1 Introduction
In the Hustle Park

When entering the Neoplan Bus Station in Accra, Ghana's capital, one crosses into a dense field of social and economic interactions. The station serves as a hub of various urban economic activities: whether in the boisterous work of drivers and loading boys managing the intricacies of interregional and international road transport; or in the abundance of mobile vendors and chop bar operators peddling food and small goods; or in the myriad services offered by hairdressers, head porters, preacher men, money changers, sex workers, and shoeshine boys touting their crafts and services.

The dizzying array of activities at the station resembles West African marketplaces. Stalls displaying colourful assortments of local foodstuffs are not to be found here, though. And the air is not full of pungent odours. It smells of exhaust fumes. An impressive variety of vehicles dominates the scene, most of which have undergone modification by means of local craftsmanship. There are minivans and full-sized transporters, cargo trucks, and large coaches, classy new saloon cars, and tropicalised microvans in utilitarian designs. On busy days, vehicles depart and arrive incessantly, and days that are not busy are rare at Neoplan. The vehicles that wait in line for their turn are parked nose to tail, at times with not enough space in between for a child to pass through. Neoplan's remarkably small and narrow yard, which covers an area of approximately one hectare only, is regularly packed beyond capacity. Unlike the marketplace, the station is devoid of any apparent allure. The people inside it pay little heed to its appearance, though. They strive to make a living by labouring in transport work and in the many adjacent businesses. Others come as passengers, for most of whom travelling is also connected with making a living.

The Neoplan Station is one of West Africa's busiest long-distance bus stations, which are called 'lorry parks' in Ghanaian English.[1] Thirty-four

[1] 'Lorry park' or 'lorry station' is a term used in reference to long-distance stations, as distinguished from stations serving inner-city routes, which are called '*tro-tro* stations'.

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destinations are served from its yard directly, including the most important route in Ghana, which connects Accra with the country's second biggest city, Kumasi. Its other destinations are mainly scattered across Ghana's central and western regions and link Accra to the port cities of Tema and Takoradi, as well as to Lagos in Nigeria, among other places (see Map 1). Neoplan thus acts as Accra's central gateway to all the major commercial centres in Ghana and, through the feeder routes branching off from its destinations, to the West African subregion at large.

Due to its high number of travel connections, the station is frequented by many travellers from diverse backgrounds. There are people from all the regions in Ghana and from neighbouring countries, as well as from much further away. The groups of station workers are also diverse. They are composed almost exclusively of people from outside Accra and often also from outside Ghana. In most cases, they originate from one of the many towns and regions that are served from the station.

What unites the diversity of people who engage with the station is that they qualify as working poor, thus representing a vast demographic compelled to work through and with uncertainty to eke out a living. This is as true for the transport workers and vendors as it is for most of the passengers passing through the station. In this respect, it is significant that the plurality of livelihood strategies the station accommodates is inextricably linked to a relative scarcity of resources, capital, and money. Here, a great many coins pass through many hands. But these are almost invariably small coins and they tend to become smaller with each hand that they pass through, a circuit of exchange that blends market logics with principles of reciprocity and redistribution.

In her fabulous collection of ethnographic vignettes of Ghanaian lorry parks, Polly Hill describes how the abounding plenitude that is characteristic of these 'peoples' airport[s]' (1984: 215), as she terms the stations suggestively, converts into 'extraordinary practical difficulties' in finding orientation within them. She writes that it is:

> not just the great heat, the lack of shade, the lack of breeze … the multiplicity of languages, the hustle and bustle and general state of harassment and anxiety, the constant interruptions [There] is also the further problem … that one often

The term *tro-tro* is used in reference to converted minibuses. It derives from the threepence coin ('*tro*' in Accra's urban vernacular) that covered the fare back in the 1950s, when the first inner-city stations were established. The equivalent term for long-distance vehicles used to be the 'one pound', which is why some older Ghanaians speak of the 'one pound station'.

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cannot perceive order in chaos when overwhelmed by the sight of piles of produce in motion. (Hill 1984: 2–3)

The 'general state of harassment and anxiety' Hill describes is not simply the product of an outside observer's perspective. Many Ghanaians I talked to, about half a century after Hill's experience (her fieldwork dates from the early 1960s), expressed similar sentiments about the country's major lorry parks. The 'hustle and bustle' inside Ghana's bus stations evokes a sense of disorientation and danger, especially for the non-initiate. The image of notoriously chaotic and dangerous locations is endorsed by local media, and even more by social media, where the stations are reviled as sites of 'nuisance' and 'disorderliness'.

From the perspective of those who run the stations and rely on them for making a living, whether as transport workers, vendors, or regular travellers, a more differentiated picture emerges. While their viewpoints are far from glorifying the stations' workings, they draw attention to how the varied modes of mobility, circulation, and exchange made possible by the stations help in securing economic sustenance. This more nuanced view finds clear expression in how people, in turn, employ the term 'hustle' in relation to the place and work of the station. The following explanation from Al Hassan, who has been working in Neoplan for four years, captures well this refashioned meaning of hustle:

In the olden days, they called this place the lorry park. Now, we have a different name for it. Now, this place is the hustle park. For us it's the place to hustle … You see, all of us are suffermen. We come here to succeed, to fetch money. Because this place is free for everybody.

The way in which Al Hassan references hustle reveals central elements of the wider field covered by the local uses of the term. This field stretches from labour, effort, competition, and individual and collective struggle, to shared ideas of group belonging, camaraderie, and solidarity, through more embodied qualities of prowess, timing, and improvisation. Evocative of hassle, as in effortful work, hustle coveys the demanding work conditions of the transport sector: the pay is poor and irregular; the work is rife with competition for passengers, customers, and patrons; there are frequent confrontations with clients and co-workers; and in addition to the exhaust produced by cars, there is the exhaustion inflicted by the wearing temporalities of long, yet highly intermittent, working hours.

Although commonly voiced from a position of perceived social and economic marginality, as Al Hassan's reference to the 'suffermen' makes clear, the designation of hustle as an activity and orientation foregrounds the potential for making a living and for transforming lives for the better.

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The emphasis on transformation also relates to the changing idea of what the station is. The change of name from 'lorry park' to 'hustle park' that he suggests is not merely a jocular play on words. It alludes to the experiences and effects of profound social, economic, and not least infrastructural change, change that affects the work at the station as well as the conditions of urban living and livelihoods in Ghana, and, similarly, in other urban centres across West Africa.

The way in which the term 'hustle' is used by the station workers, chiefly as a verb and thus as a language of action, affords a perspective of the activities taking place at Neoplan that complements and complicates its use as a noun, as seen paradigmatically in the 'hustle and bustle' that Hill describes. As a noun, it designates crowded, hectic, noisy, and potentially intimidating situations in which a multitude of social interactions take place simultaneously. This use also resonates with many popular and academic writings that reproduce the distorted image of the supposedly inscrutable dynamics and 'teemingness' of African cities. In its station-related uses as a verb, it renders a particular logic of economic practice that is equally driven by necessity as it is bent on making the most of it.

When set out in relation to one another, the two notions of hustle – as a designator of complex and seemingly disordered *situations* and of precarious, yet venturesome, economic *activities* – encapsulate many of the contradiction-laden discourses, of both emic and academic origin, about urban (economic) life in Africa. And they dovetail with the ambivalences ascribed to Africa's roads and roadside spaces, which, as Adeline Masquelier (2002: 831) stresses, provoke 'fear and desire', among both 'Africans and Africanist scholars', as Gabriel Klaeger (2013b: 359) adds. In Neoplan's *hustle park*, these meanings of hustle, as verb and noun, are closely interwoven. Indeed, they can be thought of as two interrelated categories; not as two sides of the same coin but rather as two components of the same frame. For, at Accra's central bus station, the many different practices, strivings, relations, and contestations of individual and collective hustling activities shape the character, thrust, and temporality of the situation of hustle. Conversely, the situation of hustle undergirds and feeds back into the orientation of people's hustle activities.

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Taking as a point of departure the ambivalences conjured up by the different uses of the term, in this book I draw on hustle as an ethnographic and analytical guide for examining the workings of a West African bus station. The two meanings of hustle as complex situation

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and venturesome activity serve as an organising principle of the book. Taken together, they provide the main gateway for exploring the dynamic interplay between structure and practice in which the work of mobility performed at Accra's Neoplan Station takes shapes.

Building from the two meanings of hustle as situation and activity, I develop two primary arguments. First, I argue that the situation of hustle has nothing to do with chaos or disorder. Notwithstanding a certain element of uncertainty that characterises the income-generating activities of the station workers, which is a feature of most economic activities anyway and anywhere, the diverse social and economic practices that the station harbours are structured by rules of conduct, social hierarchies, and thus social order. Put differently, the hustle (and bustle) in the station has an organisational pattern, the actualisation of which, however, is far from being free of contradiction and conflict.

Second, and with regard to hustling activities, I argue that this pattern is a contingent process through which people reproduce the bus station's order by accommodating themselves to the situation of hustle, while simultaneously trying to make ends meet and to master shifting situations. The capacity to master situations – and to sometimes fail to master them – is in turn embedded within a spectrum of norms and regulatory systems that relate to different, often conflicting interests of state and non-state institutions and that are furthermore tied up with wider structures of economic and political organisation and change at different scales.

In other words, the station hustles have a logic, and they have a context that frames this logic. There is a dialectical relationship between the ways in which the great diversity of people – comprising principally road and city dwellers – make the station work and the ways in which the station – as an urban road and roadside institution embedded within wider historical and political-economic frameworks – makes people work and hustle. There is also a reciprocal relationship between the singular place of the station and the many, often distant elsewheres to which it is connected.

In the chapters that follow, I attempt to understand the dialectic makeup of these relationships and to identify the prevalent practices by which the station workers act upon and thereby co-produce these workings and connections. By repositioning the notion of hustle as a device central to my ethnography and analysis, I do not aim to resolve its diverse qualities and implications but rather to elicit, encompass, and elaborate on them. Moreover, in expanding on the different renderings of hustle as an economic practice and a distinct mode of production and organisation, my goal is to bring the description closer to the language, perspectives, and realities of the people who engage in the work of mobility at the station.

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Taking seriously the terms they use to convey their activities, expectations, and struggles brings me to move beyond notions of 'informality' and 'informal work', as widely rehearsed in scholarly and policy discourse to describe African road transport ventures (e.g. Agbiboa 2018; Cervero 2000; Cervero and Golub 2007) and so-called street economies (Hansen et al. 2014). The term 'informality' is conspicuously absent from the vocabularies of the station workers, despite the knowledge many of them have about the term's application in relation to their work by government and international agencies. And, as I argue below, it is also frustratingly imprecise and bereft of explanatory heft as an analytical device; it also carries with it the misleading assumption about the marginality of economic activities labelled as informal, which in many respects have long been central to popular livelihoods. With regard both to people's experiential life and to the technical and measured terms of the production, circulation, and valuation of goods and services, it is the 'real economy', which makes the 'informal' a redundant term.

The term 'hustle' constitutes a popular emic label expressive of the conditions of both possibility and constraint that these livelihoods entail.



Figure 1.1 Hustling in the lorry park.
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It is these conditions and the varied ways in which people individually and collectively position themselves at the juncture of hustle as situation and activity that I explore in this book. Focusing on Accra's Neoplan Station, I consider ethnographically how a pivotal infrastructural hub of work, mobility, and exchange is made to function in a context of insufficient state provision and high degrees of local institutional inventiveness.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I set out some of the key features of the station as a place to and of hustle in relation to the broader empirical context in which it is embedded, as well as to scholarly discussions of transport work, urbanism, infrastructure, and (auto)mobility to which this study ties in. Before doing so, I first work out a brief genealogy of the term 'hustle' by discussing some of the meanings it has accrued over time and across different cultural contexts, the significances of which map onto its purview as an analytical notion I seek to develop here.

A Genealogy of Hustle

Of Dutch provenance, where the verb *husselen* meant to toss or shake, the adoption of 'hustle' into eighteenth-century American English expanded its semantic range to include, as a noun, a hurried and bustling scene and, as a verb, to thrust or work busily. Over time, its meaning shifted towards describing forms of economic activity that were born from necessity and that often bordered on illegality, whether this meant moonlighting, gambling, or trading drugs, sex, or stolen goods. A prominent figure associated with these expedient and extemporaneous ways of making a living was the con man (or woman), whose hustling meant grifting and cutting corners. In their seminal study of 'career hustlers', Robert Prus and C. Sharper (1977: 2) define them as 'sage opportunists … able to match their abilities exactly to the opportunities presented by the city's shifting economy'.

Accompanying these semantic shifts, hustling was also used to describe the reality of black Americans during the Jim Crow era. Framed in terms of a racialised struggle against systemic inequalities in employment and public services, hustle acquired a significance that drew together experiences of social and economic plight and the values of strength and ingenuity needed in order to get by. This twofold connotation of hardship and hardiness folded into the more contemporary understanding of hustling that is expressive of a particular lifestyle. Linked mainly to a street culture of Afro-American youth, this type of hustling denotes savvy and illicit ways of making money that negotiate, and to some extent transcend, the constraints and consequences of structural violence reigning over the lives of people in America's black ghettos

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(Wacquant 1998; Ralph 2014), as exalted in rap music and associated movies. It was likely via the prominence the term acquired through global circuits of US popular culture that it gained currency as a culturally significant concept across Africa, predominantly in Anglophone and urban parts of the continent.

Here, it was mainly youth who embraced hustle as an expressive articulation of practices and attitudes of smartness, toughness, and endurance amidst fraught life chances. It was also in the lives of youth that Africanist scholars began to harness its potential as a conceptual lens for framing the simultaneity of embracing and contesting the conditions of marginalisation, inequality, and social and economic adversity (Di Nunzio 2019; Ntarangwi 2009; Thieme 2017; Thieme et al. 2021). Principally informed by a juxtaposition of harsh circumstances and shrewd resourcefulness that echoes its earlier adaptations on the other side of the Atlantic, in urban African contexts the term became detached from the unequivocal connotation of crime – think of John Chernoff's (2003) programmatic title *Hustling Is Not Stealing* – although related practices might refer to manipulative and deceitful activities. The characteristic feature here is *making do*, and it is expressed in a variety of cognate indigenous terms, such as 'strain' and '*dreg*' in Sierra Leone (Finn and Oldfield 2015; Hoffman 2011: 53), '*dubriagem*' in Guinea-Bissau (Vigh 2006: 128), or '*débrouillardise*' across Francophone West Africa, which Achille Mbembe (2001: 126) translates as 'ways of making ends meet'.

Assessing this Africanised type of hustling from the perspective of existential anthropology, Hans Lucht (2015: 122) identifies an important dimension, which he subsumes within the 'existential imperative to make more out of this life than what has been given'. Although survivalist at root, hustling also involves productive engagement with and 'a sense of mastery of the world' (ibid.), and thus agency. While many 'hustle *from* "nothing"', as one of Lucht's informants put it (ibid.: 109, emphasis added), most do not expect to hustle *for* nothing. They come to the hustle in the city in order to 'succeed', as station worker Al Hassan framed it. The aspiration of success and thus of social mobility is often equated with the need for physical movement. In the West African context in particular, as Lucht and others show, the term 'hustler' became tantamount to a figure of migrant mobility (Gaibazzi 2015; 2018; Prothmann 2018). 'The hustler,' writes Paolo Gaibazzi (2018: 477), 'is typically a hardworking, honest, and dynamic man who ventures away from his homeland in search of the means to support his family and to realize himself as a self-reliant man.'

Among the workers of the Neoplan Station in Accra, hustle retained its idiomatic quality of describing the daily struggles while simultaneously

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asserting the adaptive, generative, sometimes cunning, and ultimately agentive capacities of marginalised groups. As an expression wedded to the station's work environment, it sums up people's livelihood and survival strategies in the face of persistent structural constraints. Tellingly, among the Akan-speaking station workers, hustling is often used interchangeably with the terms for toil (*yɛ adwumaden*) and work (*adwuma*).

Its uses at the station also build on the close association with the strenuous labour invested in mobility and in mastering a moving and unstable environment of social and economic relations, as related by the West African migrant-hustler. Unlike in the language of migrants, however, the station workers rarely nominalise the term into 'hustler'. Besides dissociating themselves from the get-rich-quick attitudes of the street hustler, as conveyed in US gangsta rap and its localised adoptions, this omission also serves to underline the understanding of hustling as a combination of activities and orientations associated with the hard – and honest – work in the transport sector; work that, unlike that of the street hustler who operates at the margins or 'outside' the system, is of utmost systemic relevance. After all, the work in mobility that the station workers perform by organising transport and exchange is integral to the wider social and economic relations in which they are embedded. It is their work in mobility *qua* hustling activities that literally keeps the country moving.

Departure from Informality

The quintessential role that the central bus station plays in many aspects of social and economic life, as well as the hustles linked to the station's workings and extensive connections, is wedded to two defining characteristics of Ghana's public transport sector, both of which apply to public transport in many regions across Africa. First, public road transport provides the main means of travel beyond walking distance. Railways, which were of critical importance during the colonial era, particularly with regard to extractive economies, have been slowly disintegrating since independence and are frequently in a state of decay. Other means of transport, such as aeroplanes and private motorcars, are restricted in access and affordability. For most people in Ghana, and similarly in many other African contexts, motorised transport is a matter of getting a ride on shared, often crowded, minibuses, taxis, microvans, trucks, and lorries. Most inner-city, interregional, and international travel, in turn, is organised in the bus station. This is where travel communities are formed and channelled by the various roadside communities of the station. And

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this is where mobility – here understood in the literal sense of movement, transport, and travel – is facilitated and gains momentum.

Second, public road transport in Ghana is not a public undertaking but is mostly in the hands of a large number of labourers and small-scale investors. This has been so ever since the onset of what Polly Hill (1963b: 234) called 'the lorry age', alluding to the great transformations brought about by the motorisation of Ghanaian society from the second decade of the twentieth century. The related technologies – above all, roads and motorised vehicles – and the model of mass transportation were imported from the North Atlantic regions, mainly from Britain and the USA. Subsequently, this model was adapted to the cultural syntax of West African practices of transport and travel. In the course of this process, Ghanaian modes of road transport began to deviate significantly from the forms of public transport in Britain and the North Atlantic regions. In the latter, public transport follows bureaucratically administered models with high levels of regulation, standardisation, and formalisation. European railway systems, for example, epitomise the cogwheel rigidity of Western states' public transport planning and organisation through their centrally controlled routes, schedules, and fares, as well as through meticulously differentiated sets of scripts devised for operators and users.

Ghana's public road transport, by contrast, is characterised by low levels of central planning and regulation. The practices of road operators and users do not follow top-down prescribed scripts. Rather, the modes of organisation have evolved from distinct repertoires of skilled, often tacit, practices and quotidian interactions that take place on the road, at the roadside, and, crucially, inside bus stations. The routes are not centrally planned, but develop according to a logic of their own, in which supply is regularly given precedence over demand; vehicles do not run according to time schedules, but depart once they are 'full'; and although fares are fixed according to officially set rates, in practice they are adjusted at will.

As trades with decentralised, diverse, and bottom-up structures of operation, the entrepreneurial practices inside Ghana's bus stations are often considered emblematic of economic informality. Indeed, the emergence of the concept of the 'informal economy' itself has been closely related to popular transport enterprises in West Africa. Keith Hart, who first introduced the notion of informality into academic debates, drew largely from his observations of what he termed the 'irregular' economic activities of public transport operators in urban Ghana (Hart 1973). Economic activities in Ghana's bus stations and on the roads indeed appear to match the traits that are commonly used to define the informal economy.

Most public transport providers operate in the context of a relative lack of state control, taxation, protection, subsidies, and support. Their

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operations are characterised by generally low capital endowments and cash flows, low conditions of entry, and correspondingly high levels of competition and creation of economic niches. As a result, precarity and uncertainty are common markers of labour relations in the transport sector and its adjacent trades, and they manifest themselves especially in a general lack of security and benefits, and in hand-to-mouth existences. Work and wage relations are a long way from the criteria for 'decent work' set out by the International Labour Organization (ILO 2002), and they exemplify the structural disadvantages reproduced within the income-generating activities of the 'sub-proletariat' (Hart 1973: 61; see also Peace 1988; Rizzo 2017).

At the same time, bus stations, and the extensive public transport operations they facilitate, provide an opportunity to challenge generic models of the informal sector, and indeed to move beyond the 'informality' label. This is especially true with regard to the simplified binary classifications these models project onto a wide range of economic activities and relations, and, even more so, with regard to the range of negative qualifiers such as 'marginal', 'residual', 'unregulated', or 'shadowy' used by development specialists and political analysts (e.g. Collier 2007; Reno 2000). Among the people who invest in transport are also politicians, bureaucrats, and businesspeople. The private transport sector encompasses various levels of capital consolidation, and it also includes bigger fleets of buses that require substantial financial investments, which differ greatly from the small capital of, for instance, hairdressers, shoemakers, and vegetable vendors who are often seen as the hallmark of the 'informal sector'. In terms of the overall provision of public transport in Ghana, the services of road operators are far from being marginal; indeed, they are the dominant economy. Most of the economic activities that take place in bus stations are positioned outside the scope of formal state regulation, but their economic interrelations are structured by a plurality of 'alternative' (Meagher 2010: 16) forms of regulation.

As findings from earlier research indicate, the 'informal' organisation of bus stations in Ghana, as well as across many parts of Africa, reveals highly formalised hierarchies, modes of coordination, and codes of professional practice (Barrett 2003; Cissokho 2022; Hart 2016; Jalloh 1998; Ntewusu 2012; Okpara 1988; Steck 2004). Bus stations serve to highlight the often high levels of institutional inventiveness and bricolage of administrative practices, and to showcase the striking linkages between non-state economic actors and the state. In addition, while most jobs in the transport sector do indeed reveal grave '*decent work deficits*' (ILO 2002: 4, emphasis in original), many transport operators articulate their

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work activities in terms of autonomy and a distinctively entrepreneurial spirit – an ambivalent valuation of the simultaneity of economic pressures *and* opportunities referenced by local expressions of hustle.

The group economic activities taking place in Ghana's bus stations thus provide a striking illustration of scholarly takes on African economic practices that question the analytical valency of the concept of informality (Bekker and Fourchard 2013; Godard 2002a; Lindell 2010; Meagher 2007; 2010). Writing about different economic sectors, scholars have pointed out in particular how positing crude dichotomies between informal and formal spheres of the economy risks ignoring the multifarious networks that people draw on across different degrees of institutional formalisation and regulation. Furthermore, the dichotomy associated with the label 'informality' readily lends itself to normative perspectives commonly taken up in development policy, in turn becoming a justification for either formalising or eliminating informal economic activities.

The fact that an analytical term is reified in policy discourse and practice in overly simplified ways, it could be argued, must not lead us to completely abandon the notion of informality. After all, there remains an element of descriptive utility to be gained from categorising modes of economic engagement, for which a notion such as informality may provide a useful tool. Such an argument is certainly not entirely wrong. But the conceptual baggage the term has acquired through its absorption into developmentalist jargon and its appropriation in the broad-brush approaches and analyses of economists and political scientists has widened its scope to an extent that prevents rather than enables an understanding of the practices and perspectives of the people engaged in what is termed 'informal' work.

The notion of hustle, which is grounded in turn in the language of the station workers, offers a framework that is more sensitive to these practices and perspectives. It better captures the ambivalent properties, valuations, and conditions of station work; and it helps bring to the fore how the many modes of regulation in which the station workings take shape are integrative of many conflicting purposes. Taken together, they yield an organisational structure that is far from clear to all of its participants. Linked through a widely ramified network of socio-economic relations, most of which follow the station's itineraries, a central lorry park such as Accra's Neoplan Station represents a complex conjunction of heterogeneous modes of value production. This heterogeneity pertains to the different ways in which value is constituted, commoditised, exchanged, and (rarely) accumulated. And it also pertains to differences concerning the ways in which people invest and anchor value in specific places; how their economic practices are informed by pressures and interests of kin

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groups and non-kin affiliations and by the strictures and opportunities following from occupational gender divides; and how they position themselves within different degrees of collaboration and competition, risk and opportunity, and, ultimately, hustle as activity and situation.

Urban Complexities Reconsidered

The Neoplan Station is located near Accra's main road intersection, the Kwame Nkrumah Circle, or simply 'Circle' in the urban vernacular. Resembling Ojuelegba in Lagos, Circle functions as 'a vortex for all the flows' (Bakare-Yusuf and Weate 2005: 326) within Accra, a property it owes to hosting the city's main inner-city bus station, the Circle Station. The Neoplan Station complements Circle's role as a vital transportation hub that supports the overall economies of Accra and Ghana. The station is, at one and the same time, a central institution in Ghana's road regime and a thoroughly – and, in fact, exclusively – urban institution. Lorry parks exist in smaller towns as well, each of which represents an integrative node within the broader network of transport connections. A station like Neoplan, however, which links up with more than 34 'sister stations', as the transport workers refer to them, is to be found in large conurbations only. Neoplan is both product and hallmark of Ghana's principal metropolis, Accra. Conversely, many features of Ghanaian urbanism and of Ghana's roads and roadside spaces are writ large inside the station.

In this sense, the station hustles offer a window onto the complexities – meaning conditions where 'things relate but don't add up' (Mol and Law 2002: 1) – that characterise many of the socio-economic formations in urban centres across the West African region, and similarly in many other cities of the global South. 'The city as a site of everyday practice,' writes Setha Low (1996: 384), 'provides valuable insights into the linkages of macroprocesses with the texture and fabric of human experience.' It is, of course, 'not the only place where these linkages can be studied', as she adds. '[B]ut the *intensification of these processes* – as well as their human outcomes – occurs and can be understood best in cities' (ibid., emphasis added). And as the city provides a kind of convex lens for observing social processes and change, the small yet extraordinarily dense and diverse urban locale of the station further concentrates the image of the city.

Many studies that try to come to terms with the complexities of urban life in Africa fall under the rubrics of two diverging strands of research. One strand tends to (over)emphasise the dysfunctional and hazardous aspects of supposedly under-regulated modes of urban organisation, while the other tends to (over)emphasise the self-regulating powers of

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social ingenuity. These two strands of the Africanist urban research agenda correspond to what Kate Meagher (2010: 21–2) terms the 'dramatic' and the 'enthusiastic' view respectively (see also Ferguson 2006: 1–23; Fredericks and Diouf 2014; Goldstone and Obarrio 2017).

The former, predominantly following the agenda of urban developmentalism, conjures up scenarios of disaster and predation, depicting African cities as sites of deteriorating structures, malfunctioning public services, uncontrollable sprawl, environmental degradation, chronic poverty, violence, epidemics, and so forth (e.g. Davis 2005; Pojani and Stead 2017; Stren and White 2018). Here, empirical and theoretical articulations of the city are based on the notion of 'crisis'. The latter, represented mainly by cultural analysts, interprets urban Africa's malaises not as portents of doom but as potentiality, celebrating the coping capacities of urban denizens as 'mystery and miracle' (Tollens 2004: 48; see also Förster 2014; Konings and Foeken 2006) and even suggesting the existence of an 'acephalous rationality' (Bakare-Yusuf and Weate 2005: 333). Here, it is the notion of 'creativity' that both anchors and steers theorisations.

Whether of a dramatic-alarmist or an enthusiastic nature, these approaches tend to produce reductionist explanations. Beside a penchant for normativity, both approaches echo functionalist models, albeit in rather different registers. The celebratory view of creative coping capacities presupposes that there is a kind of distributional, or meta-structure, organism at work beyond (or underneath) the ubiquity of urban hustle. The alarmists construe a kind of teleology of calamity and, paraphrasing Ulf Hannerz's (1980: 56) assessment of the earlier ecological models of the Chicago school, they tend to think of disorganisation, dysfunction, and disorder when they describe diversity.

Similar critiques of these two strands of research have been voiced in a cluster of recent Africanist urban scholarship (e.g. Melly 2017; Myers 2011; Nuttall and Mbembe 2008; Pieterse 2011; Simone 2004a; 2010). Driven by the effort to recast social science engagements with African 'cityness' (Simone 2010) and to depart from reductionist models and explanations, the orientation of this scholarship has not (or not yet) bred an operational theoretical paradigm. Notwithstanding that the works have yielded a wealth of evocative (and often also elusive) concepts, their reach is of a methodological rather than a theoretical ambit.[2] This

[2] Ato Quayson (2014: 6) also comments on the recurrent lack of clarity in some of these works, and he cites AbdouMaliq Simone as 'the most suggestive and yet, by the same token, also the most elusive' author. Arguably, there is method to this elusiveness. Simone (2004a: 15) explicitly draws attention to his complicated language of description ('It will not always be clear just what is going on'), arguing that he 'tried to find a form of narration close to the actual process underway'.

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methodological reach is anti-reductionist in principle and pluralistic in orientation. With borrowings from Paul Feyerabend, the perhaps most pronounced advocate of scientific pluralism (whose intellectual orientation offers important points of convergence with this scholarship), this can be described as an epistemic stance that casts off preconceived notions, acknowledges diversity, and takes at face value 'the abundance that surrounds and confuses' us (Feyerabend 1999: viii). It is in this pluralistic orientation in method, description, and analysis that I root my study of the station hustle.

Jane Guyer (2011) encapsulates this stance in the notion of 'ethnographic realism' in the classical sense. She explains this with recourse to Malinowski's famous maxim: to 'study what "looms paramount" in people's lives' by seeking 'to grasp "the native's point of view" and document the "imponderabilia of actual life", within incongruence' (ibid.: 476–7). With regard to the study of the imponderable matters of urban life in Africa – and of their condensed manifestation in the station hustle – this realist ethnography translates into two main principles. The first is attentiveness to the ways in which urban denizens triangulate their lives with, on the one hand, the relational, provisional, ephemeral, irregular, and spectral dimensions of the city, and, on the other hand, its more structural, stable, enduring, regular, and material forms. The second principle, which follows directly from the first, can be expressed as the attempt to embrace, rather than reduce, the variegated, often extraneous, and incongruous ways in which people experience, navigate, endure, exploit, manipulate, and thereby co-produce the complexities constitutive of urban everydayness. Instead of imposing categories and explaining away conflicting or contradictory relations, the task is to identify the diverse social, economic, and political forces that shape 'the simultaneous promise, threat, and resource of cityness – i.e. the city's capacity to provoke relations of all kinds' (Simone 2010: 3).

Infrastructural Intersections

The many loose ends formative of urban life in Africa, with their proximity to experiences of confusion bred by the abundance of people and activities at the station, have been interpreted by Filip De Boeck (2015) using the morphology of the knot. Produced through 'processes of knotting, tying, connecting, weaving and intertwining', knots, he suggests, are 'both conjuncts and disjuncts'. They express processes of 'interlinking, connecting [and] border crossing', while simultaneously expressing 'acts or states of disconnection, of the untying of integrative links' (ibid.: 53). The strength of De Boeck's analogy, beside the graphic

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mental image it creates, lies in its capacity to capture the processual manifestations of 'the urban'. The conceptual metaphors of the knot and knotting foreground practice and action, and hence the making and unmaking of ties between people living and working together and apart. Moreover, while these knotting practices and knotted relationships intensify within the geographical boundaries of the city, they are not confined to it.

De Boeck's analogy of the (African) city as knot resonates with the notion of 'social infrastructure', especially when seen in relation to material infrastructures. Reminiscent of earlier conceptualisations of the relationship between wealth in people and wealth in things (Guyer 1993), this notion has provided a rich resource for better understanding the many provisional, often precarious, and inventive ways in which city dwellers in Africa make use of the urban environment, particularly with regard to realms in which state services are insufficient or lacking altogether (e.g. transport, communication, water, and waste). From seeing 'people as infrastructure' (Simone 2004b) to 'soft infrastructure' (Larkin 2008), 'invisible' or '(im)material infrastructure' (De Boeck and Plissart 2004), and 'infrastructural sociality' (Lamont 2017), this conceptual prism throws into relief the different types of practices and relationships that people draw on for expanding and utilising both social and material networks, for making their engagements productive and reproducing them, and, ultimately, for making ends meet.

Accra's Neoplan Station is, in this sense, an infrastructural hub in full reach of the concept. If we follow Brian Larkin's (2013: 329) trenchant definition and conceive infrastructure as 'matter that enables the movement of other matter', then Neoplan is among the most tangible reifications of movement-enabling matter in Accra's urban fabric. At the bus station, movement is imperative, and conceptual metaphors such as 'mobility', 'flow', 'circulation', 'knotting', and, not least, 'infrastructure'[3] are made flesh and put into practice there. The station serves as a principal feeder of movement, as it facilitates large parts of the country's motorised road traffic. And it is fed by movement, because it is the activities and relationships of travel and roadside communities that keep it running. It stands at the very 'centre of the knot', to borrow an expression from Mbembe (2012). At the same time, its constitution as a central hub within broader networks of transport connections also transcends facile urban–rural divides.

[3] As Appel et al. (2015) point out: 'Infrastructure has long been a central conceptual tool – a productive metaphor – for critical theory and the analysis of social life more broadly.'

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The ways in which people make use of Neoplan's infrastructural 'matter', how they hone their 'infrastructural practices' (Kleinman 2014) and invest their engagements with meaning, are essentially open to negotiation, modification, and change. Especially when compared to the highly regularised procedures in North Atlantic transport hubs, a place such as Accra's Neoplan Station is rife with opportunities for new, unorthodox, ingenious, or hazardous engagements. Yet the fact that uncertainty is an endemic or even systemic property of social action and organisation, as captured by the two meanings of hustle as activity and situation, does not mean that there are no routines or that structures are too weak to facilitate predictable procedures. Nor does it mean that this context – and specifically the need to hustle for a living, in a situation of hustle – is what people put up with.

There are routines, but these require hard work in order to be sustained. Although the majority of people who work in the station lack the generative capacity that would lend their ventures a more significant measure of predictability, stability, and, not least, protection, their *making do* should not be confused with *striving for*. What makes the difference is the degree to which these activities are wedded to a regime of formalised regulation and economic calculation. A key question this book seeks to answer is how people position themselves within the relatively loosely regulated and complexly distributed social and material relations that comprise the infrastructural matter of the urban roadside institution of Accra's Neoplan Station.

The Station's Significances

Marc Augé (1995), expanding on Michel de Certeau's (1984) analysis of place making by virtue of everyday practice, draws a distinction between anthropological places and non-places. The anthropological place is concerned with identity, history, and relations. It is defined as 'a principle of meaning for the people who live in it, and also a principle of intelligibility for the person who observes it' (ibid.: 52) – prominently, the anthropologist. In direct opposition to the anthropological place is the non-place. Devoid of identity, history, and relations, the sociality of non-places is solitary, anonymous, contractual, and consumptive. Airports, along with highways and shopping malls, are the prime specimens Augé cites. The experience of moving through these non-places of transit and consumption is organised and conditioned by regulatory systems of signs and instructions. Seizing on Augé's typology, Douglas Coupland (1997: 72) describes the non-place of the large hub airport as 'a "nowhere", a technicality … an anti-experience'.

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The particular kind of place that the Ghanaian lorry park represents, which in its function is comparable to the species of spaces with which Augé is concerned, is diametrically opposed to a non-place. In this respect, it is symptomatic that at Accra's Neoplan Station there are no instruction signs, no timetables, and only a very few, mostly obsolete, destination boards to organise movement or explain the conditions of use. Instead, there are people and vehicles. The multiplicity of actions, interactions, and uses that enfolds between them generates an 'everywhere' rather than a 'nowhere'. Far from any 'technicality', it is full of 'practicality'. And rather than causing 'anti-experience' (whatever that means), it is more likely to produce an excessive dose of experience – or, to use Augé's term, a veritable anthropological experience.

This multiplicity is made evident by the many purposes served by Ghana's bus stations. Besides choreographing the transport of people and freight, the stations support and sustain trade, commerce, and exchange at different scales. Moreover, they are gateways between urban and rural areas; they are sites of political contestation and popular mobilisation; they serve as nodal points for the circulation of value, knowledge, meaning, and ideology; they enable the circulation of news and information; they are a source of (urban) legends and narrations; they provide large numbers of people with a place to hear news, meet friends, and find shelter; and they serve as public stages on which different styles of clothes, language, and demeanour are displayed, performed, popularised, and at times even invented.

These many different bus station encounters and exchanges, ephemeral as they may be, generate proximities of people who are otherwise separated by geographical, social, and often also cultural distance. Their diversity affords people the opportunity to hone their skills in the everyday politics of coexistence and, ultimately, to gain a sense of the city, region, and state they inhabit and the society of which they are a part. In short, bus stations are loaded with social, economic, political, and cultural significance.

Bus Station Types

Bus stations in Ghana not only encompass a multiplicity of functions; they also encompass a diverse spectrum of manifestations, or types, of station. Within this spectrum, Accra's Neoplan Station represents what is the most common (and perhaps also the most stereotypical) idea of bus stations: the large, crowded, hectic, noisy, and seemingly chaotic central urban station, which is often taken as an emblem of urban Africa's 'hustle and bustle'. Reminiscent of an inner-city bazaar, this kind of station

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commonly accommodates a great number of transport workers, chop bar operators, and hawkers, as well as a broad range of vehicle types. This, however, is only one of many types of bus station.

In Accra alone, we shall also find dozens of small and relatively tranquil roadside stations that serve only short-distance routes, as well as various larger inner-city stations, such as Accra's Circle Station, mentioned earlier, located adjacent to Neoplan. A very different type is the caravanserai-like station that serves only a few specialised long-distance routes, where passengers have to await preparations for the departure of a single bus for as long as a week, a characteristic example of which is the Niamey Station. Although located in downtown Accra (but hidden away in the backyard of an industrial storage area), the atmosphere it emits is reminiscent of long-distance desert travel and a far cry from the surrounding urban 'teemingness'. Then there is the type of chronically congested urban market station that specialises in the transport needs of traders, blurring the lines between haulage, storage, and sales. (A common variation is the rural market station, which becomes busy only during periodic market days.) One prominent example here is the Tudu Station, located in downtown Accra, which is a particularly busy, market-adjacent lorry park and one of the longest-running stations in the West African subregion (it was established in 1929).

Yet another type is the station that specialises in offering high-speed or high-end services, or both, a prominent representative of which is the so-called VIP Station, which is located across the road from Neoplan's yard. It was established as a joint business venture between former senior members of Neoplan and of its main sister station in Kumasi (along with wealthy private investors – among them, it is said, Asantehene Osei Tutu II, the ruler of the Ashanti people). VIP operates a fleet of luxury coaches that mainly serve the route between Accra and Kumasi, competing with Neoplan for travellers who belong to Ghana's aspiring middle class. The ordered environment of its fenced-off (and hawker-free) terminal differs significantly both from the hectic and noisy yard of its direct competitor, Neoplan, and from the somnolent, quasi-rural atmosphere at the Niamey Station.

While these types of station are run by a vast diversity of non-state commercial actors and constitute the majority of stations in Accra, other stations are government-run. They comprise the long-established State Transport Corporation (STC), which operates terminals in regional capitals and a few major towns only, and Metro Mass Transit Ltd (MMT), launched in 2003, which has a comparatively higher density of stations (most of which are located strategically in close proximity to

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lorry parks) and a fleet size of about 1,000 buses.[4] While both STC and MMT are operated as public–private partnerships, with the majority of shares being held by large-scale private investors, generally people perceive them as state-run transport enterprises.

In 2009, a new type of station was built in Accra that further blurs the distinction between state-run and private transport businesses: the Achimota Transport Terminal. Mandated by the government, it is operated by a private sector company and used by both STC and MMT buses and by private operators' vehicles. It was established as an 'exemplary model' that would eventually replace all of Accra's (and Ghana's) main lorry parks, but so far it is the only one of its kind in the country. (I address the particularities of this new type of station in Chapter 8.)

Recentring the Station

In view of these manifold significances, functions, and types of bus station in Ghana – a framework that could be extended to the role of stations in other African countries – it is striking to note that they have only rarely been studied as subjects of research in their own right. Two important exceptions are the historically oriented works of Samuel Ntewusu (2012) and Jennifer Hart (2016): the first offers a detailed examination of the contribution of northern migrants to urban and economic development in Accra, assessed primarily through the lens of the Tudu Station; the latter addresses the development of Accra's inner-city public transport services, in turn focusing primarily on the role of commercial drivers.[5] Both works made significant contributions to the understanding of the social dimensions and the historical and political-economic frameworks in which public transport evolved in Ghana and the Gold Coast, respectively. In this book, I expand on their findings and seek to complement the largely historical perspective they both take on Ghanaian transport provision with a more grounded anthropological perspective that pays attention to the daily practices of bus station workers.

On the part of anthropologists, there is a surprising lack of interest in the significance of bus stations in Africa. This is all the more remarkable because many anthropologists must have spent considerable amounts of time at stations. Sjaak van der Geest (2009: 269), for example, reflecting

[4] For comparison, more than 1,000 vehicles are registered for plying routes from the Neoplan Station alone.

[5] Other important exceptions include (parts of) the collections edited by Godard (2002b), Lombard and Steck (2004), and Stasik and Cissokho (2018).

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on the three and a half decades of repeated visits to the continent, states that in 'those years I spent countless hours in lorry parks waiting for my bus or taxi to leave', during which he 'killed time by talking to drivers, "bookmen", mates and fellow passengers'. Van der Geest's long-lasting, albeit not deliberate, bond with African bus stations is certainly no exception among fellow Africanist fieldworkers, both within and outside the scope of anthropological research.

Van der Geest provides an explanation for this lack of interest in lorry parks by pointing to the 'dismal farsightedness' of (Western) anthropologists: 'What originates in their own culture is too familiar to be visible in another setting: schools, factories, hospitals, pharmaceuticals and cars – all these exports have – until recently – been overlooked by Western anthropologists doing fieldwork in other cultures' (van der Geest 2009: 259). Much the same is true with respect to Africa-based social scientists doing research in settings of their own culture.[6]

Nearly all anthropological studies that relate to African bus stations appear to have emerged as subsidiary products of research on other subjects, often on marketplaces. The pioneering work of Polly Hill is a case in point. After setting out to examine the distribution of specific market commodities in Ghana, she became absorbed by the intricacies of transport systems and, in passing, she produced what constitute some of the most engaging descriptions of the social organisation of bus stations to date (Hill 1984). Other classic examples include the in-depth account of Nigerian motorparks by Adrian Peace (1988), whose elaboration of socio-economic relations within the parks was merely a point of departure for his analysis of the political economy of patronage systems in urban Nigeria; and Paul Stoller's (1989: 69–83) deep reading of social interactions in a bush taxi station in Niger, the final purpose of which was to illustrate the hardness of Songhay culture.

There is, of course, a longstanding tradition of scholarship addressing various dimensions of road transport in Africa, and social science research on African transport systems and automobility has burgeoned since the turn of the millennium.[7] Several clusters of studies relate key

[6] As noted by Quayson (2018: 114), this apparent neglect of bus stations extends to African artistic works, as, with a few notable exceptions, such as Wole Soyinka's *The Road*, Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name*, and King Ampaw's *Kukurantumi*, no elaborate representations of African stations appear in literature or film.

[7] Ghana has figured prominently in Africanist research on motorised transport systems, with a history of scholarly works going back at least to Gould (1960) and Dickson (1961). Other prominent and more recent studies addressing road transport and automobility in specific African countries and on the continent include the volumes edited by Beck et al. (2017b) and Gewald et al. (2009), as well as the works by Green-Simms (2017), Klaeger (2013b), Mutongi (2017), and Rizzo (2017).

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insights into different aspects of the relevance of cars, public transport, and road infrastructures in Africa. These include analyses of the politics of public transport and its political economy more broadly;[8] descriptions of some of public transport's central figures – drivers and traders in particular;[9] as well as interpretations of the symbolic and cultural meanings with which automobility is invested and the social imaginaries surrounding it.[10] While the significance of bus stations for organising (auto)mobility and exchange, and as crucial sites of everyday socio-economic activity and cultural production, is touched on in these studies, they have not paid nearly enough attention to bus stations as places of significance in and of themselves. One main objective of this book is to make the place and significance of the station the focus of attention, rather than looking at these issues parenthetically.

By exploring ethnographically how transport and exchange are made to work in a West African bus station, this book also critically engages with the social science study of (auto)mobility, which, ever since the so-called mobility turn (Sheller and Urry 2006), has produced a wide range of vital research. From the ethnography of performative 'passengering' on ferry boats (Vannini 2012) to the analysis of railway commuters' affective dispositions (Bissell 2009a) and the examination of the politics of 'aerealities' (Adey 2010), these studies provide a rich toolbox of concepts and methods for investigating how socialities practise mobility, and how mobilities remake socialities.

[8] For studies attending to the politics and political economy of private road transport business in different African countries, see Albert (2007), Bähre (2014), Cissokho (2012; 2015; 2022), Czeglédy (2004), Khosa (1992), and Rasmussen (2012).

[9] Grieco et al. (1996) provide a particularly insightful collection of essays dealing with the complex interlocking of trade and transport systems in Ghana, especially with regard to the cooperation between (mostly female) traders and (almost exclusively male) transporters. On detailed studies on drivers and other roadside trades and professions in Ghana and beyond, see Feld (2012: 159–97), Jordan (1978), Klaeger (2009; 2014), Okpara (1988), Reynolds (2015: 103–23), Seck (2006), Ungruhe (2015), van der Geest (2009), Verrips and Meyer (2000), wa Mungai (2013), and wa Mungai and Samper (2006).

[10] One prominent body of anthropological literature juxtaposes conceptions of modernity with cultural perceptions of cars, roads, and motorised transport more generally (Lee 2012; Masquelier 1992; 2002; Sanders 2008). Another body of literature is devoted to collections and interpretations of car inscriptions, or 'minivan poetics' (Weiss 2009: 49), which provide a wealth of insights into road-related imaginaries in different African contexts, as linked to politics, religion, morality, and the desired but unfulfilled promises of modernity; collections compiled in Ghana make up the largest part of these studies (Awedoba 1981; Date-Bah 1980; Field 1960; Kyei and Schreckenbach 1975; Lewis 1998; Quayson 2014: 129–58; van der Geest 2009). On Liberia, Nigeria, and Tanzania, respectively, see Guseh (2008), Lawuyi (1988), and Weiss (2009: 45–52).

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The bulk of this work, however, develops conceptualisations of practices and experiences of movement, transport, and travel that are based solely on North Atlantic transport systems. The grand concept of 'automobilities' (Featherstone 2004) is a case in point. Its empirical basis is drawn almost exclusively from the highly developed, technologised, and saturated forms of mass mobility centred on the figure of the autonomous driver in North America and Western Europe. These 'car cultures' (Miller 2001) have little in common with the largely collective practices and experiences of road travel in Ghana, and similarly in other regions beyond the North Atlantic. In order to account for the differences, and to map out overlaps, the established concepts need to be revised in important dimensions. The 'new mobilities' paradigm has yet to be driven off the well-paved roads of Europe and the USA.

Venturing into the Station

The material for this study was gathered during 12 months of fieldwork conducted between July 2011 and April 2013, with follow-up visits in 2018, 2019, and 2020. During the first period of research, I surveyed the different types of station in Accra, and later expanded this survey by making a round trip to Neoplan's sister stations. In the remaining time of the main fieldwork period, which amounted to about ten months, I focused my research on the Neoplan Station.

My engagements with the station's space of work and mobility were carried out mainly by means of 'thick participation' (Spittler 2001). Akin to other reformulations of classic anthropological fieldwork methods à la Malinowski, such as 'ethnographic embodiment' (Stoller 1997), thick participation is principally a 'radicalized form of participant observation' (Spittler 2001: 1). Complementing the standard ethnographic toolkit of systematic observations, interviews, and surveys, it involves sustained participatory experiences (*Miterleben*) gathered via immersions in the activities of the people under study. Contrary to Hill's assertion that, when conducting research in the complex and potentially confusing social environments of Ghanaian marketplaces and lorry parks, participant observation becomes 'an absurd notion' (1984: 3), I argue that it constitutes a most pertinent method. But it needs to be intensified, or thickened.

Key to this thickening process is apprenticeship, and thus hands-on practice and training. Resonating with Charles and Janet Keller's (1996) seminal research on the tactile and largely non-verbal thinking of blacksmiths, apprenticeship facilitates the apprehension of embodied thought in both routinised and creative practice that words frequently fail to

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capture. Geared towards 'making work speak' (Spittler 2014), thick participation helps to close the gap that verbal inquiry (that is, conversations and interviews) leaves open. Moreover, bound to a process of learning and collaboration that goes beyond the common requirement to establish rapport, it may also enable access to kinds of concealed or secret knowledge that communities of practitioners will reveal to initiates only.

The adaptation of this method to my research on work practices and hustles in a Ghanaian lorry park is perhaps best captured in the fact that, rather than employing a research assistant, I spent most of my time assisting the station workers. Because there is no apprenticeship-like formalisation of training in the station trades (barring the profession of driver), over time my engagements frequently came close to relations of employment. I consistently denied offers of payment, though. While mainly participating in work related to the organisation of transport, and the loading of buses in particular, I also gained experience in the crafts of vending and hawking.

My entry into these occupations was remarkably easy. Generally, there is little control over access to the unskilled, manual labour that I performed, not least because this kind of labour is usually in demand. With regard to my case as a European foreigner, some people raised doubts as to whether I could – or even should – toil in work perceived to be way below my ascribed status. But these reservations were overcome by my expressed eagerness to learn what the station work is about, as well as by people's amusement at seeing a 'white man hustle'. And so I cleaned buses, assisted in loading luggage and checking engines; I helped to sell bus tickets and participated in many of the ruses used to fill buses expeditiously. I hawked sachet water, chewing gum, and phone credits to passengers; I sold rice stews and soups, prepared tea, and shared countless cigarettes.

Through this prolonged involvement in the station workers' everyday routine and grind, I gained first-hand knowledge of their procedures, actions, and tactics, many of which were of a tacit or complicit kind. I established a close rapport with some three dozen station workers of diverse trades and levels of seniority. Largely based on these connections, I conducted about one hundred interviews.[11] While English served as the

[11] These interviews included talks with active and retired transport workers in the Neoplan Station and in numerous other stations across Ghana, executives of Ghana's private road transport associations, and senior administrative staff of regional and national transport and urban planning divisions, as well as station vendors, hawkers, and passengers in Accra and in other towns. Especially productive was participating in the eighth national congress of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (the country's largest transport

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main language of communication, I also drew on my competence in Twi and in French. What made my social integration into the communities of station workers possible, however, were two incidents, which, in hindsight, were crucial to establishing my presence as a co-worker and, not least, as a clearly gendered person. These two incidents, extraneous as they may seem, also reveal important elements of what it means to hustle at the station.

Rumble and Chop

The first incident occurred during the third week of my full-time engagement at the Neoplan Station, and it involved a fight. I had recently begun assisting a station worker in his daily duties. While taking a break in front of a hangout that was popular with senior station staff, I was approached by two male Nigerian passengers in their mid-twenties. They asked me to buy them a coconut, which I declined. In response, they showered me with abuse, to which I tried to retort appropriately. At that, one of them hit me in the face. I hit him back. The situation escalated into a brawl but was soon concluded by intervening station workers, who chased away the two Nigerians. Agitated and out of breath, I was immediately seized with remorse for not keeping my temper, especially as several senior station members had been observing my reaction. I was pondering a possible explanation for my uncontrolled behaviour when one of the seniors approached me, telling me that I did well. Surprised by his positive response, I replied that I should have reacted differently, non-violently. He objected by saying that my reaction was in fact very appropriate, because it was me who belonged to the station while they were troublemakers and outsiders. He left open, however, whether my belonging had preceded the fight or resulted from it.

Fortunately, this episode did not create an image of me as a hothead. What it did produce was a good deal of sympathy (I had a black eye for a full week), amusement, and insistent teasing. Reminiscent of Clifford Geertz's (1973) acceptance in a Balinese village by way of fleeing a police raid, the 'Lagos rumble' (as some station workers subsequently referred to the fight) significantly eased my integration into the station

association), which I attended together with the delegation from Accra. The event, held every four years, took place over four days in Tamale in September 2011. It was attended by more than 2,000 senior bus station staff from across the country and provided me with ample opportunity for casual conversations, interviews, and establishing contacts. I also conducted archival research, mainly in the National Archives of Ghana, as well as in the Ministry of Transport and the Accra Metropolitan Assembly, and in national and regional offices of Ghana's main private road transport associations.

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communities. This was the case not least because, unlike for Balinese villagers, fleeing is not a preferred course of action for the station workers. Here, conflicts and disagreements emerge with a striking regularity, and they are regularly fought out with high intensity. Although that does not necessarily mean engaging in actual fistfights, verbal and physical violence are part and parcel of the station work, and of the station hustle. Especially among the younger male station recruits, the ability to fend off attacks is seen as an essential feature of the successful hustle. In the regular, even daily, confrontations they face with competing co-workers, the need to show hardiness is a means both of maintaining boundaries and of asserting one's position and belonging.

Boundary work through acts and displays of toughness is only one part of what successful hustle is about. At least as important is the ability to cross boundaries and create and maintain connections across the different groups of people working at the station, as the second incident illustrates with regard to relational work across gender divides. This incident was less hazardous but had similarly important consequences with regard to the position and role I held within the station communities. It occurred two weeks after the fight, and thus a full month after I had first entered the field. In the course of this month, the process of my enculturation into the values, appropriate behaviours, linguistic customs, quotidian rituals, and thus the 'lorry park culture' had progressed relatively quickly. Still, in one important dimension my position remained at a level that resembled that of a child: I had come to Ghana alone, without a wife and children. Being a bachelor at my age (my early thirties) was considered, and commented on, by many of the station workers as unconventional, if not improper. My repeatedly expressed decline of proposals of marriage, which were made to me by both female and male station workers (the latter supposedly on behalf of female kin), proved counterproductive in that regard. Yet more decisive was my non-participation in the ubiquitous flirting that accompanies many of the interactions between men and women at the station.

Here, a short excursus about the everyday performances of gender relations and identities at the station is necessary. Generally, the station trades are structured by relatively rigid occupational gender divides, with masculinity being deeply inscribed in transport-related activities, while vending activities are largely associated with female entrepreneurship. In demographic terms, the station communities are distributed equally between the two sexes. Within this clear-cut field of gendered positions, everyday interactions are characterised by sexually connoted innuendoes. For instance, many seemingly business-related encounters between a male transport worker and a female vendor are accompanied by

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suggestive jokes and coquetries from both parties. Virtually any occasional encounter can prompt such flirting, be it during the purchase of food, during an enquiry about the price of a product or service, or simply while watching someone bringing off a bargain.

What often lurks behind this veil of 'sweet talk', as the station workers refer to flirting, is the attempt to establish intimate bonds in order to protect or promote one's trade, however brief that bond may prove to be. The pattern of exploiting gender (and sexuality) is common among female sellers seeking (male) patronage by, for example, engaging male station personnel in 'reciprocal amorous exploits' (Stasik 2016b). These exploits may be performed in order to secure additional support for continued access to, or to strengthen one's ties in, the fluid social networks of the station communities. Also, many men seek accomplices for their cause by means of flirting with settled women, hoping for brokerage in order to further their job opportunities. In instances when there is a need for a fill-in driver or an additional labourer, for example, the settled female vendor might use her ties to (male) station seniors and vouch for the suitability of her devotee. In other instances, she might simply hire him for her own purposes. Although flirtations are often instrumental in that they serve as a means of mobilising business relations, they are frequently also meant as actual courtship or are indulged in just for the fun of it. By abstaining from these often witty, at times vulgar, coquetries, I missed out on (and ignored) a crucial element of everyday relationships and hustling activities.

This changed after I made a passing remark while sitting with a group of young female station vendors. We were joking about the hypocrisy of Ghanaian men, many of whom, the vendors claimed, went straight from Sunday church services to visit the sex workers located in shanties next to the Neoplan Station. One of the vendors then tossed in a seemingly unrelated comment, which I understood to be directed at myself. She said that she had 'always wanted to chop a white man's red dick' (where the verb 'chop' means to eat, not to cut up). In a rather thoughtless manner, I replied by saying, 'Well, I'm here.' Immediately, the women burst into laughter and roared their approval by applauding my remark. After that incident, I was considered to have a 'station girlfriend' and, perhaps more importantly, to have achieved an at least incipient stage in one significant field of the boundary-crossing relational work that defines hustling at the station.

Itinerary through This Book

I have organised this book in six main chapters, which are framed by this introductory chapter and a conclusion. All the chapters contribute to an

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understanding of the dialectical relationship between the ways in which people make the station work and the ways in which the station, in the political-economic framework with which it is entangled, makes people work – thus the interrelationship between practice and structure that is this book's main thread and which I hope brings to life the everyday constituents of the complex urban space that is the West African bus station. Each chapter, in turn, assumes a distinct empirical and theoretical vantage point to examine the multifaceted linkages between hustle as activity and as situation, and to elicit different dimensions of what counts as hustle from the perspective of the station workers, when, how, and why.

A few caveats. The lens offered by hustle – as both an ethnographic point of departure and an analytical device – is particularly useful for decentring our understanding of urban precarity and livelihoods. The condition of hustle, driven by the imperative to earn a living and to make one's engagements both meaningful and productive, captures the station workers' outlooks, practices, and relations in ways that go beyond dichotomised views of chaos/disorder or creativity/ingenuity and of formal/informal modes of economic organisation. While the ethnography I develop of the station hustles is set directly within the larger sector of public transport services, this is not a study about transport systems in Ghana in the narrower sense. Other works, prominently those of Ntewusu (2012) and Hart (2016), have covered that field by attending to questions of the emergence, consolidation, and subsequent changes of commercial road transport and the development of the local transport industry in relation to factors such as the expansion of urban and commercial areas and the shifting economic, political, and technological contexts in which commercial driving evolved in the country. The perspective I adopt in the following chapters is at once more narrowly focused and more ethnographically oriented in that I pay particular heed to the practices and experiences as they evolve and define the dense and complex urban setting of a large West African bus station.

My focus on the single location of the station, which is essentially defined by its connections to other, often far-flung locations, offers important methodological insights into the value of ethnographic methods for making sense of urban complexity, while questioning, at least to some extent, common trends of multi-sited ethnography. However, while Accra's Neoplan Station offers a prismatic view of many salient dimensions of work and life in urban Ghana, it is far from representing all of the realities the city generates and provokes. Other elements of Accra's diverse urban tapestry – the mushrooming gated communities, the fishing communities of Ga-Mashie, the cosmopolitan and globalised

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Oxford Street (Quayson 2014), the spacious Ministries – are worlds away from the social and economic life of the small urban space of the station.

This narrow focus on the workings of the station notwithstanding, I do not attempt to offer a description of its totality. A study of a place of such abundance as Accra's Neoplan Station is bound to be selective. I consider the practices and roles of all the different groups that take part in the workings of the station, but some groups will be dealt with in less detail than others. My principal focus is on the many different groups of providers and producers of the service industries that Neoplan harbours. Groups that contribute to the station's workings from more exogenous positions, passengers in particular, receive less attention.

In the chapter following this introduction (Chapter 2), I consider the historical context from which today's station hustle, as a distinct economic logic and mode of production, has emerged. I relate the conditions of operation that characterise the contemporary workings of the station to the history of local economic practices and of wider political and economic changes that have shaped Ghana's commercial road transport since the first days of motorisation in the early twentieth century, with particular emphasis on the role that lorry parks have played in these developments. I show how local transport operators have long harnessed the logics of risk, competition, and shrewd resourcefulness as the principal properties of economic organisation and action, features that have allowed them to both capitalise on and compensate for the weakness of services provided by the state. The ways in which they have accommodated the effects of state regulatory intervention, which have varied in terms of capacity and efficacy, are consistent with these logics: in most cases, state intervention has been taken as merely another element of market volatility.

In the remaining chapters, I zero in on the structures and practices that define the hustle in Accra's Neoplan Station. In Chapter 3, I explore the multiplicity of ordering dynamics that are integral to the working of the station, and the complex and contingent constellations that emerge from this multiplicity. Expanding on the notions of the 'niche economy' (Guyer 1997) and 'involution' (Geertz 1963), I discuss the institutional arrangements through which people create and accommodate themselves to the hustle as situation, a process that reproduces the complexities that shape the social space and social order of the station. The ethnography I present in this chapter focuses on the changing occupational organisation of the station's transport trades. These shifting arrangements, I argue, are characterised by involuting growth within a niche economy logic, and they offer a window onto the complex constituents of hustle as a distinct mode of production and organisation that prevails in many spheres within African cities.

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An essential practice of transport work at the station, one that focuses many of the concurrent and competing attempts to make a living, is the preparation of buses for departure. This is what the station workers refer to as 'loading', the significance of which highlights key aspects of hustle as an activity, and above all the salient combination of hardship and hardiness. In Chapter 4, I look at the practices and the various ruses, tricks, and bluffs that make up the task and craft of loading. I show how changes in the organisational structure of the station, accelerated by the pressures of the urban labour market, have created a context of loading that is permeated by contingent constellations, a situation of constantly reproduced hustle. After detailing practices of non-competitive and competitive loading, I turn the analysis around to describe the different ways in which the station dwellers experience, accommodate themselves to, and try to exploit situations of hustle.

Chapter 5 carries forward the analysis of the reciprocal relationship between hustle as situation and as activity by considering its constitution from the angle of rhythm and practice. Here, I focus on the different temporalities that are interwoven in the station, feeding into everyday experiences and informing patterns of action. In the Neoplan Station, just as in most bus stations in Ghana, departures do not follow designated scripts dictated by clock time; instead, they are collectively timed by the inflow of passengers. These inflows follow diverse rhythmic temporalities co-composed in Accra and in the destinations served by the station. I show that, by attending to the rhythmicity of activities in the yard, station workers accommodate motional inputs that take shape hundreds of kilometres away. By detailing the daily work activities of an inexperienced and an experienced station worker, I tease out different levels of perceptual attunement to movement and rhythm, which I frame using the notion of kinaesthetic enskilment. The focus on the tacit dimension of temporal enskilment brings out the important qualities needed to make one's hustle successful. In the demanding working conditions of the station, the capacity to master shifting situations essentially requires the ability to 'read' the different rhythms, tempos, and intervals of eruptive situations and to align and time one's actions accordingly.

In Chapter 6, I examine the social and economic implications of the station's unscheduled departures by exploring the practices and experiences of waiting at the station, which is a quintessential property of social action in a major public transport hub. Building on a 'slow' ethnographic elaboration of the minutiae of the loading of a bus (which took six and a half hours), I set out the positions of three groups of actors in relation to the waiting temporalities at the station: the passengers, the drivers, and

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the station workers responsible for organising departures. Focusing on the dimensions of 'empty time' contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the station hustle, one that goes beyond its seemingly perpetual busyness and ceaseless activities and facilitates a subtle analysis of social and economic relations in contexts of contingent and involuting organisations of labour and time.

In Chapter 7, which follows closely on the argument in Chapter 6, I extend the typology of waiting at the station by considering the practices of two groups that exploit rather than endure periods of waiting: station hawkers and so-called shadow passengers, a group of professional 'waiters' deployed to entice passengers to enter the buses. By transforming what, to passengers, is often tantamount to 'empty' and 'delayed' time into a means of generating income, the practices of station hawkers and shadows give rise to what I term a micro-economy of waiting. This is an economy not in the abstract sense of the broader economic implications of unaccounted-for time, but in the literal sense of a plurality of commercial practices bent on exploiting the waiting time of others, thus harnessing economic margins in a way that is characteristic of hustle as activity. The close reading of different waiting temporalities as they unfold within and encompass the station hustle, I argue, throws into sharp relief the irregularity of work engagements and the different ways in which people act on the temporal porosity that these engagements entail.

In the concluding chapter, Chapter 8, I summarise the key findings of the book by juxtaposing the workings of Accra's old-established station with the designated function of a government-mandated and top-down-administered public road transport terminal, 'The New Station', as Accra's urbanites have pithily dubbed it. In so doing, I scale up the comparison to consider the significance of urban infrastructure as a 'hard' technical system and as a 'soft' system of sociality in relation to questions of governance, social order, and the significance of usage. Finally, I reflect on the broader implications of this study by pointing out empirical and theoretical continuities with the practices, places, and politics of urban hustle that go beyond this particular case of a West African bus station.

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