1 *Democracy, Development, and Daily Life*

On a hot morning, a traditional fetish priest sat beside a major street drinking a beer in Ga Mashie, the oldest neighborhood in Accra, Ghana. This was not any street, but *his* street – the street for which his family was custodian of the land and he was the family elder. On this particular day, he basked in his latest accomplishment: securing the government contract to rebuild the local food market. He has no contracting skills and has never been to technical school. Instead, his close personal connections to the Member of Parliament (MP) helped secure him the contract. But this was not merely petty corruption or vote buying. The MP needed the support of a traditional elder to build on the property. He needed to offer state concessions to a traditional leader in order to develop a market on the land. The contract was the prize outcome of a long political struggle for the rights to rebuild the market, one that spanned political parties, market women's associations, and various MPs and local leaders.

The fetish priest is just one of dozens of traditional leaders in the neighborhood to engage in multiparty politics as a way to build local support and legitimacy, as well as make money. Though ethnically diverse, community decision-making is restricted to a narrow club in indigenous neighborhoods like Ga Mashie: members of the ethnic group who claim ancestral rights to the land, called indigenes. Community governance follows customary norms and procedures, and spills over into the practice of multiparty politics.

Despite its long history as the political center of the country and the spiritual core of the indigenous ethnic group, these underlying political dynamics contribute to a situation where houses are substandard, sewers overflow, and poverty and unemployment rates are high. The situation is even more surprising because elections are extremely competitive, civil society organizations are active, and the community is directly next to Ghana's central business district. Yet the neighborhood descends into squalor as clientelism is rampant, its leaders

empower their own families at the expense of the common good, and ethnic politics persist.

The situation is very different in a stranger community in Ashaiman, a settlement on the outskirts of Accra. On a rainy day in a notorious poor neighborhood, a drunk driver drove his truck into an electricity pole. A blackout ensued, and the entire neighborhood went without power. As water flooded the muddy roads, a respected landlord rushed to the scene to calm tempers. A group of residents followed, arguing and deliberating about what should be done. Some of them threatened to beat up the driver. They debated whether to send the driver to the police station, knowing that if he were charged he would not be able to pay for a new pole. He worked for a known "big man" in town, causing concern that he had influence over the police.[1]

Filing a complaint with the electricity company would take too long. The Municipal Assembly and police officers were ineffective. Community members had to resolve the issue themselves. Twenty residents, including the local assemblyman, landlords, and the owner of the vehicle – respected and legitimate authorities called "opinion leaders" in Ghana – piled into a local store and came up with a plan.[2] The owner of the vehicle was pressured to pay for most of the new pole, while residents contributed a small amount. The assemblyman drove straight to the utility company to demand they fix the pole immediately. Residents were able to hold their leaders to account and get them to do their jobs, contributing to collective decision-making and community governance. By the early evening, electricity was restored to the entire neighborhood. This outcome was even more surprising because the neighborhood is ethnically diverse, highly impoverished, and has weak and often ineffective formal institutions. In contrast to Ga Mashie, this Ashaiman neighborhood has responsive and effective leaders, a robust public sphere that facilitates community decision-making, and a multiethnic civic life.

Despite similar demographic patterns to Ashaiman, the practice of politics contributed to a very different development outcome in Old

[1] A "big man" in Ghanaian society is a leader perceived for his high degree of wealth and virtue and privileges the public demonstration of power, generosity, and consumption of expensive goods (Price 1974).

[2] Assembly persons are elected representatives of Ghana's 254 decentralized assemblies whose role is to "spearhead development projects such as [the] drainage system, [and] rural, urban electrification among others."

Fadama, Accra's largest squatter settlement. A few months earlier, families sat alongside trash heaps with as many of their possessions as they could salvage. Their own community leaders had just collaborated with municipal authorities to demolish their structures and they had nowhere to go. But they were far from surprised: Their neighborhood has been under the threat of eviction since 2002, and their leaders had since become untrustworthy and concerned only with their self-interest.

During Accra's annual floods, squatter settlements become scapegoats for the city's larger problems. Municipal authorities cannot keep up with Ghana's rapid urbanization, build enough infrastructure, prevent squatters from settling on flood plains, and clean sewers and drains. Instead, they blame residents in the poorest of neighborhoods for causing the urban crisis. During this particular flooding season, the government used the crisis as an excuse to demolish hundreds of structures illegally built along a central lagoon. But community leaders saw the exercise as an opportunity to lead the demolition themselves, to provide an employment contract, and a way to show strength and bolster their power in the community. Within weeks, residents had rebuilt their houses and the neighborhood continued to grow larger.

The view from within the neighborhood is largely an untold story. Residents work long hours as scrap dealers and market sellers. Opinion leaders hold weekly meetings to discuss issues in their hometown, as well as ways to support new migrants to the city. Entrepreneurs start private shower and toilet businesses, as well as microloan institutions to service a growing population. Political parties extend sophisticated organizing machinery into the deepest corners of the settlement, providing a mechanism to ensure votes and distribute patronage. Representatives of the state form coalitions with community leaders, political party activists, and NGOs to maintain a low level of control in these areas. Yet as the example of the demolition demonstrates, the political process serves private interests, empowering leaders and brokers who are not accountable to the entire population, but rather to a small slice of people from the same ethnic group. While residents engage in collective decision-making, the community is governed along private lines – often ethnic, personal, and partisan. Despite vibrant struggles for power, political clientelism persists, the political arena is reduced to private decision-making, and an associational life is organized along ethnic lines.

These introductory vignettes illustrate an intriguing puzzle in African urban development. Poor neighborhoods with similar demographic and institutional characteristics demonstrate very different patterns of collective decision-making and community governance. Despite having many of the variables that scholars have put forth to explain how communities can improve their livelihoods and demand development, including vibrant civil societies, high political competition, and robust political participation, the Ga Mashie and Old Fadama neighborhoods continue to suffer from political clientelism, the elite capture of public goods for private gain, and ethnic politics. Yet with a seemingly similar demographic profile, the Ashaiman neighborhood – the community in the second vignette – has overcome these nondemocratic politics to construct a public sphere that serves the interests of a majority of residents. This variation in governance and development across city neighborhoods in Ghana serves as the empirical puzzle in this book.

Conventional political science theories are limited in their ability to explain these divergent development outcomes. One approach narrowly focuses on the role that elections play in fostering accountability and distributing public goods and services. The second approach zooms in on societal characteristics, and emphasizes factors like ethnic diversity and poverty to explain why certain areas struggle to develop. Yet as these introductory vignettes suggest – and as I will demonstrate in this book – these theories overlook the everyday politics in urban neighborhoods that bring representatives and their constituents together or keep them apart in daily affairs. Everyday politics refers to the institutional context of daily decision-making in a neighborhood – how people act, think, and feel about power on a daily basis. The everyday politics of urban neighborhoods helps explain why clientelism persists, the capture of state resources for private gain, and entrenched ethnic politics.

The context of daily life is important to African politics because this is where leaders legitimate their authority, as well as make decisions about how to distribute resources. Politicians and political parties are motivated by appealing to constituents' daily struggles, and gain their support by engaging them in face-to-face deliberation. Citizens, on the other hand, expect their leaders to be available and concerned with personal issues and affairs. This is also where governance of goods and resources occurs. People make decisions about keeping the neighborhood clean, educating students, providing healthcare, and contracting infrastructure projects on the streets of neighborhoods and

in quotidian interactions. Yet in most political science scholarship, everyday politics is treated as merely a reflection of formal political forces like elections, or as representative of broader societal processes. The motivations, behaviors, and decision-making are overlooked. This book treats daily life as an arena of politics in its own right, providing a lens into an aspect of democratization that has been mostly overlooked.

The second major argument of the book is that informal norms of settlement and belonging continue to structure everyday politics in Ghana's cities, despite significant changes in the formal and societal realms. In particular, norms of indigeneity – that groups native to a territory hold special rights and entitlements – remain sticky, setting cities on a path of urban development where host–migrant relationships dictate the politics of its neighborhoods. These cleavages are apparent in everyday politics, but extend to the formal realm during elections and in courts over claims to property rights. By combining survey methods, historical analysis, and ethnographic research, I provide a comprehensive look at leadership and civic life in Ghana. In doing so, I provide a more complete picture of the political process of urbanization.

Since African governments inherited structures of authority in the late 1950s and 1960s that were significantly impacted by colonial rule, African cities have grown rapidly and unequally. And they keep growing: By 2050, 70 percent of all Africans are projected to live in urban areas, signaling a huge transformation away from rural life. But the majority of these people will live in conditions where infrastructure is poor, services are under-provided, and property rights are insecure. The increasing number of poor neighborhoods, many of which are not recognized by formal authorities, raises important questions about claims to land and incorporation of migrants into political society, as new communities form, identities change, and relationships between representatives and constituents are altered. As African countries adopt more politically and economically liberal policies, and their societies become more urban, this book demonstrates that everyday politics requires a central place in the study of urban development.

An Urban Future

Africa is undergoing an urban revolution that is remaking polities and societies (Parnell and Pieterse 2014). Its 3.5 percent urbanization rate

per year during the past two decades is the highest regional urbanization rate in the world (African Development Bank 2012). Currently, 40 percent of the population lives in urban areas, making up more than 414 million people (United Nations 2014). A result of this rapid urbanization is the growth of under-resourced neighborhoods across the continent. As of 2010, an estimated 200 million people (Vidal 2010), or 62 percent of the urban population in sub-Saharan Africa resides in neighborhoods often called slums (UN-Habitat 2012; Arimah 2010).[3]

This urban transformation poses an enormous societal challenge. Cities are at the forefront of political struggles as previously marginalized communities demand citizenship rights and seek inclusion into democratic polities (Holston 2008; Resnick 2013). It also poses a policy challenge. The recently launched sustainable development goals specifically call to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable." This reflects growing recognition that human development depends on how well urbanization is managed. According to Dr. Joan Clos, Executive Director of UN-Habitat and former mayor of Barcelona, the global view of "cities as containers of problems" must change. Cities are, in fact, "accelerators of development."

The rise of megacities, especially in the Global South, has left large populations to suffer congestion and pollution in poor neighborhoods (Van der Ploeg and Poehlhekke 2008). Urbanization has often occurred without economic growth and industrialization, contributing to a process of urban informalization and the growth of the urban poor (Fay and Opal 2000; Ravallion et al. 2007). Mike Davis popularized this alarmist sentiment in his book *Planet of Slums*, where he argues that the 1970s debt crisis and IMF-led restructuring of Third World economies in the 1980s decreased wages, increased unemployment, and led to an informal proletariat and urban crisis (Davis 2006). Scholars and pundits suggest that rising land prices,

[3] UN-Habitat (2003) defines slums by their physical conditions. Slum neighborhoods lack durable housing of a permanent nature; sufficient living space; easy access to safe water at an affordable price; access to adequate sanitation in the form of a private or public toilet; and security of tenure that prevents forced evictions. Slums are neighborhoods that have these observable conditions (though they might not have all five characteristics).

privatization of subsistence agriculture, and declining state and social safety nets has forced rural dwellers to the city to sustain basic livelihoods (Mahmud 2010; Almeida 2012).

The restructuring of economies in the 1980s and 1990s hit African cities particularly hard (O'Connor 1993). Its state and civil service was hampered by policies that contributed to capital flight, the collapse of manufacturing, marginal or negative increase in export incomes, drastic cutbacks in urban public services, soaring prices, and a steep decline in real wages (Rakodi 1997; Myers 2005). These challenges occurred in the context of poor economic policies and political instability that had already constrained development across the continent (Bates 1981). By the 2000s, many in the development and policy-making industry expressed how these policies backfired, and were never fully implemented (van de Walle 2001). The most important report on the failures of urban policy was published by the United Nations in 2003, and concluded: "Instead of being a focus for growth and prosperity, the cities have become a dumping ground for a surplus population working in unskilled, unprotected and low-wage informal service industries and trade . . . The rise of [this] informal sector is . . . a direct result of liberalization" (United Nations 2003: 76).

But these significant changes also signaled a political opportunity. The increasing liberalization of the 1990s resulted in a strange paradox: It exacerbated socioeconomic inequalities, but also created political space independent from the state (Tripp 1997; Chalfin 2008). In countries like South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana, cities were the main setting for political change, becoming sources for homegrown political opposition that would usher in a new era of democratization (Chazan and Rothschild 1988; Bratton and van de Walle 1994). The first protests broke out in highly urbanized countries, mostly in cities (Bratton and van de Walle 1997). But the rise of democracy in the third wave opened new mechanisms for political dissent (LeBas 2011). The wave of democratization in the 1990s coincided with the development of an urban middle class and a burgeoning civil society in many African countries.

Political liberalization in the 1990s coincided with a shift in international development policy: Democracy, good governance, and human rights became priorities (Young 2012). For urban planners and development specialists, governance included setting out to fix what went wrong with African cities (Myers 2005). But this also meant

limiting the role of the state in this process, while strengthening decentralization through the empowerment of local administrative units (Eyoh and Stren 2003).

These shifts in priorities forced urban residents to confront livelihood and welfare challenges without the assistance of the state (Azarya and Chazan 1987; Chalfin 2014). Residents were resilient, and devised various strategies to cope with insecure living conditions.[4] They formed grassroots associations that were involved in a range of activities including community management, provision of social services and infrastructure, finance and credit, and religious and social affairs (Tostensen et al. 2001). They relied on informal networks because the formal structures of the city or the state did not protect them.[5] These responses were not always democratic or egalitarian. In some cases, populations politicize conceptions of belonging and notions of citizenship, making new claims over territory and land (Geschiere and Gugler 1998; Geschiere and Jackson 2006). Nonetheless, communities depend on the strength of their social networks and underlying networks of reciprocity and social capital.[6]

Political scientists have been slow to respond to the changing urban landscape in Africa. While political liberalization, good governance, and urbanization have all received significant attention, their impact on African politics and how the urban poor are integrated into modern political systems remains understudied. Moreover, scholars of political clientelism, distributive politics, and ethnicity focus their attention primarily on rural settings, overlooking crucial sites of democratizing societies. This book shows how the dual process of political liberalization alongside rapid urbanization in Ghana interacts, supports, and even shapes each other. Africa's urban future rests on poor neighborhoods as emerging spaces of intense political importance.

[4] Some of the most influential studies in urban Africa focus on the different ways that individuals and groups confront governance and economic challenges in the context of state failure. See: Maylam and Edwards (1996); Ferguson (1999); Simone (2004).

[5] See the following studies for this perspective: Attahi (1997); Hart (2000); Appadurai (2001).

[6] Putnam (1993, 2001) has documented the importance of social capital in Italy and the United States, respectively. In Ghanaian politics, community associations and pressure groups have a long history, as I show in the next section.

Democracy in Ghana

Ghana is an ideal site to study the parallel processes of urbanization and democratization. While much of the continent is in the early stages of urbanization, Ghana's experience with these processes dates back to the colonial era, where rural residents began flocking to its cities in large numbers to take advantage of budding industries and economic opportunities (Acquah 1958). In addition, its vibrant and well-established two-party political system emerged in the struggle for Independence in the 1940s, and these distinct political traditions now shape party politics (Fridy 2007).[7] Today, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) dominate the political arena. Examining these dual processes of urbanization and liberalization in Ghana provide a lens into the role that they might play in other countries across the continent.

The political importance of Ghanaian cities dates back to the colonial era when the city acted as both a system of control and a space to engage in political struggle against colonial authorities (Austin 1970). In 1957, Ghana became the first country in Africa to gain independence.[8] The impetus for this early transition came from pressure from its political parties, particularly the Convention People's Party (CPP) led by founding president Kwame Nkrumah, which drew support from the grassroots. Nkrumah rallied support based on his slogan "Independence Now," as opposed to the United Gold Coast Convention's (UGCC) call for "Independence at the shortest possible time." Most of this resistance emerged in Accra, where "disgruntled commoners" like returned ex-servicemen, unemployed youth, and "elementary-school-leavers" who had little chance of social mobility protested rising prices of goods, as well as colonial rule more generally (Apter 1955; Austin 1970).

Local *asafo* companies – groups of military bands organized in towns, villages, and traditional states – provided an organizational framework for popular mobilization during the colonial period (Datta and Porter 1971; Shaloff 1974; Simensen 1974, 1975; Fortescue 1990; Akyeampong 2002). By the 1940s, the CPP and the UGCC existed side

[7] See: Sebastian Elischer (2013) and Rachel Riedl (2014) for a discussion of the origins of Ghana's political parties.
[8] Ethiopia was never colonized by a European power, but was occupied by Italy.

by side with these youth associations, fighting to gain their support and hoping to subsume them into party organizations. We see legacies of these earlier struggles in Ghana's neighborhoods today, with the contemporary manifestation of the CPP and UGCC – the NDC and NPP, respectively – rallying support in these urban areas (Klaus and Paller 2017).

Throughout Ghana's postcolonial history, including periods of authoritarian rule, political parties have been very active in mobilizing local communities. Prior to the current multiparty era, which began in 1992 and is called the Fourth Republic, the country experienced numerous coup d'états and threats to freedom of association and expression. Nonetheless, nonstate actors like traditional authorities, religious figures, and other local leaders have long contributed to an active and vibrant associational life. For example, during the authoritarian regime of Jerry John Rawlings (1981–1992), a group of market women at Accra's Makola Market served as a de facto representative group for the opposition. The government made concerted efforts to decentralize administrative control and devolve budgets to district assemblies. Politicians used these assemblies to fund their party machinery, while trying to co-opt grassroots organizations like keep-fit clubs, cleanup committees, and "fisher folk" in order to strengthen political control (Gocking 2005).[9] Local leaders and associations have long been a crucial part of Ghana's process of democratization.

While Ghana has avoided the large-scale electoral violence that has broken out in other African democracies like Kenya and Cote d'Ivoire (Klaus and Mitchell 2015), elections have contributed to communal conflicts in Northern Ghana (Jockers et al. 2010) that have played out in cities, as well as low-intensity electoral violence in urban Ghana (Bob-Milliar 2014). This is often because local leaders use political parties and elections to advance their own personal agendas (Onoma 2009). But political parties also exploit these local divisions, many of which draw on long-standing grievances over claims to land and territory (Lentz 2013; Klaus 2015).

All this is to say that Ghana is a vibrant multiparty democracy, and is considered to have some of the most robust liberal-democratic institutions on the continent. The country has had six free and fair elections, and has experienced three peaceful transfers of power between

[9] Keep-fit clubs are local youth athletic clubs made up of mostly young men.