

Out of Place? Global Citizens in Local Spaces: A Study of the Informal Settlements in the Korle Lagoon Environs in Accra, Ghana

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INTRODUCTION

Squatter and spontaneous settlements are a major part of the residential geographies of most cities of the lesser-developed world. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2003: xxv) calculates that 924 million, or 31.6% of the world's population, live in slums, and a good proportion of these are classified as squatter settlements. However, this was not always the case. Prior to 1990 squatter settlements were rare in urban West Africa (Konadu-Agyemang, 1991; Peil, 1976).

According to Konadu-Agyemang (1991: 140), "cities in Anglophone Africa, although characterized by all the conditions which have led to the development of squatter settlements elsewhere, are relatively free from such settlements." Their absence was explained by the land tenure system, which makes access to land easy, government intervention in the housing market as a provider of low-income housing and peoples' attitudes to land, which are shaped by traditional beliefs, religious myths and taboos. Cultural factors that privileged the chiefs as the custodians of land shaped the political environment (Tipple et al., 1997). Urban chiefs wielded considerable power over urban migrants because migrants typically lived under the influence of chiefs in their rural homes, and being landowners in their own right through communal holdings they knew that squatting on someone else's land provoked serious trouble. This safeguard, combined with beliefs about the superintending role of the spirits (hovering around the properties of their families and capable of bringing harm to those who might wrongfully or unjustifiably occupy this land), meant land was protected (Konadu-Agyemang, 1991). In addition, affordable land or accommodations or both were available. Plots of land were available at nominal costs for occupation. Before 1990, about a quarter of urban

residents lived rent-free in Ghana (Korboe, 1992:1159). An excellent illustration of the absorption capacity of the land systems occurred when 1 million Ghanaians were repatriated from Nigeria in 1983 without creating large squatter settlements.

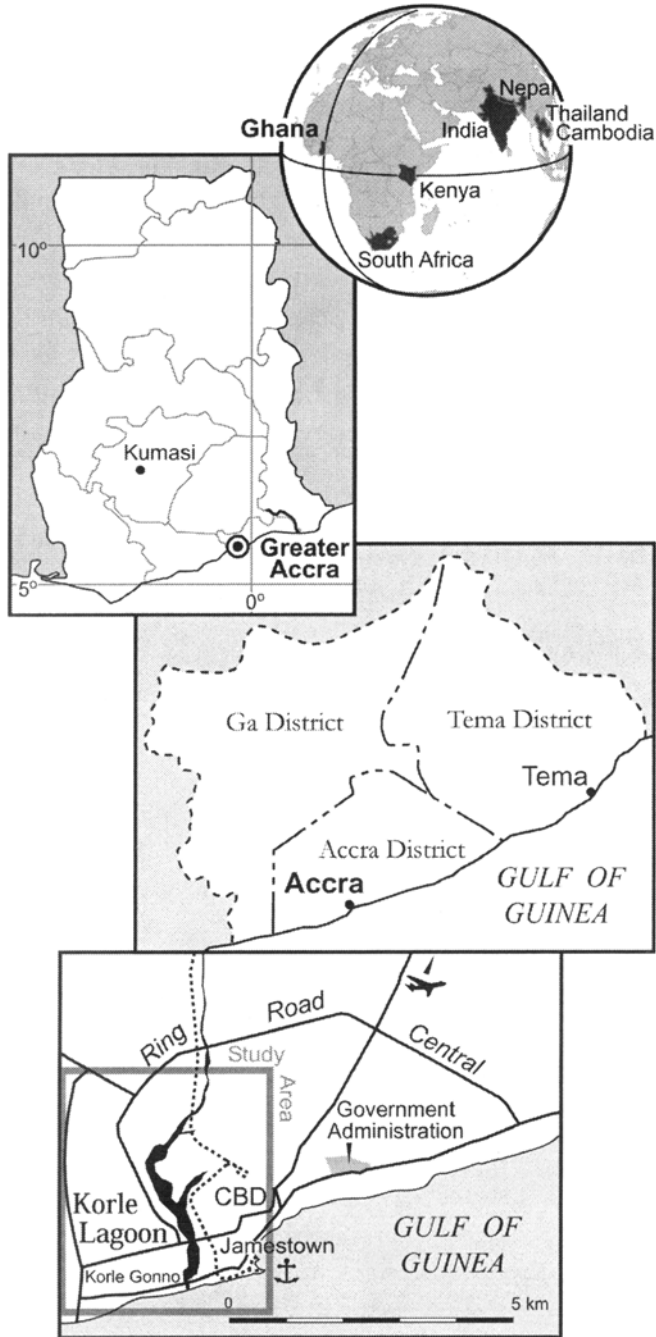
Squatter settlements now exist in Accra. Since 2001 the debate about one particular squatter settlement—variously known as “Agbogbloshie/Old Fadama,” “Old Fadama,” and/or “Sodom and Gomorrah”—has reached a fever pitch. The designation “Sodom and Gomorrah” draws on the dramatic biblical story in the book of Genesis of settlement destruction by fire and brimstone. This representation has been employed by settlement detractors (including the Accra municipal authority until recently and the main national newspaper) calling for demolition of the settlement, as well as removal of all of “the invaders” from the land (*Daily Graphic*, 2002a: 17). The media describe the settlement as “out of place,” “a no-man’s land” as well as “a hideout for armed robbers, prostitutes, drug pushers and all kinds of squatters” (*News from Africa*, 2002: 1). The government advocated a politics of non-recognition toward the settlers, arguing the settlement’s existence undermines an adjacent environmental project, the Korle Lagoon Ecological Restoration Project (KLERP), and noting that “its location vis-à-vis the Central Business District (CBD) is an eye sore as well as a major source of pollution” (AMA and Ministry of Works and Housing, 2002: 3).

The area has achieved notoriety in Accra. On July 31, 1993, 400 houses were affected by a dawn sweep that evicted people from public land (Accra Studio, 2003: 132). On May 28, 2002, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) served an eviction notice on the entire population of Old Fadama. Community residents responded with an appeal to the High Court for an injunction to restrain the AMA from following through. The Accra High Court rejected the community’s request and on July 24, 2002, gave the AMA authorization to evict. During the summer 2002 community leaders requested international help, and efforts at grassroots globalization commenced. Efforts at grassroots globalization connect particular Accra citizens at a variety of scales and create linkages that crisscross the globe (Figure 1).

There is no scholarly research on this Accra experience. A number of commissioned reports (COHRE, 2004; Jack and Braimah, 2004) are utilized for documenting the settlement since the 1990s. For the earlier period, I use archival research to detail the formation of the settlement and the political geography of ownership. My research on the stakeholder claims was conducted during three field visits (August 2004, February 2005 and May 2005). It involved interviews with key agents and representatives from international organizations (COHRE, UN-Habitat), GOG (AMA, Ashiedu Keteke Sub-Metro, Ministry of Works and Housing, Town and Country Planning Department, etc.), the GaDangme Organization, lo-

Figure 1

Accra and Its Localities in a Global Context



cal nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (People's Dialogue on Human Settlements [PD]) and Land for Life), a community-based organization (Ghana Homeless Peoples Federation [GHPF]), a non-profit organization (Centre for Public Interest Law [CEPIL]), as well as group and individual interviews with Old Fadama and Agbogbloshie residents. I also attended weekly meeting of various savings groups in Old Fadama to assess how their organization works from the ground upward.

This paper has three aims. First, I document and explain the land history of this contested area. Second, the paper details the main arguments and strategies of the three main stakeholders in the area, in addition to the types of relationships that stakeholders employ and the scales at which they employ various arguments to mediate and justify their positions. Third, I concentrate on the local community and its relationships with a community-based organization (CBO), as well a partner NGO. In examining these relationships, I assess Appadurai's (2000; 2001) notion of "globalization from below" to illustrate how it is working in Accra from the ground upward.

THEORETICAL POINTS OF ENTRY: LAND, OLD POLITICS AND NEGOTIATIONS AND NEW POSSIBILITIES

Rapid rates of urbanization in West African cities have put new pressures on land and its value. Complexities surrounding land, politics and negotiations have been well articulated and researched in rural as well as peri-urban settings (Berry, 2000; Mabogunje, 1992; Juul and Lund, 2002). Existing research on land politics in Ghana recognizes that the place, the setting and the moment matter greatly, but a number of general observations are possible. First, there is the coexistence of overlapping land systems, namely traditional, state and private. Land struggles in each of the systems entail distinct political geographies with different key stakeholders at the center depending on the land system in question. Second, the GOG has not liberalized land, which means that land transactions and ownership patterns are very murky. It is not uncommon for traditional and private sources of land claims to clash (e.g., oral histories versus national registration documents). Third, in the past, land use planning and its politics was mainly a local affair (with the exception of colonial town planning). Fourth, alienated and marginal groups in past land struggles expressed their opposition via the local political/legal context (Quarcoopome, 1992).

With regards the current land environment, researchers are assessing "transitions" in urban lands and reconsidering informality by assessing land use changes and connections to poverty (Jones, 2003; Hansen and Vaa, 2004). Because of the

extent of transformation in urban land in African cities, new political geographies are emerging. I contend that a new political geography of landlessness/homelessness is emerging in contemporary Accra on a scale that has not been witnessed before. The poor's desire for survival means that they cannot operate in the typical political sphere. Their survival calls for action at different scales that were previously unthinkable. NGO-initiated intervention encourages the poor to frame their situation in a global context. Movements among the urban poor, such as the branch that I document in Accra, Ghana, are connected to Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI).¹ SDI involves an international federation spanning 21 countries in 2005 whose members share ideas and experiences and lend each other support in their efforts to secure access to housing, infrastructure and land. There is a growing scholarship about SDI and its federations in the developing world (see D'Cruz and Mitlin, 2004; Mitlin and Satterthwaite, 2005; and Appadurai, 2001 for reviews of established federations in a dozen countries), but no research has been undertaken on the emerging federation in Ghana (D'Cruz and Mitlin, 2005). However, as my analysis will show, land, security and housing are becoming more intertwined than ever before in urban Ghana. The emergence of a new globally connected CBO in the same political space to counter parochial tendencies of communitarian identities and solidarities represents a significant departure in urban politics.

Three theoretical propositions underlie the transition from local squatters to global squatter citizens. First, there is a new importance of a different politics of scale in urban land as it pertains to housing and shelter. Well documented in the literature are national housing systems undergoing profound change. Appadurai (2001: 26) emphasizes that these changes in the system "are deep, if not graspable as yet, in a simple theory." The presence of an NGO (that would otherwise have not been there) in a particular place can connect that place into a global network and bring new meanings, resources, forms of power and a range of other influences to bear on that place (Bebbington, 2004: 732). Accordingly, the choice of spatial scale is not one or another but possibly both or more, entailing inherent complexities. Routledge (2003: 336) nonetheless argues that many movements, although engaged in grassroots globalization networks, remain local or national based, since this is where individual movement identities are formed and nurtured. The most politically successful grassroots organizations become part of a geographically flexible network in which there is an intermingling of the scales of political action to the extent that the scales can become mutually constitutive (Routledge, 2003).

Second, NGOs and citizens' movements are appropriating significant parts of the means of governance in the urban economy (Appadurai, 2001; Taylor, 2005). New forms of globally organized power and expertise operate inside national boundaries (Ranney, 2003). The elites are not the only ones who can harness global

expertise to design policies and to position their interests in the national and urban economies. Interventions in housing for the urban poor do not have to be dependent on the World Bank and/or national governments (Huchzermeyer, 2004). Some organized members of the poor are developing a capacity to learn and liaise with similar groups across national borders, to formulate their own housing strategies and to reposition themselves within their local political context (Appaduri, 2001). DeFillippis (2004: 35) emphasizes that these new relationships connecting particular places with the rest of the world have the capacity to generate new urban politics, create new localities and make new social meanings in the process.

Third, new political horizons and a new urban frontier (Smith, 1996) are being shaped by CBOs and their NGO partners, who provide significant energy as well as financial resources to some members of the poor to pursue cross-border activism. On the ground, this means that individuals are taking independent action ahead of national government policy and sometimes in direct opposition to local political elites. Various groups are attempting to pressure the state to take a specific course of action or to adopt a new specific policy (Tostensen et al., 2001). In many ways, the emerging global discourse on reducing poverty in Africa is providing a powerful boost to particular emerging civil society formations. Ghana is signature to the Millennium Developmental goals, which means that issues about housing, shelter and strategies to reduce poverty have a current salience and visibility. The poor can now not only be seen but heard.

LAND HISTORY OF KORLE LAGOON AND ITS ENVIRONS

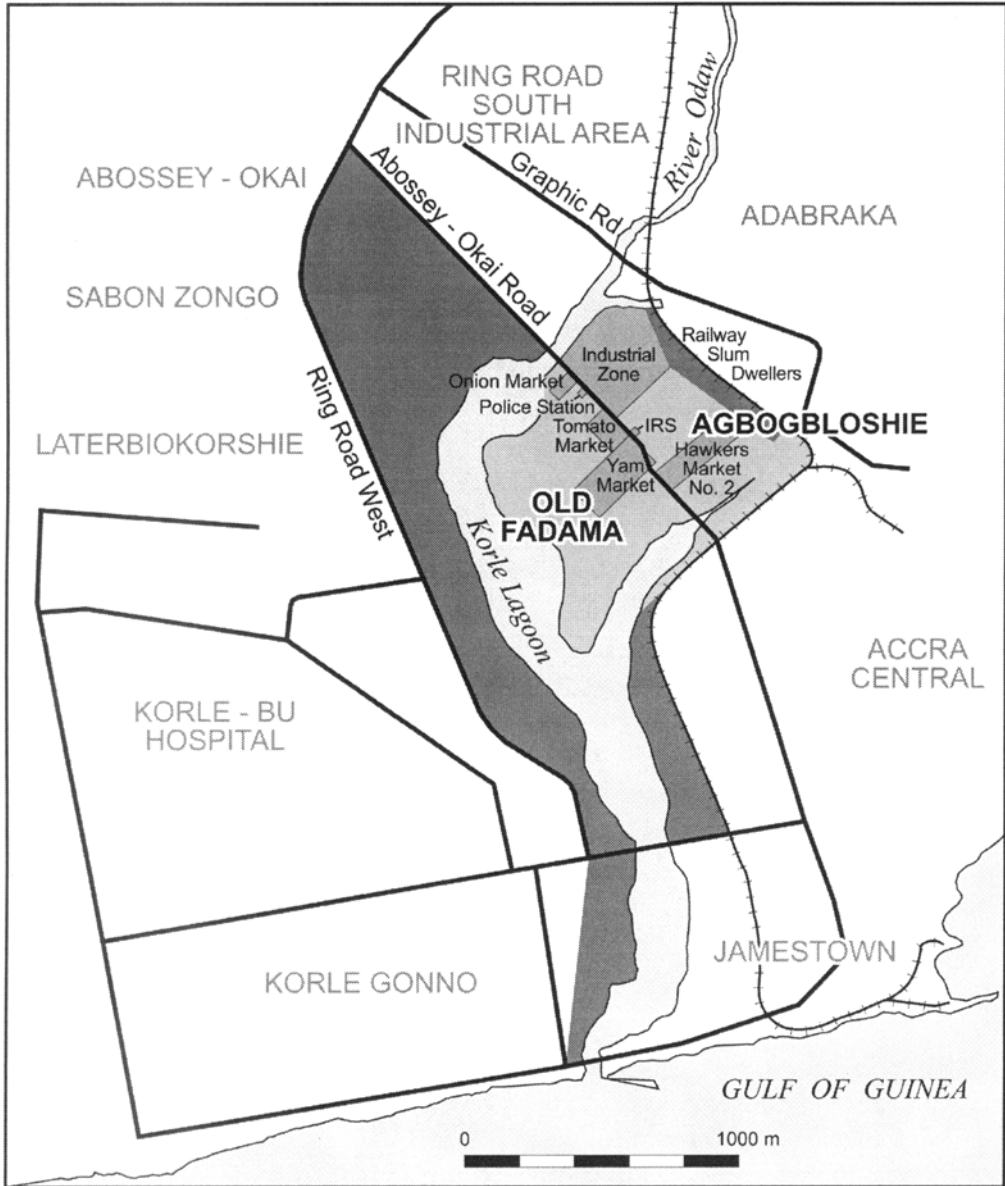
The land of Agbogbloshie/Old Fadama is 146.21 hectares. It is a triangle of land bounded by the Abossey Okai Road, the Odaw River (in the upper reaches of the Korle Lagoon) and the Agbogbloshie Drain, less than a kilometer from Accra's CBD (Figure 2).

The population could be as high as 40,000.² Living conditions are poor and characterized by high-density living in wooden shacks and kiosks. There are no sanitary facilities and all kinds of waste end up in the Lagoon. The area is subject to frequent flooding in most months of the year (and acute flooding in the rainy season). The area is composed of two related human settlements with different origins.

First, there is the Agbogbloshie³ formal settlement that has been surrounded by informal residential developments. The poorest squatters are along the railway line on the edge of the settlement. Agbogbloshie has a large commercial function and contains a number of food markets (namely the Makola Agbogbloshie food market), a commercial bus depot, numerous small shops and stalls, and a significant

Figure 2

The Korle Lagoon and Old Fadama/Agbobbloshie Settlements within the Urban Context



number of large industrial enterprises (e.g., brewing, paint manufacturing, engineering). In addition, the area contains a number of municipal authority offices (e.g., AMA market office), as well as a government tax collection office (e.g., IRS). Local leaders estimate that 15,000 people live in the area.⁴ A good number of residents have titles to the lands that they occupy; a few elders have titles from 1943. The land is now public, but in the past it was under the control of local stools, principally the Korle and Gbese stools.

The second settlement, Old Fadama, is an informal settlement located next to Agbogbloshie. It has a mix of commercial and residential functions and contains a large number of niche food markets (e.g., those specializing in yams, onions, tomatoes, etc.), a number of hawker markets, and a variety of small economic enterprises, and services for residents (hairdressing, food production, dressmaking etc.). A settlement profile conducted by local leadership put the total number of residents at 24,165,⁵ but local community leaders estimate the current number to be closer to 35,000. The residents do not have title to the land that they occupy, and the land is under control of the state.

Politics over land in the Agbogbloshie/Old Fadama area has deep roots. Three political timeframes with specific historical roots are relevant to current land politics: (1) a period when traditional claims to the land clashed with colonial plans, (2) a period where the GOG acquired that land over traditional claims and (3) the contemporary period, which has pitted the GOG against the settlers. Historians (e.g., Parker, 2000) have documented political controversy about this area during the colonial period. The politics revolved around the designation of the Korle Lagoon as sacred by the local traditional group, the GA. In the opening and closing seasons of the lagoon for fishing, Ga traditional priests performed rituals honoring the body of water as a provider of individuals' livelihoods (Acquah, 1957: 142).

As a result, colonial town planning had limited intervention in this area. Land was acquired for a railway station in 1914 and for a village site,⁶ but more urban development plans clashed with Ga notions of ritual space. The political struggle over this land came to a head in 1920 when a British consortium approached town leadership requesting to lease the lagoon for conversion into harbor facilities. This proposal led to an intense political struggle, and local opposition became very vocal about "selling" the sacred lagoon to the Europeans. Colonial Town planners then concentrated on the development of low-income housing estates beyond the area (at Korle Gonno, Sabon Zongo, etc.), developing "model" settlements for low-income residents that could be resettled from over-crowded CBD areas like Jamestown (Acquah, 1957: 28). Two small low-income "village settlements" at Agbogbloshie and Fadama (with 298 houses) were identified in the 1952 Land Use Map (Acquah, 1957: Fig 9, p. 1678). Agbogbloshie was composed of Ga, who

had obtained land rights from the local chief (Accra Studio, 2003). Fadama was composed of migrants who came from Northern Ghana (Jack and Braimah, 2004: 23). But for the most part, the lagoon remained in its natural state up to 1961 and supported “a thriving fishery of both fin and shellfish, which served as a source of employment of some people in nearby low income housing areas” (Boadi and Kuitunen, 2002: 301).

In the second political frame, the GOG became directly involved in the area in 1961 when it claimed the land at “Accra–Fadama for Korle Lagoon Development” by issuing a Certificate of Title to the area.⁷ Under the auspices of this intervention, land acquired in the public interest for development purposes extinguished all subsisting rights and interest to the lands. Subsequently, under the authority of the Accra Industrial Estate (Acquisition of Lands) Ordinance no. 28 (1956), land in the vicinity was allocated for a variety of industrial projects (brewing, food processing, and later auto repairs) (Accra Studio, 2003: 132). In 1966 the GOG undertook a soil dredging exercise to reclaim land and raise the level of some of the flooded area along the Odaw River, including Agbogbloshie.⁸ Some of the reclaimed lands were allocated for use by the government (State Housing Corporation, State Transport Corporation) as well as by light industry. The area of Old Fadama was left unused. Reclaiming efforts led to additional lands being added to the area, and failure to develop up-to-date maps of the area meant that the boundaries became murky over time. Relevant compensation was reported to have been paid at the time of acquisition to the Korle and Gbese stools (Accra Studio, 2003: 132). The Ga Traditional Council, an organization with authority to speak on behalf of the chiefs, has not disputed the government’s right to use the land in the national interest for Korle Lagoon development.⁹ The Stool has maintained that in the event the land is not used for the intended purposes the local stools will have a renewed claim to the land.

The GOG renewed restoration efforts with KLERP in the early 1990s. The government’s explicit aim was to “restore the lagoon to its natural ecology and realign the lagoon to improve its hydrological efficiency to increase the flow of the water through the lagoon, and finally to develop it into a major tourist attraction” (quoted in Boadi and Kuitunen, 2002: 308). Funding for \$73 million was secured for phase one of the restoration in 1999 from various sources (OPEC Fund for International Development, the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Development). Restoration started in March 2000 and concentrated on dredging and removal of materials. A second phase began in 2003 and targeted “upgrading.” A total of \$48 million was raised from two sources: the Belgian government and a government loan from the Standard and Charter Bank of London. Upgrading in this context implies improving physical infrastructure

(seawalls, drainage improvements), beautification of the lagoon (landscaping) and management (waste).

The arrival of large numbers of settlers to the area shapes the most public and current political debate about the area. Largely unoccupied up to 1990, settlers came to Old Fadama in various waves through the 1990s. A number of urban emergencies facilitated population growth. First, the AMA embarked on decongestion exercises in 1991 and 2005 to “temporarily” remove hawkers from major intersections around Accra. The 1991 exercise relocated hawkers to the edge of Agboghloshie on the Abossey Okai main road. Second, in a separate exercise in 1993, AMA relocated the yam market to Old Fadama (COHRE, 2004). Yams involve extensive labor: from traders to truckers to security personnel that are essential to guard the produce because of poor storage facilities. According to COHRE (2004: 19) “these criteria created an initial demand for trustworthy labor, which was achieved by bringing people in from the food producing areas.” In turn, trucks needed repairs from time to time so requisite services also developed (welders, mechanical, tire, repair shops etc.). As the market became established, workers came and stayed: the market served home and workplace functions (COHRE, 2004: 19). Over time the need for additional accommodations arose and temporary ones were built. The consolidation of the yam market in turn led to the emergence of a larger wholesale food market.

Third, a series of land struggles in northern Ghana in 1995 involving the Kokomba, Nanumba and Dagomba peoples displaced thousands, and many made their way to urban Accra. Fourth, the population of the entire area continues to grow as migrants within Accra, across Ghana and from proximate states (e.g., Niger, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone) find it unaffordable to rent accommodations in established residential areas. The Old Fadama area offers migrants the cheapest rents in the city as well as a proximate location to the central markets in the city, where many migrants seek casual and informal employment. The settlers have been careful to respect particular Ga shrines and to stabilize the political environment with the local stool as much as possible. For instance, older settlers have documentation of the payment of rents to a local Ga farmer for a number of years until the Korle stool informed them that the rent collector did not represent the stool.¹⁰

Current politics centers on the delineation and the geographical relationship between the settlements and the lagoon and on who has the legal rights to the area. The debate raises issues about the legality of settlements, whether the settlers are original residents or invaders, whether occupation undermines the government’s environmental and urban planning objectives and whether the GOG is in not complying with the original executive instrument. Various claims and counterclaims are being made in the legal and policy environments.

THE CURRENT DEBATE: KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND NEWER POLITICAL GEOGRAPHIES

Most city residents have opinions on what should happen to the settlers and the area. A number of high-profile groups (e.g., the donor community and the Ga Traditional Council) with considerable political clout have taken public positions of silence. Instead both parties exercise power by influencing the government behind the scenes. The debate is now therefore centered on three main stakeholders: the GOG and local authorities; the settlers and their support organizations, (CEPIL, PD and GHPF); and the GaDangme, a local political organization. The GaDangme are vocal as well as provocative, arguing that neither the squatters nor the government has any rights to Ga lands in Accra.

The debate can be divided into two phases. The first phase concentrated on legal aspects. The major stakeholders followed their respective legal positions and policy stances. Phase two is focused on dialogue between the GOG and the settlers and NGOs, and international connections are helping to mediate as well as facilitate discussion. Ironically, community control of Old Fadama/Agbogbloshie now requires alliances between seemingly disconnected scales, creating a new benchmark in an important land question.

GOG and Its Institutions

Negotiation Position. The GOG position represents a large array of institutions with particular policy domains. There is general agreement among the institutions that Old Fadama is a settlement created by the occupation of land without the permission of the landowner (in this case the GOG). It is mainly populated by displaced persons from northern Ghana. Legally, the government believes that the settlers should be removed before twelve years of occupation (the 12-year limitation decree), when under Ghanaian law, settlers could claim prescriptive title and rights to compensation. The GOG makes an important legal distinction between the two settlements: Agbogbloshie residents are informal settlers but not squatters, whereas Old Fadama settlers are considered squatters and thus should be evicted. The GOG relies on legal, land and housing experts as well as on land and planning laws to bolster its position.

Policy Implications. Importantly, the GOG has no housing or shelter policy for the urban poor so its stance reflects the central position of a number of established policy domains. Continued occupation threatens the restoration of Accra's most important marine resource and undermines urban planning efforts around the CBD. For instance, the government's current Strategic Planning Map designates the en-

tire area as a green space for future recreational use. Moreover, continued illegal occupation and particularly the scale of the occupation also set a bad precedent for urban land policies. Government officials emphasize the additional costs in the form of extra interest payments that are being incurred by the government due to delays in completion of the project.¹¹ With regards to international policy environment, the GOG emphasizes that KLPER loan terms require the removal of settlers to assist in the completion of the restoration project (UN-Habitat, 2005: 85).¹² Privately government officials emphasize that the government's international image is at stake and that this is important for a country that markets itself as an African showcase of democracy.

GaDangme

Negotiation Position. GaDangme is a political organization established in 1999.¹³ Its membership is open to all members of the GaDangme traditional ethnic grouping. The organization emerged to counter the situation where "the GaDangme are falling behind as Ghana moves forward" (GaDangme Council, 2002: 16). Specifically, GaDangme claims "their identity is increasingly being submerged and that their customs and traditions have been disregarded or treated with contempt by foreigners" (e.g., ban on drumming and noise-making during Accra's annual Ga "Hommowo" festival). The organization's position is propagated by newspaper advertisements, public lectures, marches, popular writings and other avenues. The Ga-Dangme organization views the land questions through a local political prism with strong associations between land and ethnicity. Its position on Old Fadama/Agboghloshie centers on four claims. First, the government has ignored encroachments in the area. Second, the government has not acted appropriately in using GaDangme land in the public's interest. For instance, the organization claims that governmental plans to abandon the Accra railway station and current misallocation of land for industrial use instead of environmental restoration require the government to return the land to the allodial owners, in this case particular Ga families. Third, because Ga land is being occupied by squatters, trespassers have no rights to compensation nor should they be given a resettlement option. Fourth, the settlement of non-Gas on Ga lands needs to be opposed because it has the potential to change the demographic balance of the city. Two Ga families are undertaking legal proceedings against the GOG. Both are arguing in litigation that they are the rightful owners with legal documents and claiming compensation.¹⁴

Policy Implications. The strategy is to influence the development of a new national land policy that will be more sensitive to origins of land ownership patterns

(particularly with reference to original Ga lands in Accra). In the interim, the organization demands governmental compensation for members' large losses of lands to national development purposes (Gymiah-Boadi and Asante, 2003; GaDangme Council, 1999). GaDangme Youth, a vocal sectional group of the organization, has held demonstrations and marches to voice its concerns. During these demonstration members mounted placards that read "give us our land back, "beware of potential bloodshed" and "Ga land keep off" (Ghana Chronicle, 2001:2).

The Settlers and the NGOS

Negotiation Position. The area has been recently settled by economic migrants, many of whom participate in the informal economy of Accra, particularly the food sector. Contemporary Agbogbloshie/Old Fadama is simply a microcosm of a city where most live and work informally (COHRE, 2004). There are some original settlers in the area who were not adequately compensated by the government when it acquired their land. Many would consider resettlement if they were invited to participate in relocation decision making and/or adequately compensated.

Policy Implications. Their position exposes the GOG's failure to address the housing situation of the poor. The groups argue that people squat because there are no alternatives given the land and housing market. They seek to give poverty a human face and to emphasize their contribution to the urban economy built around their provision of food. A proper, upgraded settlement can co-exist with Lagoon environmental restoration. Development is not just about showpiece projects like KLERP but also about integrating social, economic and environmental goals (COHRE, 2004). Emphasizing housing and shelter as opposed to land, the settlers want to stay clear from land politics, particularly a land politics of ethnicity.

GLOBALIZATION FROM BELOW: THE SETTLERS AND NGO PARTNERSHIPS

This evidence suggests that poverty does not always have to be a relentless isolator. Researchers have questioned many of the myths about slums as being defeated, disorganized and composed of marginalized inhabitants (Perlman, 1976; Rogerson 1989; Aina, 1990). Building upon this literature, I illustrate that what is seemingly marginal and isolated can become a domain through which translocal activities are conducted. Just as global command functions are often highly localized (Taylor, 2005), squatter connections, although rooted in a specific local context, have the potential also to crisscross the globe.

Political Horizons Prior to Transformation

Old Fadama and Agboghloshie settlements had robust social and political orders since the early stage of their formation (as opposed to alternative representations of chaos). But their community frameworks were not legible to the formal policy community, which was in denial about landlessness/homelessness and the living conditions of the poor. That representatives of the Old Fadama community approached CEPIL and started legal proceedings against the AMA is a good illustration of the informal world being organized enough to act in the legal formal world. Up to 2002 the settlers combined local legal action and local political pressure via the main political parties to halt the eviction. The settlers' *modus operandi* was survival. Before 2002 political order inside the communities was maintained by group and overlapping hierarchies.

A thumbnail sketch of the main groups and their coexistence before their current political transformation is important to present. Various northern factions had a number of traditional chiefs who were leaders to community constituents. These northern groups also had national political party allegiances, and religious leaders held considerable power within their congregations. Slumlords and local mafia wielded much influence and exercised power and instigated community action in particular instances, such as opposition to army and police coordinated criminal searches inside the area. Another powerful and often floating group (crossing political, ethnic and religious lines) within the communities is "the opinion leaders." Typically drawn from the youth and working behind the scenes they held considerable power in terms of representing the community, particularly in dealing with outside organizations. "Opinion leaders" were pivotal in strategizing about evictions and were less affected by the village pressures that could be exerted on traditional and religious leaders from their former communities of origin.

Just like all communities, political struggles existed within and among these groups, but detailing these goes beyond the scope of this research. Most important to my research is that these groups formed a common political front to oppose the threat of evictions, and that front involved mobilizing constituents to register to vote, to sign petitions, etc. Through their political party affiliations (both the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress have branch office in Old Fadama), the groups made it known that there were 20,000 registered voters in the settlements. The community groups were able to hold a united front until the July 24, 2002, Accra High Court ruling that the occupation was illegal. An appeal was considered in August 2002 but was not followed through by community representatives (UN-Habitat, 2005). In the meantime, the government delayed the evic-

tions, stalling on the implementation of an unpopular and a logistically difficult decision (UN-Habitat, 2005). Instead, the GOG explored alternatives (at least on the surface), such as the possibility of settler relocation to another (yet unnamed) location.¹⁵ The Communities' resistance politics began to come apart at the seams. Post-litigation fatigue set in among the main activists around the time that tribal politics among northern groups were escalating. The beheading of a northern Dagbon chief in March 2002 (along with 40 Yendi townspeople) spilled over into the local community (*Daily Graphic*, 2002b). The northern groups became more and more factionalized, and coordinating activities on behalf of the entire communities became impossible.

New Political Horizons: Accra, Cape Town, and Beyond

The seeds of connecting the community to international organizations started with CEPIL contacting COHRE to request its legal support in preparing CEPIL's case against the GOG. COHRE's involvement in the legal proceeding enabled the community to jump scales and act in concert with an international organization and to begin to imagine other possibilities. The court's final decision was interpreted as a legal victory for government but a political victory for the community. International pressure was then placed on the government not to evict the settlers without considering alternatives or without consulting the community. Through COHRE's involvement and briefings, SDI officials became involved in the situation. Coinciding with SDI attending an international conference in Ghana, SDI officials visited the settlement. Subsequently, SDI became involved and attempted to develop a new kind of community solidarity: one that linked the urban poor across national, ethnic, religious and international lines.

The SDI model was started in Old Fadama in November 2003, and this became the learning experience to be replicated in Agbogbloshie in May 2004 and then in other communities across Ghana. It commenced in Old Fadama when Rose Molokoane, SDI board member and informal settler from Western Pretoria, led a "town hall" meeting in the heart of the factionalized slum. SDI appeared to offer a cosmopolitan perspective promoting a sense of global citizenship rather than being confined to local, regional and national spaces. The SDI methodology involves various instruments, such as daily savings, the collection of these monies, horizontal exchanges, vertical exchanges, local projects (drainage, demolition after fires, road clearing), and self-enumerations, working with NGOs to establish dialogue with formal institutions (Mitlin and Satterthwaite, 2004). Above all else, these actions linked the settlers with an SDI head office in Cape Town (subsequently they were facilitated by a local NGO: PD¹⁶). SDI facilitated settler's connections with

squatters and slum dwellers internationally: fostering their participation in a movement among the urban poor of developing countries.

Important in this particular instance, the Old Fadama federation began to speak for as well as organize the community. The leadership was derived from various existing political groupings in the community and from involved members who had not been active politically before (including many women). Opinion leaders supported these efforts, and strong support emerged for a global strategy to deal with the local situation. In June 2005 Old Fadama/Abogbloshie federations had registered 3,500 members. It is important to acknowledge that the settlers' incorporation of SDI methodology into practice meant that their efforts have sought to transform (rather than overturn or replace) local political institutions (particularly state and municipal authorities) and to make it more inclusive of the poor and more responsive to squatter citizens.

The community has already registered a number of political achievements:

- (1) *The cessation of evictions and acknowledgment of the phenomenon of urban marginalization: vital first steps in the policy process.* By their actions, members have challenged many of the stereotypes of squatters, including the naming of the area and the marginalization of squatters in various political arenas. Even though the community still remains under threat, the organizers have been able to buy time with the city. Through their networking they have been able to turn the tables around on the GOG and take the initiative, demonstrating that the city has no policy to deal with the urban poor. Moreover, the settlers have questioned governmental definitions of poverty and homelessness and forced the government to acknowledge the extent and scale of poverty. By bringing attention to the matter, the UNDP implemented a new reporting requirement mandating Ghana's Ministry of Works and Housing to incorporate a slum inventory into its annual reports.
- (2) *The development of city-wide and national solidarity.* The community has participated in community exchanges with other groups in Greater Accra (Ashiaman, Avenor, etc.). While exchanges serve many needs, the most important is for the poor to reach out, connect and create strong personal bonds with members of other communities that are in similar situations. Interaction of Old Fadama's residents with communities in six of the ten national regions is evidence of a new political movement based on a federation among the poor. The process of federating illustrates that "community" in this context does not have to be based just on locality; it is geographically far more extensive, drawing on squatter communities around the world. By federating, the poor organize and command a voice in both local and global policies that pertain to housing the poor.
- (3) *Local-global connections.* Old Fadama community leaders participate in horizontal exchange as cross-cultural exercises. For example, two community leaders from Old Fadama visited South Africa in the first exchange between the emerging Ghanaian federation and an established federation. Representatives had the opportunity to deepen their knowledge about community-led development and to learn about the importance of local-to-global connections in supporting slum upgrading. Five additional international exchanges (Thailand, Kenya, Nepal, Cambodia, India) have taken place in 2004 and 2005. Certainly, the SDI head office in Cape Town is a major hub in shaping the formation of these connections. All of these exchanges have involved at least one

community leader from the Old Fadama/Agboghloshie settlement. Leaders involved in the exchange report at as many Federation weekly meetings as possible when they return. One community leader said, “we now have traveled more and acquired more knowledge than the AMA leaders that seek to evict us.”¹⁷

Certainly working with PD and SDI has dramatically increased the exposure of community leadership to international organizations, the international press, academics and NGOs. The settlers, with the help of their NGO partners, were even successful in filming a short documentary about the settlement from the settlers’ perspective at the World Urban Forum in Barcelona in September 2004. Taking this initiative surprised municipal authorities. Municipal authorities responded by holding discussions with the settlers and NGOs to resolve the deadlock (UN-Habitat, 2005: 85). Almost weekly now the Old Fadama community receives a visit from some type of international delegation, and typically this involves their participation in the process of documenting their place in the city. Community leaders express that their strategy at present involves an explicit global dimension. As they put it, “the AMA is only one small player in a bigger world.”¹⁸ There is a realization that international pressure can be a very powerful force in strategizing about their situation. Moreover, this realization includes a keen awareness that they can draw on international expertise and straddle the worlds of global, national and local policies: utilize conceptualizations from the formal housing policy worlds and present solid data—city and country wide as well as cross-national analysis—including alternatives.

- (4) *The development of new relationships with local authorities and GOG.* By organizing at the grassroots, the settlers enjoy a greater degree of legitimacy in the eyes of policymakers and multilateral organizations. Throughout 2004 and 2005 GOG’s strategy has shifted from an uncompromising eviction position to one that currently involves dialogue among NGOs, IGOs, residents groups and local authorities. Three important developments have taken place that may influence the formulation of a more comprehensive housing policy for the urban poor. First, members of the first savings group in Old Fadama and SDI representatives held a meeting with the Sub-Metro Director to explain the SDI model and to put local developments into a global context.¹⁹ Second, the settlers have participated in two roundtable discussions with NGOs, GOG institutions, real estate developers and the press.²⁰ Building on their partnerships and alliances with other epistemological communities, the settlers have been able to legitimize their role in the urban policy process as well as find their place in local urban politics. Third, in February 2005 GOG welcomed a UN-Habitat mission to investigate the Old Fadama/Agboghloshie settlement, and it commenced a dialogue with the UN mission on the situation (UN-Habitat 2005: annex 6). Subsequently UN-Habitat established an office in August 2005 with a mandate to provide technical and logistical support to slum upgrading in Accra. Although these initiatives do not yet translate into urban poor housing policy action, they show that the debate is being sharpened as well as broadened.

CONCLUSIONS

The emergence and consolidation of the human settlements at Old Fadama and Agboghloshie represents a new land phenomenon as well as a new urban frontier in Accra. Their formation challenges the traditional view among policymakers and academics that squatter settlements are absent from West African cities. The evolu-

tion of the settlements at Old Fadama and Agboghloshie shows that when large parcels of land in a government acquisition of lands remain idle, land occupation is a reality. In this particular instance, AMA's stopgap policies and temporary measures (the removal of hawkers and relocation of markets) had significant ramifications because they occurred during a time when the government had no policy to deal with urban poor. Moreover, the urban poor faced an emergency because of their inability to afford land and rents.

My research supports Appadurai's notion of "globalization from below" among members of the urban poor in Accra. My case study shows that the urban poor and their support organizations are going forth into the world and consequently repositioning themselves within the local urban political context. In this new political landscape, locally-rooted but globally-connected steams have emerged to address issues of homelessness, housing for the poor and landlessness. From their point of view, the ability of their locality to continue to exist depends now more on its position within a larger global world.

The settlers are using an NGO-initiated support-based approach. Previous efforts at slum upgrading in Ghana were either externally designed by the World Bank (e.g., Urban 4) or government-initiated support-based interventions. The NGO-initiated effort represents a very different approach to the emerging commodification and individualization of land in private middle and upper-income housing. It is also very different from the conventional traditional land and home ownership that prevails on traditional lands. Because of the efforts at globalization from below, the GOG and UN-Habitat are talking about supporting a NGO-initiated interventionist approach. The scholarly literature on appropriate informal settlement intervention in South Africa, Brazil, India and Zambia should provide some important lessons on how best to proceed (Huchzermeyer, 2001; Huchzermeyer, 2004).

It is too early to assess the success or failure of Old Fadama/Agboghloshie grassroots political activities. Many questions remain unanswered at this stage, such as whether the settlers will be allowed to stay or relocated and under what conditions. It seems highly unlikely that government bulldozers would be able to reign "fire and brimstone" on the settlers. How the settlers and their NGO partners will deal with the geographical tension inherent in prosecuting multi-scalar politics and balance local struggles and international networks is far from clear (Routledge, 2003).

We also do not know if the settlers will want to continue to participate actively in SDI activities if their tangible goal of obtaining housing is achieved. As Robins has emphasized (2004:27) "social capital, like global capital, can be very fluid—and fickle; here today, gone tomorrow." However, its "spatial fix" at particular moments in the evolution of urbanization (in places like Old Fadama) can make a

major change in the way the urban land-use policies and transformations are re-considered and possibly remade. The capacity of scaling-up development may dwindle after other stakeholders reposition themselves to respond to the new realities on the ground. Nevertheless, the current dialogue between NGOs, IGOs, academics, activists and policymakers in different societies as well as different places are allowing for the democratization of certain aspects of globalization knowledge and practice (Robins, 2004). These collaborations may not resolve the great unevenness in economic and political power, but they are allowing Accra squatters to take their issues “out of place.”

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NOTES

1. SDI is a network organization with a presence in South Asia, Africa and Latin America. It grew out of alliances formed in the mid-1980s by three Indian organizations: the National Slum Dwellers Federation, Mahila Milan (a network of poor women) and the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers (a research group). International networking led to the development of a similar approach comprising parallel organizations and peoples in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe (Huchzermeyer, 2004:73).
2. There are no current accurate surveys or statistics on the occupied parts of the Lagoon. The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) (2004) puts the counted population at 4,505 and other sources estimate 30,000 (COHRE, 2004). Local community leaders explain the large discrepancy by noting the significant differences between day and night population numbers. The population rises at night as many workers come back to sleep from informal sector activities. At night some rooms sleep up to twenty renters. Moreover, about 10,000 people are reported to be temporary residents, many of whom come from the north for short-term work as head-carriers (*kayoyou*) at local markets. Once these individuals obtain enough savings for a wedding or small business they return to their villages. Because this portion of the population is always in flux it makes an accurate census difficult.

3. Agboglobshie is a Ga traditional name for the area, and the name is associated with the Agboglo shrine located in the area.
4. Interview with Bampoe Addo, leader of first savings federation in Agboglobshie, May 10, 2005.
5. The settlement profile was conducted on December 31, 2004 by the Old Fadama Branch of the GHPF.
6. Deeds Registry no. 522/1914. Certificate of Title 24 September 1914 (Railway Station Site/East Agboglobshie Village).
7. The Certificate of Title highlights lagoon development but also mentions acquisition for the purpose of locating a police reserve barracks and buildings for the Department of Agriculture. This land acquisition pertained to 361.29 acres of land (GOG, 1961).
8. Executive Instrument 160/1966 Accra Korle Lagoon Project (Odaw Channel).
9. Interview with Gbese stool, May 12, 2005.
10. Interview Samuel Tetteh, Chair of the Ashiedu Keteke Sub-Metro, May 9, 2005.
11. Interview with Sub-Metro Director, May 12, 2005.
12. Newspapers sources put the loan penalties at US\$30,000 per month (GriNewsreel, 2003).
13. It registered as an official NGO in June 2000, claiming that it is a non-political, non-partisan, non-religious and non-profit group (GaDangme Council, 2002: 17). Its political agenda is well outlined in its publications, and it has become much more of a political organization since its establishment.
14. Interview with Bright O. Akwetey (Akwetey & Associates), who represents both families, May 10, 2005. Two families claim 80% of the entire area of Old Fadama/Agboglobshie. The J. E. Mettle family claims an area roughly corresponding to Agboglobshie as its land, and the case is in the local court. The Ablorh Mills family is preparing to go to court claiming an area largely corresponding to Old Fadama. Both families claim that they have the legal document signed by King Tackie of Accra in 1896 gifting them the land with an accompanying site plan demarcating the boundaries.
15. During the legal proceedings a rural market location (Kasao on Cape Coast Road) was mentioned as a possible location for resettlement, but the settlers made it clear that they would only consider an Accra location. AMA officials confirm that no formal resettlement plan has been drawn up as of May 2005.
16. PD registered as an NGO in December 2003 to build and support an urban federation of the poor in Ghana. PD is affiliated with SDI.

17. Group interview, May 7, 2005, with Tunetya, the first savings group in Accra, Ghana.
18. Interview with Tunetya Savings Group, May 7, 2005.
19. The meeting took place on February 23, 2004. The SDI website details this meeting; see <http://www.sdinet.org/reports/r28.htm>.
20. The first roundtable was organized by CHF International (an NGO concerned with housing and micro-finance in developing countries) and was held in April 2005. It was significant because PD introduced the urban poor to speak from themselves on urban poverty and the housing crisis. Several members from Old Fadama spoke about their present conditions and put forward solutions. The second roundtable, "National 2015 Housing Strategy: Policy Review and Action Planning: Strategizing Towards the Millennium Development Goals," was organized by the Ministry of Works and Housing and took place on May 25-26, 2005. Architects, ministry officials, UN-Habitat, the Building and Road Research Institute, PD and the informal settlers participated.

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