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– A SHADOWY 'CITY OF LIGHT': Private Urbanism, Large-Scale Land Acquisition and Dispossession in Ghana

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of African cities has created both housing deficits and a pluralization of urban orders, including the growth of slum settlements. With an ever-increasing middle class, urban sub-Saharan Africa is now also characterized by large-scale land acquisition processes linked to the construction of wholly private and increasingly enclaved cities. This article maps the impacts of the Appolonia City of Light project—a privately built enclaved city catering to the housing needs of a rapidly growing middle class in Ghana. Building on field research and exploring various dimensions of the development marketed as 'The City of Light', we highlight how the project has dramatically altered social relations and resulted in dispossession rippling through nearby local communities. We therefore argue that, instead of merely focusing on the actual physical spaces of private developments or turning attention to often phantasmagoric and utopic visions of the future, research should be directed at changes in the immediate surroundings of urban developments. We highlight the problematic land acquisition inherent to such enclaved developments and demonstrate how these intrinsically constitute assemblages of livelihoods and exemplify dynamics of appropriation, dispossession and commodification.

Introduction

With more than half of the world's population living in cities, about 3 billion people are expected to become urbanites before 2050 (Egidi *et al*., 2020). Commonly celebrated as engines of economic growth in the Global South (see e.g. Mitra and Mehta, 2011), cities are without doubt simultaneously domains of culture and business but also of extreme poverty, increasing inequality and spatial marginalization. Crucially, urban centres across the globe also constitute the prime sites for capitalization and financialization, especially of real estate (see e.g. Stein, 2019)—a trend that has also implied an intense reformatting of urban politics (Swyngedouw, 2018).

In cities across Africa, these global trends assume a particular form where:

> urban regions become a hodgepodge of makeshift, hurriedly constructed commercial centres, affordable housing for an emerging middle class, farmland, rough-hewn, self-constructed provisional shelters, leisure parks, waste dumps and factories—which, for all their urban features, frequently remain dependent on rapidly diminishing agricultural surpluses (Simone, 2020: 604).

This ongoing 'hodgepodge' large-scale transformation driven by a combination of multinational developers, businessmen, urban citizens and political stakeholders (Shatkin, 2014; Van Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2018) comprises a composite force of multiple actors (Herbert and Murray, 2015) that are also tangibly present in Ghana in the guise of multiform private urbanization irreducible to neat visions of private–public partnerships (Eduful, 2019).

However, despite such breath-taking transformations and the many proclamations that African cities are laboratories of the future (Comaroff and

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Comaroff, 2012) or sites of futurity more generally (Mbembe, 2016; Sarr, 2020), the rapid 'expansion-transformation' of African cities has nevertheless created housing deficits and produced a pluralization of urban forms, including the emergence and growth of slums. Crucially, the immediate global needs for affordable housing are estimated at 400 million units and, in Africa in general, the rate of urbanization far outstrips the ability of development to keep pace—a flaw exacerbating housing needs across rapidly growing cities in the region (Chirisa and Matamanda, 2016).

Ghana is no exception to this African trend. Here, rapid urban expansion has resulted in low-income communities (slums) with limited access to water, adequate housing and health care, among other things (Gillespie, 2016; Ablo and Yekple, 2018). This tendency is aggravated by the fact that Ghana currently has a housing deficit of about 2 million, projected to exceed 4.2 million by 2030 and an estimated annual housing need of about 133,000 (Awuvafoge, 2013). The implementation of the IMF/World Bank-led ERP (Economic Recovery Program) and SAPs (Structural Adjustment Programmes), and the subsequent deregulation of the economy, have resulted in increased rural–urban migration with a growing urban informal economy (Oteng-Ababio and Grant, 2019). Furthermore, a significant proportion of urbanites cannot afford decent accommodation with basic toilets or an in-house water supply (Chalfin, 2014; Amoako, 2016). Various government strategies to provide affordable housing over the years have failed as most of the houses are priced above what the urban poor can pay (Grant *et al*., 2019).

The inability of African governments to plan and manage the rapidly growing cities and the increasing lack of housing for the urban population has seen the emergence and growth of 'privatized urbanism' (Murray, 2017). Fält (2019) therefore contends that these privatized cities should be considered as a 'quick fix' to sprawling African cities characterized by poverty, housing deficits and inadequate infrastructure and services. Crucially, this shift to private urbanism does not merely entail transformation at a surface level but also means that state agencies increasingly retreat from significant aspects of the urban economy and that new political coalitions are forged, effectively transforming cities (Shatkin, 2014). Furthermore, private urbanism has important implications for environmental sustainability and social equity and produces spatial fragmentation (Herbert and Murray, 2015; Murray, 2015).

This article examines the impacts of one such instance of private urbanism, namely the large-scale land acquisition for development into a modern self-sustaining city at Appolonia—a former rural community in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. As Grant *et al.* (2019) underline, the Greater Accra Region constitutes in itself a form of microcosm where various forms of urbanization congeal, mix and are opposed, including large-scale development projects, auto-construction practices, spontaneous urbanization and land speculation. This article focuses explicitly on the large-scale Appolonia City of Light (ACL) initiated in 2014—one of the largest privately engineered and master-planned city projects on the continent (see also Fält, 2019).

Building on long-term fieldwork and research on ACL and its immediate surroundings, we explore the development trajectory with particular attention to what Simone (2020) called 'extended urbanization'. For Simone, the term seeks to capture the fact that urbanization is not limited to spatial expansion—although this is a crucial feature also of ACL and the Greater Accra Region—but that it also extends itself into a wider multiplicity of situations and histories (Simone, 2020). Taking the perspectives of our interlocutors seriously, in this article we seek to map such an extension of the urban, not only through the dynamic construction of the built space of ACL, but by analysing the transformations of the spaces, people and livelihoods being exposed to the rays of light from the new city in Appolonia. Centrally, we argue that these transformations show, precisely, that the 'extended urbanization' that ACL produces beyond its gates generates 'shadowy urbanites', city dwellers who are 'shadowy' as a result of having their livelihoods, social relations and agricultural spaces transformed

and deterritorialized. This analysis of the cascading effects of ACL is also reflective of other important work on urban development, such as Cronon's account of the expansion of the American city of Chicago (Cronon, 2009) as well as more recent work on the impact of enclaving beyond its spatial and material forms in sub-Saharan Africa (see Nielsen *et al*., 2020). Moreover, our analysis here contributes in crucial ways to the emerging literature on private urbanism and enclaving in Africa and beyond (e.g. Schuermans, 2016; Phelps *et al*., 2020). For, building on an incisive analysis of the linkages between enclave urban development and political and spatial fragmentation in Cairo, Ashoub and Elkhateeb (2021) note that there is a dire need to grapple with enclaving beyond fixing our gaze on walls or material structures. As such, and as we show below, the case of ACL can be instructive in this regard thanks to its focus on the cascading effects on livelihoods beyond the immediate exclusive spaces of the City of Light. Further, such an analysis may help, we argue, in understanding the impact of such large-scale development projects elsewhere in Africa—and beyond.

Concretely, by underlining the importance of studies of the immediate surroundings of such developments, we argue that many analyses of large-scale private developments are either limited to their actual physical spaces or turn their attention to their often phantasmagoric and utopic domains. By focusing instead on the livelihood changes in Appolonia's immediate surroundings and exposing the changes that radiate from such developments, we argue, first, that such effects of private urbanization are far too often overlooked when assessing the latter and, second, that they expose a fundamental feature of enclaved developments related to forms of dispossession (see also Murray, 2015). Thus, rather than solely focusing on their spatial isolation—in a sense thereby replicating argumentatively the ideal of seclusion marketed by developers—an analysis of private urbanization needs to be one that approaches them as forming parts of vaster assemblages of livelihoods and particular localized dynamics of appropriation and commodification (see also Sawyer *et al*., 2020).

The Ghanaian political economy of large-scale land transactions

Over the past decades, while large-scale land acquisition across Africa has come under sharp scrutiny (Cotula, 2012; Boamah, 2014), consensus among analysts has been absent. On the one hand there is the view that such large-scale land deals may constitute an essential (and beneficial) catalyst for transforming livelihoods (Collier, 2008). As Collier (2008) argues, commercial agriculture, which often requires large tracts of land, can play critical roles in increasing global food supply and ending hunger. At the other end of the spectrum is the view that such large-scale land acquisition adversely affects livelihoods and involves multiple forms of dispossession (Van Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2018). Thus, the discourse on large-scale land transitions concentrates on whether and how these large-scale transactions are helpful or detrimental to societies. Boamah (2014) summarizes the situation succinctly: the question of land acquisition in Africa is divided into the opposing discourses of 'land grab' or 'land transactions', exposing varying perspectives on land and development in Africa (Hall, 2011; Lavers, 2012).

A Marxian political economy approach that sheds light on processes of class-based dispossession in an urban context can highlight how the application of force, dynamics of power and changing socio-cultural relations is transforming access to land and rural livelihoods. When rural lifeworlds and forms of sociality encounter capitalist production systems, there is a fundamental change in the institutional configuration that shapes access to land (Obeng-Odoom, 2015). This is so because land access rights are intricately linked to and embedded in specific socio-cultural contexts (Kansanga *et al*., 2019). Thus, in Ghana, legal pluralism, that is, the co-existence of customary and statutory land administration (Agbosu *et al*., 2007; Larbi, 2009; Zenker and Höhne, 2018; Denchie *et al*., 2020), prevails in land governance. Amanor and Ubink (2008) highlight several

complex relations emerging from land ownership and the profound changes to land access and tenure rights due to modernization, neoliberalism and structural adjustment. A critical juxtaposition here is between customary and statutory tenure—the difference also reflecting dynamics of power, economic interests and conflicts over the nature of transparency and accountability.

Indicative of the importance of a critical site of conflict, what is defined as customary land—including stools, skins, clan and family lands—constitutes about 78% of land ownership in Ghana, where the remaining 22% of the land is either privately owned or under state control (Ablo and Asamoah, 2018; Larbi, 2009). Governed by unwritten codes derived from traditional practices and norms, customary land tenure is in practice variable and context-specific (Amanor and Ubink, 2008). However, central to customary land tenure in Ghana are traditional leaders and family heads who hold the land in trust for their community and family members. Traditional authorities are headed by a chief, who has the allodial title of communally owned land.

The site where ACL is being built, Appolonia, comprises such a site of customary land tenure with a so-called stool council headed by the chief. Crucially for our argument about the profound transformations brought about by the ACL project, the stool land governance set-up reflects land tenure and livelihood activities and is also central to social relations that the ACL project transformed. The argument here is that when social ties and access rights are altered due to the commodification of land in rapidly urbanizing African cities, dramatic forms of economic and social stratification and dispossession are generated in contexts that hitherto experienced these only to a limited degree. Thus, in Appolonia, the processes of gentrification increased dispossession, and urban pressure transformed land use in a previously rural community.

Such full transformation, commodification and privatization in Appolonia may helpfully be approached through Marx's prism of primitive accumulation, in particular outlining how the expropriation of land by elites and investors to meet the housing demands of a growing middle class transforms livelihoods. Given the processual nature of such transformation, Harvey's notion of 'accumulation by dispossession' stresses the ongoing and contemporary nature of 'predation, fraud and violence' (Obeng-Odoom, 2015: 342) provides further depth to a Marxian primitive accumulation approach. For Harvey (2003: 145), accumulation by dispossession involves a great range of practices:

> the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations; the conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights; the suppression of rights to the commons; the commodification of labour-power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption.

Such generalized descriptions also resonate with experiences in many rural communities—such as in Appolonia. Here, rapid urbanization and liberalization of the Ghanaian economy expose their livelihoods to competing land uses, which produces complex outcomes. Harvey's approach thus offers an apt conceptual lens to understand the expropriative effects of large-scale land acquisition for private city development.

The significance of accumulation by dispossession is that it captures the plurality of outcomes and changes in social relations (Benjaminsen and Bryceson, 2012; Obeng-Odoom, 2015). As Gillespie (2016) noted, the rapid northward expansion of Accra is reconfiguring political, institutional and economic systems and leaves in its wake an unequal geography where many people are without access to basic infrastructure and services (Ablo *et al*., 2020; Yiran *et al*., 2020). For Harvey (2003), accumulation by dispossession entails eliminating rights and increased capitalist grip on collective forms of property, namely land, in the context of the ACL development in Appolonia.

While accumulation is an economic process—the transaction between the capitalist and the wage-labourer (Harvey, 2003)—the latter is not the original purpose of dispossession. As will be shown, in the case of Appolonia capital only uses the land and resources of the people but does not require their labour power (Li, 2011; Levien, 2015). Thus, for Kan (2019), the notion of 'accumulation by dispossession is 'urbanization through dispossession', and in many African countries, this involves the appropriation of rural land from subsistence use to a mechanism for revenue extraction through commodification. As will be discussed, the processes of dispossession entail deception and physical and symbolic violence in Appolonia. In South Africa, Herbert and Murray (2015: 471) found that 'everything from basic infrastructure (including utilities, sewerage, and the installation and maintenance of roadways), landscaping, security services, the regulation of common spaces, and selling and branding the city are firmly in the hands of private profit-making corporate entities and outside the mandate of public authorities'. Critical questions that emerge from such takeovers by capital is what happens to the right to the city?

In a rapidly urbanizing context characterized by land commodification and privatization through accumulation by dispossession (Hall, 2013), access to livelihood assets (the resources, claims and access necessary for a means of living) are transformed. In the rural community of Appolonia, where ACL is located, the sprawling of Accra and the engulfing of the community by a multitude of forms of urbanization directly influence access to land. As shown in this article, the commodification of land for private city development has eroded assets and increased the vulnerability of livelihoods.

Study area and methods

Appolonia is a rural community located in the Kpone-Katamanso Municipal Area (KKMA) of the Greater Accra Region (see Figure 1). KKMA has a population of about 109,864, making up 2.7% of the total population in the region and was carved out of the Tema Metropolitan Assembly (TMA) in 2012 through the Legislative Instrument, LI 2031 (GSS, 2014). Agriculture is the significant economic activity in the municipality, including crop and livestock production, fishing and agro-processing.

Appolonia reflects this general livelihood pattern in KKMA and is a rural community with a total population of 943. Currently it is in transition and under pressure from the northward sprawl of the city of Accra, typified by a change in land use from agriculture to residential and commercial by such bodies as the private city development ACL. With data collected through a series of fieldworks, this article examines the transformation of rural livelihood as a result of urban sprawl and the development of the ACL project. Specifically, the first tranche of fieldwork took place in November 2016, with follow-ups in February 2018, May 2018, December 2018 and March to June 2019, with the latest visit taking place in February 2020. The extended period of recurrent fieldwork provided an opportunity to track the emerging issues relating to the land acquisition for the ACL project and to monitor livelihood transformation dynamics. Importantly, it allowed the stakeholders in the land acquisition process, the various livelihood activities and the categories of people most affected by these changes to be mapped. The strategies that community members adopted in response to the changes in their livelihood were also examined. In all, 20 key informants were interviewed; Table 1 summarizes the category of informants and the issues broached.

Additionally, 50 Appolonia community members, 26 women and 24 men, were interviewed. In the interviews with community members, we discussed their views on the ACL project, the benefits and effects on their livelihood, and their adaptation strategies. We also conducted four group interviews on the impacts of the transformation in Appolonia on the youth, families and livelihoods.

Field observation was carried out in the Appolonia community and the ACL project site to gain an overview of the scale of the project and the physical changes

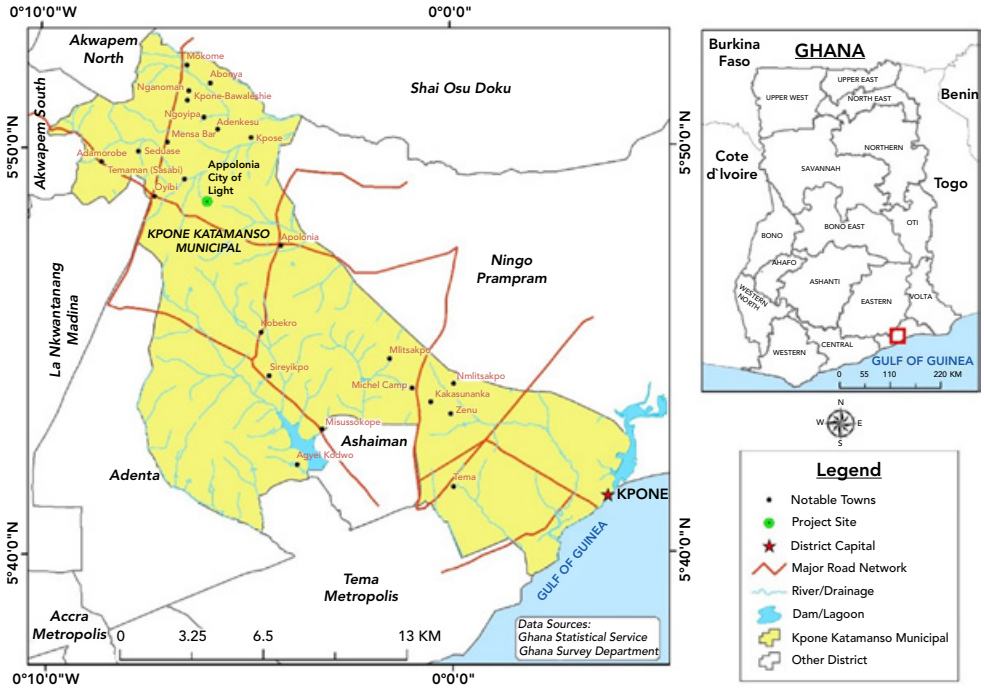

FIGURE 1 Map of the Kpone Katamanso Municipal Area (*source:* map produced by RS/GIS Lab, University of Ghana)

TABLE 1 Categories of interviewees and issues discussed

Category of informant	No.	Issues discussed
Officials of Appolonia City: Project managers, marketing associate, Chief executive officer	10	Overview of the Appolonia City Project, the land acquisition process, compensation process and employment
Assembly member	1	Livelihood activities in the community, land acquisition, compensation and livelihood impacts of the ACL project
Community leaders	8	Overview of the Appolonia City Project, land acquisition and compensation, distribution of benefits from the lease of land for the Appolonia City project, land-related disputes, chieftaincy
Investor(s)	1	The motivation for investing in the Appolonia City project, Business portfolio

SOURCE: Fieldwork 2019

occurring in and around the community. Secondary data included a review of relevant literature and documents from various stakeholders in the ACL project.

Appolonia City of Light: a complex labyrinth of glocal actors and capital

ACL is a private city developed by Rendeavour—an urban development company with over 30,000 acres of land under development across Africa, including Tatu City in Kenya, Alaro and Jigna Cities in Nigeria, Roma Park in Zambia, Kiswishi in the Democratic Republic of Congo and King City in Takoradi, Ghana. Private city developments now dot many African countries (see e.g. Buckley *et al.*, 2016; Splinter and Van Leynseele, 2019). In Johannesburg, for instance, Waterfall City is a privately managed city that emphasizes conformity with Islamic principles (Murray, 2015).

After Rendeavour acquired land in 2011 and the necessary permits were granted in 2012, the ACL project commenced in earnest in 2014. Truly impressive in size, scale and ambition, it is described by developers and the Ghanaian media as the single largest private urban development project in Africa in recent times, although some observers claim it is, as of 2019, 'in a slow phase of development' (Grant *et al*., 2019: 326). The project is located 20km northeast of Accra and between Oyibi and Afienya, and during multiple periods of fieldwork—including further visits by the authors in February 2020—the plots and houses have been developing rapidly. ACL is a mixed-use development project under the banner of 'live, work and play'—a slogan that has become representative of certain global (neoliberal) trends in urban development privileging spatially demarcated zones for mixed domestic, labour and consumption use (see e.g. Malizia and Song, 2016). Being such a mixed-use form of development, ACL provides residential, commercial, industrial and recreational land use spaces situated on 2,325 acres (941 hectares) of land. Rendeavour planned to invest over $250 million in infrastructure, including roads, water, sewerage and power, at ACL. This is a significant selling point for the project. Many parts of Ghana plan for infrastructure, but its provision trails behind urban growth and development, with many parts of Accra lacking access to electricity, water, and good road networks. Thus, the ACL project eliminates some significant challenges facing other property developers in Ghana (see Oteng-Ababio and Grant, 2019).

During interviews with us, the ACL project manager noted that ACL is a master-planned and zoned mixed-use development that takes inspiration from the historically significant Tema Development Corporation (TDC) in Ghana—a large-scale public body that initiated urban development from 1952 onwards, predating the country's independence by five years (see also Asabere, 2007). In the project manager's view, while the TDC developed and zoned Tema, Ghana's main industrial hub, with different land uses, it 'lacked development control, leading to various land-use types in areas that have not been demarcated for such uses' (interview, May 2019). Thus, currently in Tema residential, commercial and industrial activities can be found in the same enclave, which was not originally part of the planning and design of the city (Quayson, 2014). In the case of ACL, the project manager noted that they would enforce 'a strict development control' to ensure that the 'project does not become another Tema'.

At a formal level, such a 'development control' refers to the contractual agreement between the Appolonia Development Company Limited (ADCL)—the local subsidiary of Rendeavour tasked with developing ACL—and investors in ACL. Thus, all investors and property owners in ACL sign a pre-construction, construction and post-construction development control agreement that stipulates the types of development acceptable to the ADCL. Its managers argue that by guaranteeing proper development control, investors in the ACL are assured that the poor urban management in Ghana, which in their view affects the value of properties, is prevented. This, according to the ADCL officials, is important for both local and international investors since lack of development control often results in incompatible land uses, such as factories and churches in residential areas.

Another trump card held by the ACL project is providing stability in the sometimes volatile land market in this quite attractive project catchment area. While land ownership in Ghana is complex and often conflict-ridden, in ACL Rendeavour and the ADCL allegedly acquired the land directly from the Appolonia stool council. They registered the entire 2,325 acres of the project area in a single process—a move almost unprecedented in Ghana. The totality of this land is then titled and leased to investors and, by registering the land, the ACL project eliminates a significant uncertainty that characterizes land acquisition in Ghana (Agbosu *et al*., 2007; Ablo and Asamoah, 2018; Kansanga *et al*., 2019). In terms of the aforementioned conflict between state and customary land tenure, with land titles guaranteed the ACL project offers investors the

safety net needed in property development since they do not have to pay off different families, clans and other groups claiming land ownership or land guards or spend time and money litigating over the land.

Rendeavour and the ADCL provide tenure security and infrastructure for investors interested in either the commercial, residential, industrial or recreational enclave of ACL—enwalled as it is and with multiple layers of security systems, as well as internal walled compounds or enclaves (Nielsen *et al*., 2020). Currently, the residential development has started in the so-called 'Oxford' enclave of ACL—a partnership between the ADCL and Imperial Homes, a private real estate company. The Oxford is exclusively a residential development offering lands and different types of homes with prices ranging from US $85,000 to $150 000 (see Table 2).

As of early 2020, at least 11 properties were occupied by owners with construction ongoing in other areas of ACL, including Bijou Homes, an affordable housing enclave with prices ranging from US $50,000 to $75,000. A school was also under construction along with other residential developments.

Land, dispossession, and livelihood transformation in Appolonia

Historically, Appolonia was an agricultural community with livelihoods revolving around farming, fishing and livestock rearing. As noted, the land in Appolonia is stool land and estimated to be 14,000 acres in total and with a traditional council made up of three clans, Kojo-we, Bediako-we and Sanshie-Sackey-we, which hold the land in trust for the community. Led by the chief, elders from the three clans are supposed to administer and adjudicate all matters relating to its land. Reflecting land tenure patterns from elsewhere in predominantly rural Africa, interviews with community members and some elders of the community revealed that, historically and until recently, community members could access any parcel of land that was unoccupied.

According to an 82-year-old woman, 'when you need land, you just have to locate any parcel of land that no one occupies, and you can use it'. Her view was corroborated by others, underlining that community members do not need to ask permission from the traditional authority to cultivate the land. Access to the land is grounded on the principle of the first-come basis—the first person to move into an unoccupied parcel of land has use rights to that parcel. When the first person who cultivates a parcel of land for a period decides to relocate to another parcel, they lose the use right, and any other community member can move in to cultivate it. This implies that community members' right to use the land is guaranteed if there is activity on the land, while fallow land is open to any member of the community to occupy. The land access system historically was without

TABLE 2 Price list of plots of land on sale at ACL

Size of land (ft)	Price (US$)
40 × 70	20,500
50 × 60	22,000
50 × 70	25,500
50 × 80	29,000
60 × 70	30,500
60 × 80	35,500
60 × 90	40,000
70 × 90	45,750
70 × 100	51,500
80 × 100	60,000

SOURCE: Fieldwork 2019

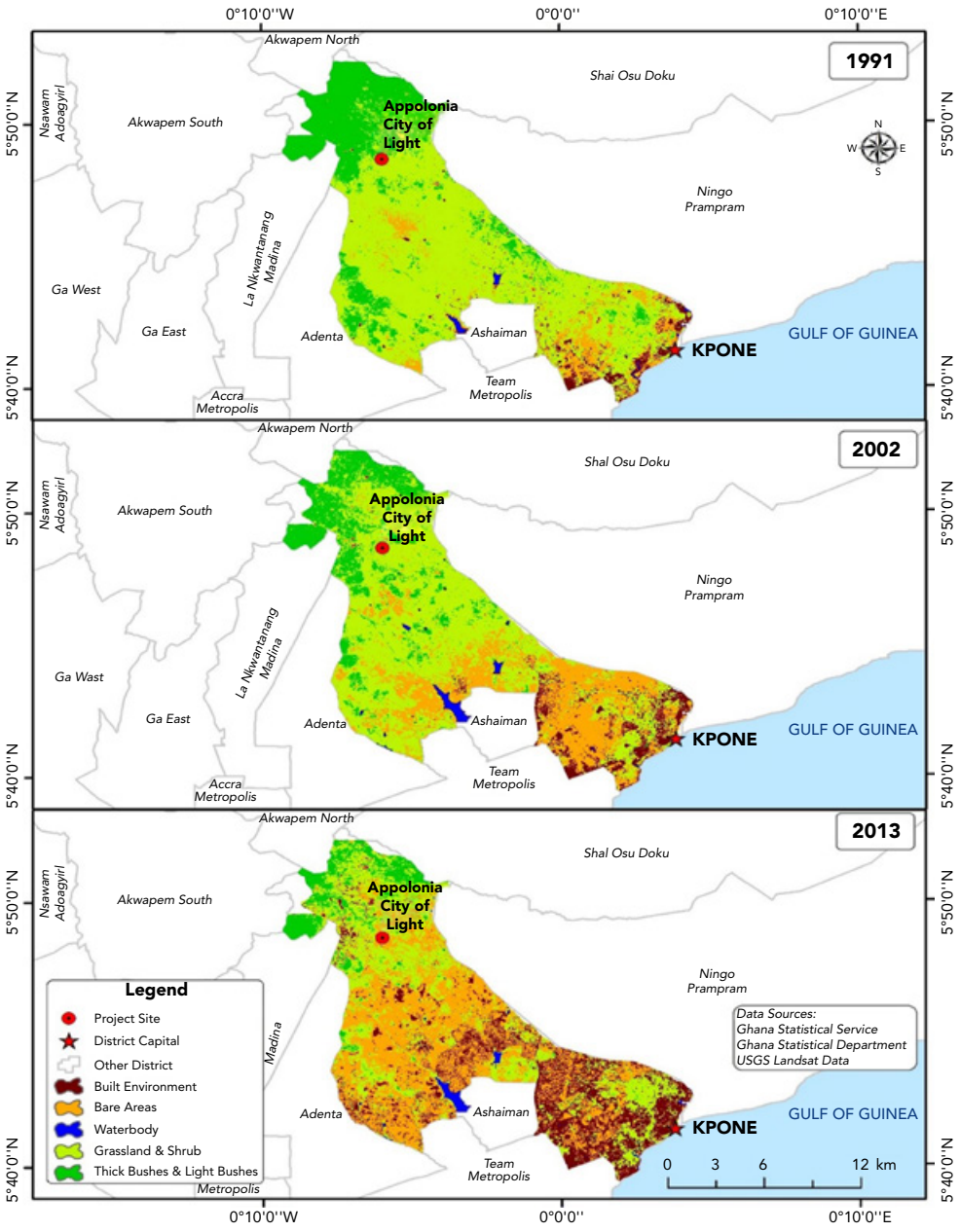

FIGURE 2 Land use change in Kpone Katamanso Municipal Area (*source:* map produced by RS/GIS Lab, University of Ghana)

any significant conflict. The community, however, has come under pressure from the northward sprawl of Accra: the map shown in Figure 2 above highlights the expansion of the built environment in KKMA over the past few years. This rapid expansion of Accra has resulted in agricultural livelihoods competing with commercial and residential land uses.

With increasing pressure on and demand for land also unfolding in Appolonia, the traditional council in 2011 decided to abandon the flexible use right system and allocate fixed plots of land to each community member. Each member was therefore

entitled to three plots of land, which measured 100 x 100 feet. Those residing in the Appolonia community paid US $100 for the land, while those living outside the community paid US $255 to be allocated their parcels of land. According to one of the elders, this money covered the cost of customary drinks for demarcation and contribution towards infrastructure development.

However, this whole process of re-allocation entailed the rampant lease of land by individuals, which, in turn, has led to deep conflicts in the community. For one thing, many community members who paid for and were allocated land could not access the plots as other members—usually the community's elites—laid claim to those lands. Second, agricultural activities, which hitherto constituted the primary source in Appolonia, have been eroded by competing land-uses.

Over the past few years, the ACL project has catalysed the transformation of the landscape and livelihoods in Appolonia. With the inception of the project, some community members complained that there was no longer any land available for agricultural activities. A complex and tense situation has emerged in that, while Rendeavour currently controls a significant proportion of the land for the ACL project, ownership of the remaining parcels of land is contested among the clans and individuals in Appolonia, an almost complete breakdown of the system of traditional communal land tenure. Interviewees expressed frustration at this situation, and several also claimed that the ACL project had transformed the community into an urban transformation 'hot zone' (interviews, July 2019). This was also clear from other evidence, as individuals and real estate developers, anticipating the transformation of Appolonia in response to the ACL project, are all jostling to secure land in and around the community. Together, intense competition, land speculation and land scarcity have made it difficult for community members to continue agricultural activities. The situation is, in fact, so tense that Ghanaian police have been stationed at Appolonia for longer periods and since 2012 the army has had to intervene to prevent escalation into a violent confrontation.

The situation is aggravated because the boom in the construction industry has also set in motion excessive sand winning/mining—the removal of soil to be used in construction work. While initially part of the allocation of land to citizens of Appolonia, the breakdown of the traditional tenure arrangement resulted in many individuals encroaching on people's farms for sand. Sand winning has, according to many informants, become a far more critical livelihood activity than agriculture. During multiple fieldwork visits in Appolonia, the ground shook and the air became thick with dust with every sand-filled truck that passed through—approximately one every few minutes—almost around the clock. Thus, agricultural livelihood in Appolonia is under siege from the northward sprawling of Accra, sand winning and the ACL project. Illustrative cases are presented below, showing both how the project is transforming livelihoods and the adaptation strategies of the community members.

– Case 1: Changing social relations and livelihoods

During a group interview in May 2019 at their homestead in Appolonia, a family of four recounted and reflected on how social relations have changed over the years and how this has affected their livelihood. The family included two sisters aged 75 and 84, a 46-year-old daughter and a 38-year-old son of the 84-year-old. According to the eldest of the sisters, 'land in Appolonia is communal land. In the olden days, if you wanted to farm, you did not need to ask anyone. You just went and farmed'. The interviewees noted that they could not say they lost a parcel of farmland because no family owned land in Appolonia, the land belonged to the community. They noted that the only problem was that gradually it became more challenging to start cultivating any parcel of land without another member of the community laying claim to it. They also identified sand winning and increasing demand for land for real estate development as the drivers of

social relations and land tenure changes in the community. According to them, increased demand for land and its attendant conflicts necessitated allocating three plots of land to each community member.

The sisters were also allocated three plots of land each after they had paid the customary fee and been issued with a certificate. However, one sister's land was encroached upon by some young people in the community for sand winning. The other sister's plots were, unbeknown to her, sold by another community member to private developers. They reported the case to the elders, but no action was taken due to the conflict within and between the clan leaders. With bitterness, the elderly women noted that given their age and lack of financial resources, they were unable to litigate the matter in any court. They currently rely on their son to cater for the family, including his sister, who suffered a stroke and cannot work. According to the 38-year-old son, he engages in construction work and any other job he can get, including sand winning, for his main livelihood activity. It has become impossible to engage in any agricultural work.

Interviewees argue that while their leaders fight, their sources of livelihood are eroded. One of the elderly sisters noted that when the land was released for the ACL project, they were told that whatever proceeds accrued from the lease of the land would be shared with the community members. Indeed, the elderly sisters and their daughter had received approximately US $50 each in 2014 from the traditional council. They were told it was part of the proceeds from the lease of the land allocated to widows and the sick in the community. But when we checked against other interviews, it was revealed that only a segment of the community, namely, those aligned with one of the factions in the ruling clan, received any cash benefits.

– Case 2: Transition from communal to private land ownership

In a conversation, a 52-year-old man described the transition from communal land ownership to land commodification and private ownership and how that has changed livelihoods and social relations in the community. He stated that Appolonia 'was a farming area, but no one farms anymore. Now, [the community members] have sold and are still selling lands'. He argues that due to the current trend of land being leased by individual community members, it is no longer possible to describe the land in Appolonia as a stool land:

> I do not know whether it is stool land or not anymore. Initially, if you want to farm, you do not need to ask anyone; you just go and farm. Though you farm [on a parcel of land], the land is not yours. Today, there are no more lands for farming. They have leased all the lands in and around the community. I do not know who gave the land to the investors. We were not given any money for the land for the [ACL] project (interview July 2020).

The interviewee also noted that a dispute between the three clans started in 1992, leading to limited interaction and collaboration between the clan elders. Likewise that, within a context of mistrust and a general breakdown of cordiality among the elders and community members, it has become difficult for them to take collective decisions in the community's interest. Concerning the lease of land for the ACL project, he underlines that information flow was lopsided due to the mistrust between the various clans. For instance, the clan to which he belonged only heard about the lease of lands for the ACL project but was not a party to the decision-making process.

With the loss of farmlands, the current livelihood activity in the community is petty trading for women, while most of the men are either doing sand winning or selling land. According to an official of the stool council, 'today, when we talk about what the people of Appolonia do, one can say sand winning and selling land' (interview, May

2019). The interviewee argued that the demand for land for housing and other non-agricultural uses over the past few years has made it difficult for anyone to farm. Thus, it is more lucrative to lease any piece of land one controls than to attempt to farm.

– Case 3: Changing rules and livelihood

The members of a family of four were all allocated three plots of land side by side, paying the necessary fees and given documentation by the traditional council. They then started preparing the land for planting only to be informed by another community member that the parcels of land belonged to him. Upset, they challenged the person with their document from the traditional council but were told by the 'encroacher' that the document from the traditional council was no longer valid. They reported the issue to some elders but were informed there was nothing the elders can do since 'the rules have changed'. Without enough land, the family raised funds to construct a water tank and now sells water for a living.

Another family lost their farm in similar circumstances. They now rely on the eldest daughter, who sells *kenkey* (a Ghanaian staple dish of fermented corn) and fish to support the family. Previously, the household's mother farmed full time and only sold *kenkey* to supplement her income from farming. But since they lost their land, they now depend solely on income from its sale to support the family. This has made their living conditions worse as what was originally a supplementary source of income now has become their primary one.

Large-scale land acquisition: whither the rent?

As is clear from the three representative cases above, the ACL project has adversely affected and intensified conflicts around land tenure—propelling disruptive notions of land as a commodity into the Appolonia community. This is especially so as a problematic aspect of the ACL project is the terms and cost of the lease and how the benefits are distributed in the community. Moreover, the relation with the community is, clearly, key to understanding the broader ramifications of the project. For instance, at the early stage of fieldwork in 2016, officials of the ADCL claimed the ACL project was a partnership with the Appolonia community—an assertion also confirmed by some officials and elders from the Appolonia stool council in conversations with us. What is still unclear following recurring fieldwork in the area since 2016 is the nature and scope of this partnership. Neither ACL managers nor elders of the Appolonia community were willing to provide a clear response as to its contents. For instance, according to a key informant from the traditional council, the community is entitled to 10% of the proceeds from the ACL project. When this assertion was probed further, the interviewee noted that there is supposed to be a financial benefit for the community. There was supposed to be a trustee set up to manage the funds before the ADCL would release them to the community. But, due to the current conflict between the various clans in the community, they have yet to access the funds.

However, the explanation above on the proceeds from the lease of land for the ACL project was rejected by several other community members, who held that some few selected individuals *did* receive money for the lease of the lands. According to these informants, the claim about setting up trustees for the funds to be released was simply a 'smokescreen' to hide the suspicious activities of a few community members. In sum, fiscal benefits for the community remain, as in many large-scale development projects, elusive.

In 2019, during follow-up interviews with the project manager of the ACL, he said that 'we are not privy to the details of the agreement between Rendeavour and the community', adding that it was only the CEO of the ADCL and the top ranks of Rendeavour who could provide details of the nature of the agreement. ADCL officials interviewed claimed that the Appolonia community is a part-owner of the ACL to the

best of their knowledge. Whatever benefit accrues from the project is shared with the community as a shareholder. If that is the case, how has the community benefited from the project since its inception and the sale of some of the serviced plots and houses? These are critical questions that remain unanswered.

Both officials of the ADCL and some members of the Appolonia stool council noted that the project would prioritize the youth of Appolonia in employment and training opportunities. With dwindling agricultural activities in the community, it is argued that the ACL project will offer a variety of job opportunities in construction for the youth. According to the head of community relations, the ADCL liaises with investors to recruit locals to fill job positions. They also provide an opportunity for community members to be trained. However, many Appolonia youth claimed the available jobs were poorly paid—hence their lack of interest. A few of those who got employed also stopped working at the ACL project site because of poor wages. There is also claimed to be segregation in the recruitment of community members, with the clans supporting the ACL project favoured to the detriment of others.

According to officials of the ADCL, the company has renovated the basic school and clinic in the community as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility obligations. They also support various sporting activities. Community members, however, argue that it is not enough for the ADCL to come and paint the school and clinic and call that renovation. It was particularly obvious during our field visits and interaction with health personnel in the community clinic that their living quarters were dilapidated with leaking roofs and a ceiling that was falling down as a result of bat infestation. As the cases indicate, benefits are not readily forthcoming for a heavily divided community with dramatically altered livelihoods.

In the shadows of the City of Light

At a general level, postcolonial urban formations are fraught with both spatial and political interrelatedness and multiple temporalities, comprising 'a complex site of colonial and anti-colonial struggle, postcolonial politics, and neo-imperial economies' (Herbert, 2014: 200). Additionally, the ACL example may also invoke the view that Africa often exhibits elements of 'rogue urbanism' (Pieterse and Simone, 2013). These general African and postcolonial trajectories have only been exacerbated by the way that private urban development has gathered momentum across Africa (Herbert and Murray, 2015; Murray, 2015; Van Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2018; Sawyer *et al*., 2020). Moreover, large-scale urban development may also, in the African context, reflect clear interests from the political elite, as Gastrow (2020) has shown for Luanda and the Angolan presidency's continued involvement in crucial city spaces). Similarly, Bekker *et al*. (2021) also demonstrate how gigantic urban development schemes—like the land-reclamation project Eko Atlantic in Lagos, for instance—reflect how the new enclaved and satellite cities in Africa are integral to a whole new urban order on the continent that integrates real-estate speculation, political elites and new forms of dispossession and (spatial, social, financial) separation (see also Watson, 2014; Murray, 2016). For, with the unprecedented sprawling of African cities fuelled by a growing middle class (Mercer, 2014; Melber, 2016; Mercer and Lemanski, 2020), the demand for housing and other urban infrastructure is on the rise. Private small-scale and multinational corporations are leading the drive to meet the housing deficit in African cities through what has been termed private urban development (Bhan, 2014; Watson, 2014; Fält, 2016).

The sprawling of African cities and large-scale land acquisition has resulted in land commodification and privatization (Hall, 2013; Murray, 2016) and set in motion transformations of livelihoods and social relations in hitherto rural communities (Peprah, 2014; Dekolo *et al*., 2015). The case of Appolonia, as explored here, shows how large-scale land acquisition for the development of a private city has fundamentally transformed social relations and the fabrics of rural livelihoods. From this study, it is also

clear that, while the ACL project is considered by proponents, politicians and the media as a model for the future of African cities, being a part of global and African processes of urbanization it casts long shadows over social relations, community organizations and the diversity of livelihoods hitherto pursued in the area. As Harvey (2003) argues, as capital accumulates, there is the dispossession of vulnerable social groups as wealth is centralized in a few private individuals (Gillespie, 2016; Kan, 2019). The agents of dispossession in the case of Appolonia are foreign investors, local elites and the political class. In Appolonia, the development of the so-called City of Light—a futuristic vision of African cities—leaves a large segment of the population marginalized and brings several uncertainties in its wake.

For, as a rural community, livelihood activities in Appolonia revolve around land, which is based on historical antecedents of communal ownership of a resource. The existing social relations in the community provided security and access to livelihood resources. As the three case studies show, the tradition of communal ownership of a resource, which guaranteed every member of the community equal access to the resource, was crucial in shaping livelihood activities in Appolonia. Privatization and commodification of land reconfigured existing social relations in Appolonia before the northward sprawl of Accra and the ACL project, ensuring that every member of the community had access to land for various livelihood activities. Expropriation of land for the private city is not only dispossessing people as argued by Harvey (2003), Gillespie (2016) and Kan (2019) but has transformed the social relations that protected livelihoods. Thus, the 'violence' wrought by capital here is seen not only in the lack of access to land but the fracturing of the social relations that defined a group of people (see also Herbert and Murray, 2015; Murray, 2017).

Naturally, access to land is essential for the people of Appolonia as an agricultural community. Appolonia's changing social relations and the conflict within and among the clans have disrupted the land tenure arrangements in the community. These conflicts Have created room for powerful community members to appropriate land for their own gain without considering how it affects other community members. The overall sprawling of Accra and the changes in rural areas like Appolonia show what Harvey (2003) describes as the inner contradictions of capital accumulation.

In broad strokes, the privatization of communal land and the changes in social relationships in Appolonia reflect Harvey's analysis of accumulation by dispossession. Although the transaction leading to the development of ACL included large amounts of money changing hands before the land was released for the project, it remains unclear how much the transaction cost, who received the money and how it was distributed. However, what is not opaque is the fact that some members of the community were enriched at the expense of others. While the value of the transaction for the ACL project is not known, what is certain is the costs to the local community.

Furthermore, it is also clear that these threats to the livelihoods of the many can disrupt assets and increase the vulnerability of communities to poverty (Hesselberg and Yaro, 2006). The sprawling of African cities typified by the ACL project and other private city developments (see also, Mercer, 2014; Murray, 2016; Sawyer *et al*., 2020) must therefore also be approached as a significant threat to enduring agricultural livelihoods and not be analysed only as an urban phenomenon that erodes rural worlds. In Appolonia, agricultural activities, which were the primary source income, have been eroded because of the increasing demand for land for non-agricultural activities. Therefore, the ACL project has transformed the community's outlook and accelerated the transition in agricultural livelihoods. Farming *has* become less viable due to the pressure from other land uses and the conflict between the clans that has changed the land tenure arrangement in the community. For many interviewees, the fact that farming is no longer a viable livelihood activity in the community casts a shadow on the community's future. When the question was put to interviewees regarding the

community's future, they were pessimistic about the outlook. For them, the ACL project symbolizes the shadows that uncontrolled sprawl and urbanization, land expropriation and commodification cast over their future.

While one might convincingly argue and demonstrate empirically that African communities harbour powerful potential to transform and shape their futures (see e.g. Ofosu-Kusi and Matsuda, 2020), as the cases above show, severe structural constraints are nevertheless affecting the majority of Appolonia residents. For these, rather than potential and opportunity in the wake of ACL, adaptation to changes in their livelihoods can entail livelihood diversification and migration, as Scoones (1998) argued and as is detailed above. In Appolonia, however, the options for adaptation are becoming increasingly limited. This is because adaptation to change requires individuals or society to draw on and combine physical, social, natural, financial and human assets. In Appolonia, the land is an essential asset for their livelihoods. The institutions of chieftaincy and the communal land ownership system that existed in the community ensured community members had easy access to land for farming. The conflict over the stool and change in social relations in Appolonia has limited people's access to land. The violence of capital is thus both material and symbolic, as the case of Appolonia shows.

The primary adaptation strategy by the community members is the lease of land and sand winning. The irony of these livelihood activities is that they further exacerbate the vulnerability of the community to poverty. Accra's urban explosion and construction boom have also resulted in increased demand for sand. Sand winning has become a viable livelihood activity, especially for the youth. But with the current trend of uncontrolled sand extraction, the few areas remaining for farming are also being destroyed as the productive part of the soil, is removed and hence the land is no longer useful for farming. For many women, the situation is much more precarious; they cannot lease land or engage in sand winning.

Conclusion

Official ACL discourse promotes the ideal urban form that African cities must take—similar to many other future-centric and speculative African urban developments such as Cité de Fleuve in Kinshasa (De Boeck, 2011), Eko Atlantic in Lagos (Ajibade, 2017) or the Waterfall city in Johannesburg (Murray, 2015). Like these other developments, ACL is expected to be a future bastion of tranquillity, security and urban order that sets the pace for other African cities. On the other hand, as detailed above, in the shadows of ACL are radically disruptive transformations of social relations and livelihoods in the Appolonia community—processes well-captured through the lens of accumulation by dispossession, as these generally involve the loss of land without reparations or pay-outs.

Beyond the problems identified in this study, ACL's shadows also raise broader questions about African urban transformation and the overall impacts of Africa's rapidly sprawling cities on rural communities and livelihoods. Viewed from the 'post-rural' world of Appolonia, where sand winning, petty trade and land sale are now important aspects of dramatically changed livelihoods, it seems clear that it is highly problematic to separate private urban developments such as ACL from global and local transformations of territory and capital. As Simone (2020: 606) notes, 'rather than presuming that states and municipalities with their given borders will be the most effective territories for managing critical economic processes, material and financial flows piece together new territories, new metropolitan entities, through the conjunctions of trans-scalar financial flows, expertise and legal arrangements'. The triangulation of financial flows, expertise and legal arrangements are all present in the case of ACL and continue to transform livelihoods—although, as we have shown, the way the triangulation works remains murky—at least viewed from the village of Appolonia. As private urbanism is gaining ground across African cities, attention must go beyond the phantasmagoric imagery of

'new cities' or the promise of fast-track housing solutions to include the heterogeneous, emerging, and dynamic nature of the African urban environments—environments that also, as in the case of ACL, involve dynamics of dispossession.

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