

Book Reviews

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Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go: African Mobility in the Age of Motor Transportation*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2016; 250 pp., US\$35, ISBN 978-0253023070.

Reviewed by: Gordon Pirie, *University of Cape Town, South Africa*

Jennifer Hart's text sweeps triumphantly across a century of automobility in colonial and post-colonial Ghana. The thoroughness of her analysis is marked out by lengthy field work in Ghana that involved travel in modern *trotros* and in an iconic 'mammy wagon', conversations in lorry parks and elsewhere (noted in the Acknowledgements), some 70 interviews, and an impressive range of archive and library sources. London libraries and archives round off the list. The comprehensive bibliography and footnotes contain intriguing research leads. Eight two-tone historical photographs add flavour; three maps help situate the text.

Ghana on the Go is a sophisticated, clear and inspiring account of how the technology of motorised transport has been used by ordinary and diverse drivers and passengers to achieve entrepreneurial goals and meet aspirations for modernity. It is also a study of how a predominantly commercial automobility took root and was grafted onto a pre-existing set of mobilities and mobility values. Importantly, trucking, busing and taxiing were mostly away from the railway, but not only subservient to it or in opposition. Africans agitated for roads. Over time, personal automobility became more prominent, and mundane commercial driving became less respected and less remunerative work, and no longer a path to prosperity.

The book explores the subtleties and distinctiveness of Gold Coast and then Ghanaian automobility practices and cultures in relation to conditions in the colony and post-colony. It tackles complexities and contradictions in mobility trajectories. Choked mobility, danger and sharp-eyed survivalism are among the stamps of contemporary mobility. The historical continuities surface in persistent-linked discourses about mobility, autonomy, accumulation, citizenship and development, and in relation to relict spatial formations gradually engineered during decades of mobility. Now there is nostalgia for an older order of automobility in which road infrastructure was undamaged, less congested and more predictable. The days are gone in which driver apprenticeship was a gateway to an occupation

(other than chieftaincy, priesthood, teaching and civil service) and not just to a business or an economic tool.

Consciousness about aspirational and actual mobility and its regulation saturated the colonial project and sharpened under transitional nationalist politics in the 1950s and 1960s. Latterly, mobility politics has on occasion morphed into identity politics and rights and has been tainted by bribery, corruption and despair. In Ghana, as elsewhere, deploying categories of person and occupation related to their automobilities is, indeed, a fruitful way of understanding fluid twentieth century societies and economies. Conventional socio-economic filters suppose that mobility is inconsequential, uncontested, and a technological given, all of which is disputed by the evidence assembled by Hart.

Hart's well-informed monograph glides expertly and dexterously across historic periods, technologies and governmentalities. Five imaginatively titled chronological chapters work with the notion that Ghana's automobile drivers (mostly male, but not exclusively) have been cast variously as ingenious and indigenous workers, admirable and honest, as public servants, as modern, as criminals and as agents of development. They, their vehicles and their infractions have featured continually in media and in private and public discussions about service, roads, fares and safety.

The first 60 years of vernacular mobility history in colonial Ghana, regarded by some as a golden age, witnessed clear occupational profiling, tightening regulation, tension between private profit and public service, and the professionalisation of driving as an occupation, including labour union protection of driver interests. In the years of Ghanaian political instability and economic crisis that followed, drivers struggled to retain their good standing and their secure livelihoods amid neglected and decaying road infrastructure, competition, labour strikes and aging vehicles. The descent of mobility from integral part of a socio-political order to its enemy, and the emergence of new degrees of immobility, became the foci of conversation and some public policy.

Straddling past and present, *Ghana on the Go* is meticulously researched, richly detailed, beautifully composed and elegantly constructed. Its alert and deep scholarship is luminous. It reveals splendidly the complex layers and overlaps in transport provision, delivery and use. It is a marvellous book. It takes its place among the most insightful and rewarding analyses of transportation in Africa and helps lift studies of (past) transport there onto par with fine mobility research anywhere.

Camilla Campedelli, *L'amministrazione municipale delle strade romane in Italia* [Municipal Administration of Roman Roads in Italy], Bonn, Rudolf Habelt, 2014; 345 pp., €75, ISBN 978-3774938588.

Reviewed by: Cornelis van Tilburg, *Universiteit Leiden, the Netherland*

In her PhD thesis, now a book with the title *L'amministrazione municipale delle strade romane in Italia*, Camilla Campedelli discusses legislation in regard to the management and financing of Roman roads and streets in Italy. The book covers the entire ancient Roman period, but concentrates on the first century BC and the