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# Street Vendors Facing Urban Beautification in Accra (Ghana): Eviction, Relocation and Formalization

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## Introduction

- 1 The subjects of street vendors and the place allocated to them, especially in the Global South, have been thoroughly covered in urban studies. Some scholars underline the weight of this informal activity to the urban economy (Lyons and Snoxell 2005a, Skinner 2008, Skinner and Roever 2016), others study conflicts between local authorities and street vendors (Anjaria 2006, Salès 2016). A third axis looks at the capacities of street vendors to resist, to be heard, and to negotiate against the repression they suffer (Cross and Morales 2007, Brown et al. 2010, Benit-Gbaffou 2016). This paper aims to contribute to this large debate by looking at the tension between this important resource for poor people searching to eke out a living and the urban policies implemented by local governments to eradicate street vendors from downtown areas. In Accra, as in many other African cities, urban authorities aim to make Ghana's capital a competitive world-class city (Pieterse 2008, Le Blanc et al. 2014, Watson 2014, Myers 2015). To reach that goal, they have instituted neoliberal principles of entrepreneurial urbanism (Harvey 1989). These major urban transformations attempting to making the city conform to international standards take the form of large urban and infrastructure projects, the construction of high-standing residential spaces aimed at elites, the privatization of land and urban production, and the cleansing operations of street vendors. Actually, in Accra, as in other African cities (Steck et al. 2013, Morange 2015), street vendors and hawkers are regular targets for repressive measures and eviction operations (Yankson 2000, Lyons and Snoxell 2005b, Steel et al. 2014). One of the measures implemented to reinforce

spatial control is the enforcement of old bylaws that outlaw street traders in downtown public spaces. These strategies are not new, as since the colonial period a long history of repression characterizes street vending in Accra. But in these past few years in Accra such as in many other African cities, the bulldozer has become a recurring element in the urban landscape, with evictions or *déguerpissements* becoming quite common (Blot and Spire 2014).

- 2 In Ghana, the local government (AMA, Accra Metropolitan Assembly) considers the regulation of street vendors one of the most pressing challenges faced in this decade. In the past few years, street vendors have been forced to leave spaces they irregularly occupied. Some of them were relocated to specific areas conforming to the socio-spatial order promoted by the local authorities following a formalization process. Removing and relocating street vendors testifies to the power of the local government and its capacity to regulate and re-arrange socio-spatial usages. This power seems to reorganize the ways in which public space is occupied, thus redefining the place street vendors are able to produce.
- 3 This paper focuses on one specific case study, the Octagon Project in the Central Business District (CBD), a regeneration project in downtown Accra, and the relocation and formalization of street vendors to the new Odorna market next to Circle, a major crossroads close to a ring road. This paper is based on empirical data gathered during three rounds of fieldwork (June 2015, April 2016, and September 2016). This fieldwork focused on the case of Odorna Market as part of a drive to “decongest” the city centre. This market located in a peri-central area (close to ring road and Circle) opened in 2010 due to the forced displacement of nearly one thousand traders operating in the former Novotel Market in the heart of the CBD. The guidelines of the fieldwork were to focus on the “post-eviction” period, aiming at analysing the subsequent processes of social, spatial and political changes a few years after a formalizing process. The qualitative methodology relies on direct observation and semi-directed interviews with some AMA officials of the town and planning department, the leaders of vendors’ associations (Queen Mothers and their associates), and 20 traders selling in Odorna Market. This fieldwork also added in semi-directed interviews with the Octagon Project stakeholders, the NGO Wiego and urban dwellers living in the area around Odorna Market. This study explores how street vendors reconfigure their status as city dwellers through their new material position in a public and formal market. After protesting and mobilizing against the strong coercive measure of eviction, the vendors rebuilt a new order for themselves in the formal market.
- 4 This paper aims to contribute to the large debate on the disputed place of street vending activities within a neoliberal and modernised urban agenda in Accra by looking at the process of reordering street vending activities. Starting from the reasons for the relocation process itself that created both dispossession and relocation, we analyse the manner in which a social and spatial order is reshaped within the relocated space. One cannot speak here of immediate dispossession. While there was no financial compensation, the street vendors were nonetheless given priority in obtaining stalls in the new public market. It does not mean that we negate the exclusion process created by the reordering of public space. By methodologically choosing to follow street vendors who “accepted” to be displaced and to have their activity “*formalized*”, this paper aims to understand how power relations are readjusted within a group of vendors in a semi-authoritarian context (Hilgers 2013). Although the media characterize the country as

undergoing democratic transitions, a very powerful social control is nonetheless exercised on the population. This control takes the form of “*everyday small coercion*” (to take up and adapt the expression “*everyday small corruption*”, in Blundo and de Sardan 2006). This everyday small coercion is not only exercised by the police but has a strong political, social and religious anchoring. It is also buttressed by new forms of government linked to the neoliberal policies advocating a certain spatial order.

- 5 The first part of this article questions the processes of restoring order to the city and bringing it up to development standard in a neoliberal and semi-authoritarian context. This shows how urban regeneration and the reordering of public spaces transformed Central Accra through evictions and the formalization of street traders. The second part of this article focuses on micro-level in the Odorna market and considers how social practices and power relationships have been transformed in space and time in the post-protest period.

## Beautification and decongestion: banishing street traders from the CBD

### The Ghanaian credo of neoliberalism

- 6 In the past few years, urban policies aiming to decongest and beautify West African cities have been implemented. The policies of neoliberal regeneration, in Ghana and elsewhere, have major impacts on small petty traders, who are driven out of downtown areas, and on inhabitants of poor neighbourhoods, who are often brutally evicted (Du Plessis 2005, Afenah 2009). In Accra, as in other African cities, the discourse is the same: the figure of the street vendor is seen as inadequate for the modernity of a capital city. The mega events, megaprojects and new masterplans give opportunities to cleanse street traders from strategic parts of the city. Mass evictions have taken place in Abidjan (with the construction of a new road to Bassam), in Bamako (with the France-Africa summit in January 2017), and in Dakar (in the context of the new “Grand Dakar 2025” masterplan), among others.
- 7 In a similar way, Accra’s local government, the AMA, aims to “*clean up*” downtown Accra in order to “*decongest*” the CBD (AMA 2014, Fält 2016, Gillespie 2016). The different measures taken by the AMA aim to reinforce Accra’s competitiveness at an international level (Fält 2016). In 1995, after the end of the military regime and the proclamation of the Fourth Republic, the local government, then ruled by the National Patriotic Party (NPP), introduced a by-law that legally prohibited street vending in the Central District Business. This followed upon the establishment two years earlier of a new local government, the AMA. The watchwords “*beautification*” and “*decongestion*” are part of the “Accra Millenium City Goal” and its urban agenda, deriving from the National Urban Policy Framework and the Ghana National Urban Policy Action Plan (Spio 2011). According to the AMA’s terminology, what is at stake in these operations is the displacement of “*unauthorized structures*”, “*traders and squatters operating on the streets*”, and “*the prosecution of traders and residents who violate the AMA by-laws on selling on pavements*” (AMA 2014: 3). This clean-up of central public areas forms part of the local government’s plans to encourage foreign investment so as to transform the metropolis into a competitive international city. As mentioned by Asiedu and Agyei-Mensah (2008), the local government has the ability to banish street vending from the CBD using a

juridical tool, the by-laws, and a special police, the AMA task force (popularly known as *abeyee*). This takeover of central spaces by local powers is that much more complicated given the problematic property context in Ghana, where strong control of land resides in traditional chiefdoms (Bertrand 2002, Jaquemot 2007). The empowerment of the local government thus depends on its capacity to requisition lands and to maintain its authority over public spaces. The 1995 by-law banning street traders within the CBD takes up a 1943 colonial ordinance that was the existing legislation until then.

- 8 The major Octagon project at the heart of the Central Business District illustrates and materializes these ambitions of beautification and uplifting to a global standard. The construction of this large mixed-use luxury building (75,000 square meters for offices, apartments, a shopping mall) led to the displacement of informal traders occupying the strategic space in front of the central Novotel Hotel. Taking the place of the informal market was a one-stop shop complex that the urban authorities elaborated in a partnership with the company Dream Realty. The Octagon Project is a huge luxury residential complex set for completion in 2017. It is a joint venture between a Lebanese developer from Beirut and a wealthy Ghanaian entrepreneur financing this huge project through a public-private partnership (PPP). In the frame of the project, Dream Realty Ltd. is building for AMA new offices in the front part of the plot (now called millennium city Hall for AMA). This ultra-modern glass building symbolizes the beautification process in two ways: firstly, the privatisation of a public space by a classical PPP (designated BOT in Ghana) aiming at being more economically competitive; and secondly, the cleansing up of the streets around the new complex where street vendors are theoretically and practically forbidden to operate in order to meet international standards. Thus, the beautification project of Accra has brought into play an aesthetic discourse alongside a hygienic discourse, thus allowing for the introduction of norms surrounding the “good behaviour” of city dwellers in public spaces (Harms 2012). This rhetoric deeply echoes colonial times as the hygienist dimension of urban policy enshrines the need to control the behaviour of natives. For instance, the by-laws related to hygiene in the market of the British colony and the Market Model By-Laws of 1944 aimed to clean up crowded areas (see Native States Market By-Laws, PRAAD, Accra, ADM/11/1/1583, quoted by Vasconi 2015). The acts of Accra’s former AMA mayor, Dr A. Vanderpuije, who held office from 2009 to 2017, show this at work. In 2015, he personally went into the streets to point out how public spaces should be cleaned and how “good” modern city dwellers should behave in public spaces. This kind of rhetoric is often taken up by inhabitants themselves, as R., a former street vendor who now works for the international NGO WIEGO, explains: *“It is not beautiful to have vendors in the streets. The law does not allow it; they need to be in a market. The AMA needs to find a space for all the street vendors; they cannot be tolerated like this on the street. They need to respect the law, but in return the markets need to be maintained”* (interview, 30 March 2016). However, not all the vendors agreed with the decision from the start. A diverse number of those interviewed used the term “sack” to describe the eviction processes.

**Picture 1. The Octagon complex at the heart of the CBD: entrepreneurial urbanism and eviction of street traders**



SOURCE: AUTHORS, SEPTEMBER 2016

## From the street to a covered public market

- 9 The terms “beautification” and “decongestion” are used to justify the eviction of street vendors alongside modernization and neoliberal principles (Blot and Spire 2014). In 2010, the authorities began to displace street vendors in order to free up the site for the Octagon building project (see map 1). This huge real estate project could not get off the ground unless squatters and petty traders were first evicted from the heart of the CBD. That is why, in July 2010, the AMA forced street vendors to move to a legal market at Odorna, near Nkrumah Circle, one of the main traffic hubs in the city (undergoing construction). The authorities provided the evicted vendors 1,200 locations in a “covered” market. The vendors – most of them females selling fruits and vegetables – were strongly encouraged to set up shop in the Odorna market. In the Odorna neighbourhood, two markets had been recently created in order to “welcome” the vendors cleared out of the downtown streets: the Pedestrian Shopping Mall (PSM), built in 2006, and the Novotel Market (NM), built in 2010. A gate that should be closed each night materializes the limits of the formal market (in reality, the fence remains open at night to allow for the delivery of goods). Two caretakers, as the Novotel Market Association desires, work day and night at the market to provide security. They are not paid as caretakers but as intermediaries between the semi-wholesalers who come every night and the formal vendors buying goods. In contrast to the pedestrian Mall, Odorna Market is very decrepit. As one of the leaders explained to us, AMA should have built a

temporary structure so that vendors could have been given a choice in the design of a permanent and modern structure.

**Pictures 2a and 2b. Pedestrian Mall and Odorna Market: a “new” decrepit infrastructure**



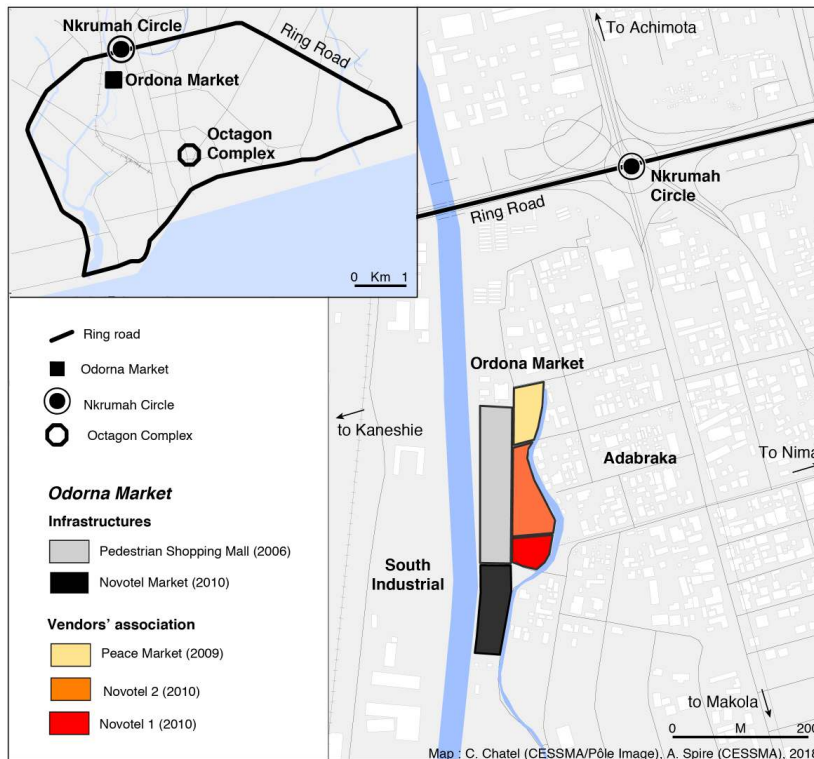
**SOURCE: AUTHORS, APRIL 2016**

- 10 The PSM specializes in the sale of non-food goods while the Novotel Market sells perishable goods. These two markets were part of the larger project to make Odorna a



new commercial hub connected to the modernization of Nkrumah Circle's intersection and the reorganization of the city's bus terminals. Yet the formal market is threatened by rain and floods because of its environmental location (tied between two gutters), as the map indicates (map 1).

**Map 1. Odorna market in Accra**



- 11 In the early part of 2010, the announcement of the market's relocation met with a mixed response. Although a number of vendors directly joined Odorna, others did not. Most vendors targeted for relocation objected to the city authorities' plans. They were hesitant to give up their strategic position downtown for a market thought to be on life support and out of the way. In May 2010, the relocation plans thus occasioned strident cries of protest, which were taken up by international networks. Empowered by international NGOs like WIEGO and Streetnet, the protesting vendors, most of them female, resisted for a number of months and even threatened to march naked on the Parliament. They asked for an upgraded market with better concrete infrastructures. The media highlighted this larger mobilization. Some protestors demonstrated in front of the Castle at the end of May 2010. This kind of protest has been recurrent in the Ghanaian story of (urban) mobilisation (Sackeyfio-Lenoch 2016: 89).
- 12 The resistance was also the result of a conflict about the project itself and its governance in 2010. There was clearly a political conflict between the AMA mayor (A. Vanderpuije) and a Member of Parliament (MP) in charge of the Greater Regional Ministry who did not agree with Vanderpuije's decision to move vendors from Novotel to Odorna. While city hall urged the street vendors to move to the Odorna market, the MP warned them against flood risks on site that made it inappropriate for relocation. Yet, the President of the Republic himself, Atta Mills, personally summoned the MP to force the female vendors to leave. The opposition between the Regional Ministry and the AMA only ended when the

President asked the MP to stop the mobilization. Thus, the relocation process spotlighted the power relationship and the conflict of governance between the AMA and the Greater Regional Ministry.

- 13 Locally, though, different, sometimes contradictory grievances were voiced via the participation of groups protesting the decision-making process (Afenah 2009, Adaawen 2011). After much resistance and negotiation, the AMA decision had not changed. In July 2010, 900 out of nearly 2,000 vendors accepted a place at the new Odorna market (fieldwork 2015). The first vendors who arrived took up places in the car park instead of inside the covered market set up by the AMA.

## Reordering processes

- 14 Despite the protests, opposition and reservations that the relocation initiative triggered, the plans to “reorder” the city are under way and the status of street vendors is being constantly renegotiated. Once an eviction order is undertaken, the city no longer has coercive and direct powers. Instead, other forms of control appear. Despite being less visible and more diffuse, they are nonetheless just as effective, with new figures in charge of implementing them.

### The crucial role of the “go between”: focus on the competitive associations in Odorna

- 15 The relocation process led to a very important competition for leadership of the market. The former unified group – or seen like that by the vendors – burst into several sub-groups or sections. Three phases can be identified. At first, in 2009, the “Peace Market” was created by those who agreed to the resettlement. They settled in the northern part of the car park, bypassing the logic of formalization and the assignation of a formal place inside the closed market (see map 1). In a second period, after July 2010, another group of women accepted to join the formal structure but, quickly, they became divided into two groups, “Novotel” and “Novotel 2”, as they call themselves. Spatially, there is an invisible border between the three groups, with each group having a leader, a “Queen Mother”, defending its right to stay and defining its community interests. Diverse trajectories have led to the creation of these competing associations.
- 16 The Novotel Market Association settled inside the peeling structure is ruled by Mrs B. She used to be a semi-wholesaler selling oranges. At the end of the 2000s, faced with unpaid bills, B. complained that she could no longer unload and stock the goods that she sold in front of the Novotel. She then met T., who worked for the AMA’s health and hygiene department. Responsible for all the markets, he promised to find B. a new place of business. It was at this time that the city hall gave street vendors one year to move out of downtown, promising them a new market. B., however like the others, quickly realized that the new location was poor, and that being displaced into a market made out of vulgar sheet metal would lead to lower revenue. After long negotiations and some pressure, B. gave in and finally accepted to be displaced in exchange for a stall in the market. As an influential woman who had learned to speak in public thanks to an NGO, B. was elected Queen Mother after the relocation and formed the ‘Novotel Market Traders Association’.

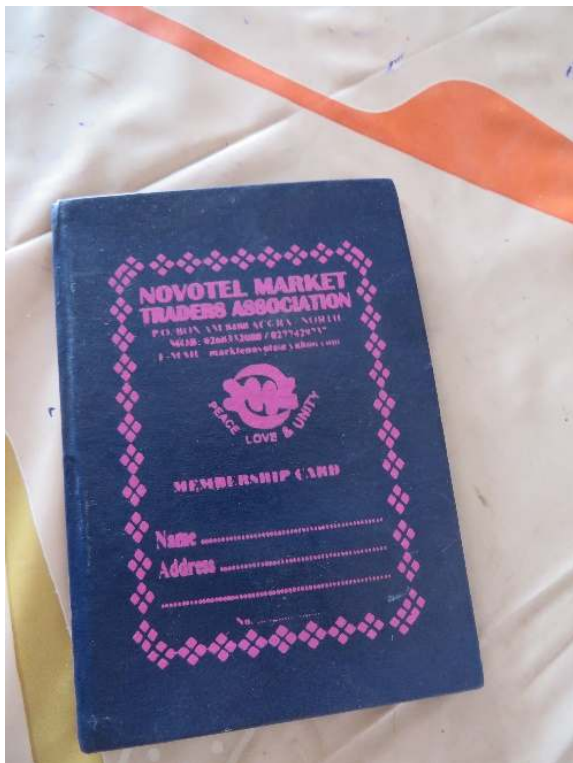
- 17 Her role as a Queen Mother is to appease conflicts and to manage resources. The motto she enjoys repeating is “share and control”. For the security of the market, B. can rely on the two permanent caretakers and their team of carriers. For supporting the organizations and taxing its membership, thirty-three leaders, almost all women, have been theoretically designated as in charge of one specific item (pineapple, cassava, fish, etc.); they are supervised by the Queen Mother. B. is in turn supported by T., a retired member of the AMA’s Environmental Health service who is familiar with the various laws and regulations. He became the association’s administrator for the Novotel Market Traders Association and thus an important mediator for resolving the conflict with competing associations and the AMA. T. has the ambiguous position of protecting the interests of the vendors while at the same time ensuring that the AMA’s rules of good conduct are respected. In order to implement a good code of conduct, the association set up a disciplinary committee consisting of B., four items leaders, and T. The local association is able to support activities through common projects (tontines, locally called *susu*) and emergency loans following a death or an accident. Control over the market is thus exerted very much at local level, with everyone being made aware of the rules through associations.
- 18 A number of female vendors reject this very heavy economic and social control of the market. Some of them have strongly objected, refusing from the start to align themselves with the practices implemented by the Novotel Market Association. At first having no designated vending space in the Odorna market, they began to occupy the parking lot in front of the market, which displeased the association they refused to join (and whose taxes they do not pay). The leaders of the Novotel Association denounced these vendors ‘outside’ the market for disloyal and deviant practices; there have been protests and even lawsuits. During the legal proceedings, the association’s leaders point to the need to follow the law: “*You have to see that the law is working ... The law is there already. They have a task force*” (interview, 29 March 2016). The items leaders have called upon the AMA to intercede with the dissident vendors on the Novotel Market Association’s behalf.
- 19 In reaction to these repeated attacks, the female vendors who occupied the parking organized themselves into an association, the Novotel Association 2, electing their own leader, D. The Novotel Association 2 has twelve head members (item leaders) and, since 2011, a notebook for establishing the membership. It is designated “*by laws and article of association for the Novotel N°2 Cooperative Traders Society Limited*”. The Queen Mother D. asserts her authority explaining that she had not decided to become a leader but had been designated by some vendors in order to resist B.’s excessive control. Actually, a permanent political conflict oppose the two Queen Mothers. All this underlines the symbolic role of the Queen Mother in competing to maintain order in a formal market.
- 20 Within several hundred meters, then, no less than three associations with three Queen Mothers are in open conflict with each other. While controlling its own adherents, each association competes against the other two, denouncing their behaviours, loyalties and networks of influence.
- 21 The emergence of these figures accompanied the formalization, regularization, and implementation of new rules overseeing the operation of the market. At a micro level, the Odorna market appears to be a space of conflict where every individual, now recognized with an assigned space, fights for his or her livelihood in the city. This happens through different forms of constraint and coercion. The market is thus a miniature replica of the numerous stakes involved in governance, with political conflicts and clientelism that can

be read through complex social-spatial relationships at different formal levels (from daily relationships in the market to links with WIEGO).

## Registration as the grassroots of the formalization

- 22 Inside Odorna Market, due to the power of the competing associations, each vendor was resettled in a defined stall, and registered in a book according to the foodstuff sold. Each association is in charge for security, cleaning, closing and registering vendors. The item leaders are in charge of enforcing the rules of the market and being aware of the presence of each vendor registered. If one vendor is missing, each item leader has to report this to the Queen Mother. Lines were drawn up on the market floor so that vendors would not infringe upon the public right of way. T.'s assistant, G., looked after the entrances and exits of the market and helped with the unloading of goods day and night. Inspired by the way in which the previous association at Novotel Market operated, G. oversaw the daily control and functioning of the market.

**Picture 3. Membership notebook: a step towards formality**



**SOURCES: AUTHORS, MAY 2015**

- 23 Registration symbolizes the continuity of old organizational models. It involves complying with a large array of rules that define the space for business, respecting the market's opening and closing hours, and having official membership in an association which in turn has a 'certificate of membership of Greater Accra Markets Association'. The diverse duties linked to the registration operated by the associations for the AMA implies a series of rights and duties for the vendors either inside or outside the peeling infrastructure.

- 24 The same also goes for the control exerted by the AMA through collectors who go through the market every day to collect 50 cents from traders, as happens in most markets, according to a WIEGO report (Roever 2014). In 2014 in Odorna, street vendors who carry or hold their merchandise on tables pay a daily tax of 0.50 Ghana cedis (0.10 euros). The payment of this daily tax is materialized by a receipt symbolizing the respect of municipal law (whether inside the market or not). According to WIEGO (interview, 30 March 2016), this tax had been at 0.20 Ghana cedis in 2013. In 2014, vendors with a shop or a stand in the market paid an annual license of 10 Ghana cedis. This tax is levied regardless of whether the traders are inside the market or in the parking outside. “*We don’t know what the AMA does with all this money, but here in the market, we cannot do as we like*”, the vice-president of the Peace Market, M., explains. ‘*We have to pay the tax. If you don’t, the AMA will give you trouble. They take the goods. You have to pay*’ (interview, 2 April 2016). In charge of collecting the daily tax, M. nonetheless details the difficulty she has in getting everyone to pay since a number of traders are in extreme financial difficulties, if not poverty. She admits to not knowing where the money goes. The “richest” vendors, who have the most durable stalls (containers transformed into shops), pay an annual tax to the AMA, while other vendors pay B. directly. This practice seems to have the support of international NGOs like WIEGO due to certain people like R., an intermediary between the structure, the AMA, and the market. Different microcredit lenders, who are competing intensely against each other in this commercial space, come daily, marking down in their notebooks the sums vendors deposit with them so that a trip to the bank can be avoided.
- 25 In 2016, six years after the displacement, rather than there being a lingering criticism or resistance to the public authorities who orchestrated the forced eviction, the group of women who fought against the displacement has broken down. The power dynamics have changed among the displaced vendors. New conflicts have broken out, focused on the space each vendor occupies in the market, between vendors who have accepted to take a stall within the covered market and those who have returned to spaces on the fringes of the market (in the parking lot or side streets) or even downtown. The latter are in a large majority, as a number of different strategies have been taken up to keep one foot in the Odorna market and another one outside. The most widespread practice in this respect is to leave goods in the market, which becomes a warehouse of sorts, and to set up shop in the parking lot outside or even to sell goods downtown, where there are more customers.
- 26 The studies examining the conditions for vendors operating in Odorna Market after the displacement clearly show that the relocation was a double failure: the vendors’ revenue has considerably fallen and they have returned to the streets (Adaawen 2011, Adaawen and Jorgensen 2012). Yet the relocation has allowed vendors to obtain a legal status and to transform the way their activities have been ruled and reordered. The rearrangement of the activities shows that the urban ordering – understood here as the operation of formalizing, relocating and allocating a stall based on the nature of the goods sold – is only temporary. Vendors adapt to coercion; they transgress the rules and return to the streets at certain times of the day, week, or year. Municipal agents (the *abeyee*) regularly circulate downtown. While they embody ancient figures of municipal control, their deployment has intensified with the official injunctions concerning beautification and decongestion of the sidewalks. Their presence does not signify the end of informal street commerce but rather the setting up new rules of behaviour between agents and vendors (verbal interactions, spatial location, the acceptance of a daily tax). Just as they do with formal vendors, the agents of the AMA make the rounds every day of informal vendors

installed on the street even though this activity is outlawed (Steel et al. 2014). The essential thing is to find at all costs “a place” in the reordering process.

## Adapting and conforming socio-spatial order as a formal (street) vendor

### Creating division, reinforcing order

- 27 For the street vendors, formalization is linked to the quest for dignity and respectability. The registration is one of the most important steps, but by itself, it does not suffice to be recognized as a formal vendor. The gain in social respectability through the formalization process can be explained by how it involves processes of familiarity, seniority, acquaintance, and clientelism. Formalization and legitimacy are constructed for a large part by the important role played by the Queen Mothers. Different discourses are thus mobilized by these “big women” to differentiate themselves from, in their words, “*small girls*”. These discourses – pertaining to the respect of the law, seniority, autochthony, physical attributes – allow them to claim their place in the city as they are adjusted and adapted for different enunciation contexts. International networks play a fundamental role in this apprenticeship of female empowerment (Lindell 2010). As B. explains, WIEGO taught them “*how to present yourself to the state, how to talk in public. How to prepare your business plan? How to manage our financial issues? Why we have to pay our taxes and for what? What you can claim when you have paid your taxes? What you can claim for?*” (interview, 1 April 2016). B has integrated these diverse skills for reinforcing her power relationship within the market, creating at the same time dissidence between evicted vendors.
- 28 The vendors work in different ways at individual and collective levels to secure their formal activity and their right to have a place. The Queen Mother of the Novotel Association, B., mainly uses the lexicon of the respect for the law to denounce the practices of other vendors: “*They have been selling their wares at the car park, creating congestion, and preventing the trucks, which brings in goods into the market from entering. With the relocation, everybody has a stall. You have to be in your place they gave you. This is the right place*” (Interview, 2 June 2015). In an opposing vein, for the leaders of the “dissidents”, being formal and occupying a place in the city is a product of fact, from below: they have occupied the same space day after day, year after year. This is how D., Queen Mother of Novotel 2, justifies her place: “*Why should I have to submit to B’s orders? I have been in the market for as long as she has. I’m here every day. She has no right to ask me to justify myself. She establishes rules that my vendors do not accept; that’s why we have decided to steer clear of her practices and of her market*” (interview, 4 April 2016). The assistant of the Queen Mother of the third market (Peace Market) has this to say: “*Why would I go to that horrible market whose roof will fall on your head? As we never should have left downtown, so we don’t want to be hidden behind the Pedestrian Mall that no one shops at. They threaten us here because we are near the station and thus have a better location, and that annoys them. But, when it comes down to it, we are here and they won’t make us leave*” (interview, 2 April 2016).
- 29 Daily, long-term occupation seems to have led to a potential recognition of rights because the AMA officially recognized D. as Queen Mother of Novotel Association 2 in April 2016. D. proudly displays the different “*Business operating permits*” that prove her legitimacy, not only for the location she occupies but also as Queen Mother: “*I have the papers. We can stay where we are*” (2 April 2016). She goes even further, saying that she met traditional

chiefs who had sold her the land: *"I have the paper of the land. I saw the chief"*. The lexicon of a formal condition intersects with the discourse on autochthonous belonging. The Ga people are one of the most important groups in Ghana, especially in the south, where Accra is located; they are considered as the owners of the land in the central part of the city. These various papers are laminated and framed and on display in her house, not at the market; they prove that she is in the right place, whatever the other Queen Mothers say. In general, the vendors are engaged in fierce competition to receive such papers and other stamps from the administration, the AMA and the Trade Union Company that supervises Accra's forty-two markets. The vendors keep any proof attesting to their exemplary conduct. The different papers that these female vendors present are eminently symbolic in the process of legitimation and accreditation. By their materiality, they participate in urban life and in the forms of citizenship and city dwelling (Hull 2012).

- 30 The very act of speaking up in public is itself defined by conformity to the formal condition. It is part of the city dweller's daily apprenticeship in constructing civic recognition. This perpetual quest for being a formal vendor at different levels (different discourses, the production and respect of rules, the accumulation of papers) also shows how fragile the situation of these women is. Their presence in the city appears to be conditional, even after their relocation and formal recognition.

### Being a formal vendor: towards inclusion?

- 31 A tension is at the heart of the formalization process for the street vendors relocated in Odorna. On the one hand, they see the market in a negative light because it is isolated, making it difficult to maintain a dynamic business (the absence of a road and the difficulty for accessing is always mentioned by the vendors). There are also nostalgic references to the Novotel's old location in the heart of the CBD. On top of that, Odorna is a site that scares off people and that is considered dangerous because of recurring flooding. Everyone remembers what happened on 3 June 2015, a disaster that cost the lives of 150 people trapped by the water and fire near the market. On the night of 3 June 2015, while a heavy rain beat down on Accra, dozens of individuals, blocked by the rapid rise of waters around the Circle interchange and the Odorna market, found refuge in a gas station. For unknown reasons, the station exploded, leading to the death of around 150 people.
- 32 On the other hand, there is more than opposition to the Odorna market or a feeling that the site is dangerous. In fact, many see much to envy in the market. The vendors deploy any number of individual (like the Queen Mothers) or collective strategies (through multiple associations, umbrellas or networks) to draw out the slim resources that the market offers. The division of the trading space into three markets is the result of these battles of influence, which testifies to the ceaseless quest to exercise as a formal vendor. In this battle, the market, which appears like a microcosm, is far from being a self-contained or closed space. To the contrary, it is a space connected to a neighbouring slum (the Sahara community). The vendors thus go nearly daily "to Accra", which means the downtown Makola market, in order to complement their livelihoods.
- 33 These individual daily tactics are amplified by more collective strategies of recognition during important events, like the December 2016 presidential elections. According to our first surveys in May 2015, B. supported Dr Zanetor Rawlings, daughter of the former President of Ghana Jerry Rawlings and a Parliamentary Aspirant (NDC) for the Klottey Korle Constituency. Rawlings's stickers and flags adorned the market; even though the

market was a marginal space in her constituency, it represented a strategic space come voting time since the vendors, like other citizens, are allowed to vote in their workplaces. The candidate undertook a large campaign around the market, from the neighbouring community to the larger area around the Circle interchange. After the deadly fire in June 2015, she was designated ambassador of the “TV3 June 3 Disaster Support Fund”, a television fundraising program to help the victims’ families.

- 34 After the tragic flooding episode, the different associations organized together to make their collective voice heard by the public authorities: *“The state and the city have to act. They cannot close their eyes. The government need to do something, to improve the place”* (interview with B. the Queen Mother, 4 June 2015). The vice-president of the Peace Market expressed similar opinions: *“We are waiting for the government. We were removed. The contractors did not come to cover the market. The gutter is a problem”* (interview, 2 April 2016). The leaders went to the AMA headquarters to demand the cleaning out of the gutters behind the market as well as elevating the market and its walls. They complain that they have never received any compensation for the damage caused by the water (the loss of cash, foodstuffs, the destruction of stalls). While they expect much, the female vendors express little rancour towards the public authorities, who are not seen as responsible for the flooding. Urban risk seems to be depoliticized, presented as a natural catastrophe or a fatality (as the root meaning of the term “disaster”, with its strong Christian apocalyptic connotation, underlines). At the location of the gas station, a banner was raised: *“In Memoriam, June 3rd, 2015, Water and fire”*. Instead, the inhabitants of the city themselves are blamed – they are perceived as ill-adapted to living in a city by throwing out their garbage in public spaces, which fills up and obstructs the canals and gutters.
- 35 Several months after the dramatic event and as the election approached, popular clean-up operations of the canals began. Zanetor Rawlings is credited with initiating these actions. In September 2016, the candidate organized a large meeting with President Mahama in the Sahara neighbourhood (beside Odorna Market), to which the various Queen Mothers and numerous vendors were invited. At the end of the month, supporters of “candidate Zanetor” updated T., the Novotel Association’s secretary, every day with a list of vendors who were sympathetic to her. These vendors decided to register to vote at their workplace rather than their residence: *“We vote here to change our life here”*. T. was thrilled with these vote transfers: *“The greater the vote for Zanetor, the easier it will be for us to press our case on the market”* (interview, 28 September 2016). Zanetor, just like her opponent M. Philip Adisson (MPP), promised to improve the market by elevating it to avoid flooding, improving access, and building a permanent market building. As the elections approached and the vendors spoke of nothing but votes, the Queen Mothers appeared to have forgotten the tensions between them to come together to turn the market a political force. In December 2016, Rawlings was elected MP for the constituency, even though she supported President J.D. Mahama, who was, against all expectations, beaten after one term in office.

## Conclusion

- 36 Bringing about new ways of being a vendor in the city after an eviction is not only the product of opposition between the city dwellers and the urban authorities who ordered these changes. Vendors participate in creating a new socio-spatial order that extends the framework set up by the necessity of relocation. Once they have been relocated, street



vendors update and adapt their practices to consolidate their activity in relation to the urban authorities, and in so doing grant some respectability given by formalization (Morange and Spire 2017). Through the formalization process, street traders are selectively included within the modernist agenda and the economic growth project of the metropolitan government. This is one side of a larger process of spatial and political inclusion specific to neoliberalism. This process of formalization reveals power dynamics that play out at different levels of time and space. In the post-eviction context, social and spatial order is upheld by daily practices of insidious coercion. This market might appear as a neoliberal microcosm, with the figure of the “good vendor” developing all the traits of market capitalism: entrepreneurship, microcredit, social capital relations, collective strategies to protect rights and individual tactics to conserve assets. Yet this also opens up new possibilities for the city dwellers to renovate their urban condition.

- 37 This point leads us to emphasise how street vendors may strategically endorse the logic of formalization and of order, even if they are likely to transform rules in practice. Once the authority of the AMA forcing the eviction has disappeared, other forms of authorities have merged within the relocation area. Several rules and constitutions state what the formal vendors have the right to do or not do, where they have the right to be or not be. As a result, papers have become an important tool for any vendor to prove and claim his or her (right) place. These could include the receipt of the daily tax paid to the AMA or a paper certifying membership in an association, but they could also include membership in a *susu* group (microcredit association) or having a bank account. These are all important proofs of the construction of a new condition and establishment in urban society. We would not argue that street vendors have completely endorsed the logic of spatial ordering and of ruled practices.
- 38 However, the relocated vendors learn how to integrate rules as a tool in their strategy to preserve their assigned “right place” in the city. In order to do so, city dwellers are willing to fight for their individual rights to preserve their assets (collecting papers, microcredits, relation to ownership). Yet, they do it in the frame of a community organization to be protected against scarcity and uncertainty, questioning who is willing to be recognized within the leadership competition. All this questions the transformation of the social norms within the reordering process: how to talk, to negotiate, to represent.
- 39 The everyday practices observed in the relocation site of Odorna show that people do not reject the principles of the ordered and competitive city. We cannot maintain that city dwellers are willing to become “good traders” only because they accept the modernization program, the association constitution (alignment, opening hours of the market, cleaning, etc.) and sometimes refer to laws or papers. Street vendors try to dialogue with political actors, respecting (or not) the way to access the state. This case study of Odorna market raises the question of the place in the city reshaped for city dwellers managing formalization. We cannot easily conclude that formalization has improved their livelihoods, whereas the formalization process is fostered by the international agencies in order to reduce poverty. On the contrary, for some former street vendors, living conditions seem to have worsened. Thus, if their new formalized status has not led to a better economic situation, one might wonder if it has given them at least a place with uncertain political impacts in the city and broadly, if they become ordinary citizens, allowed to take part in (urban) society.

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## ABSTRACTS

This paper focuses on the consequences of the relocation processes of a group of street vendors evicted from downtown Accra in 2010. This eviction is seen as an emblematic operation of the decongestion and beautification of Accra's city centre. Relocated in a public market, the street vendors set up new kinds of organizations, which were themselves characterised by division and competition for ruling the new allocated space. Based on empirical data collected between 2015 and 2016, this paper shows that vendors rebuilt a new order for themselves in the formal market. The paper stresses the daily control of the relocation space and raises the issue of the social and political transformation of the conditions of street vendors experiencing eviction and relocation. The development of the relocation space shows how power relationships between vendors, city dwellers and urban authorities are being reconfigured.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** street vending, informality, beautification, eviction, relocation, formalization, urban transformation

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