Roskilde University

'You can have it for God'
Mosque building and the production of informal citizenship and property in urban Africa

Stacey, Paul Austin

'You Can Have It For God': Mosque Building and the Production of Informal Citizenship and Property in Urban Africa

PAUL STACEY

Old Fadama in Accra, Ghana is home is some 80,000 people and the country's largest informal settlement. All buildings and settlement in the densely populated site are also illegal following an eviction order against residents in 2002. Thus, not only are all without formal rights to the land, but the thousands of different dwellings, buildings, shops and small businesses that make up the site openly defy the judicial decision as well as the will of city authorities and successive national governments. This article explores the residents' mobilization to free up space for the construction of mosques inside the settlement. In the absence of any overarching regulatory bodies, accessing and control of land proceed through a diverse range of ad hoc exchanges. Residents give up land they tenuously hold individually, contribute with different resources, and voluntarily resettle in other areas of the settlement, where they gain and enjoy the recognition of a broader community. Theoretically, the article contributes to new areas of urban research by showing how informal citizenship and property rights are made contemporaneously at the grassroots level through micro-level exchanges and processes of social recognition, and which take place entirely outside the reach of regulatory authorities and politico-legal institutions. In support, it exemplifies that urban land-based developments are not only driven by urban policy agendas and formal state laws, but by their everyday, practical absence. This allows for 'alternative' temporal and spatial understandings of land and belonging to develop, which offset the precariousness of living in the informal and illegal settlement.

The 80,000 odd residents of Old Fadama, located about 3 kilometres from Accra's central business district, live precarious lives. A Ghana High Court judgment in 2002 confirmed they have no legal protection as illegal settlers and that city authorities '*are under no obligation to resettle or relocate or compensate [the residents] in any way before evicting them from their illegal occupations*' (Amnesty International, 2011). Yet the eviction order has proved impossible to execute and city authorities and national governments have been unable to relocate the residents, dissuade settlement, close the site, recognize residents' illegal occupation of the land, or push through their own ambitious, urban redevelopment plans for the area. Almost all the Old Fadama residents are Ghanaians. Nearly three-quarters originate from the country's northern regions, and about two-thirds are Muslim. In a 2009

enumeration and survey, about 70 per cent expressed having no intentions to return to hometowns. Some 90 per cent of the population also considered Old Fadama their permanent home, about 8 per cent considered it their temporary home, and only 3 per cent comprised a mobile population (Housing the Masses, 2010). The population density of Accra as a whole is about 250 persons per hectare while in Old Fadama it is about ten times higher, making it one of the most densely populated sites in the capital, if not the country. It covers about 30 hectares and residents live mostly in self-built single-storey dwellings, where it is common for eight to ten people share a modest sized room.

The settlement is roughly triangular and its spatial expansion is limited by a major truck road to the north (the Abose-Okai Road), and waterways on its west and east sides (the Odaw River and Korle Lagoon). Expansion is however possible as settlers raise riverbanks and fill in boggy areas with all kinds of waste and land fill. This results in severely clogged waterways and frequent flooding in Old Fadama as well as upstream parts of central Accra. The site and its immediate surroundings also experience substantial land, water, and air pollution from severe traffic congestion, open sewers, untreated land fill, the extensive burning of household waste, and the operations of thousands of unregulated small industries, and mechanical workshops.

In recent years, the adjacent site of Agbogbloshie has attracted global media attention as an expansive, toxic dumping ground for electronic waste imported from developed countries.[1] The pressing and intertwined political, legal, environmental and social challenges have contributed to a complex stalemate, as any improvements to the living standards of the 'squatter' settlement by government or city authorities would undermine the

Figure 1. Shacks in Old Fadama. (*Photo*: Paul Stacey)

Figure 2. Recycling electronic equipment in Agbogbloshie. (*Photo*: CC Marlenenapoli)

judicial decision as well as risk encouraging others to squat. Thus, statutory authorities endeavour to stop settlement by holding back on basic public services and infrastructure. The stalemate means that formal governance is 'suspended' and there are no all-powerful institutions or organizations that convincingly or uniformly control land distribution in Old Fadama. Yet even though authorities refuse to recognize occupation rights, streams of rural–urban migrants continue to make Old Fadama their home and a rich mosaic of logics and practices have developed which shape land access, control, usage, and occupation (Stacey, 2018).

This article explores the ways in which Old Fadama residents manage to offset the everyday uncertainty of living in the informal settlement and take advantage of the absence

of statutory regulations concerning land. It traces how they produce local rights to property and citizenship by giving up part of the land they occupy and gather material resources to build mosques: they swap self-defined plots, move around and resettle in other parts of the settlement, and they contribute with their labour and time. The overall objective is to free up space in the crowded settlement for the building of mosques for the enjoyment of a wider community. Their actions establish local norms and social recognition of land control, identity, and belonging, and socially embedded, informal relations of property and citizenship outside the reach of statutory institutions (Stacey, 2019, p. 96).

The process of transferring land and providing for mosque building changes residents'

status from that of 'illegal squatters', which is how they are characterized by city governments, to active members of the community and local citizens who contribute to the development of the area. At the same time, their tenuous claims to land which are often based on individual negotiations and transactions are improved through their participation. This is because their involvement results in a broader level of recognition from the wider community to settle, belong, and live in the settlement, thereby demonstrating the contemporaneous production of property and citizenship (Lund, 2016). Accordingly, the process of mosque building is not only about the mosques themselves but concerns the mobilization of different physical resources to establish immaterial resources of value that reduce uncertainty and insecurity. The process reflects an overlooked form of urban land dynamics at the local level that contrast with dominant depictions of urban land transitions in terms of pressing urban plans, public polices, and new land laws (Parnell, 2016). In Old Fadama, it is more the *de facto* absence of 'state' and the 'non-working' of formal designs that act as key drivers for significant micro-level developments and land-based processes to take shape.

Citizenship and Property: Some Conceptual Perspectives

The process of mosque building demonstrates how urban residents tackle long-term processes of social, political, and economic marginalization – processes that have become a mainstay of research about urban dynamics in the developing world (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2014). Specifically, a key contribution of the article is to exemplify the interconnectedness and contemporaneousness of the informal production of urban citizenship and property and, thereby, the shaping of the local and 'micro' (non-statutory) state as inherently developmental and progressive (Parnell and Robinson, 2012).

State-centred analysis typically relates citizenship status to different formal rights such as political, civic, and social rights bestowed by statutory institutions and governments and which guarantee, for example, access to social systems and an impartial legal system. In turn, a productive social contract develops as citizens are free to choose their own leaders, and they follow rules that define relations to the state and other citizens. This means that they shape the rules of the polity in which they become full members by delegating power to their formal representatives (Honneth, 1995; Marshall, 1950). Meanwhile, property is typically approached in historical and normative studies in terms of an absolute right of private ownership and as a title to a physical object of value that is recognized and defined by statutory institutions to make society effective and legible (Hornby *et al.*, 2017; De Soto, 2000). Yet absolute 'rights' are rare because they mostly depend on relationships to a range of non-statutory powers, which may be more or less supportive of any state endorsed rights. In an everyday capacity therefore, the actual status and worth of both citizenship and property rights for individuals is not only based on formal and codified criteria, but decided by a slew of non-state actors, institutions, and stakeholders, which to varying degrees may endorse, ignore, or dismiss different, formal rights in any given context. Hence, what often defines legal pluralist contexts, such as urban informal settlements, is that formal rights and status are less significant than the local socio-political and cultural contexts and relations they play out in. A key element of both citizenship and property is therefore the issue of recognition, which in turn, can contribute to the authority of the powers that recognize and shape social contracts in society (Lund, 2011).

Thus, to comprehend actual relations of property and citizenship in Old Fadama, it is necessary to focus on everyday local exchanges, social interactions, and informal processes that translate claims to social recognition and rights, and which relate to

community-based efforts to offset uncertainty, insecurity, and to establish a sense of belonging. Social actions produce (and deny) rights and 'rights subjects' as actors recognize the claims of others and, thereby, shape the norms of the community they become a part of (Isin and Turner, 2002; Stacey, 2019). Potential recognizers or deniers of claims, that may or may not become socially recognized rights, include neighbours, acquaintances, friends and adversaries, family, religious leaders, elders, chiefs, local government officials, parliamentarians, patrons, informal public service providers, local NGOs, charities, traders, small businesses.

Mosque building is an expression of hard-pressed communities overcoming challenges that stem from living under the shadow of illegality. It reflects the significance of local over national citizenship, and how local logics of 'rights' are produced that are more meaningful than statutory designs. It produces powerful material images in the form of well-kept concrete buildings, and offers effective, everyday reminders that residents have contributed significantly and positively to the shaping of their own physical landscape, thereby giving meaning to the place where they live.

On the one hand, the mosques contribute to everyday ideas that Old Fadama is just like any other part of the 'normal' city, and they help soften otherwise sharp distinctions between the 'developed city' and the decrepit 'illegal' and shabby settlement. But on the other, the mosques demonstrate what local people are capable of with little 'outside' support. This reproduces local ideas of Old Fadama as a unique place, based on local 'alternative' logics, and 'can-do' ability and resourcefulness. Participation in the process of mosque building, however modest, signals support to the claims of others of the right to live there. Subsequently, the micro-level land exchanges and negotiations around mosque building translate to socially embedded local citizenship and reflect informal relations of property.

The building of mosques in Old Fadama demonstrates productive and beneficial land-based developments that are not based on formal state law or individual, private property titles, as conventional wisdom purports, and attest plainly to the ineffectiveness of statutory institutions to enforce statutory rights in densely populated urban sites (Hornby *et al.*, 2017; Stacey, 2019). The broad range of individuals involved are not explicitly creating institutions of ownership or belonging, or rights to citizenship or property. Nor are they actively recognizing or gaining explicit recognition from any over-arching land-based authority. But involvement in the process shapes social recognition and informal 'rights' based around consensus and common interests. The 'rights' do not coagulate into clear understandings of 'ownership' or land-based authority but nevertheless are expressions of collective will that oppose the will of statutory institutions. The accumulation of efforts towards mosque building accordingly define local norms, interests, and rights. These limit the ability and legitimacy of statutory institutions to exercise their will and enforce the rights they want to recognize.

In a broader perspective, the analysis aims to contribute to emerging areas of conceptualization to help inform a theoretical shift in urban studies away from dominant understandings, where the focus is often on 'what is missing', and where assessments of the Global South are measured against Western developmental trajectories (Locatelli and Nugent, 2009). Thus, urban land dynamics in the Global South are often depicted in terms of omnipresent market mechanisms, and market and investment driven forces, under often ill-defined neoliberal influences, over which marginalized groups have little control (Steel *et al.*, 2017).

There are two dimensions of mosque building of interest here. First, the processes of social recognition effectively offset the broader, market-based forces of urban development as well as diverse physical-legal mechanisms including privatization drives, gentrification,

and eviction, which are recognized as failing to consider the interests of marginalized groups or simply negate local level agency (Van Noorloos *et al.*, 2018; Gillespie, 2016). Second, the centrality of local agency, social recognition, and cooperation between diverse groups of stakeholders that gel into local rights, defying dominant explanations of informal settlements and slum dwellings as resource-weak, relatively unchanging, violence prone, and as occupied by the losers of globalization processes (Davis 2006; Mohanty 2006; Shabane *et al.*, 2011).

The article is based on qualitative data collected over nine visits to Old Fadama from July 2014 to July 2016, totalling nearly six months. Over twenty semi-structured interviews, and many more informal conversations, were carried out with a range of stakeholders, including residents, community and religious leaders, and participants in mosque building. This was supported with ethnographic observation, daily visits to the settlement, and numerous informal conversations with residents.[2] The following sections provide a background for the informalization of land control in Accra, an outline of Old Fadama, a description of land control in Ghana and in Old Fadama. Then, the empirical sections focus on the process of building mosques, and the socio-moral economy of land exchanges. The main arguments are drawn together in a concluding section.

Drivers of Informal Settlements

As is the case with many other sub-Saharan African countries, Ghana experiences a steady growth of urban populations as a result of rural–urban migration, which in turn leads to increasing numbers taking up residence in all kinds of informal and illegal settlements dotted around cities. There are many drivers of rural–urban migration to such low-end dwellings. Many African countries experience a lack of viable employment in rural areas and a persistence of near-subsistence levels of agricultural production. And social networks

and flows of knowledge to and from urban settings often direct migrants to the cheapest housing and informal work opportunities. Other push and pull forces to such settlements include the long-term withdrawal of the state from the public sphere, and political disinterest in social housing following the neoliberal turn from the mid 1980s. Further, large-scale entrepreneurs and investors have long preferred high-end housing and many African cities have for decades experienced urban planning deficits and mismanagement. The cumulative effect is that streams of seasonal and permanent rural–urban migrants end up living and working in informal settlements where shelter, dwellings, and businesses etc. are built on land that formally belongs to others.[3] As Africa's population doubles to about 1.3 billion people by 2050, the number of rural–urban migrants who live in areas that lack the most basic of services is also expected to rise (UN Habitat, 2011).[4]

Meanwhile, governments experience pressure to develop and 'normalize' informal and illegal settlements from multiple sources, including urban residents' increased access to social media, and increases in local, national, and global NGOs that take up urban dimensions of the Millennium Developments Goals (MDG) and, more recently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). All call parliamentarians to account and have meant that any large-scale evictions or heavy-handed treatment of 'squatters' risk political backlash and criticism from numerous angles. Many African governments have, at least on paper, moved away from eviction rhetoric following pledges made at global events such as the 2004 World Urban Forum in Barcelona, the 2006 World Urban Forum in Vancouver, and commitments to agendas including the MDGs and SDGs. Nevertheless, although these agreements may increase African governments' international standing and legitimacy, they do not in themselves solve the challenges of governing areas where land is occupied against the wishes of landowners

Old Fadama: A Brief Background

Settlement in Old Fadama is traceable to Hausa and other migrants who established peri-urban villages around Accra from the late nineteenth century (Acquah, 1958).[5] And since the colonial period, different governments have had a series of ambitious, yet altogether unfulfilled developmental plans for the area. Steep population growth is traceable to the late 1980s, and many narratives from long-term residents pinpoint this period as key to understanding the myriad developmental challenges the settlement faces today (Interview, 29 July 2014). Besides the structural drivers of rural–urban migration, since the early 1990s the increase in population is attributable to specific events. These include decongestion exercises undertaken by city authorities in other areas of Accra in connection with a Non-Aligned Movement Conference in 1991; government permission given to a temporary yam market in Old Fadama in 1993; and a series of ethnic conflicts in the north of the country that culminated in 1994 (Gillespie, 2013, pp. 160–163; Stacey, 2015).

In the Accra metropolitan area only 15 per cent of the population have direct access to a sewer system, and nearly 40 per cent of the population, or over 1.6 million people, live in slum conditions where a lack of adequate sanitation is one of the most serious concerns (Diener *et al*., 2014; UN Habitat, 2011). The jurisdiction of the Accra Metropolitan Authority (AMA) covers some seventy-eight slums of different sizes with nearly half (thirty-four), defined as having either 'insecure' or 'no' land tenability.[6] Following the 2002 eviction notice served by the AMA, and which residents have failed to overturn, the position of different levels of government towards the settlement has tended to vacillate between begrudging accepting, confrontation, and increased interest at election times when the need for party political support means that pressure to move eases and resource flows may increase.

Generally, the stalemate is characterized by city authorities and governments pursuing contradictory objectives.[7] However, in an everyday sense, the role of state institutions in the area today appears limited to upholding an absolute minimum of public health, safety, and public order standards, discouraging settlement, and communicating that settlement is illegal. The absence of statutory institutions and public service provision in the area is evident in the lack of planned infrastructure such as public spaces, roads, traffic lights, pavements, health clinics, post office, state schools, public buildings, street names, and house numbers etc. (Stacey and Lund, 2016). As a result, Old Fadama exemplifies a decades long process of statutory institutions effectively retreating from public life, and city and national governments failing to meet even the most basic of needs, with marginalized communities left to their own devices (Chatterjee, 2004). In the different sites of illegal and informal settlements around Accra however, people generally do not expect or anticipate the 'state' to come along and improve on their living standards. This means that necessary improvements in everyday life stem predominantly from micro-level relations and initiatives, rather than the fulfilment of lofty objectives by governments as proposed by global developmental agendas.

Land Control in Ghana and in Old Fadama

Similar to many former British colonies, land issues in Ghana revolve around relationships between and within two broad land systems. One comprises customary and traditional institutions which control about 80 per cent of Ghana land, which is typically acquired through membership of a lineage or community, through ethnic citizenship, and relations to customary authorities. The other system derives from the introduction of English common law by the British colonial power, which recognizes individual ownership and pursues the formalization

of land titling. About 20 per cent of all land is formally under the latter system and the control of statutory institutions. However, it is widely acknowledged that both Ghana's land administration systems are cumbersome due to the involvement of numerous statutory and non-statutory institutions. These often have overlapping and competing jurisdictions and pursue different bureaucratic and administrative procedures. Thus, formal state and customary laws attaining to land access are often circumvented, and the fundaments of both systems are often not effectively or consistently enforced, making land related contestation and litigation common (Ayee *et al.*, 2011, pp. 7–8; GoG, 2011, p. 2).

Old Fadama is part of a much larger land area under the customary control of the Ga ethnic group, for whom the land is sacred. However, their traditional authority over Old Fadama has eroded steadily since the colonial period due to competition with governments and encroachment. As different governments have come and gone, the occupation and expansion of settlement, together with illegal building, continues to be a cause of grievance and annoyance for leading Ga, who see it as an affront to their customary authority (Grant, 2006; Interview, 7 August 2014). In efforts to establish control, Ga traditional authorities have representatives in Old Fadama who endeavour to keep check on the land exchanges that take place. They regularly scout around the site to identify new building projects and to persuade small-scale developers that the land they build on actually belongs to the Ga, and that developing the land carries an obligation to make a customary payment. However, they lack the resources to enforce their demands and it is not unusual for their requests for homage and recognition to be rejected. Divisions within different Ga clans further undermine their authority over the land. This means that the role of Ga customary authorities in regulating land access in Old Fadama is limited, and they may experience competition from other, more powerful local

stakeholders. In short, Old Fadama reflects an extreme case of a failure of both statutory institutions, and state-recognized customary (Ga) institutions, to exercise convincingly their authority over an urban land area.

However, the relative absence of the two dominant systems and any universal rules does not mean Old Fadama is not governed, ungovernable, or a no-man's land. On the contrary, the manoeuvres of each of the dominant land-controlling systems goes hand-in-hand with micro-level dynamics involving a plethora of other actors, interests, and powers, which step in and create their own norms and mechanisms to secure land. For example, new categories of ethnic Dagomba 'chief' have emerged and successfully carved out informal jurisdictions, and now function as land-distributing powers in some areas of the settlement, and these may or may not follow Ga customs. There is therefore a wide variability and fluidity of land dealings and logics, which reflect a kaleidoscope of different relations, rationales, and resources, but which share the objectives of securing control of land and establishing facts on the ground. Different interests make and unmake their own informal relations of property with the resources they have at their disposal. This means that different groups of people may comply to different sets of rules and norms to substantiate their tenuous claims to the land, and different buildings in the settlement may enjoy recognition from different parties and be based on different logics (Stacey, 2018).

Moreover the illegality of settlement means there is no formal, state recognized documentation for any of the thousands of *ad hoc* constructions on the site, although some developers do endeavour to introduce elements of formality into building processes in order to substantiate their claims to the land.[8] Nevertheless, the legitimacy of any documentation, be it social or formal or written, can change, and there is often uncertainty over who controls what piece of land and on what basis. As such, the process of establishing local rights to land is rarely

complete. It can wax and wane as it is influenced by the fluidity of the surrounding social and political landscape.

The Mosques and the Building Process

In Old Fadama there are numerous mosques of different shapes, sizes, and designs. At least fifteen are prominent enough to define public places and mark out localities. Countless other smaller places used for prayer are less conspicuous to the casual observer. Some take the form of a smooth, flat slab of concrete a few metres square with nothing other than a surrounding low wall to mark their significance. Others resemble *ad hoc* shelters or places to rest with plastic prayer mats rolled out on the bare earth under parasols. Close by, plastic kettles of water lined up for washing feet before entering reveal these are also places of prayer. The lack of documentation, the informality of land occupation and resource exchanges, and the diversity of logics that influence land access and control, make it difficult to quantify accurately the number of people involved in building the larger mosques (see figure 3). However, anecdotal evidence from diverse stakeholders holds that at least 'a dozen or so' households are involved in giving up land, and 'many, many others' participate and support the construction in other ways. Clearly, it is especially the large mosques, which contribute to the landscape and skyline, add aesthetic value to the area and reflect local agency (Amin and Cirolia, 2018). From the data collection, there was no evidence that the mosques or their religious leaders enjoyed a higher level of protection or tolerance than other buildings or stakeholders in the settlement, as *all* constructions are formally illegal. But at the same time, it cannot be ruled out that the cultural and symbolic capital enjoyed and produced by religious organizations may translate to a level of tacit recognition that others do not enjoy.

The larger mosques are built from concrete blocks, and painted white, green, and brown.

They look solid, and sport minarets with balconies and speakers used to call people to prayer. They plainly stand apart from the surrounding ramshackle dwellings and kiosks built mostly from timber and plywood. Spaces outside the large mosques serve as meeting places, and inside, the floors are typically covered with prayer mats and carpets. The large prayer spaces are about half the size of a tennis court and allow for a hundred or so people to congregate. They serve primarily as sites of prayer up to five times a day but also as community centres, as well as casual places to meet, chat, and hang out, and where the open doors and windows offer respite from the heat of the day. Each mosque has its own *mallam* (a Muslim religious teacher) and a committee under the Chief Iman.

One resident who had participated in the building of a mosque explained that the process normally starts with a motion put forward by an individual or a small group to the effect that they want to build in such and such a place and the idea is then communicated to the congregation at prayer times. The illegality of settlement means there are no formal regulatory bodies or urban plans to comply with. The biggest challenges are thus the overall shortage of space for new buildings, the mobilization of materials, and the gaining of local support. Improvisatory committees are set up to organize fund raising activities, identify potential donors, donation collectors, and target sympathetic local businesses for material support. However, a *mallam* explained that monetary collections take place mainly within the settlement itself so not to unduly upset or draw too much attention from city authorities, and community leaders spoke of care taken about which political figures they approach for donations and support. It is normal that the initiators of a new mosque occupy part of the land they wish it to be built on, or at least live close by. Before sharing their idea with a *mallam* they would already have talked to neighbours, gained some backing for the

Figure 3. One of the many mosques in Old Fadama (*Photo*: Paul Stacey)

idea, and formulated notions about what needs to be done.

Gaining the necessary support can take several years but is a process which itself contributes to a sense of community ownership and determination. As a *mallam* explained:

Some people come out boldly to donate land but the situation now is that getting the land is difficult, and we have to do a lot of talking with others to get it.

The Socio-Moral Economy of Land Exchanges

Giving up a small piece of occupied space is not considered an important decision, but regarded as straightforward and rational, contributing to the work of God, improving the neighbourhood, and utilizing space. The social economy of land stands in contrast to the workings of the vibrant land markets that also characterize Old Fadama and where the increase in population and lack of space has pushed up land prices for all kinds of rented accommodation and shelter. There are, however, risks connected with selling land, space, or buildings, because there are often multiple claimants to the same self-defined areas. Disputes can flare up and claiming a right over the land risks contestation. Thereby, giving up a piece of land for a symbolic fee to a religious organization, or giving part of the land one occupies for nothing, can remove the risk of land-related contentions amongst multiple claimants, associated with living 'illegally'.

Volunteers go around the settlement and collect donations while all kinds of other resources are mobilized: voluntary labour, local expertise and knowledge, and various building materials. Labour is organized and the build-

ing phases are planned and scheduled. Local producers of cement blocks are contacted and encouraged to donate an amount they can afford, and other builders' merchants are contacted to donate, to sell at cost price, or to provide materials at a discount. In this way the physical materials: cement, bricks, concrete, timber, steel, paint, windows and doors etc. are accumulated, as are the necessary human resources: bricklayers, builders, plasterers, painters, carpenters, electricians, and plumbers, who are encouraged to offer a couple of days free labour. The limited level of formal employment, the strong social base of neighbourhoods, the high levels of under-employment and casual labour, and the widespread understanding of insecurity and that 'we have to do things for ourselves here' act as drivers that mobilize the necessary materials and resources. One resident explained:

If they need cement or blocks it will be announced at the Friday prayers. They will say we want to buy this and that. Anybody who wishes to can give a gift to God. Go and get what you want to bring and what you want to give us, as we need it now! Maybe somebody will say 'Oh, I'm a block moulder. How much do you want?' And when it comes to the pillars, they will say, we need this and that to make them, and if you wish you can come and give to God. Somebody will say I can supply this and this.

Accordingly, mosque building relies on the ability of participants to open up and claim pace successfully. There are no plots as such, but irregular, self-defined spaces used erecting shelters and kiosks. These are mostly between 10 and 20 square metres and are often wedged between existing *ad hoc* structures. These and larger spaces may however increase in the event of fire and flood, which are common, leading to razed buildings, destruction, abandoned plots, and damage to surrounding shacks. Badly made shelters fall quickly into disrepair, and occupiers may not have the resources or inclination to rebuild, and occupiers may make the decision to move their home towns. Neighbours may eye an opportunity to extend their own shelters by a half metre of so, put up a 'temporary'

plywood shack to claim a newly created space, or may use the opportunity to block off an 'annoying' 'public' path to stop it becoming well-trodden and more intrusive. In yet other instances, residents mobilize to remove abandoned vehicles and heaps of garbage that pile up in unclaimed spots. All such processes free up space in the heavily populated site and contribute to its gradual (re)spatialization and rebuilding that often renders redundant previous 'demarcations' of space, and self-defined plots. All are expressions of micro-level processes of claim and right making which contribute to the myriad, informal relations of property and sense of belonging.

A *mallam* explained an ideal situation is when word comes through a large family living together plan to return to their home town. Someone from the mosque will then try and bargain a low price and persuade the family on religious and community grounds. The plot is then taken over by the mosque and levelled to make way for the new construction. Common themes of discussion concerning land issues in Old Fadama include the realizations that 'we are all squatters here', 'this land does not belong to us', 'no-one has the right to call themselves the owner of this land', and 'one day we will all be evicted'. These understandings present religious leaders with opportunities to take over contested, abandoned, and 'free' space and 'claim it for everyone and God' (Interview, 21 January 2016). Meanwhile, relative apathy regarding profit can stem from an awareness that mosques have few resources of their own and rely solely on public support. The combination of illegality, insecurity, and the moral authority of religious leaders therefore contributes to a sense that it is better to donate land to a religious organization, or at least to sell it cheaply, and increase the degree of social recognition one enjoys, than to try and sell at a high profit and risk contestation. The relative disinterest in profit maximization in relation to transferring land for mosque building is also influenced by where people

move. This is because besides the expense of moving, a family or individuals who return to the north of the country to rural home villages and ethnic home towns will be able to access land for free and their living expenses in rural areas will be considerably lower than in the capital.

On other occasions neighbours will be encouraged to give up some of the space they occupy and shuffle their shacks closer together so that a mosque can be refurbished or expanded. This is a practice that is becoming more common due to the increasing difficulties of obtaining enough land for large constructions and adds to the physical restructuring of space. In other instances, a *mallam* may visit people and plead with them to move if their space is needed, and act as a mediator and help occupants find another space to move to. Because religious organizations are often able to mobilize much greater resources in the community than others, they can sometimes build in places that are otherwise deemed problematic and unsuitable. For instance, there are examples in Old Fadama of religious organizations successfully reclaiming and building on land that is otherwise prone to flooding and waterlogging and which have been abandoned by others. Such building projects are only possible because religious organizations can rally a relatively large voluntary workforce and mobilize the resources needed to raise the ground and make it suitable for building.

The process of resettling in another part of Old Fadama is also a resource demanding activity for households and demands co-ordination, planning, and support. It can involve carefully dismantling and saving timber from badly constructed wooden shacks that have typically been patched up for years, and then transporting the whole lot by hand-drawn barrows to a new site and putting the whole thing together again. Subsequently, the dismantlement, movement, and re-assembling of dwellings and kiosks contributes to the (re)production of space and the social embed-

dedness of land exchanges, as it cannot proceed without agreement between stakeholders. To exemplify one instance of the process, one informant spoke of how proud he was to give up a piece of land for 'almost nothing', which he had lived and built on for many years, reasoning:

If you give up the land, when you pray and put your forehead on that land God will bless you more. And if you pray tomorrow, the reward is [there] for you. (Interview, 21 January 2016)

The giving up of land is therefore an individual moral and religious investment that translates to a social undertaking that establishes community-based ties to the land and community membership. He continued:

A Muslim who does not pray regularly with others in a mosque, but alone in a room, will die alone and be buried in the clothes he is wearing. Nobody will come and touch you, or bathe you, and that is dirtiness. But [if] he is praying [with others] they will find a way to bathe him and put him into the white cloth, but when they are not seeing you in the mosque anytime, anything can happen to you, and nobody will come to help. It's a very important place for Muslims that everybody should gather and pray together. If anything happens they will bear witness that that person is coming to the congregation. (Interview, 8 December 2015)

Another resident explained his reasons for giving up land for a mosque as follows:

You know, giving out your property in a community to build a mosque means you will find a home in paradise. That's why I gave up my wooden structure. Besides, praying in Islam is better than sleeping and is one of the pillars of Islam. Therefore, I cannot have a place to sleep where the Muslim community are not having a place for prayers. I have been in this community for the past 27 years. There is also 'Zakat' a pillar in Islam that states 'give and it shall be given unto you' so when you give you are purified. In my tradition, I need to go back home before I die. If not, my death will be considered as bad. As you can see I'm old enough to go home now and not to stay here and die. If I die today, I will be sent to the mosque for the Imam to pray for me before I will be buried. A friend of mine, he also gave up his house here and gave the space for building a mosque. (Interview, 14 January 2016)

Here we see an informal social contract between, on the one hand, community members who have contributed with physical resources and recognize the social and moral authority of the mosques, and on the other, the non-physical resources they receive from the mosque in return, and which safeguard and protect the interests of the community. On a practical level, the mosques provide shelter for those who have nowhere to stay, and its leaders help solve all kinds of community disputes, while looking out for the welfare of the community. As one resident explained:

The mosque that we just passed by, if I don't go in today and they do not see me, and in the evening they also don't see me, and the next day they don't see me – then they will ask, 'why was it we didn't see you yesterday?'. If not the Imam, then those you normally pray with will ask you.

Conclusion

City authorities and successive governments have proved unable either to recognize or relocate the residents of Old Fadama, following a 2002 eviction order, and a stalemate has taken hold where formal state land laws are ignored, customary control is renegotiated, and the flow of much needed resources from government is held back. The corollary is that land access, control, and usage proceed through a diverse range of *ad hoc*, micro-level negotiations, exchanges, and contests. Hence, this article presents a case of urban development driven by the *absence* of coherent urban planning and regulation, and which has inadvertently allowed for the emergence of 'alternative' temporal and spatial understandings of land and belonging to develop. The article traces the process of cooperation and mobilization of different resources by residents that free up space for the construction of mosques. This exemplifies the interconnectedness and contemporaneous making of citizenship and property rights at the local level through improvisatory micro-level exchanges, and processes of mutual, social recognition.

The local relations of property and citizenship emerge from what individuals actually *do*, what they contribute with, what they have given up, and what they achieve through active cooperation with others. New local subjectivities are produced as residents give up land they tenuously held individually and involve themselves in a broader process. They contribute with physical and non-physical resources, and some move to other areas of the settlement to make space available. Participation defines local communities as achievers and as active agents who create their own urban landscape in ways that extend and improve social life (Margaretten, 2015, p. 59). With this, participation in the non-institutionalized process can be construed as micro-level efforts to use land to establish spatial justice, while the lingering legal prerogative surrounding the settlement deprives residents of secure land rights or meaningful citizenship status. The currency of persuasion for obtaining land for mosque building is not legal paper work or definitive monetary value, but moral and social norms that help people overcome everyday, hard, social realities (Smart 2018; Wang 2018). Subsequently, involvement in mosque building is beneficial because it helps validate an individual's own occupancy while signalling to others common decency. In turn, the broader community recognizes individual rights to settle and status as a local citizen, and the socially-based exchanges of materials and resources give meaning to the place people live.

Finally, the mosques that residents help produce provide social and moral authority for the community and reduce the uncertainty and insecurity that all share living in an urban environment against the will of city authorities and governments. Thereby, the different participants act as a loose, socio-political body of underwriters for local rights, who validate their own actions that make it possible for the building of mosques. This means that the local economy of land related to mosque building is not dis-embedded from the surrounding society but is a central part

of it (Mitchell, 2002). In a practical, everyday sense, residents' involvement in the process offers a much-needed respite from popular and political condemnation of their status as 'illegal squatters' who should move on or move back (Obeng-Odoom, 2011). Hence, mosque building in Old Fadama both defines and produces mutual relationships of recognition and obligation between individuals, and exemplifies close linkages between, on the one hand, the social and moral economy of land and property, and on the other, the social and moral economy of identity and citizenship (Lund, 2011).

NOTES

1. Agbogbloshie was described as 'the highest toxic threat to human life' on the planet in a 2013 study of 3,000 sites in forty-nine countries by the *Blacksmith Institute/Green Cross (see* Parameswaran, 2013).

2. The fieldwork and research has produced several other works about Old Fadama and, therefore, some of the background features and conceptual points presented appear in different forms by the same author elsewhere (see Stacey 2019; Stacey 2018; Stacey and Lund 2016).

3. There are numerous definitions of informal settlements. The UN definition is housing areas that occupants 'have no legal claim to, or occupy illegally' (UN, 1997).

4. Potts (2012) disputes the widely held view that urban populations in Africa are increasing.

5. In Hausa, *Fàdáma* means a marshy ground for agriculture.

6. Status as 'slum' is based on access to sanitation, water, population density, housing quality, and security of tenure (UN Habitat 2011). At over 2,500 people per hectare, the population density of Old Fadama is about ten times that of Manhattan (Farouk and Owusu, 2012, p. 55).

7. The AMA continues to demolish selected informal settlements at short notice and, in June 2015, cleared perimeter areas of Old Fadama although the bulk was left intact (see Yankson, 2014).

8. For example small time developers may try and obtain receipts for cash payments, use third parties to witness transactions, or reach consent on the measurements of a plot.

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