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From quiet to bold encroachment: contesting dispossession in Accra's informal sector

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ABSTRACT

This article draws on Asef Bayat's theory of "quiet encroachment" to analyse the political agency of street hawkers and squatters in Accra, Ghana. It demonstrates how squatters and street hawkers in Ghana's capital city are engaged in everyday practices of quiet encroachment, whereby they occupy urban space as a means to reproduce themselves. It then explores how encroachers take collective action to defend their access to urban space from state-led dispossession. In a context of competitive partisan politics where the management of urban space has become highly politicized, hawkers and squatters organizations have been empowered to seek active engagement and dialogue with the authorities. Whereas Bayat argues that the informal proletariat in authoritarian contexts desire autonomy and invisibility from the institutions of the state, therefore, the particular characteristics of Ghana's multi-party system have created the possibility for bold acts of encroachment on urban space.

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Introduction

It is a Thursday afternoon in June 2011 and I am chatting to Fuseini, a street hawker selling clothing close to Accra's central Makola Market. Despite the recent passing of a by-law making informal street trade an arrestable offence in the city, the street bustles with people buying and selling a multitude of goods. The traders are visibly edgy as they keep an eye out for the green uniforms of the Task Force, whose job is to clear them from the city streets. Fuseini tells me about his brother, also a street trader, who refused to let the Task Force confiscate his stock and was hit over the head with a paving stone and put into a coma. Despite nearly losing his brother, Fuseini cannot afford to obey the Task Force and leave the street to cars and pedestrians as the city authorities dictate. Due to the lack of employment opportunities in Accra, he explains, he has no choice but to ignore the by-law and return to hawk his wares day after day.

Fuseini's struggle to survive outside of formal waged employment is one that will resonate with a growing number of people, not just in Accra but globally. Twenty-first century capitalism is increasingly characterized by the extraction of resources and the "expulsion" of people whose labour is not required (Sassen, 2014). Indeed, wagelessness is now so widespread that Denning (2010, p. 80) argues for the need to "decentre wage

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labour in our conception of life under capitalism”. As such, there is a growing recognition that the European industrial proletariat is not an archetype through which the experience of the global working class can be understood. Rather, there is an emerging understanding that Marx’s category of “surplus populations”, those who have been dispossessed and proletarianized but not absorbed into the capitalist production process, better reflects the reality of life for the masses in the contemporary Global South (Murray Li, 2009; Neilson & Stubbs, 2011; Sanyal, 2007).

Marx himself understood the industrial worker as the privileged agent of historical change and was therefore sceptical about the political agency of those proletarians not integrated into the wage relation (Denning, 2010; Pithouse, 2006). However, there is now a growing interest in the subversive character of the everyday practices, such as street hawking, through which wageless proletarians such as Fuseini appropriate and occupy urban space in order to reproduce themselves (Holston, 2009; Miraftab, 2009; Neuwirth, 2006). Bayat (1997, p. 57) has been particularly influential in his theorization of squatting, street trading and the illegal tapping of utilities in urban Iran as a process of “quiet encroachment”: “a silent, patient, protracted and pervasive advancement of ordinary people on the propertied and powerful”. Apart from a few noteworthy exceptions, however, there is a lack of research that develops Bayat’s pioneering framework by exploring its applicability for understanding political agency in different geographical contexts (see for example Johnson, 2005; Magure, 2014). This article explores how Bayat’s theoretical framework, developed in the context of the authoritarian states of the Middle East, can be useful for understanding the political agency of squatters and street hawkers in a multiparty democracy in the Global South. In the process, it addresses recent calls to examine how urban theory can “travel” from place to place – not just from north to south, as has been the established direction in urban studies, but between different southern contexts, such as the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa (Robinson & Parnell, 2011).

Drawing on original empirical research in Ghana’s capital, this article demonstrates how sections of Accra’s “informal proletariat” (Davis, 2006) are engaged in everyday practices of quiet encroachment whereby they occupy urban space as a means to reproduce themselves despite their exclusion from both formal wage labour and formal housing markets. It then explores how and to what extent squatters and street traders have moved beyond individual acts of quiet encroachment to take collective action to defend their access to urban space from state-led dispossession. Two organizations—the Informal Hawkers and Vendors Association of Ghana (IHVAG) and the Ghana Federation of the Urban Poor (GHAFUP)—are examined as examples of collective organization in Accra’s informal sector. In the context of Ghana’s competitive partisan political culture, with Accra as a key electoral battleground, the management of urban space in the capital has become highly politicized. This has led to tensions between local and national state actors and a slowing in the pace of dispossession due to fears of the electoral consequences. Within this context, both IHVAG and GHAFUP have been empowered to seek active engagement and dialogue with the authorities. Whereas Bayat argues that the informal proletariat in authoritarian contexts desire autonomy and invisibility from the institutions of the state, therefore, the particular characteristics of Ghana’s multiparty system have created the possibility for bold acts of encroachment on urban space.

Theorizing the politics of the wageless

Marx (1867/1976) argued in *Capital* Vol. 1 that the dynamics of capitalist accumulation inevitably produced a “relative surplus population” or “industrial reserve army” as variable capital (labour) is gradually replaced by fixed capital (technology) in the production process. The concept of surplus populations has gained renewed currency in the twenty-first century. In the Global South in particular, there is a growing prevalence of forms of accumulation, such as agricultural land grabs, “in which places (or their resources) are useful, but the people are not, so that dispossession is detached from any prospect of labour absorption” (Murray Li, 2009, p. 69; see also; Sassen, 2014). Since the 1980s, structural adjustment programmes have engendered processes of economic informalization across Africa, Latin America and Asia, swelling the ranks of a vast urban informal proletariat that outnumbers those engaged in formal wage labour (Davis, 2006; Drakakis-Smith, 2000).

The informal sector was first discussed by Hart (1973) in his study of the Nima neighbourhood of Accra in the 1960s. Hart reported on the activities of a large “sub-proletariat” engaged in a range of entrepreneurial income-generation activities outside of the realm of regular wage labour. Since Hart’s original study, there has been a sustained debate on how best to conceptualize the informal sector and its relationship to the formal economy (see Obeng-Odoom, 2011). Although this debate is ongoing, the formal/informal divide can be understood as the contested, shifting and often blurred boundary between activities deemed legitimate and illegitimate in a particular context (Schindler, 2014). Accordingly, the “informal economy” concerns various activities, such as unlicensed street trading, that “take place outside the formal norms of economic transactions established by the state and formal business practices” (Cross, 1999, p. 580). Similarly, the concept of “urban informality” encompasses multiple uses of urban space, such as unplanned residential development, that violate formal regulations (Roy, 2009b).

The expansion of the informal sector across the Global South since the 1980s has led Neilson and Stubbs (2011, p. 450) to argue that “a clear majority of the world’s laboring population is now relatively surplus to the functioning of capitalism”. This is particularly evident in Southern metropolises, whose rapid development is characterized by an “intractable disconnect between capital and labour” (Schindler, 2015, p. 8). As a result of these tendencies, Sanyal (2007, p. 53) argues, postcolonial capitalism is characterized by the production of a “vast wasteland inhabited by people whose lives as producers have been subverted and destroyed by the thrust of the process of expansion of capital, but for whom the doors of the world of capital remain forever closed”.

There is a long history of radical thinkers debating how best to understand the political agency of those excluded from regular wage labour. In contrast to his celebration of the revolutionary industrial working class, Marx and his early followers conceived of the wageless “lumpen-proletariat” as a class that was unproductive, parasitic and had reactionary political tendencies (Denning, 2010; Pithouse, 2006). During the struggles for decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s, however, Fanon (1967) argued for the revolutionary potential of the dispossessed lumpen-proletariat who had migrated to the peripheral shantytowns of Africa’s colonial cities. The Iranian sociologist Bayat (1997, p. 56) argues that this debate makes the mistake of viewing this population’s

actions in terms of a simple revolutionary/passive dichotomy that ignores “the dynamics of their micro-existence and everyday politics”. In response, Bayat sets out to understand how the ordinary, everyday practices of the informal proletariat in Iran’s cities “engender significant social changes” (1997, p. 56). Bayat (1997, p. 57) theorized these everyday practices—such as squatting, street trading and the illegal tapping of utilities—as “a silent, patient, protracted and pervasive advancement of ordinary people on the propertied and powerful”. The goal of these practices is the redistribution of social goods and opportunities (such as land, shelter or public space) and the attainment of autonomy from the state. Bayat (1997, p. 58) argues that these types of direct action cannot be understood in terms of an organized urban social movement because they are made “quietly, individually and gradually” and are not intended as political, but as acts of necessity. If their gains are threatened by authority, however, these actors “become conscious of their actions and the value of their gains, and they defend them collectively and audibly” (1997, p. 62). This collective action may take spontaneous forms, such as rioting, or it may lead to political organizing in order to defend gains made through encroachment. As such, Bayat describes quiet encroachment as a “dialectic of individual and collective action” (1997, p. 66).

Although Bayat’s (2000, p. 536) discussion is informed by urban politics in the authoritarian states of the Middle East, he suggests that his framework “might have relevance to other third world cities”. There is a rich tradition in the social sciences of theorizing the relationship between structure and agency (Chouinard, 1997), and Bayat’s framework represents an approach to thinking about this relationship with a view to understanding struggles over urban space within a Southern metropolis. Regarding structural factors, Bayat argues that natural population increase, rural–urban migration and the implementation of structural adjustment policies since the 1980s have swelled the numbers of the unemployed, informal workers and other marginalized groups across the Global South. As such, he identifies the proliferation of “potential ‘street rebels’” in many Southern cities (Bayat, 1997, p. 67). Yet, Bayat argues that “local political cultures and institutions” will determine the extent to which the informal proletariat takes collective action to challenge their structural marginalization. He speculates that quiet encroachment will be the more viable option in countries with authoritarian political systems and repressive governments, whereas competition between parties in liberal democratic states will enable the informal poor to engage in sustained collective action. As such, Bayat provides a framework within which this dialectic of structure and agency can be studied in other contexts.

There is now a growing literature that recognizes the political agency that lies behind the everyday spatial practices of the informal proletariat in the cities of the Global South. Direct action to appropriate urban space for housing and livelihood purposes has been theorized as a form of “insurgent citizenship” that enables the realization of the “right to the city” for the urban poor (Ballard, 2015; Holston, 2009; Mirafteb, 2009; Neuwirth, 2006). Conversely, some observers argue that informal workers lack influence in urban governance and are often treated as “outsiders” and denied citizenship rights (Brown, Lyons, & Dankoco, 2010). Despite this evolving debate, there are only limited examples of researchers applying Bayat’s framework in other geographical contexts. Magure (2014) argues that practices of quiet encroachment by informal workers in Zimbabwe can be understood in terms of claiming the right to the city.

Johnson (2005) uses the case of Jamaica to demonstrate the limitations of Bayat's concept in a context where organized crime is a powerful force shaping political mobilization amongst the urban poor. Despite these noteworthy examples, however, there is a lack of research that explores to what extent and how the urban poor have been able to move beyond quiet encroachment and successfully engage in collective action in a multiparty liberal democracy, such as Ghana. This article draws on Bayat's framework to examine how particular groups within Accra's informal proletariat engage in struggles over the use and control of urban space. This responds to recent calls to develop urban theory that draws on the diverse experiences of cities in the Global South rather than relying on concepts based on the urban centres of North America and Western Europe (Parnell & Robinson, 2012; Robinson & Parnell, 2011).

Although researchers have examined the characteristics of street hawking in Accra, these studies have largely overlooked the role of hawkers' organizations in promoting their members' interests (Adaawen & Jorgensen, 2012; Asiedu & Agyei-Mensah, 2008). Meanwhile, although academic commentators have discussed the role of GHAFUP in contesting the eviction of squatters in Accra, there is to date a lack of critical reflection on the limitations of the approach adopted by this organization (Afenah, 2010; Grant, 2009). As such, Obeng-Odoom (2011) has called for more research into organizing in Accra's informal sector. This article builds on this research by exploring how and to what extent two particular organizations have been able to defend their members' access to urban space in central Accra. The research that forms the basis of this article was largely conducted in Accra between October 2010 and July 2011. During this period, 48 qualitative interviews were conducted with a range of participants, including local authority officers, civil servants, government ministers, informal street traders, squatters and non-governmental organization (NGO) workers. Although this article seeks to give a platform to the voices of those engaged in struggles over urban space, the names of all respondents have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Accra's informal proletariat

Ghana has been a presidential democracy since the declaration of the Fourth Republic signalled the end to military rule in 1992. Ghana is a de facto two-party system with the National Democratic Congress (NDC), the incumbent party since 2008, and the National Patriotic Party (NPP), who governed from 2000 to 2008, dominating electoral politics. National elections have become increasingly competitive, with very narrow margins separating the two parties. The outcome of elections is largely determined in swing regions that contain high numbers of floating voters. Greater Accra is one such region, and electoral politics is extremely competitive in Ghana's capital city (Kelly & Bening, 2013; Whitfield, 2009). In terms of local government, the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area comprises three administrative districts governed by elected district assemblies: the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), the Tema Municipal Assembly and the Ga District Assembly. The AMA district corresponds to the built-up metropolis of Accra that is the focus of this study. The AMA comprises a general assembly and 11 sub-metropolitan district councils. The Mayor of Accra is directly appointed by the president of Ghana, subjected to the approval of two-thirds of the general assembly (Bob-Milliar & Obeng-Odoom, 2011).

Accra has a population of 1,848,614 and its population grew by 11.4% between 2000 and 2010 (Yeboah, Codjoe, & Maingi, 2013). In addition to natural growth, Accra's population has been swelled by decades of rural–urban migration and urban–urban migration driven by the separation of peasants from the land through the encroachment of market forces, the underdevelopment of Ghana's rural areas and the concentration of investment and opportunities in the capital city. These processes have their roots in the colonial economy but have intensified since the 1980s, when Ghana embarked upon a neoliberal structural adjustment programme prescribed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank (Asamoah, 2001; Konadu-Agyemang, 2001; Obeng-Odoom, 2011; Songsore, 2009; Yeboah et al., 2013). Contrary to the European experience in which rural–urban migration created a supply of labour that fuelled industrialization, Accra's formal labour market has failed to absorb this growing urban population. Due to Ghana's peripheral role in the global economy, the urban centres that emerged under colonialism were not based on industrial development but on warehousing and exporting functions. This dislocation of urbanization and industrialization was compounded as structural adjustment policies led to the retrenchment of huge numbers of public and formal private sector jobs as a result of government downsizing, cuts in public infrastructure expenditure, the privatization and closure of state-owned enterprises and trade liberalization policies (Panford, 2001; Songsore, 2009). The result has been a process of dramatic economic informalization, with 71% of all employed persons in the Greater Accra Region engaged in informal employment (UNDP, 2007, p. 28).

The expansion of Accra has been characterized by the production of an extremely unequal urban geography. Economic liberalization and the marketization of housing delivery has encouraged a building boom in which private developers have focused on building high-quality housing, such as US-style-gated estates, for the wealthy, while the majority of Accra's residents are excluded from formal housing markets (Grant, 2009; Konadu-Agyemang, 2001; Obeng-Odoom, 2013b). Furthermore, weak state capacity, the persistence of inappropriate colonial-era planning regulations and a lack of coordination between statutory and customary institutions have encouraged unplanned informal development to become the norm (Owusu, 2008, 2012; Yeboah, 2000; Yeboah & Obeng-Odoom, 2010). The result of these intersecting factors has been the proliferation of informal settlements characterized by substandard, overcrowded housing and insanitary living conditions. Obeng-Odoom (2009) estimates that 70% of Ghana's urban population now lives in these "slums". In Accra, it is thought that the proportion is slightly lower, at 60% (Grant, 2009). A large number of people working in the informal economy, in particular, cannot afford to access the formal housing market, demonstrating a relationship between the growth of an informal proletariat that is excluded from formal wage labour and the proliferation of informal settlements (Obeng-Odoom, 2011).

These intersecting processes place the informal proletariat in what Bayat (1997, p. 67) terms "a similar collective position" as "the unemployed, squatters, slum dwellers or street subsistence workers—in short, as potential 'street rebels'". It should be noted, however, that such exclusion does not place the informal proletariat absolutely and permanently outside of "the domain of capital" (Sanyal, 2007, p. 55). There is a growing recognition that many informal workers, such as Accra's E-waste scavengers, are linked

into the formal capitalist economy through global commodity flows (Grant & Oteng-Ababio, 2012). To be precise, then, Accra's informal proletariat takes its shared positionality from its exclusion from formal wage labour and housing markets. The following section examines how two groups within this population—informal street traders and squatters—engage in practices of quiet encroachment in order to reproduce themselves despite this exclusion.

Quiet encroachment and the creation of urban commons

Accra's informal proletariat has responded to its exclusion from formal wage labour and housing markets by taking direct action to appropriate urban space as a means of reproduction. These practices of quiet encroachment are evident in the presence of large numbers of street hawkers, in the central business district (CBD), and in the proliferation of squatter settlements on undeveloped land in the city. Regarding the former, a huge number of street hawkers operate in Accra's CBD, clustering in areas where there is a large amount of traffic and footfall, such as around transport depots and busy intersections. These traders appropriate public space as a "livelihood resource" (Brown, 2006), transforming pavements, roads and other public spaces into lively improvised marketplaces. In addition, informal economic structures, such as kiosks and workshops, have sprung up along major roads in the city, often erected on squatted land without building permits and in defiance of zoning rules. Informal traders in Accra sell an almost infinite variety of goods including fruit and vegetables, cooked food, drinking water, jewellery, clothing, mobile phone credit and so on. Others provide services such as shoeshine, repairs, tailoring and hairdressing (Adaawen & Jorgensen, 2012; Asiedu & Agyei-Mensah, 2008; Grant & Yankson, 2003; Yankson, 2000).

Research by Asiedu and Agyei-Mensah (2008) suggests that street hawking in contemporary Accra tends to be dominated by migrants from various parts of Ghana, by younger people, and by people with no more than an elementary level of education. Through most of the twentieth century, the informal trader role was constructed as a female one, while men typically worked in the formal sector. However, as a result of the informalization of the economy since the 1980s, men have increasingly become informal traders, subverting these established gender roles (Adaawen & Jorgensen, 2012; Overå, 2007). A recent study suggests that the vast majority of hawkers in Accra are own-account workers, with no direct employer (Akua Anyidoho, 2013). Asiedu and Agyei-Mensah (2008) report that street traders' average earnings are similar to that of the average Ghanaian worker—around \$2 US Dollars a day. However, it is important to recognize that informal enterprises are not uniform. Overå (2007) reports that some traders manage to accumulate capital and expand their businesses over time, but many have to struggle just to subsist.

Street traders justify their appropriation of public space on the grounds that they do not have an alternative means to make a living and feed themselves and their dependants. Many of those I interviewed had migrated to Accra due to a lack of employment opportunities in the countryside but had failed to find formal employment in the capital, and so felt compelled to resort to street hawking. Albert, a luggage vendor, migrated from Brong Ahafo region

because there is no work. When I finished school I had to come and find work to do. So I decided to come to Accra to find work ... I came here and I get some bag to sell. I don't have place, I don't have money to rent a stall so I decided to sit on the roadside.

He argues that the lack of alternative employment made selling on the streets a necessity for many individuals with no access to capital:

Employment problem is the major issue in Africa here. Because they cannot create work for these people. And we don't have anything to do. How do you do unless buy and sell?

Joseph, another trader, explained his decision to occupy public space in the CBD:

Where we found ourselves, it is not legally designated for us, but we occupied the place by ourselves ... because of the economic pressure, the economic hardship, we wouldn't like to go into any unfair activity like robbery or prostitution. But what we believe we can do to make a living is to do some minor trading. So we always look for any bare land that is closer to the commercial city. That is where we found ourselves to do our trading activity.

He also blamed the lack of employment opportunities for the proliferation of informal street trade:

Supposing there are a lot of factories, we wouldn't found ourselves in this situation. A lot of people would never do trading.

This was a common opinion amongst hawkers:

If our political leaders are really to solve the unemployment problem in this country, I doubt somebody will go and play with his life in the middle of the street. (Oboye)

In Ghana, there's no job. No job in the country ... so definitely people will go to the street and find what they can. (Kodwo)

In addition, traders' experiences suggest there had been an increase in children and young people engaging in informal commerce due to the introduction of school fees under structural adjustment. Several traders noted that pupils often sell on the streets in order to pay their school fees, or that they drop out of school altogether because it is too expensive. One trader, Charles, said that he had personally migrated to Accra from the Eastern Region as a teenager:

Because of the finance problem, that's why I came here. Because my family don't have anything to help me to go to school (and) the work is not in that area. So that is why I came here for.

In addition to the growth of informal employment, squatter settlements have proliferated since the 1980s, as people excluded from the formal housing market have occupied unused state land to meet their shelter needs (Grant, 2009). The most high profile is the settlement of Old Fadama, whose population numbered approximately 80,000 people when an enumeration was conducted in 2010. The residents, mostly migrant workers from northern Ghana, have occupied state land adjacent to the Korle Lagoon in the centrally located Agbogbloshie area. Initially acquired by the state in 1961, the undeveloped land began to be resettled illegally in the early 1980s by migrants arriving in Accra. Since then, there have been several waves of in-migration that have led the squatted settlement to grow to its current size. The settlement is popular amongst economic migrants and refugees, who are attracted by the cheapest housing in the city

and its close proximity to employment opportunities in the adjacent market and Accra's CBD (Farouk & Owusu, 2012; People's Dialogue on Human Settlements [PD], 2010).

Almost the whole population (96%) of Old Fadama is employed, with 85% of these working in the informal economy. The settlement is home to a large number of "Kayayei", female migrant workers from northern Ghana who transport goods on their heads for customers in the local markets. It is also home to a range of diverse economic activities including personal services such as hairdressing, food production, dressmaking and various forms of manufacturing. In addition, many people are engaged in the provision of utilities and services such as water and sanitation facilities. As well as relying on work for their own survival, residents remit money to all over Ghana. Housing in Old Fadama generally takes the form of shacks built from scrap metal, wood and other available materials. The majority (68.1%) of residents are owner-occupiers, albeit without legal title, having built their shelter or bought it from someone else. An active rental market has also emerged in the settlement, with 28.9% of residents renting their shelter from other squatters, and rents are amongst the cheapest in the city (People's Dialogue on Human Settlements [PD], 2010).

According to Nana, a resident of Old Fadama, northern Ghanaians migrate to Accra because

in their villages back where they come from there are not any work over there. There's not any factories, there's not any companies, there's not anything that they can rely on. So they decided to come in the city so that they can look for jobs ... when I finished school and my brothers cannot take care of me to proceed to the tertiary school, I decided to come to Accra.

He explains the decision to squat as a response to the lack of genuinely affordable housing in the city:

When the politicians say that they are building "affordable houses", it is not affordable houses. Because the poor people cannot access these houses.

According to Mensah, another resident,

the situation we find ourselves in is not our own making. It is a policy failure. It's not ours. It's not our making. It's policy failure that is make it this way. Because anyone who comes into Accra can see that a poor person has no place to live. He has to find himself somewhere in the slum communities. What is the government doing about it? The affordable housing scheme that they are putting up—how many of us can afford it? How many of us? We can't.

The appropriation of urban space by squatters and hawkers in these examples can be understood as examples of quiet encroachment. As with Bayat's (1997, p. 58) account of similar practices in Iran, these processes of appropriation have been enacted "quietly, individually and gradually", rather than through organized social movements, and are justified as acts of necessity in a context where the state has failed to provide employment or housing. These everyday acts of encroachment have contributed to the creation of "urban commons"—spaces over which city dwellers have established a collective property claim through sustained patterns of collective use and appropriation (Blomley, 2008; Harvey, 2012; Hodgkinson, 2012). These commons are extremely important because they provide Accra's informal proletariat with access to low-cost housing in

the city centre and public space as a livelihood resource, enabling them to reproduce themselves despite their exclusion from formal wage labour and housing markets.

Contesting dispossession

The forms of quiet encroachment practiced by Accra's informal proletariat have provoked a strong reaction from the city authorities, who have a very different agenda for the city's undeveloped land and public spaces. The AMA has adopted an entrepreneurial approach to urban governance that seeks to serve up urban space as a means of capital accumulation so as to attract investment and tourism (Obeng-Odoom, 2013a, 2013b). However, these strategies are complicated by the fact that this same urban space is subject to pre-established patterns of use by Accra's urban poor. Led by Mayor Alfred Okoe Vanderpuije, the AMA has responded aggressively to practices of quiet encroachment by launching a "decongestion exercise" to evict squatter settlements and clear the streets of informal traders in order to transform Accra into a modern, business-friendly "Millennium City". This can be understood in terms of the state-led enclosure of the urban commons or "accumulation by urban dispossession" (Gillespie, 2016).

Repressive policies directed towards Accra's informal sector date back at least as far as 1979, when the military government of Flt. Lt. J. J. Rawlings scapegoated women market traders for Ghana's economic decline, resulting in the beating and killing of traders and the demolition of Makola Market (Robertson, 1983). During the 1990s, the AMA implemented by-laws that banned unlicensed street trading and hawkers were relocated from the CBD to Old Fadama (Adaawen & Jorgensen, 2012; Broadbent, 2012). During the NPP regime that governed from 2000 to 2008, Mayor Stanley Nii Adjiri Blankson attempted to decongest Accra by removing hawkers from the CBD and evicting the rapidly growing Old Fadama settlement. However, the success of this decongestion exercise was limited by political interference from central government and the poor execution of a project to relocate hawkers to a marketplace outside the CBD (Adaawen & Jorgensen, 2012; Bob-Milliar & Obeng-Odoom, 2011). The appointment of Vanderpuije following the NDC's election success in 2008 has seen a continuation in this policy approach.

Despite the best efforts of the successive regimes, street traders have continued to encroach on public space in the CBD, adopting "spatial strategies" to evade capture by the Task Force, such as relocating to less frequently policed locations (Asiedu & Agyei-Mensah, 2008, p. 199). There have also been numerous reported incidents of people taking spontaneous collective direct action, such as stone-throwing, setting fires and building barricades, to prevent evictions and demolitions (Obeng-Odoom, 2011; Silver, 2014). However, these tactics have not deterred the AMA from continuing to pursue the decongestion exercise. As such, some encroachers are participating in collective organizing with a view to challenging their structural marginalization and defending their access to urban space. The rest of this article will examine a particular organizing approach that seeks to strengthen the position of the informal proletariat by engaging in "dialogue" with the state. It will focus on two organizations: IHVAG and GHAFUP. These organizations are relatively small and are by no means representative of squatters and hawkers in general. However, they do represent a particular organizing approach

that seeks to engage with the state in order to challenge the marginality of the informal sector in urban governance.

IHVAG

One of the effects of the informalization of the Ghanaian workforce since the 1980s has been to undermine trade union membership. In response, Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) has adopted a policy to actively organize the growing number of informal workers. Many informal street traders belong to associations whose role is “to fight for the rights of the vendors, particularly the right to space, and to protect vendors from harassment, and seek recognition and integration of street vendors in urban development” (Mitullah, 2004, p. 12). However, Accra’s numerous street traders’ associations have historically lacked political influence and have been limited in their ability to assert their members’ rights (Brown et al., 2010). In 2003, GTUC supported several informal traders’ associations to establish a national network called StreetNet Ghana Alliance, later renamed IHVAG. IHVAG is affiliated to StreetNet International, a global network of membership-based organizations (MBOs) (such as unions, cooperatives and associations) of informal market and street traders.

The aim of StreetNet is to encourage the sharing of information and ideas on the issues that face informal traders and the development of effective organizing strategies for promoting the rights of these workers. The establishment of a national network is a deliberate attempt to address the weak and atomized character of Ghana’s street traders’ associations and their failure to cooperate and take joint action for their members’ mutual benefit. IHVAG prioritizes strengthening traders’ networks with a view to sharing information on effective organizing and campaigning strategies and enabling members to gain an understanding of their common problems. IHVAG has approximately 6,000 members, belonging to a range of MBOs, and has branches in Accra and Takoradi-Sekondi (Akua Anyidoho, 2013; Brown et al., 2010; Mitullah, 2003; War on Want, 2006).

GHAFUP

Slum Dwellers International (SDI) is a global NGO that presides over a network of local NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) based in informal settlements across Africa, Asia and Latin America. Originating from an Indian development approach based around organizing women in informal settlements into savings groups, SDI was created in 1996 to link organizations with similar approaches across the world. Under the SDI organizing model, local savings groups are networked into national “federations of the urban poor”, which are supported by a local NGO affiliated to SDI. The activities practiced by local affiliated organizations are typically drawn from a standard list of “rituals” prescribed by SDI, including sharing information between groups and federations; negotiating with the authorities to prevent forced evictions; conducting community-led enumerations to generate data on informal settlements and providing microfinance for self-help settlement upgrading. Academic commentators are divided over whether this development approach represents a progressive form of “globalization from below”, or a neoliberal governmental strategy to promote

entrepreneurial self-reliance and discourage making demands of the state (Grant, 2009; McFarlane, 2012; Roy, 2009a).

In response to an eviction notice served on the Old Fadama settlement in 2002, SDI's South African leadership visited Accra and established a local affiliate NGO, named People's Dialogue on Human Settlements (PD). PD has supported the creation of a local federation to organize the residents of Old Fadama into savings groups and to engender a process of negotiation between squatters and the authorities. To date, the AMA has not followed through on its threat of forcefully evicting the settlement, although a large number of structures on the banks of the lagoon were demolished in June 2015, supposedly to prevent flooding. Meanwhile, the Federation has gradually expanded from a local CBO fighting eviction in Old Fadama to a national network of savings groups called GHAFUP. Members have accessed SDI's international microfinance facility in order to fund a series of upgrading projects in Accra. In Old Fadama, savings groups have built a public toilet block, a bathhouse and a hostel for homeless Kayayei. In addition, GHAFUP has cooperated with UN-Habitat's Slum Upgrading Facility to build a cooperative housing block in the Accra neighbourhood of Ashaiman. GHAFUP now has savings groups in 7 out of 10 administrative regions of Ghana, is active in 13 cities and has over 13,000 members in about 125 savings groups (Farouk & Owusu, 2012; Grant, 2009; <http://www.pdfghana.org>).

From quiet to bold encroachment

The AMA has an ingrained antipathy towards squatters and hawkers, who it views as a threat to its entrepreneurial plans for Accra (Brown et al., 2010; Gillespie, 2016; Mitullah, 2003; Obeng-Odoom, 2011). Both IHVAG and GHAFUP have sought to counter this antipathy by building the confidence and capacity of their members to enable them to engage with the state and challenge the marginalization of the informal sector in urban governance. In the process, these organizations seek to openly engage the state in dialogue, render themselves visible, participate in urban governance and emphasize centrality of the informal sector in the urban economy.

It is a priority of IHVAG to provide leadership training for traders, and particularly women who are under-represented in the leadership of traders' organizations (War on Want, 2006). In order to address the fact that informal traders often have a low degree of education and lack confidence to engage with the authorities, IHVAG collaborates with GTUC to provide training for building confidence, networking, lobbying and negotiating with local authorities, media work and public speaking. According to activists in both IHVAG and GTUC, this training is designed to develop the political power of street traders by giving them the skills and confidence to organize themselves and stand up to the authorities. Similarly, PD and GHAFUP provide leadership training for members so that squatters themselves can engage with the authorities and the media. According to Nana, a Federation member in Old Fadama, training is intended

to give them capacity in order to dialogue, in order to sit with the city authority and tell them vocally what they need. Because without doing all these things, when they sit with the city authorities they don't even know how to say. And finally the city authorities say "oh, these people they are useless". They are not useless! And that is why we are giving them what we call "capacity building".

For both organizations, building the capacity of their members to engage with the authorities is instrumental to challenging the marginalization of, and seeking recognition for, the informal sector in Accra. IHVAG seeks to achieve this by challenging the AMA's perception of informal workers as urban outsiders or outlaws by emphasizing that they play a central role in the urban economy, contribute to the city's tax base and comprise the majority of Accra's workforce. According to Rose, a market trader and a member of the national Coordination Committee and the StreetNet International Council,

Informal economy workers in Ghana are almost 85% in Ghana. We pay taxes, we pay a lot of dues, and we don't know where our money goes. Because our educational background is very low, we don't know how to ask. So we decided to organize and educate ourselves, enlightening and let them know the benefit of being formed together, to be under one umbrella, to become one strong voice.... This is what StreetNet is trying to do. To educate the members. Then how to fight for their rights. And then lobby with the authorities, those who are in charge, so that they will acknowledge the street hawkers and vendors and the market vendors as well. And informal economy workers as a whole.

GHAFUP aims to challenge the authorities' consistent discursive framing of Old Fadama as "Sodom and Gomorrah", a den of criminality and vice that poses a threat to law and order in the city (Gillespie, 2016). When Vanderpuije publically reiterated his plan to demolish the settlement in 2009, GHAFUP called a mass press conference to counter the Mayor's demonization of the squatters:

The mayor was going to radio station, going to the media, saying that those living here are criminals, armed robbers, we are nothing to the state, we don't contribute to the state, we are occupying the government land, they have to evict us by force, by any means. We said no. That is not the issue. We are not armed robbers. We are not thieves. We are citizens like you.... So we told ourselves that, ok, let's invite the media and let's tell each and everybody of this community tomorrow nobody is going to work, we are all marching out from the community to the roadside. We are going to invite the media and we are going to tell the city authorities, the government and the whole world that the way that the government or the city authorities wanted to do to the community is not fair. (Nana)

GHAFUP members argue that the collection of settlement data through Federation-led enumeration projects has, to some extent, shifted the balance of power between squatters and the authorities. When Vanderpuije announced his intention to demolish Old Fadama in 2009, GHAFUP were able to buy some time by insisting that an enumeration process be carried out first to determine the number of squatters being evicted. Nii recounts how population data have enabled GHAFUP to challenge the AMA's plans to evict people living along the railway line in Accra:

any time government wanted to do something, especially these railway people, they want them to evacuate, I mean sack the people along the rail line, we just go and we call on government, tell government that "look, there are more than many people in the area, so it is not an easy thing to just get them out. Where are you sending them to?" So we've been using that tool to fight government.

Whereas Bayat argues that those engaged in quiet encroachment in the authoritarian Middle East do so because they seek invisibility from the institutions of the state, therefore, both IHVAG and GHAFUP are motivated by a desire to openly engage the

authorities in a process of dialogue in order to challenge the marginalization of the informal sector in urban governance. SDI's enumeration activities in particular represent a strategic attempt to render previously "invisible" uncounted citizens visible and lay bare the myths and prejudices that are used to justify their exclusion from substantive rights afforded to other citizens (Appadurai, 2002; McFarlane, 2009).

Although they are separate organizations, the ability of both IHVAG and GHAFUP to promote their members interests has been shaped and constrained by the same "local political cultures and institutions" (Bayat, 1997, p. 67). As Bayat predicted, the fact that Ghana is a multiparty democracy has enabled hawkers and squatters to move beyond individual acts of quiet encroachment to pursue their interests through participating in collective organizations. However, both hawkers and squatters report experiencing hostility when attempting to engage the city authorities in dialogue. There is a lack of formal mechanisms by which negotiations can take place between government and hawkers associations, and activists reported the AMA routinely ignoring their letters and requests for meetings:

They are not listening to us, they are not respecting us, they are not meeting with us. So they think they can do whatever they want to do. (David)

Whenever we write to them nothing would come out of it. (Kodwo)

We've had a series of dialogues with the government but ... they see us as people with less education so sometimes they hardly take our issues serious. (Joseph)

Similarly, GHAFUP members report facing sustained hostility from Vanderpuije, who has repeatedly stated his intention to demolish Old Fadama:

The current mayor seems to not want to understand our process, he wants the community to be demolished. That is his position, and I don't think his position has changed ... we made an attempt but he never give us the audience. (Mensah)

He does not want to talk to anyone. This is the issue. (Twia)

As such, it must be acknowledged that this dialogue-based approach has been limited in its effectiveness. Vanderpuije has remained publically committed to cleansing Accra of hawkers and squatters. In June 2015, thousands were made homeless when the AMA demolished structures along the banks of the Korle Lagoon at Old Fadama, provoking angry street protests. By the end of September, the AMA was returning to pull down structures that had been rebuilt in the meantime (Botchway, 2015). Despite the best efforts of IHVAG and GHAFUP to engage the AMA in dialogue, therefore, what Bayat (2012, p. 123) terms the "long war of attrition" between encroachers and the city authorities appears set to continue for the foreseeable future.

Since Accra's Mayor is directly appointed by the central government, Vanderpuije is not directly accountable to those who suffer the consequences of the decongestion exercise. In some respects, therefore, Accra's informal proletariat lack leverage over the city authorities. However, there have been repeated incidents of the central government intervening to restrain the AMA due to fears of the political costs of decongestion. In 2005, the NPP government instructed the AMA to stop evicting street traders out of fear that it was eroding electoral support for the party (Bob-Milliar & Obeng-Odoom, 2011). In 2009, the NDC Presidency told the Mayor to suspend the decongestion exercise and the planned eviction of Old Fadama for the same reason (2011). In January 2012, Yaw Boateng Gyan, the National Organiser of

the NDC, publically accused Vanderpuije of undermining popular support for the government in the run-up to the general election: “It seems we are putting water in a tank while someone is, at the same time, draining the water from the same tank” (quoted in Peace FM Online, 2012). This demonstrates how the management of urban space has become highly politicized due to the fierce competition for votes in Ghana’s capital (Adaawen & Jorgensen, 2012; Bob-Milliar & Obeng-Odoom, 2011; Yeboah & Obeng-Odoom, 2010).

In addition to electoral concerns, this ongoing tension between state actors can be explained in terms of the contradictory priorities of national governments and city authorities. National governments across sub-Saharan Africa have developed initiatives to support the informal economy through microfinance and training initiatives in the hope that it will develop into a source of economic growth, employment and poverty reduction (Rogerson, 1997). In Ghana, the NDC government has established a new National Committee on the Informal Economy (NCIE) in order to promote informal enterprise. At the launch of NCIE, Fiifi Kwetey, Deputy Minister of Finance and Economic Planning, publically criticized repressive policies that lead to the destruction of capital for small enterprises, such as those being pursued by Vanderpuije’s AMA (Statesman, 2010). Whereas Ghana’s national government is concerned with addressing structural unemployment by producing an entrepreneurial working population, however, the AMA is characteristic of city authorities in the Global South in that it is primarily concerned with controlling and “transforming urban space” (Schindler, 2015, p. 7) with a view to attracting tourism and investment (Gillespie, 2016).

Despite the ongoing hostility of the AMA towards squatters and hawkers, therefore, electoral competition and contradictions between the governmental priorities of national and local state actors have slowed the pace of dispossession in Ghana’s capital. Rather than acting quietly and individually, this has enabled Accra’s informal proletariat to take collective action and become increasingly bold in their encroachment on urban space. PD and GHAFUP in particular have sought to capitalize on the division between central government and the AMA: Interviewees reported engaging in constructive dialogue with the NPP government over the possible relocation of the residents of Old Fadama and with the NDC presidency over the drafting of national policy on urban development issues. Contrary to the efforts of the AMA to marginalize the informal sector in urban governance, therefore, the actions of successive governments demonstrate that Accra’s squatters and hawkers are politically powerful. In a context where the management of urban space is highly politicized and the mayor is directly accountable to the ruling party executive, Accra’s informal proletariat can exercise leverage over the city authorities indirectly by withholding the electoral support that the political class depends on. Given this knowledge, a mass boycott of elections, such as that organized by the “No Land! No House! No Vote!” campaign in South Africa, may be the most effective way for Accra’s citizens to apply coordinated pressure to the AMA (Sinwell, 2011).

Conclusion

This article demonstrates how Bayat’s (1997) concept of “quiet encroachment” can have explanatory power in Southern cities beyond the Middle East. In the process, it illustrates how urban theory can be advanced by exploring how concepts travel between

Southern cities (Robinson & Parnell, 2011). Whereas Bayat's concept was originally developed in relation to authoritarian political contexts, it can also be used to understand the particular "dialectic of individual and collective action" practiced by the urban informal poor in a multiparty democracy such as Ghana (Bayat, 1997, p. 66). Due to their exclusion from formal wage labour and housing markets, Accra's informal proletariat have engaged in everyday acts of quiet encroachment to appropriate urban space as a means of reproduction, creating urban commons in the process. Widespread encroachment on public space and undeveloped land has provoked an aggressive response by city authorities, who perceive these urban commons as a hindrance to their entrepreneurial plans to transform Accra into a business and tourist-friendly "Millennium City". As such, the AMA is engaging in violent processes of dispossession in order to enclose the urban commons and expel the informal proletariat.

Although relatively small organizations that are not representative of the informal proletariat as a whole, IHVAG and GHAFUP demonstrate that squatters and hawkers in Accra have been able to take collective action to contest dispossession and defend their access to urban space as a vital means of reproduction. In an authoritarian context, Bayat (1997) argues that the informal poor engage in quiet encroachment with a view to remaining invisible to the institutions of the state. In Ghana's multiparty democracy, however, IHVAG and GHAFUP are empowered to openly engage the state in a process of dialogue with a view to challenging the marginalization of the informal sector in urban governance. Furthermore, GHAFUP has sought to render squatters visible to the authorities by collecting settlement and population data for use in urban planning.

Despite their best efforts, however, squatters and hawkers report that their attempts to participate in urban governance have been met with continued hostility. The June 2015 demolition at Old Fadama illustrates the limitations of these organizations' attempts to overcome their marginalization by engaging the state in dialogue. This demonstrates that operating in a multiparty democracy is no guarantee that city dwellers will be protected from violent state-led dispossession, particularly in a context where the Mayor is not directly accountable to the urban population. In addition to seeking negotiations with the authorities, therefore, there is a need for squatters, hawkers and their supporters to develop an analysis of how the informal proletariat can achieve leverage over the city authorities. This article seeks to contribute to such an analysis by arguing that Accra's informal proletariat, who constitute the majority of the city's working population, exercise considerable power in Ghanaian electoral politics and can therefore take coordinated action to apply indirect pressure to the city authorities. This fact should encourage Accra's squatters and hawkers to take confidence and continue to act boldly in creating and defending the urban commons.

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