# DECONGESTING ACCRA

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Some of the big men who drive past us every morning to work feel we are a nuisance to the society. They wish they would drive to work without the sight of these young men and women who are making a living on the street. The AMA [Accra Metropolitan Assembly] must not decongest because of these men who believe Ghana was made for them and we are meant to be slaves.
– Yaa Mamuma (Pure-water vendor)

Where do they want us to go when we leave the streets? After all, I do not believe that our mere presence on the streets litters the streets so why the harassment? We are not mad men and women who are causing a nuisance or disturb the public peace; we are sane beings who are making a conscious attempt at trying to put in place measures to help kill the hunger that appears in our stomach from time to time.
– Philip Adjei (Cocoa drink vendor)
(Tagoe 2011)

*Why the fixation with "decongestion" in Ghana's local media and planning policies? How might decongestion speak to the perceived challenges of the nation's growing urban centres? What can decongestion possibly reveal about policies of exclusion and the right to the city?*

In this essay I examine "decongestion"—the removal of informal settlers and sellers from public spaces in Ghanaian cities. The above epigraph is taken from a blog post by journalist George Tagoe in the aftermath of one such undertaking in Accra. On a regular basis municipal governments announce a "serious decongestion exercise in the central business district" (Odoi-Larbi 2007). With the launch of each new endeavour, there is the promise that this time the activity will be more successful and more permanent than the last: "As we decongest the city, we will make sure that they [squatters] do not get back to the place [city-centre]" (GhanaMMA 2013). However despite the pervasiveness of decongestion as policy, the voices of those affected are often excluded from the official archives of the city, both in the media (e.g. newspapers articles, television programmes, and radio broadcasts) and in urban planning documents. Repeated decongestions and the subsequent excision of the urban poor from the pool of rights-bearing citizens, I will argue, points to fears about the uncontrolled flows of certain people and goods in Ghana's urban centres.

These people and their goods pose a threat not only due to the fact of their movement, but because of the kinds of bodies in motion. This is such that in the same breath, hawkers can simultaneously be accused of wrecking the city by "spring[ing]-up" and "invad[ing] public space" (i.e. moving around too much, too suddenly) as well as by "loiter[ing] all over the metropolis" (i.e. not moving enough) by the Minister for Tourism (AMA 2005). Likewise, whereas open markets and slums must be destroyed to reduce the volume of people and vehicles entering the city-centre, high-end shopping malls and high-rise apartment buildings that surface nearby—and that also attract large crowds—are celebrated.



Shop Assistant in Kiosk at Old Fadama. Photo courtesy Debbie Onuoha.

## FROM THE WORLD'S FILTHIEST...

Near the end of 2009, the news that travel guide *Lonely Planet* had ranked Accra as the second worst city in the world hit many Ghanaians like a slap in the face. In a listing of the "9 least favourite cities," compiled from feedback by the site's members, the nation's capital was described as "ugly, chaotic, sprawling, and completely indifferent to its waterfront location" (Wagle 2010). Ever since then, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly as well as its counterparts in other urban centres such as Kumasi, Tema, Sekondi-Takoradi, Cape Coast, and Tamale have striven through city upgrade schemes to improve the images portrayed of Ghana's cities to the rest of the world. At present, some of these development plans include the construction of an external ring road to ease traffic in Kumasi and an environmental restoration project to "transform the filth-laden Korle Lagoon in Accra into a modern pleasure and transport complex comparable to those in Paris" (RadioXYZonline 2013). In each of these cases, decongestion is represented as a necessary first step without which future imaginings of the city cannot be ushered in.

Burning Waste Near the Korle Lagoon. Photo courtesy Debbie Onuoha.

### ...TO 'MILLENIUM CITIES'

Urbanization is fast-expanding in much of the global south. On the African continent alone, an estimated 50 percent of people will be living in cities by the year 2030 as compared to just 20 percent in the 1980s (McKinsey Global Institute 2010). After the discovery of offshore oil in 2007, Ghana's economy has seen rapid growth and has been hailed as one of the fastest-growing in the world. This is made manifest in urban explosions as waves of people move from rural areas into its cities. Places such as Accra and Kumasi have witnessed an influx of new residents from the country's less prosperous regions as migrants have sought better opportunities for self-advancement.

The rate of migration into these cities usually outstrips authorities' abilities to plan and provide for the new residents in terms of accommodation, employment, and service provision. In Ghana, it is estimated that 45 percent of the urban population lives in slums (UN-HABITAT 2009) and that 45.9 percent of urban workers are engaged in activities in the informal economy (Ghana Statistical Service 2008). Thus "the cities of the future, rather than being made out of glass and steel as envisioned by earlier generations of urbanists, are instead largely constructed out of crude brick, straw, recycled plastic, cement blocks, and scrap wood" (Davis 2006, 18). When local governments struggle to meet the explosive infrastructural demand, informal settlements and markets emerge, providing forms of sustenance beyond the legal realm. In Accra for instance, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) is only able to process 60 percent of all waste in the city (Boadi and Kuitunen 2002), so in the absence of metropolitan amenities and utilities, people make do: in this case they dispose of garbage by burning it or dumping it into open waterways.

The designation of Accra and Kumasi as "Millennium Cities" by Columbia University's Earth Institute in 2010 has been both a recognition of and an impetus for the efforts at urban renewal by the AMA under Mayor Alfred Vanderpuije and the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA), led by Mayor Samuel Sarpong. These have been aimed at transforming the capital city and the Garden City, respectively, into modern, globally competitive centres in order to achieve some of the UN's eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Not surprisingly, decongestion schemes have since been intensified (Bentil 2011). Illegal slums and informal markets, which are visible manifestations of urban poverty, become a blot on the national psyche for authorities working hard to engineer modern metropolises. Therefore local assemblies attempt to purge spaces that may symbolize their failure to fully urbanize as intended. Especially in Accra and Kumasi, stories about decongestion campaigns, spearheaded by the mayors, frequently capture the national imagination through newspaper articles, television news reports, and radio programmes (Owusu 2009).


Waste floats on the surface of the Korle Lagoon near Old Fadama. Photo courtesy Debbie Onuoha.

### 'DECONGESTING' GHANA

In the wee hours of the morning, assembled police, military, and fire personnel stand guard as the city's decongestion Task Forces break down and burn kiosks and shacks—structures considered "out of place"—and confiscate valuables such as traders' wares and/or slum dwellers properties (Ghana Broadcasting Corporation 2014). In some cases these items are redeemable upon the payment of a fine to the appropriate municipal authority. In others, they are lost forever. Many owners look on helplessly as their property is damaged or seized, and others try to intervene but are met with violent restraint by the law enforcement officials present (Appiah-Korang Jr. 2009).

Decongestion, as it is thus presented in the popular media, involves the removal of all informal structures that clog up the streets in the central business areas (Adjovu 2009). This conception of informality extends to both work and home: street vendors as well as slum dwellers are the objects of such operations. In the case of the former, their activities on the "sidewalks" are said to hamper pedestrian movement and road traffic, as well as to create filth and general uncleanliness.

Informal homes, on the other hand, are viewed as hubs of crime and grime, which stand to infect the city and need to be expelled (Obeng-Odom 2011).

With the informal destroyed, the city is cleansed (for the time being) and pedestrians commend the exercise. As one woman said, "it has made the sidewalks free and convenient to use. I hope that it does not become a nine day wonder as previous exercises" (Ghana News Agency 2013). The mayor may be in the headlines later that day for spearheading the amazing transformation of Ghana's cities from some of the dirtiest and most despised only a year earlier, to greener, cleaner, emerging metropolises. While there may be complaints about the violent nature of the undertaking, or the corruption of officials who take evictees' belongings for themselves, the "what," unlike the "how," is very seldom challenged. Writers might disagree with the methods or question the permanence of the clearance, but for the most part agree on the necessity of removing traders and squatters from the streets of central business areas. For example, in 2009, one writer from Kumasi, though he disapproved of the means, described the exercise as "a step in the right direction and therefore needs to be commended" (Yeboah).

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The choice of the term "decongestion" for these eviction schemes is itself an interesting one. In the popular media, journalists, municipal authorities, and city-dwellers will often collectively refer to problems caused by the overcrowding of the city as "congestion"

and its solution as "decongestion." Out of context, the concept of congestion conjures very visceral imagery of a clogged respiratory system, obstructed by bacteria-containing phlegm, and an inability to properly breathe. Decongestion—its resolution—then becomes the relieving of the sinuses, usually by the application of some potent drug, in order to restore things to normal and healthy function.

Freud describes "[b]eauty, cleanliness, and order" as markers of the well-functioning body politic. By contrast, "A city that is not well organised will slump into squalor." These are the words of a chief executive of the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Area who declared 2014 the year of "progress and development based on discipline and orderliness." He went on to emphasize that "the Assembly and the Physical Planning Unit will use all lawful means to remove illegal structures from the city" (Ghanaian Chronicle 2014), thus illustrating the frequent aggregation of congestants, the unclean, and informality. Informal structures not only block public arteries, their presence—having been determined not by planners, but by their inhabitants themselves—challenges organization. This absence of official control is then presented as precursor to "squalor" and filth everywhere. In sum, informality is disorderly and therefore dirty. The three are one and the same. Or so goes the official logic.

Furthermore, informality is cast as an illicit and unwanted phenomenon that is entirely incompatible with the images of themselves that the nation's cities intend to project into reality: e.g. an ultra-modern future-Accra that nevertheless retains the unspoiled natural environment of the past. At first glance, these goals may seem contradictory, however global cities have long sought to embody a middle ground between nature and civilization (Garreau 1992). Such was the case

in Jeffersonian plans for 18th century American cities that alternated built-on plots with natural parkland as well as 20th century edge cities—office and retail spaces built into previously residential areas—whose horizons are a melange of midrise commercial buildings and treetops. In the search for this equilibrium between too little and too much development, pockets of informality are impediments because they are neither improved enough to be evidence of modernity nor sufficiently untouched to be considered spare land. Rather than an ideal combination, slums and markets represent the worst of both urban and rural worlds and thus must be removed.

Taking the city as a system and informality as congestant—that which obstructs function and flow—the eviction of settlers and sellers becomes a kind of urban cure. Using case studies of Accra's largest pocket of informality, I will now examine these images: of interrupted urban fluidity as congestion, and "informal" people as congestant.

## OLD FADAMA/AGBOGBLOSHIE

The biggest buzz around the issue of decongestion has emerged from Accra Central. Nestled between the Korle Lagoon and the Adadaimkpo Road, northwest of the city's central business district, Old Fadama is the nation's largest slum and houses about 80,000 people. In recent years, this particular slum, above all others in the country, has come to dominate conversations about congestion, with its destruction widely held as the catalyst for the resolution of a multitude of problems (Olotunji).

The distinction is sometimes made between two areas bisected by the main-road. Agbogbloshie, which could be described as a semi-formal settlement, houses one of Accra's largest markets as well as the homes of

Marina Mall Airport Accra Ghana. Flickr: PapJeff, Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC 2.0)

some of its traders and one of the sub-region's largest digital dumping grounds Although it did not necessarily start out as a slum, worsening urban poverty has led to the deterioration of living conditions in the area. Across the street, Old Fadama, which is near the banks of the polluted Korle Lagoon, is partly built on "land" filled in with sawdust and reclaimed from the lagoon. The region was repopulated in the 1980s when the Rawlings administration relocated traders from the demolished Makola market to Agbogbloshie, and again in the 1990s when displaced Northerners from the Nanumba-Konkomba war were resettled near the lagoon. The settlement has since gained notoriety, leading to its rechristening as "Sodom and Gomorrah" (Obeng-Odom 2011).

According to city policy, however, both areas are informal—as residences as well as trading centres—and therefore unwanted. Each has to go. Decongestion in Old Fadama/Agbogbloshie has several linked components: demolition of the slum, relocation of the market to Adjen-Kotoku and other locations outside of the city,

the de-silting and revitalization of the Korle Lagoon, and the removal of the e-waste dump site. Taking these last two—the Korle Lagoon and the e-waste processing site—as my points of entry, I focus on decongestion as it relates to both the domestic (living) and the mercantile (working). I discuss not only how these sites and the area itself function as congestants in Accra, but furthermore what their designation as illegal-and-therefore-unclean, reveals about greater urban anxieties in Ghana.

## MURKY WATERS ON A GOLDEN COAST: THE KORLE LAGOON

The Korle Lagoon is the main system by which the city's rivers empty into the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Guinea. In recent times, direct comparisons are often drawn between waterways' current states as "dead" and memories of them as a thriving fishing centres during the earlier half of the twentieth century, as this excerpt from the *Daily Graphic* illustrates:

> The Odaw River has not only become a dumping ground for solid waste but also a receptacle for excreta, as some people squat along its banks to freely attend to the call of nature, even in broad daylight. As a result of this extensive pollution, the Odaw River is virtually dead. There is hardly aquatic life in the river, especially at the places where pollution is very severe. Many years ago, people used to fish in the river. (2012)

Sources of pollution to the Korle Lagoon are many. Factories in the industrial area as well as the nearby Korle Bu Hospital's mortuary dump wastewater into lagoon. Faecal matter, dumped into the sea by the city at the ironically named "Lavender Hill," may backwash

into the lagoon, and residents often throw domestic waste into the lagoon and its tributaries. Decomposition of these toxins depletes oxygen resources, and as a result plant and animal life cannot be sustained. Siltation also poses huge problems. Sediments washed-in from the banks clog the bed of the lagoon, block drainage into the sea, and cause the water to stagnate. The polluted lagoon does not just present a situation of stasis or stalled movement where continuous flow is expected; it also threatens deterioration. Stagnant waters pose a danger to human life and property: they breed mosquitoes, making malaria more likely; host pathogens which cause cholera, typhoid, etc.; and create risks of flooding since heavy rain causes the lagoon to spill over into neighbouring communities, damaging homes and other structures.

In the popular imaginary, however, as the quotation from the *Daily Graphic* illustrates, one major cause is cited for the state of the lagoon: Sodom and Gomorrah. The municipal authority and local media tout the dumping of domestic and faecal matter by the slum's residents as the greatest dangers to a clean lagoon. Not only is the slum blamed for placing polluting items into the lagoon, it itself becomes emblematic of a pollutant in the cityscape. When residents successfully resisted forced evictions from their homes in 2002, they were subsequently held accountable for stalling the progress of the Korle Lagoon Ecological Restoration Project (KLERP), and thereby wasting the $89 million that had already been spent. In 2013, during another de-silting attempt—the $600 million Accra Drainage and Sanitation Upgrade Project—the slum was again cast as an impediment to progress, as the mayor called upon inhabitants to "do their part" as citizens by evacuating their homes in order to allow the project to continue for the benefit of all of Accra (RadioXYZonline 2013).

Interestingly, although denied the rights to social services, the residents were still expected to uphold their "responsibility" to the city by sacrificing themselves and their livelihoods for its progress. Essentially, the congestants were asked to remove themselves, or else the AMA would do so for them.

Not unlike the silt blocking the Korle Lagoon, Sodom and Gomorrah becomes a source of congestion, hampering growth and development within Accra. The slum in the CBD functions like a cancer in the heart of the city. In addition to obstructing flow and growth by hindering the realization of plans for the future development of Accra Central, this blockage also threatens the destruction of existing portions of the city due to flooding and disease.

## EXOTIC TOXICS: THE AGBOGBLOSHIE E-WASTE PROCESSING SITE

A quasi-commercial centre, Agbogbloshie is home to one of Accra's largest markets, a few "more permanent" homes and structures, and the infamous digital dumping ground. Like Old Fadama, Agbogbloshie is scheduled for decongestion. Old and unusable electronics from Euro-America—computers, television sets, radios, telephones etc.—enter Ghana through the port-city of Tema and then make their way into the slum. Transporting electronics across the Atlantic began as the charitable provision of affordable used technology for developing nations but has slowly morphed into a plot through which Western companies skimp on recycling costs by dumping old appliances amongst the urban poor (Bock 2012). Plastic casings are burnt and copper wires sold for money, making these discarded machines an integral part of yet another informal market in Agbogbloshie. The dump's ever-billowing black smoke poses a health risk by releasing invisible toxins into the air that cause lung problems and cancer. In the fight against informality, some are more unwanted than others. Unlike their food-trading comrades who are to be relocated to the outskirts of the city, there are no plans as yet to resettle the workers at the dump (Ghana News Agency 2009). Like the slum residents, it is assumed that these artisanal workers will simply "go away" with decongestion.

In fact several local chiefs strictly oppose resettlement of any kind, arguing that the residents ought to go back to their own hometowns. In 2011, the Ga Mantse—the traditional head of the Ga state—pledged full support of the AMA's initiatives on the basis that "those claiming to own the land, did not acquire it from the lawful owners" (Mingle). Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah initially obtained the land surrounding the Korle from the Ga by promising to clean up the lagoon. Nearly a half-century later, since the land has not been used for the purposes for which it was acquired, many contend that it ought to be returned to its rightful owners. According to the ethno-linguistic groups who own the land upon which Ghana's cities are built—the Ga in Accra or the Asante in Kumasi for instance—slum residents who hail from other regions of the country (particularly the faraway Northern Region) are impinging upon their birth right: their land.

But the slum dwellers' unwanted-ness goes beyond ideas of pollution and poisonous smoke. On a deeper level, Agbogbloshie symbolizes the challenges Accra faces in an increasingly globalizing world order: porous borders and the unregulated flow of bodies and goods into the city. The reality of foreign waste at the dump betrays not only Western corporate greed and irresponsibility, but also the powerlessness and ineffectiveness of the Ghanaian government to prevent the entry of such unwanted goods through its borders. In other words, the nation is like a body unable to protect itself from pathogenic invasion, from congestion. These goods ought to be detected and confiscated in Tema but instead move through the port and all the way to the middle of Accra. Such incursions occur from within as well as without: old electronics are not the only unwanted aliens in Accra Central. The people, like the things they burn, are matter-out-of-place. In descriptions of the digital dumping ground at Agbogbloshie, we perceive a fear of the inundation of Accra by disruptive and uncontrollable foreign elements, be they people or things, aliens or citizens.

## 'OUT OF PLACE'

Decongestion, as I understand it in this essay, is an inherently destructive process, which places an emphasis on the demolition rather than the recovery of unwanted places and people. Authorities seem to have made a conscious decision to remove informality from Accra rather than to encourage transformations that would make these structures and communities more suitable. That the reordering, cleaning, and development of the urban space is only possible by removing slum dwellers and street hawkers is indicative of perceptions of these actors and spaces as incompatible with the long-term plans for the city. Shacks and vendors' stalls are seen as nuisances that do not belong in the collective, imagined future. This incompatibility is evidenced, for example, by the designation of Old Fadama and its surroundings as "Sodom and Gomorrah." Although its origins are uncertain—in some cases it is attributed to a Ga chief, and in others to a municipal official—the name Sodom and Gomorrah conveys two perceptions of the slum and adjoining markets.

First is the opinion of Old Fadama as a space of transgression. In religious texts such as the Bible and

the Qur'an, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, or "the people of Lot," were notorious for their sinfulness, sexual deviance, and social vices such as the sadistic torture of others. Likewise, in the media the Ghanaian version is depicted as a menace to Accra and its people—a nucleus of urban decay where drug abuse, prostitution, murder, crime, filth, disease, and homelessness are rampant and threaten to spill over into the rest of society, affecting "ordinary" citizens in more upper class parts of Accra (Olotunji). So polluted, the slum becomes a risk to the welfare of the city at large and its removal a necessary precondition for progress. In other words, slums are not only depicted as filthy and deviant, they are also considered harmful to society: for example, after clashes during national elections in 2009, Sodom and Gomorrah was declared to be a "risk to national security," beginning a new cycle of decongestion attempts in the area (Afenah 2010).

The second implication of the slum's name is temporal. God destroyed its scriptural counterparts with fire and brimstone in the Bible (Genesis 19:24) and a tornado of rocks in the Qur'an (Surat al-Qamar: 34). Despite repeated pleas by His highly favoured prophet Abraham, the city could not be spared because it did not even contain a minimum of five righteous inhabitants, on whose behalf all of the other sinners could be pardoned. There was nothing and no one that could stop the inevitable. To some extent, the name Sodom and Gomorrah in the Ghanaian context conveys the similar sense of an inescapable fate: widely perceived as transgressive and disruptive, there is the sense that such spaces are not worth saving and rightly deserve to be demolished. Their days are numbered; they have no place in the future, and it is only a matter of time until they too are removed. In this sense, cleaning the physical space around the lagoon also closely links to cleansing the city of perceived social

and moral contamination generated by spaces such as Sodom and Gomorrah.

In *Purity and Danger* (2000), Mary Douglas identifies the origins of sociocultural and religious understandings of dirt and cleanliness. Beginning with Levitical prescriptions (i.e. laws handed down to the Jews in the Biblical book of Leviticus), she identifies holiness as "wholiness," arguing that projects considered incomplete are inherently unclean (52-53). By this definition, informal dwellings—which may include unfinished buildings and are located amidst partially completed developmental initiatives (Korle lagoon, roads, sewerage etc.)—become "dirty" in more ways than one. As well as being unfinished themselves, informal spaces become undesirable when they are seen to encumber the conclusion of other programs around them. For example, woodwork is an important sector of economic activity in Kumasi, however the presence of a timber market in the path of the planned ring-road system transforms it into a congestant. As a hindrance to the completion of one of the millennium city's key transport upgrades, these otherwise useful markets become a bother, and plans have since been laid to relocate them to "a settlement enclave at a more peripheral location" (KMPG 2008).

Another manifestation of un-holiness is indistinctiveness: the absence of contradiction between "what seems and what is" makes things unclean (Douglass 200, 57). Street vendors who exist in liminal space, not quite like the established shops on one side of them, nor like the moving cars and pedestrians on another, also become "filthy" in *addition* to the fact that wrappers from their consumed wares may litter the ground. In their place, different kinds of commercial spaces that are more compatible with the "millennium city" are planned and finished such as the Accra Mall, Marina

Mall, and the new Oxford Street Mall. Unlike the informal markets where bargaining techniques and shifting bodily positions (from one stall to another) make every transaction a renegotiation, malls which offer restricted and dedicated physical space, fixed prices, and pre-packaged wares "sanitize" the city's business deals by cleaning up its visual sphere.

## BEYOND PRACTICALITY – INFORMALITY AS NATIONAL SCAPEGOAT

It is important here to distinguish between the actual and the symbolic. Contrary to municipal claims, decongestion in Ghana, I argue, is not limited to mere environmental beautification and economic progress. At present, those who inhabit the shadow markets and settlements in Old Fadama are held solely accountable for the Lagoon's pollution, yet descriptions of the "obnoxious smells for which the Korle Lagoon has been so notorious" date as far back as the Nkrumah administration, three full decades before the arrival of these settlers on its banks (Edusei 1963). It would seem that decongestion is about a lot more than just catching the polluters; rather serving as a tactic by which municipalities regain control over spaces whose growth has defied their plans.

On a practical level, the issue of the polluted lagoon need not necessarily be resolved by demolition but could be addressed by developing the slum in tandem with lagoon-rehabilitation so that the two are made compatible (Boadi and Kuitunen 2002). For instance, as residents point out, if proper sanitation and waste disposal systems were developed, they would no longer be forced to dump garbage into the lagoon:

How many times has the community asked
the Mayor of Accra and his people to provide

dustbins so we stop dumping into the lagoon? And they are saying that bringing bins means that they are legalizing the illegality! Thus the community sees this point [the Korle Lagoon] as a waste dump. Do you think they are wrong my sister? I think they should resolve the impasse with the community and find a better way of restoring the aquatic life and sanitation. (F., Resident of Sodom and Gomorrah for 20 years, interview with author, 2014)

The refusal of the AMA to provide this most practical of solutions—dustbins—indicates that there must be something else motivating decongestion, something other than the environmental claims cited by the city government. Similarly, destroying Agbogbloshie is no guarantee that e-waste will stop entering the country, or that another processing site will not emerge elsewhere to replace the old.

Neither is it simply a matter of creating empty, uncrowded spaces in the central business areas. A cartoon published in the *Daily Graphic* in May 2013 juxtaposes the replacement of informal traders from the Kantamanto market—who had a 50-year sublease for the use of the land—with an "ultra-modern railway hub and shopping mall." This is despite the fact that in terms of people and traffic, both options would attract comparable movements of people into the CBD. Furthermore, as the cartoonist shows, meeting the Millennium Development Goals is better done by improving living conditions of city dwellers (by investing in their welfare) than through the creation of large concrete structures or even the destruction of old wooden ones. Campaigns to clean out informal settlers and traders cost authorities thousands of dollars each time (Adjovu 2003; Owusu 2009; Yeboah 2009).

Decongestion, clearly, is not simply a matter of practicality, neither is it the only means by which a city in Ghana could achieve its goals for progress.

Among the ancient Greeks and other societies, a beast such as a goat would be driven out of a polity after having the burdens and sins of its residents cast upon it in an effort to rid the city of its troubles. It goes without saying that in order for any of the cleansing effects of the practice to be realized, the animal must be expelled, sacrificed on behalf of all others and for the greater good. Informal elements in Ghana's urban centres have come to function as these cities' scapegoats: they are vested with blame for the entire city's woes, such that their excision becomes a symbolic means of restoring order (and for authorities, becomes evidence of functionality). Where other forms of control have been lost in the city, urban ecologies provide an avenue for the re-imposition of order.

Evidence of this is found in some of the other claims about decongestion made by the AMA—assertions that may, yet again, be beyond practicality. Officials allege that the toppling of Sodom and Gomorrah will open the gates for the removal of other slums like it such as Babylon, Abuja, Neoplan, Old Passport etc., and cities will be totally decongested: "The decongestion of Sodom and Gomorrah would send the message across that the AMA is seriously bent on decongesting all slums and emerging ones in the city" (Ghana News Agency 2009). Equally likely is the possibility that evictees from Old Fadama will migrate to these other settlements, increasing, not decreasing, their presence in the urban landscape.

## CONCLUSION

Though the term decongestion as applied to slum clearances appears to only be widespread in Ghana, such "toxic neighbourhoods"—caught between nature and urbanization, waste management and water conservation, land ownership, and control (Roosen 2010)—do exist in cities elsewhere in Africa. On the Lagos Lagoon in nearby Nigeria, the Makoko slum, where most dwellings are built on stilts in the water, is similarly spoken of in relation to the hazard it poses to health and the environment. Sections of the squatter settlement are habitually torn down in order to prevent blockages in the waterway (which could lead to flooding) and to prevent traffic congestion, whenever the outward expansion of the slum gets too close to nearby roadways (Neuwirth 2011; Bello et al. 2012).

As part of this quest to construct world-class cities, municipal authorities have targeted informal work and homes not only in Ghana but also across much of the developing world. Local governments fear that such shadow markets and squatter settlements will metastasize, reversing cities' progress and paving the way for criminality, poverty, and destruction to run rampant. The periodic eviction of squatters and hawkers—who are cast as filthy and therefore irreconcilable with future plans for urbanization—becomes a display of competency for municipal authorities. Although the sheer violence—physical and economic—of these policies sparks some critique in local media, most seem to favour the removal of informality from the city. The point of contention is not whether decongestion will indeed beautify the city and improve its economy, but rather if the practice is sustainable and not just "an exercise that is vigorous from Monday to Saturday and completely dies out on Sundays" (Yeboah).

To a certain extent, discourses of decongestion in Ghana hint at concerns about uncontrolled mobility and flows in the city. The concern with fluidity involves both the chaos caused by the unchecked growth

of pockets of informality, as well as the motionlessness that results when these areas thwart the realization of other development goals. With millions of people under the municipality's jurisdiction, no movement as well as too much movement are challenges that endanger the millennial city. In discussions of the Korle Lagoon, concerns about the natural resonate with perceptions of the slums at Old Fadama and Agbogbloshie: the fixation with decongesting a lagoon of pollutants extends to ideas of people-as-contaminant, and the common threat becomes one of inertia (and even worse, of regression). Likewise, efforts to remove electronic waste and its handlers betray fears of foreign invasion and porous borders.

"[T]he urban poor are to some extent being sacrificed for the sake of 'urban prosperity'."

Decongestion as applied to unwanted economic activity stops chaotic and uncontrolled movement in the city by expelling the informal congestants whilst at the same time clearing out the streets and making way for government-sanctioned flows of people and goods. Lastly, the targeting of hawkers and slum dwellers reveals that the urban poor are to some extent being sacrificed for the sake of "urban prosperity." Cast as out of place, they are forcibly ejected from where they live and work—especially streets in the central business district of cities—in order to pave the way for the millennium city of the future to be built.

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