I have never been at school you may wonder why a nice gentleman like me has never been to school.

Interviewer: Please, what is your occupation?

Enoch: An old man like me, can you employ me at your work?

Geographies of ageing have so far failed to fully engage with the nuanced agency of older people in African contexts. Studies are often caught between pervasive binaries which Enoch[1], a retired prison officer living in Accra, challenges in the exchange above: between being employed and unemployed, educated and less well-educated, honest and secretive, and active and passive. As Enoch's response indicates, older people are associated with social and economic categories that do not necessarily reflect their complex lived realities. To explore how these categories are experienced and challenged by older people, this article builds on work in the alternative new mobilities paradigm (Rigg 2008) and analytical insights on everyday urbanism stemming from Simone's (2004a) notion of 'people as infrastructure'. These approaches are used to draw attention to and conceptualise the diverse and complex roles, livelihoods and uncertainties of older people living in urban

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[1] All names are pseudonyms unless stated otherwise.

Ghana, and sub-Saharan Africa more generally. It does so by examining how everyday mobilities, life-cycle migration[2] and immobility interact and shape their social agency through complex forms of 'collaboration', 'consolidation,' 'coordination' and 'speculation' (McFarlane and Silver 2017). In the process, we highlight how older urban residents continue to produce social and economic value at the margins of African urbanism.

A broader understanding of older people's agency is critical at a time of unprecedented population ageing. Africans are projected to gain nearly 11 years of life expectancy from 60.2 to 71 years by 2050. Correspondingly, Sub-Saharan Africa's current population aged 60 and above is expected to increase from 44 million to 160 million by 2050 (WPP 2017), by which time more than 50% of the population will inhabit urban areas (UNECA 2016). As Africa urbanizes, rapidly ageing populations are increasingly located in urban areas with limited resources (Velkoff and Kowal 2007). Urban centres in Sub-Saharan Africa are thus set to join other parts of the global South that are confronting the difficult issue of 'unprecedented ageing' without the appropriate health and socio-economic infrastructures or policy frameworks to sustain their ageing residents (Falkingham et al. 2011). The pervasiveness of neoliberal governance and its predilection for dismantling welfare provision, including social healthcare, is placing an increasing strain on older people to care for dependents and other older people (Ardington et al. 2010; Barrientos et al. 2003; Madhavan 2004; van Eeuwijk 2016).

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[2] This could take the form of rural-urban/urban-rural migration or transnational migration at specific key life moments (see Rigg 2007).

This article aims to advance characterisations of older people as either care-givers or care-receivers that tend to dominate discussions of older people's lives in sub-Saharan Africa (Day and Evans 2015; Hanrahan 2018; Hoffman and Pype 2016; Van der Geest 2002). Put simply, we argue that a more a relational and grounded understanding of ageing lifeworlds that appreciates but is not fixated with issues of care is needed. This conceptual approach allows us to explore how social, economic and physical mobilities shape ageing urban residents' tactics and strategies for overcoming wider structural issues including: the decay of both urban and national transport infrastructure (Abane1993, 2011; Amoh-Gyimah and Aidoo 2013; Agyemang 2017; Oteng-Ababio and Agyemang 2015); unequal state policies towards ageing populations that frequently focus on youth, working age adults and children (Aboderin 2004b; Carbone 2012); precarious living conditions (Aboderin, Kano and Owii 2017); and, despite general improvements in poverty levels and record economic growth, persistent urban poverty and inequality (McKay et al. 2015).

Nuanced and situated research on ageing in this way is needed, not merely to provide geographical specificity but in order 'to make sense of the heterogeneity of the mobility practices and experiences of different older people and to think more critically about the nature of ageing and old age' (Schwanen and Paez 2010: 592). But what do we mean by older people? As the average life expectancy in the 'African Region' is 60 years (WHO 2017), anyone this age and over forms the accepted definition, which matches retirement age in Ghana. However, in this article we draw on data collected with individuals aged between 53-87 years of age and thus take a broader definition of older people

not necessarily limited by specific age-based parameters, preferring to focus on 'ageing' rather than an absolute state of being 'elderly' or an 'older person'. This is done with an awareness that to be 'old' and an 'elder' in contemporary Africa is relational, socially determined and self-defined. As Hoffman and Pype (2016:4) argue, the '[n]otions of elderliness and seniority are by no means fixed [...] Physical/chronological age notwithstanding, it is one's position within social networks that defines one as an "elder/grand/big person" or as a "petit/small person"'. We have been steered by our participants' own definitions of themselves as an older person and have used this divergence in age ranges to capture a range of responses from people at different phases of the life-cycle.

The article is structured as follows. The next section introduces our conceptual framework for understanding the heterogeneous experiences, mobilities and dependencies of older people in urban Ghanaian contexts. This is followed by an overview of our methodology. We then explore the experiences of ageing Ghanaians by examining perceptions of changes in livelihood opportunities post-independence through to the current era, unpacking normative accounts of urban (in)formal employment. Subsequently, we turn attention to the 'livelihood-mobility biography' of Kwame, a 71-year-old man living in Sekondi-Takoradi, which we use as an entry point for a broader analysis of ageing Ghanaians' experiences of mobility and work. By exploring how their lives have tracked changes in the Ghanaian urban infrastructure and urban economy, we demonstrate how changing lives and urban development are inseparable from each other. We conclude by outlining how our findings extend scholarship on ageing and urban studies

2. Ageing, Mobilities and Social Infrastructure

Following the regional trend, due to extended life expectancy, Ghana's ageing population has expanded in recent years, despite shrinking in proportion to the general population creating a widely discussed 'crisis of care' (Coe 2017). Similarly, nearly half of all elderly people in Ghana reside in urban areas with numbers increasing year on year. Although as Ghanaians age they have tended to return to villages to be cared for by their rural kin (Sackey 2009), increasingly older people are remaining in urban areas. As such, Ghana offers a fruitful case study to understand how everyday mobilities are intertwined with life-cycle migration, livelihoods and memories of social and economic prosperity and decline.

After gaining independence in 1957, the Ghanaian state instituted a raft of welfare policies modelled after their former coloniser's reform programmes, which included free healthcare and state pensions for many retirees (Carbone 2012). Subsequent economic decline resulting in IMF structural adjustment in the 1980s, however, resulted in an undermining of several state welfare provisions and a frequent need to rely on kin for support (Aboderin 2004b; Van der Geest 2016). In terms of pension provision, even the introduction of a formal pension scheme in 1991 only applied to formal sector workers, ignoring the majority of Ghanaians who seek livelihoods in the informal sector (Aboderin 2004b; Gough 2010; Gough and Langevang 2016). Ageing Ghanaians are faced with a significant challenge, where the political and socio-cultural emphasis is still upon families to look after their ageing members, 'knowing that little can be expected from a government that does not even seem to know –

or chooses to ignore – what takes place on the ground' (van der Geest 2016:32).

The trend towards family support recreates Ghanaian tradition, where the family takes responsibility for the economic subsistence of old people (Aboderin 2004b). As Aboderin (2004b: S129) reports, "the customary moral code" in Ghanaian society is that adult children have a duty to provide such support, encapsulated in the proverb 'If your elders take care of you while cutting your teeth, you must in turn take care of them while they are losing theirs'. Concerns around adult children meeting these duties have resulted in narratives regarding a perceived 'crisis' in elderly care (Aboderin 2017). Van der Geest (2016:27) explores how the quality and quantity of care for ageing people 'depends on what they have achieved during their "active" years'; those who have worked hard and have taken good care of others, are most likely to receive good care, attention and financial help in old age. As Coe (2017:2) explains, however, there is evidence of older people being abandoned or neglected by their adult children who fail to meet expected obligations, 'incurred from their parents' contributions to their social and biological personhood'. This shows how reciprocity has only limited predictive power; people constantly deviate from accepted norms and/or are unable to provide adequate care for ageing relations due to poverty.

Such research, whilst offering vital and urgent commentary on rapidly changing intergenerational relations, tends to replicate the image of ageing people as dependent, vulnerable and marginalised (Coe 2017:7; cf. Aboderin 2006, 2004; Apt 1996; Dsane 2013; van der Geest 1997, 2016). While we appreciate

concerns regarding a contemporary crisis in old age care provision, we contend that there is still a need to develop an understanding of how "families and family support are not 'breaking down' but are adapting to new socio-economic realities, with the broad cultural values of inter-generational support remaining intact" (Aboderin 2004a:32). Our position resonates with emerging debates over the agency of older people in urban settings, where there is a growing interest in examining older people's mobilities (Murray 2015:302), particularly, how older people navigate, consume and reshape the urban locales in which they live (Barnes et al. 2012).

Mobilities

Recent studies have found that older people experience a variety of pressures reflecting physiological and cognitive vulnerabilities, changing patterns of spatial use, and reliance upon community and neighbourhood relations for support (Buffel et al. 2012; Mitchell et al. 2003; Wight et al. 2009). Yet much of this research on older people's mobilities is empirically and conceptually limited by its focus on European and North American contexts (Schwanen, Hardill and Lucas 2012). Additional contextuality is needed in order to think more critically about, and grasp the multiplicity of, mobilities as experienced and practiced by older people across the globe (Schwanen and Paez 2010). This dovetails with Kwan and Schwanen's (2016:249) recent claim that a 'focus on mobility outside Global North settings can easily demonstrate the spatial and historical contingency of understandings of mobility'.

Correspondingly, in line with Buffel et al. (2012:601), we believe that a useful starting point for understanding the pressures older people face in a range of

contexts is a 'focus on the material conditions of city life' and, by extension, how they manage these pressures now and in the past. For example, in a stark parallel, the reduction in welfare strategies by the Ghanaian state impelled by strict IMF Structural Adjustment Programmes was accompanied by a reduction in state investment in public sector transport, creating a lasting legacy of urban congestion and inconvenience (Abane 2011:314). Consequently, existing studies of transport in Ghana provide detailed analyses of how transport infrastructure is utilised by bustling urban populations for commuting (see Amoh-Gyimah and Aidoo 2013; Agyemang 2017); how contestations over informal transport reflect contested urban space (Oteng-Ababio and Agyemang 2015); and how government policies have impacted transport efficiency (Abane 1993, 2011). However, these studies are primarily focused on ameliorating the transport 'chaos' (Oteng-Ababio and Agyemang 2015:26) and lubricating the urban economic machinery, rather than examining how mobilities are folded into the everyday lives of urban residents at multiple levels (for exceptions see Esson et al. 2016; Lucas and Porter 2016). There is a need, therefore, to attend to the often-neglected difficulties of an ageing population requiring both reliable transport and social protection.

By bringing these studies into conversation with a broader 'mobilities' approach, we respond to Rigg's (2008:141) call for a 'Global South-focused new mobilities paradigm', to examine mobility in relation to the material base of people's livelihoods (see also De Bruijn et al. 2000). Drawing on the work of Urry (2007), the new mobilities paradigm seeks to undermine the inherent assumptions in much work on mobility and particularly the sharply drawn boundaries between rural/urban, local/global and everyday/cyclical forms of mobility (see also

D'Andrea et al. 2011; Rigg 2007; Soderstrom et al. 2013). Proposing to analyse mobilities 'in their own singularity, centrality and contingent determination' (D'Andrea et al. 2011:150), the new mobilities paradigm aims to create a new, critical lens through which to examine social practice and new social phenomena (Soderstrom et al. 2013: vi). For Rigg (2008:119) this means moving beyond depictions of mobility obsessed with innovations in transport technologies to focus on 'everyday' forms of mobility, which allows us to move beyond reductive approaches that link being mobile with being modern and draw arbitrary distinctions between those who can and cannot move (cf. Hannam et al. 2007; Khan 2016). As Rigg (2008:119) puts it, 'place-based theorisations need to be replaced by theories which think beyond place.'

A mobilities approach that is more attuned to the material base of people's lives provides a way to extend analysis to encompass ageing identities, expectations, and lived experiences through the life cycle. As Rigg (2008:128) argues, mobility 'becomes a central component in how individuals think about themselves in the context of the wider community, and how societies collectively view themselves' (Rigg 2008:128). Through adopting a new mobilities paradigm in our study of older Ghanaians, we respond to recent calls for older people's mobilities to be understood both socially and temporally. Given that older people bring diverse and often long biographies to urban life and offer 'a temporally more extended memory than people in other age categories' (Schwanen and Paez 2010:592), they can offer unique insights into shifting life worlds within rapidly changing (and broader) geopolitical contexts of ageing. Ageing residents, who have accumulated a life-time's worth of networks, frames of recognition, and intergenerational relations, and

furthermore have lived through the building of the city and spaces that form the axes of these navigations and mobilities, offer a lens onto hitherto overlooked forms of African urbanism.

Social Infrastructure

Understanding how older people have lived and are living, alongside how they have moved and move, can be revealed through exploring how their lives are shaped and calibrated in and through the changing urban landscape (cf. Buffel et al. 2012:601; Schwanen et al. 2012). Discussing innovative urban residents in Johannesburg's fragmented inner city centres, Simone (2004a:410), theorises that people of all ages become an essential part of the infrastructure that enables African cities to function, creating new configurations of urban space in the process through a 'conjunction of heterogeneous activities, modes of production, and institutional forms.' These constitute:

> highly mobile and provisional possibilities for how people live and make things, how they use the urban environment and collaborate with one another. The specific operations and scopes of these conjunctions are constantly negotiated and depend on the particular histories, understandings, networks, styles, and inclinations of the actors involved (Simone 2004a:410).

'Infrastructure' has become a popular lens for conceptualising the urban condition and researching urban life. Here we repurpose it to better understand how older people use mobilities to generate social and economic value that often goes unseen or unnoticed (see, for example, Amin 2004; Appel et al.

2015; Björkman 2015; De Boeck 2015; Gandy 2014; Graham and McFarlane 2014; Larkin 2008; McFarlane and Silver 2016; Silver 2014; Simone 2008). This aligns with McFarlane and Silver's (2017) recent call for a more people-centred conceptualisation of urban 'infrastructure', which accounts for the 'socio-material relations that sustain urban life'. 'Social infrastructure' in this way connotes:

> a practice of connecting people and things in socio-material relations that sustain urban life […] made and held stable through work and changing ways of connecting. It is a connective tissue, often unpredictable, anchoring urban life in popular neighbourhoods across the urban world (McFarlane and Silver 2017:463).

Employing an infrastructure lens, as depicted by McFarlane and Silver (2017) can help to extend conceptual explorations of ageing mobilities by encouraging a broader examination of the 'multiple topographies of city life', inclusive of diverse networks and assemblages of communication, objects, physical landscapes, modes of transport, and caring relations. To approach this project, McFarlane and Silver argue that a 'richer conceptual and methodological repertoire' is needed (2017:469) that builds on distinct categories of practice. Accordingly, 'social infrastructure' entails three distinct categories of practice: 'coordination, consolidation and speculation' (McFarlane and Silver (2017). Coordination builds on Simone's (2004b) idea of 'collaboration' whereby urban residents not only work together to better their own urban environments in creative ways but also 'coordinate' the practices of others working with them to try and attain efficacy. In order to

do this, urbanites must have first 'consolidated', which means solidifying and securing their position in the 'social infrastructure' in order to have a platform to extend their authority and social networks to the point where they are less reliant on the social infrastructure they have helped create. Speculation is an 'orientation to urban life itself…. a practice of imagining and acting into the future, which occurs through various moments of calculation about how to navigate the city' (McFarlane and Silver 2017:467).

In McFarlane and Silver's (2017) work in Uganda, speculation could take the form of everyday risks and rewards, or more long-term decisions about where to position yourself in terms of care and kin networks, career opportunities and investment opportunities. As they emphasise, the second set of risks tend to have more emotional stakes riding on them, punctuated by the polarities of hope, ambition, uncertainty and fear, characteristic of precarious urban living (McFarlane and Silver 2017[3]). Viewing ageing Ghanaians through the lens of McFarlane and Silver's (2017) enhanced form of 'social infrastructure', offers a way to explore the radical possibilities inherent in urban space, as individuals remake space on their own terms in the face of both the historical and structural limitations and ongoing (mis)use of urban space by wealthy elites and state administrators (cf. Simone 2004b:408).

Bringing social infrastructure into conversation with mobilities provides a conceptual framework through which we explore and highlight the diverse

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[3] McFarlane and Silver (2017) note that this also has parallels with Vigh's (2006) 'social navigation' theory which is often invoked in relation to younger cohorts.

socio-economic value of older Ghanaians who might appear marginalized from and immiserated by urban life (McFarlane and Silver 2017) but are in fact expressing diverse forms of agency in the 'messy' city in motion, and generating new urban configurations in the process (Esson et al. 2016:183; Skelton and Gough 2013:460). This article thus understands 'migration and mobility as historically rooted' whilst recognizing that 'theorisations of change need to accept that gender, class, ethnic and other social relations are co-constituted across space' (Rigg 2008:119).

Such an approach requires methodologies that account for the role of mobility in everyday lives, particularly in two key areas. First, as called for by Schwanen et al. (2012) and Rigg (2007), our methods must adapt to the new conditions of mobility, becoming 'mobile' themselves, 'following' people and encompassing not simply people who move but the social infrastructures of ideas, livelihoods, relationships and technological innovations inspired by mobility (Rigg 2008:199; cf. McFarlane and Silver 2017). Secondly, and further building on Simone's 'social infrastructure' framework, the approach we introduce here acknowledges that 'Mobility does not just connect people and places but creates its own and distinct social and economic spaces' (Rigg 2008:119). As such, our research focuses not simply on the practices of mobility in the everyday but also on what mobility produces over time and through an individual's life trajectory. Whilst, as Rigg (2008:119) argues, this everyday movement includes elements of transport, migration and physical movement, our focus here is on the product of this movement, particularly in relation to livelihoods, life experiences and the making and un-making of urban space (cf. McFarlane and Silver 2017).

3. Context and Methodology

This article is informed by qualitative data collected as part of a broader project focusing on the mobility of urban residents and their livelihood strategies, urban residents' connections to rural areas, and how their experiences vary by socio-economic categories. Data was collected in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi, two cities which are marked by their history of trade, migration and inequality (see Fig 1 for map of Ghana). Accra, Ghana's capital, developed from a cluster of small villages into a major urban centre when it was chosen as the capital of the Gold Coast colony in 1877. Subsequently it became the key port for the export of gold, cocoa and other resources extracted from the hinterland (Konadu-Agyemang 2001). Today, the built-up metropolis that sits within the Greater Accra Region covers an area of 173 square kilometres. The urban population is estimated at 2.27million, with an estimated annual population growth rate of 4.4 per cent (WPP 2017).

Sekondi-Takoradi, capital of the Western Region, is a rapidly expanding urban conglomeration formed of two previously discrete areas, which now includes approximately 450,000 inhabitants (Yankson et al. 2017). An important maritime and railway transit port during the colonial period, Sekondi-Takoradi has transitioned into a key transnational hub city due to the discovery of off shore oil reserves, which has seen the port redeveloped, an influx of foreign investment, and the urban population expand (Obeng-Odoom 2015). Despite this recent growth and prosperity, the majority of the urban population remain relatively poor, with barely functioning sanitation and electricity. Such crumbling

infrastructure outside of the main thoroughfares, reflects the failure of Ghana's

national affluence to translate into everyday lives (Obeng-Odoom 2015).

Fig 1. Map of Ghana showing location of places mentioned in the article

To capture a broad range of voices in both cities, 133 interviews were conducted in Accra with participants aged 18-87 years old (with 18 aged between 53 and 87), along with 14 focus group discussions, including four with older male residents and two with older female residents. In Sekondi-Takoradi, a total of 108 interviews were conducted with participants aged between 18-86 years, and 19 focus group discussions were held, including three with older male residents, four with older female residents and two with mixed older people (with 25 aged between 55 and 86). All focus groups conducted had between 5 and 8 participants. An overview of the settlements studied is provided in Table 1.

City	Settlement/ neighbourhood	History	Location	Income level	Population (2010)
Accra	Korle Gonno	Indigenous/traditional settlement	Western edge of centre	Low income	30,555
	Labone	Traditionally a middle-income residential area	Eastern edge of centre	Middle/high income	17,675
	Accra New Town	Migrant settlement established in 1940s, mainly Muslim	Northern edge of centre	Low/middle income	31,363
	Gbawe	Indigenous core, growing rapidly since 1990s	Peri-urban West	Heterogeneous	67,998
	Ashaley Botwe	Indigenous core, growing rapidly since 1990s	Peri-urban North East	Heterogeneous	17,071
Sekondi-Takoradi	New Takoradi	Indigenous	Central	Low-income	20,204
	Kwesimintsim	Established in 1930s	Western edge of centre	Heterogeneous	47,211
	Anaji	Indigenous and newcomers	North Western edge of centre	Middle/upper income	30,397
	Assakae	Indigenous and newcomers since 2000	Peri-urban West	Low/middle income	9,139
	Kojokrom	Indigenous/migrants and newcomers since 2000	Peri-urban East	Low income	37,722

Table 1: Overview of settlements studied in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi

The insights provided below are the outcome of thematic coding of in-depth interviews with 18 ageing residents in Accra (aged 53 and above), and 23 ageing residents in Sekondi-Takoradi (aged 55 and above), and the focus group discussions with ageing residents in both cities (15 in total). The methods adopted and analysis were informed by 'livelihood biography' and 'mobility biography' approaches (cf. Lazendorf 2003; Müggenburg et al. 2013). Taking a 'biographical' approach offers a way of 'following' people through the ups and downs of their lives, as they shadow the ups and downs of the urban landscape, national fortunes and forms of development, state reform and institutional change, which intersect with their life histories.

Moreover, in a context where 'livelihoods are becoming delocalised, identities are becoming trans-local, and people are living and making a living across spaces', a biographical approach encourages a 'multi-scalar' analysis, which incorporates a composite picture of older people's lives founded on their experiences of mobility and immobility at different levels (Rigg 2008:194). This allows us to track the intertwining of multiple mobilities, plural livelihoods and sometimes fractured life experiences in relation to equally fragmented broader socio-economic change. As we show in the following section, this framework also incorporates unrealized mobilities, imagined forms of mobility, and aspirations to migrate as part of the 'energy' of mobilities. These varying forms of mobility animate and structure the lives of ageing Ghanaians, even when their imagined mobility fails to correlate with either lived or objective realities (see also Kleist 2016).

4. 'Everybody was working': Remembering employment and (im)mobility

Ghana is often represented as an economic success story, despite the economy gradually informalising since structural adjustment policies introduced during the economic slump of the 1980s resulted in high numbers of people in 'vulnerable employment' (Aryeetey and Baah-Boateng 2015:5-6). As Langevang (2008:2045) noted, since the neoliberal restructuring of the 1980s, the Ghanaian economy has been characterised by an 'intensification of social networks' where parents have increasingly been responsible for their children's mobility, education and livelihoods, though often unable to meet these demands. Despite this general level of informality, the older people we spoke to often lamented the loss of a formal sector and highlighted difficulties created by youth unemployment. Enoch, the 64-year-old whose words we started the paper with, illustrated this situation well.

Enoch had been a prison officer for over 30 years and had seen the world around him become more competitive and difficult for young Ghanaians. Idealising his childhood of abundance on the coast, he recalled how he used to collect and sell mangoes with his father and would head to the beach with his friends to get free fish from the incoming fishermen. As he nostalgically claimed: 'We were all happy in those days.' Born in the indigenous area of Accra called Korle Gonno, this idealization inflected Enoch's view on employment and livelihoods, which also coloured his image of the young people around him: 'Everybody was working without anyone lazing about [...] but now because of unemployment the youth of today gather together to engage in gambling and smoking of "weed" at the beach'. Telling us how the 'bushy [...] top of the hill'

has now 'developed and stretches all the way to Gbawe' in western Accra, he painted a broader picture of a once prosperous area now struggling to accommodate incoming migrants. The local economy once consisted of a thriving industrial sector, the myth of which continues to attract migration from rural areas, as people come to Korle Gonno in search of 'white collar jobs' and factory work that no longer exist. Newcomers find themselves caught between 'struggling' in Korle Gonno or returning home; as Enoch put it, 'because they will be mocked and feel disgraced that they returned from the cities with nothing so they struggle here to earn a living by collecting scraps'.

As we explore in this section, however, the formal sector is often mythologised by older people as a golden period, which was very fleeting, and as a solution to current employment issues and national ills. Filtering the popular narrative among the ageing Ghanaians interviewed that 'everybody was working' through a mobilities and social infrastructure framework, offers valuable insights into the historical and ongoing changes in the Ghanaian urban economy. Our discussion is informed by an important element of the 'new mobilities paradigm', which involves understanding how the perception of modernity, development and national progress is tied to experiences of both transport infrastructure and economic prosperity (Rigg 2008). Scholars have long noted how expectations and aspirations tied to national development are rooted in the projected growth of the formal sector, including private industry (see, for example, Bryceson 2002; Ferguson 2015; Meagher and Lindell 2013; Simone 2004; Yeboah 2017).

As Rigg (2008: 147) observes, for many people in the Global South, living with 'multiple occupations' is a way of life, dictated by economic deprivation and unstable market forces but is also indicative of wider shifts in the informal/formal spread of livelihood opportunities and the interconnection of local markets into global value chains. The trajectory of informality in Ghana experienced by the older residents in our research mirrors that of the broader Ghanaian economy, where the prevalence of hustling as a primary source of income and 'side-hustling' as a secondary source is indicative of a dearth of formal sector and long-term secure employment (cf. Gough and Yankson 2006; Yeboah 2017).

For older people who witnessed an environment where solid career pathways were perceived as being more common, the current era of 'jobless growth' (Yeboah 2017), where broader economic gains fail to translate into individual wealth, seems to mark a failure of contemporary development and governance. Yet, as some of our informants claimed, even the small formal sector, which existed briefly in the past, was beset with issues that characterise the informal sector today. In fact, despite being associated with security and stability, formal sector or salaried jobs were often precarious, exploitative and dependent on multiple forms of mobility, such as travelling for education and training, and following resource rich locations or infrastructural developments (Hilson et al. 2017).

For some ageing Ghanaians, this mobile lifestyle helped them improve their life chances and prospects, offering unexpected opportunities and experiences. Several participants recounted travelling to places like the UK or Australia on scholarships or training missions. Especially for older, educated women, formal

or private sector jobs offered a route to explore the world and break free of confining patriarchal structures, with one woman even being attached to the now long-privatised Ghanaian national airline and flown all over the globe. For older men, like 64-year-old Alfred in Sekondi-Takoradi, however, despite factory work providing a solid and stable foundation for many years, life was marked by repeatedly moving from one factory to another and poor working conditions. Formal work was locked into the exploitative power relations that characterised the post-colonial urban landscape, inseparable from the unpredictable 'Big-man' patronage that persists in much of sub-Saharan African commerce and politics (Gibbs 2014; Utas 2012). At Alfred's first Ghanaian-run factory, for example, it was 'a one-man show' where the owner 'did whatever he wanted' and 'never increased our salaries even if the government does it'. When he moved to a bigger factory, run by a 'white man', conditions were even worse:

> It was also a one-man show there because it belongs to only one white man…The white men cheat us always, the pay was not all that good. We complained but he didn't increase it. He didn't even pay our national security. Because of work if you complain, you will be sacked.

In many of the narratives, the memory of past work often underpinned older people's present identity. Kofi, a 57-year-old man living in Sekondi-Takoradi, defined himself by the diligence he had displayed over his life-course and saw no reason to alter his work ethic as he aged:

> In life you learn to live and improve. I always tried to live trouble-free […]
> I believe hard work and dedication pays in life and I think that is the

driving force for the people around you. You just have to be focused in life.

Even though for older people in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi life was, and sometimes still is, difficult, Kofi indicates how the possibilities for future opportunities tend to outweigh the feelings of loss and deprivation from the past; plans to improve one's life chances are rooted in the new pathways being generated in the urban environment through being mobile. Similarly, Adowa, a 64-year-old woman living in Sekondi-Takoradi, recounted how retirement resulted in a need to create new opportunities beyond family dependency and the meagre provisions of the state: 'I, for example, am a retired worker and that is why I built the store to do something to sustain me but a lot of people have now done the same. It wasn't part of the initial [life] plan'. Meanwhile Ekow, a 57-year-old tiler from Sekondi-Takoradi, explained how he was hopeful of new economic opportunities coming his way: 'It's by God's grace and chance, if I improve economically, why not? I will build my own house and also move out'. Moreover Esi, a 64-year-old water-vendor from Sekondi-Takoradi, mentioned her aspirations for travel alongside her business activities: 'If I am well and healthy then I will keep on doing it' [selling water] and I will like to travel outside the country for some holidays and then come back […] I am planning to go to London to visit my son'.

It is, therefore, not just the case that 'everybody was working' when they were young but that ageing Ghanaians are still working and also moving. To explore these issues in more detail, in the next section we present the 'livelihood-mobility biography' of one man, illustrating how mobilities (real and imagined)

are not only rooted in the livelihood opportunities offered by shifting urban landscapes but are a constitutive part of a city in the making.

5. 'I will do anything I can lay my hands on': Kwame's Story

Born in 1943 in Kumasi[4], the capital of the Ashanti region of Ghana, Kwame (71 years old) was living in a house that belonged to his father in Kojokrom, located on the outskirts of Sekondi-Takoradi. A widower, today, Kwame moves for multiple reasons: he travels around the city by bus; he sometimes visits his children who live in different parts of the city and its surrounds, though they have bought him a mobile phone to keep in touch; and he often takes the long haul bus to Accra to see his extended family. However, Kwame is not tempted to move permanently and, like other older people, he is attached to the area he has lived in for many years, observing the development and decline of Kojokrom over several decades. His 'mobility-biography' encompasses multiple scales including reflections on wider city dynamics, as well as the material and household level. He explained how:

> Since the collapse of the railways, Kojokrom has become dull […] That time, this place was a mining community so people used to be involved in their work. Others were into farming so they woke up and spent the whole day on their farms and came back in the evenings. Some of the young men too had no jobs so they stayed at the railway station and hustled their way through when the trains came […] A lot of things have

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[4] Ghana's second largest city with an estimated population of over 2 million inhabitants.

changed. Now Kojokrom is developed and because of the collapse of the railway a lot of things have changed. Now we have big trucks that load food and bring it into the community but it wasn't as it was when the railway was in existence. When we had the railways, we had different kinds of trains that used to come from different locations. We had two types of express [trains] that used to bring food, we had a sleeper that came from Kumasi, a bus that came from Dunkwa[5] and they all brought food so during that time we had food all over Takoradi and Sekondi. That is what caused the place to develop....

Like many people living in the area, Kwame's life chances were interwoven with the fortunes of the railway line that passed through the town. As he explained, 'We all depended on the trains. They used to come at normal times and they brought foodstuffs and returned with things from here'. This connection with the railway is intergenerational; as Kwame's father worked for the railways, the family often moved around because they were frequently transferred. Thus, whilst Kwame was born in Kumasi and started his schooling in Accra, he completed his studies in Sekondi whilst staying with his uncle. Later, in 1965, his parents joined him in Takoradi.

Kwame was sponsored to continue his education at the Polytechnic in Sekondi. At this time Takoradi hosted the railway, port, major banks, timber firms and other prominent industries, ensuring 'there was work for people to do'. Kwame described Sekondi as being 'equally lively because they had companies like

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[5] A small town in southern Ghana.

Kingsway and big banks as well as the railway'. When he started to work for the railways in 1961, a year after finishing his education in Sekondi, Kwame claimed that:

> The work was effective and profitable. We [the railway] used to work side by side with the port but later there was a separation between railway and the port and that is what caused the railways to collapse […] Without the railway, there is no harbour but due to the separation it has caused the railway to collapse.

While the railway was active, Kwame like many others, engaged in farming on the outskirts of the town and in nearby villages and towns, where people still have palm oil farms. He would leave home at 4am, walking to reach his farm by 5.30am. Subsequently, Kwame lost access to his farm in Enow as 'the land belonged to someone and the person has taken over the land so now I don't do the farming again'. Kwame's inability to continue farming speaks to the shifting economic landscape and governance of the area as part of wider processes of urbanization, including the desire to build houses (Yankson and Gough 2014), which is rooted in deep-seated systems of pride and prestige (Van der Geest 1997). He explained how:

> The first chief was not concerned about the number of people who will come and reside in the community. So if you came in search of a piece of land, all you needed was a bottle of drink and an amount of money for the chief and then he apportioned a piece of land to you. Because of that, the planning was poorly done but later […] the earliest people who came

here were the people who ventured into farming but recently those farmlands have all been transformed into [residential] settlements.

Kwame has actively responded to the relative decline in farming and transformation of previously agricultural land to residential settlements. He has sought out new skills over the years, including painting, block-making and baking. Painting in particular was an opportunistic livelihood 'choice' made of necessity. As he explained:

> I wasn't trained in painting but because of hardship I had to do something to support myself. When we lived in Kumasi there was a man who built his house and needed a painter to paint. I had studied the painters for a while so I went forward and told the man I was a painter. Being my first time, I was tense but after the work I was incomparable. Now I receive calls from companies to paint for them and I gather some few other painters and we go to do the work together […] outside in Kumasi and other towns […] I knew quite a number [of other painters] so I informed them and I went with those who wanted to join me.

Seizing the economic opportunity of Kojokrom's increasing urban development – 'a lot of people have started building houses' – Kwame has also worked to build a reputation as a cement block-maker. As with the painting, this is a self-taught skill, and one that has emerged within a social infrastructure. Lacking a machine, he contracts people to collect water for him and then uses a mould to fashion the blocks: 'At first we were using wooden carved moulds to mould the block and later the agricultural department organised an exhibition and brought the metal mould, and we picked it up'. Nowadays he is physically unable to

carry a bag of cement so he transports his materials by taxi or when the customer is more local with 'the wheelbarrow that I use to transport the paints'. This allows him to maximise his equipment as house-owners buy their own paints 'and I only go to paint with them', so his wheelbarrow would otherwise be idle. Apart from painting, during key holidays he engages a baking skill from earlier on in his career: 'I did catering at Polytechnic so after school and before I started working I used to teach people how to make biscuits. During Christmas people contracted me to bake cake, bread and other pastries'.

Kwame provides an illustrative case of a life that continues to creatively interweave multiple forms of employment that has extended far into his 'older age' forging the 'connective tissue' that generates 'social infrastructures' (McFarlane and Silver 2017). Although Kwame has consolidated his position, he is still speculating on his future, using his skills and experience to better position himself in the urban landscape. For 40 years he has creatively navigated the rapid socio-economic changes brought by the rise and fall of the railways, and diversified his livelihoods to survive well into his 'retirement'. Since 'retirement', Kwame has remained in Kojokrom where he continues to actively seek and conduct work by blending different skills, indicating how: 'I am a pensioner but I do painting work and if someone wants cement work they contact me to get it for them'. He explained how: 'When I wake up and I have nowhere to go, I clean my environment. I am normally busy every day because if I don't work even one day, I feel sick'. Kwame currently has a solid building contract, 'So every day I go to the site […] I am busy throughout except on Sundays when I go to church'. Tellingly, when asked specifically if he did any other work after retiring, Kwame responded 'No. I am into painting and other

minor jobs like gardening,' a response which raises important questions about how livelihoods are conceptualised by older people (cf. Van Der Geest 2016).

Looking forward to the future, Kwame remains determined to continue producing social and economic value: 'If I am alive and strong [in five years] I will do anything I can lay my hands on […] Kojokrom is a peaceful town and with determination and focus you can work and earn something for yourself'. Poignantly, Kwame has lived to see a reversal in the railway's fortunes, claiming that: 'In five years we will see some improvement because they have started constructing the railway to connect Sekondi and Takoradi, and after that they will continue to Tarkwa and other stations'.

Kwame's account illustrates the analytical power of combining a 'new mobilities' approach with a 'social infrastructure approach. Like Simone's (2004) young people in Johannesburg, as Kwame moved through his life he also moved all over the city, contributing to the making of the city as he went. This happened through his relationships, as well as his multiple occupations and activities, thus reflecting how older people's mobilities and livelihoods are written into the physical and social landscapes of the city. His story resonates with broader observations about life in urban sub-Saharan Africa from Simone's (2004a:410) work, where he notes that as people move through their life-course they apply 'skills and sensitivities that can adapt to the unpredictable range of scenarios,' and respond to rapidly or slowly changing obligations and social demands. Older people, then, are not simply repositories of urban social memory but living links to the changes wrought around and through their mobility. Following Simone (2004b), they not only embody the social architecture of a city, they

literally 'people' the physical infrastructure, as we explore in more detail in the next section.

6. We are the pioneers: mobility and social infrastructure

Ageing Ghanaians link physical infrastructure to the social, personifying and sustaining links between the past, present and future trajectories of development. Ebo, a 55-year-old former carpenter from Kwesimintsim in Sekondi-Takoradi, explained: 'My father brought me here in 1971 […] so we are the pioneers in Kwesimintsim'. People in Ghana are not only remembered through space but space is remembered through people, as Kwaku, a 64-year-old former driver living in Accra highlighted:

> The old people I met in New Town are all dead … there was a very prominent King … who lived here and whose contribution brought forth development in the area. Most of the old people who once lived here are the ones who brought any improvement in the area. I was alive by then so I recognized any changes.

Similarly, as Ato, a 59-year-old builder, explained in relation to Sekondi-Takoradi: 'It was only mud houses that existed here but the King[6] made a law that when you break these houses [you must] replace them with a block house'.

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[6] Many Ghanaian ethnic groups have hereditary 'Kings' colloquially known as 'Chiefs', the most prominent of whom is the Ashanti King Otumfuo Nana Osei Tutu II.

Kojo (aged 86), also from Sekondi-Takoradi, went further and noted that 'I was part of those who built this town'.

For older people in Accra, mobility is woven into their histories, livelihoods and relationships. For example, *kenkey*[7] maker and shopkeeper Ama (aged 68) was born in the northern town of Bimbila[8]. Her father was a policeman, meaning like Kwame that she 'roamed from town to town' in her younger days, moving into, out of, then back to Accra, following his various assignments. Eventually, Ama and her mother settled in the outlying district of Ashale Botwe (Botwe) where she helped in her mother's bakery business. Ama's mother had taught her how to bake and, in the spirit of entrepreneurialism (cf. Langevang et al. 2015), her mother adjusted her income-generating activities according to market trends: 'When she [my mother] sees one business is not going well then she moves onto another job'. Adopting her mother's spirit, Ama now owns a small shop mainly dealing in foodstuffs whilst also making and selling *kenkey* using her mother's recipe.

As Rigg (2008:119) has discussed, mobility biographies demonstrate how the boundary between rural and urban, industry and agriculture, formal and informal are not just becoming more porous but have been blurred for several generations and are deeply enmeshed in the quest for a sustainable livelihood (see also De Bruijn et al. 2001). Ama's business, like many others in Ghana (see Gough 2010), started out 'small' before expanding as she got older. Her business became more established after she settled in Botwe and took out a

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[7] *Kenkey* is a staple Ghanaian dish made from fermented maize and is usually served with pepper sauce and fried fish or soup.
[8] Bimbilla is the capital of Nanumba North District located in the Northern Region of Ghana.

bank loan to increase the amount of *kenkey* she could make and sell. In fact, the development of Ama's *kenkey* business mirrors the development of Botwe. As she recalled: 'Botwe was a village back then but now the place has developed [more] than it was before…Initially the place was bushy but now people are building further inland and the place is opening up'. Relatively low land prices, coupled with the improved electricity and roads, saw an influx of people to the area (Gough and Yankson 2006), helping her business flourish further.

Ama described how she buys cheap maize from people coming into the city from surrounding rural areas, although sometimes she has to travel to pick up the maize. By making *kenkey* in the home, she has been able to support her three daughters: 'This is the business I used to bring up all my children [...] This is what I have done over the years to cater for my children'. Livelihoods, mobility and family relationships are mutually constituted in Ama's narrative, each determining and directing the course of her life and, in turn, changing in relation to her life choices. For other older women, selling cooked food from their homes or small provision shops operated as a vital form of supplementary informal income generation – what Ama called her 'side-hustle'.

In the informal economy, portfolio working and diversification operate as a necessary buffer against capricious markets and the unpredictable environment (cf. Gough 2010; Langevang 2008; Mwaura 2017; Rigg 2008). For Ama, her gendered experience made it difficult to transcend the financial burdens implicit in the social networks she was part of. Like McFarlane and Silver's (2017:461) fruit and vegetable seller Josephine, urban life is marked by struggle and survival and means that 'the potential to consolidate exists largely

as a dream'. The creative livelihood strategies individuals adapt can form part of their consolidation process as they establish themselves and then transcend the 'social infrastructure' they inform. As Kobina, a 59-year-old mechanic from Sekondi-Takoradi explained, multiple businesses have multiple motivations behind them and can protect against unforeseen circumstances:

> I do my own business and I have a farm too […My business] is a motor and bicycle mechanic […] at Kwesimintsim. But I am not currently going there because of the government work. They had the place closed down for the electricity project so I have halted that for a while. They took my shop from the place and put a pole [electricity pylon] there […] Before [being a mechanic] I was a palm nut farmer but that farming is really tedious and there are times you will get hurt. So I left that and now I am a rubber farmer.

Kobina complained that shuttling between multiple businesses was made more difficult by poor roads which both affected his own mobility and those of his workers: 'As I said the road is really bad so people at times don't want to help you'. This not only prevented him from operating his farm and mechanics shop but also stopped his cultivation of cassava and maize. As he put it, the latter was 'for consumption purposes and also to give some out to other people', providing an important social resource, which he used to help those less able to provide for themselves.

As these narratives illustrate, older Ghanaians speak of continuing to travel for work well past retirement, not only for survival but as a central part of their identity. Mobilities change as people become older and they adopt new

livelihood practices, either through their own entrepreneurial innovation or at the request/suggestion of family members, in reflection of their declining ability to pursue more physically-demanding livelihoods. Although this discussion has focused on mobility in relation to livelihoods, it is important to acknowledge that mobility is also central to older people's non-economic socialities), allowing them to consolidate and coordinate forms of 'social infrastructure' beyond the marketplace or factory floor. As a number of people in our study revealed, travelling within and between cities and rural areas at weekends, either to attend church or other religious centres, and to visit relatives and friends has become an integral part of their lives. Boarding buses, taxis, cars or walking, nearly all our participants exercised significant mobility in maintaining their social relations between kin and non-kin, traversing the 'multiple topographies' (McFarlane and Silver 2017 460) of the city, in sometimes speculative quests to establish enduring social networks. Consequently, each city is being created through complex social networks of consolidating, coordinating and speculative activity, within which older people are deeply embedded. These outcomes are actively reshaping the urban landscape, thereby revealing the important but overlooked role older residents continue to play in 'making the city'.

7. Conclusions

This article explored older people's livelihoods and mobilities in the Ghanaian cities of Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi. By engaging with the mobility biographies of our participants, we demonstrated how mobility and informality play an integral role in shaping the life chances of ageing Ghanaians living in urban

settings, both emotionally and financially. Significantly, rather than portraying ageing Ghanaians as dependent and disempowered by both circumstance and the post-colonial state, we showed how their agency and mobility feeds into wider city dynamics. Through doing so, we not only illustrated how older people display and perform strategic forms of agency linked to their continued mobility, but how their agency is informed and defined by the specific spatial and historical contexts in which they are enmeshed. Ageing residents in urban Ghana are 'consolidating' and 'coordinating' urban space and social infrastructure. These findings revealed how, despite often being overlooked, the agency of older populations is fundamental to contemporary efforts seeking to conceptualise African urbanism as a 'collaborative' space of multiple possibilities (see Simone 2004b:408).

Our approach and findings also enabled us to make two original contributions to geographical debates over ageing and mobilities. First, we identified and examined the creative and diverse ways older people are demonstrating agency to produce economic and social value, thereby offering an alternative and more nuanced narrative to complement the current focus in ageing literature of older people as care givers or care receivers. Rather than a population 'to be managed', older people used multiple forms of agency to both manage an array of responsibilities and obligations, and navigate ambiguous dependencies in the challenging contexts of urban Ghana, in uncertain urban contexts (cf. Ferguson 2013). The challenges faced by ageing Ghanaians in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi resonate with literature highlighting that, whilst a small proportion of the ageing in African cities are becoming richer or more comfortable, a considerable proportion get swallowed up by the rapidly

expanding urban environment, marked by increased levels of precarity and competition (Aboderin 2017).

The second original contribution is the furthering of work in urban studies by engaging with a 'Global South-focused new mobilities paradigm' (Rigg 2008:141) that examines mobility in relation to the material base of people's livelihoods (see also De Bruijn et al. 2000). Our findings showed how this paradigm can extend conceptualisations of the urban experience in sub Saharan Africa by illuminating how older people navigate the urban terrain, alongside a situated reading of the socio-economic realities of everyday life that incorporates the speculative and imagined realities of ageing urbanites (cf. McFarlane and Silver 2017;Schwanen 2017; Schwanen and Paez 2010). This approach offers a novel means to better conceptualise and theorise both the imagined and realised relationships older people have with their built environment, as changes to urban infrastructure are felt and experienced through social networks and intimate connections to urban space. Understanding these issues, as we have argued throughout this article, means engaging with but not limiting geographies of ageing to the rubric of care, while paying attention to how urban life and old age are mutually constitutive social processes, bound up with complex renegotiations of gender, generation and mobility.

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