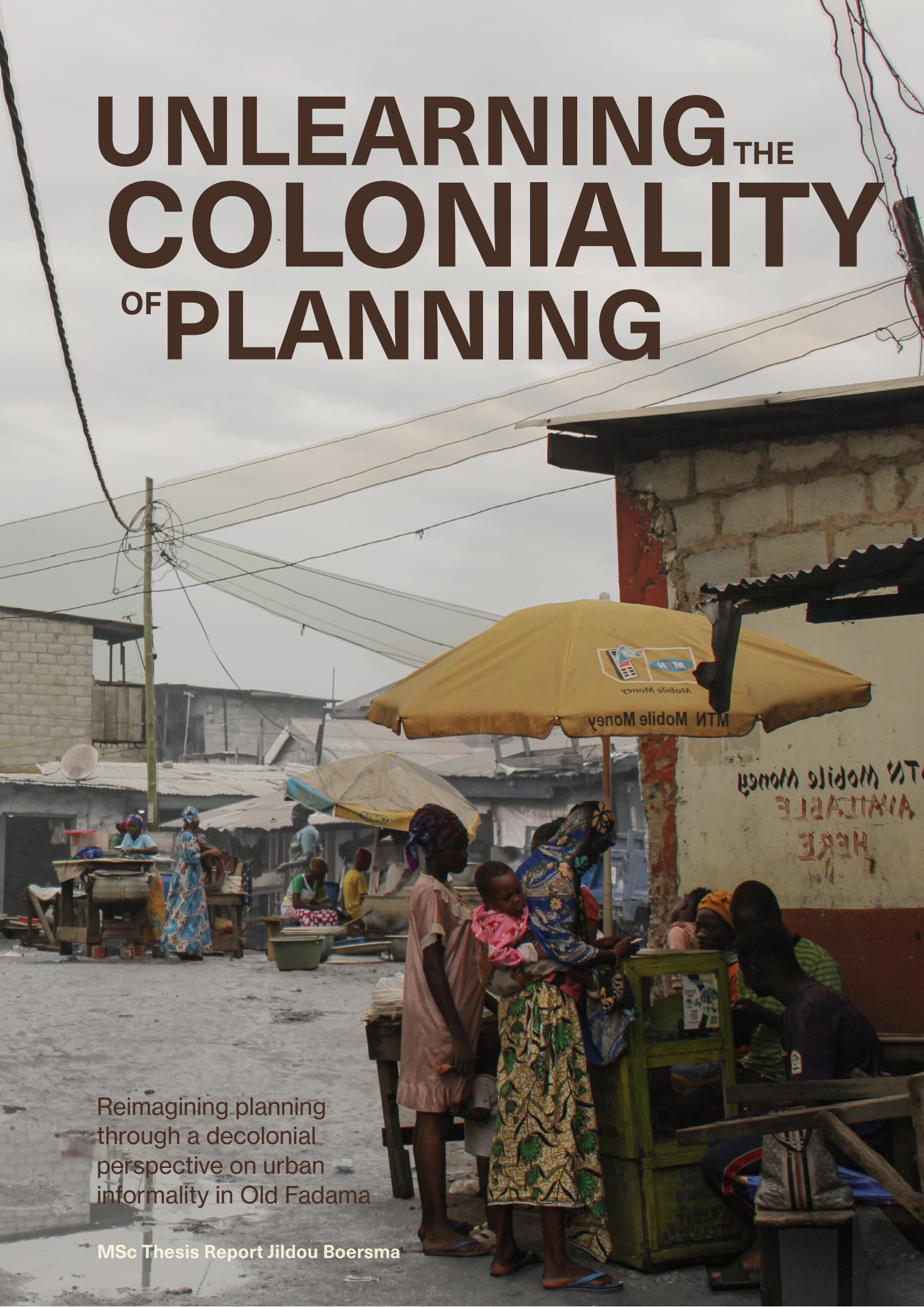


UNLEARNING^{THE} COLONIALITY OF PLANNING

Reimagining planning
through a decolonial
perspective on urban
informality in Old Fadama

MSc Thesis Report Jildou Boersma



colophon.

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abstract.

This research project reimagines planning through a critically reflexive and decolonial perspective. It positions the Western planning tradition within the oppressive structures of coloniality and neoliberalism, shaping the role of planning in the marginalisation of vulnerable communities. Modern planning is largely a product of the Western knowledge system and culture. Through its focus on rational and 'objective' knowledge inherently excludes many Indigenous knowledges and the lived experiences of vulnerable citizens. Due to the normalised application and adulation of the Western knowledge system, the colonial inheritance of an unjust built environment, and the increasing domination of neoliberal policy, these dynamics of exclusion remain unchanged.

As the Western planning tradition continuously proves to be unfit to meaningfully address the structural injustices in our built environment and society, because it is situated within the oppressive societal structures that cause these injustices, this thesis explores alternative approaches to planning to create just outcomes, such as humanist urbanism, feminist urbanism, Indigenous knowledges, and traditional planning practices.

This research bridges the gap between theory and practice by continuously connecting decolonial planning theory with the case of Old Fadama, an informal settlement in Accra, Ghana. Through critical reflexivity on the role of the planner and planning methodology, and empirical research in Old Fadama, a decolonial planning meta-methodology is proposed. The meta-methodology centres embodied and experienced knowledge in the planning process, promotes community-led and autonomous planning, and regards critical reflexivity as a key planning activity for Western planners working in non-Western contexts. The research itself is an important body of self-reflexivity and displays the transformation in thinking and acting that is necessary for decolonial planning.

The planning practices and spatial outcomes of Old Fadama are reimagined through this decolonial planning meta-methodology. By viewing Old Fadama as an example of community-led planning and governance rooted in decoloniality, our understanding of urban informality and urban planning can be transformed. The thesis contains a set of radical imagination exercises that visualise possible spatial outcomes of a decolonial planning approach that goes beyond the formal-informal binary and towards a just and decolonial future for Old Fadama.



Figure 0.1 Image of Old Fadama public space as portrayed on book cover (Photograph by Author)

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1. INTRODUCTION

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Who am I ~~to lay my hands on this?~~

Who am I ~~to say...~~

Who am I?

Who am I to talk about this topic?

Who am I to dare to say something even slightly profound-sounding on decolonisation, let alone colonisation, and the persistent pains many people still feel from it? Or on the marginalisation of the urban poor and the ones belonging to the cultural minority?

Who am I? I am a Dutch Master's student. I am studying to be an urban planner; a profession with inherent power built into the job, yet lacking any sort of democratic electoral system (Findley, 2005). In my profession, I am someone who strives to be very conscious of their actions, their thoughts and opinions, and the effect they have on others. A quick profile of me would let anyone to believe my work would be prone to bias. I am privileged in many ways; I was born and raised in The Netherlands, and I have always had access to quality schooling, healthy food, safe outdoor space, sports, and even cultural activities. I am highly educated, finishing my Master's at the Delft University of Technology through this very body of work. I am also visibly privileged; my skin is white, my eyes blue, and my hair blond.

So, who am I to touch on these important but highly complex and sensitive topics?

As an urban planner-to-be, I strongly believe we carry a big responsibility to actively stand up against the inequalities and injustices that are intertwined in, and brought about by, our own discipline, as there are many. Furthermore, in my personal life, I feel the exact same. In Western research, the researcher is often regarded as a separate, neutral being. An independent and objective vessel for unbiased information (Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Attia and Edge, 2017). Nothing is farther from the truth; your background, your education, your culture, your lived experiences, your personal morals and ethics, it will all effect your work, perhaps even more so if you are trying to deny it (Nadaraj, 2007; Attia and Edge, 2017). Research, especially Western research, could benefit from a more personal and reflexive approach. Critical self-reflection and reflexivity can not only make you aware of your bias, it can allow you to dismantle it and unlearn harmful behaviours and prejudice. Explicit reflexivity in research makes the research much better interpretable. It makes it possible for readers to understand your perspective, how it might shape the research a certain way, how it differs from their perspective and how that affects their interpretation of the research. Moreover, the current disconnect between the personal self and the professional self adds to the negligence of emotions, feelings, and most of all, empathy in professional areas of life. By acknowledging there is only one self, and thereby the fact that you cannot be fully objective, neutral, or separated, simply because you are human, you welcome the integration of empathy into your work, transforming it towards a more ethical way of doing.

Who am I..?

Who am I..?

Who am I..?

Who am I..?

Who am I..?

Who am I..?

This thesis will be a testament to this critically reflexive approach to research. It will be a direct application of the very meta-methodology it's preaching.

And on the topic of (de)colonisation and (de)coloniality, the duty and responsibility to learn and unlearn lies par excellence with white researchers and otherwise privileged people. As Briggs and Sharp (2004) state, many white researchers steer clear of projects concerning (de)coloniality and marginalised communities out of fear of doing something unethical or harmful. However, if no one ever engages with these topics, things will never change. If we do not acknowledge the shortcomings in our understanding of the wide range of knowledge and experiences out there, and if we do not address the dominance and power we have in many areas of society, the dynamics of exclusion we've created will not be structurally transformed. It is our own responsibility to educate ourselves, to unlearn discriminatory patterns, to transform our methodologies, and to amplify the voice of lived experience.

This thesis will be an example of this decentring of Western knowledge as I actively partake in the journey of my own decoloniality.

Who am I to talk about this topic, is someone who will be humble. Someone who will listen and then amplify. Someone who will be critical of the norm, and someone who is committed to unlearning and transforming the unjust ways of Western dominance and Western-centrism in research and urban planning. Most of all, I will be someone who vows to be honest and open about this process, as the goal is not to make it seem 'fixed', but rather to learn and allow others to engage in similar projects and reflexive methods as well.

Of course, this one thesis won't revolutionise planning in and by itself, nor am I the first person to think about this topic. I do hope this thesis forms an important contribution to the journey towards decoloniality that I firmly believe all planners themselves should go through. I hope this will be

transformational for my own learning; learning about my own discipline as step out of my educational pathway, towards a professional one in urban planning, but also the learning and, maybe more importantly, unlearning in personal spheres; about the structures that should not shape our world, and the structures that should, and how I wish to shape my own role within them.

Introduction

Worldwide, but especially in the Global South, cities are dealing with a rapidly increasing population. In search of the neoliberal dream of unlimited wealth, people relocate from the poor and neglected countryside to the urban centre (Davis, 2006; Ritchie et al., 2024). Here, however, they are not met with unlimited wealth, jobs, and opportunity, but rather with a city structure that is increasingly incapable of providing for its current and new residents. Inherited power dynamics and wealth distribution from colonial rule create an inherent injustice in the tangible and intangible structures of the city, which disproportionately affects vulnerable communities, such as Indigenous people, and the urban poor. Newcomers, often migrating without significant economic or social capital to buy in, find themselves cast out. Current neo-liberal policies only perpetuate the dynamics of exclusion that seem to be carved into our society and built environment (Davis, 2006; United Nations Human Settlements Programme [UN-Habitat], 2003).

In the extreme case, social injustice and urban poverty become so severe, informal settlements develop in response. Informal settlements – here defined as a settlement that is not recognised by the formal government as fully legal, often lacking at least one of the following conditions: access to clean water, access to sanitation, sufficient and adequate housing, and stable tenure (Ritchie et al., 2024; McCartney and Krishnamurthy, 2018) – are a living lab showing today's effects of coloniality, upheld by neoliberal policy, and the lacking adequate response from planning. At the same time, they provide an immensely valuable and interesting insight into the community-led social, political, and planned structures that emerge when the neoliberal system and formal services prove to be obsolete, as informal settlements are not merely a response to oppression and exclusions, but also a modern act of urbanisation and creation of heterotopias that is a characteristic of a time marked by rapid urbanisation and migration motivated by growing inequality, injustices, and climate change effects. Unfortunately, informal settlements and their dwellers are structurally demonised by institutions and still predominantly seen as a problem. Attempts to address 'the issue' of urban informality, extreme urban poverty, and spatial injustice to date are mostly of a solutionist nature and have failed to address the complexity of intersecting societal structures and urban dynamics of exclusion that informality is a response to (Davis, 2006; United Nations Human Settlements Programme [UN-Habitat], 2003). Communities themselves, however, have often developed unique alternative structures based on values like care, solidarity, and justice, to take control of their own survival instead.

In this master's thesis, I will expose the causal and enabling interrelation between coloniality, neo-liberalism and modern urban planning, and expose the tangible effects they still have in today's built environment and society. I call for a transformation of modern planning practice and meta-

methodology, decentring the Western knowledge system and adopting Indigenous, feminist and otherwise alternative methods to achieve a value-based planning approach, rather than a solutionist one. To further address the structural root of the injustices in urban planning and move towards a practice rooted in decoloniality instead, critical reflexivity should have a core position within urban planning and design (meta-)methodology. The theory explaining and exposing the relationship between coloniality, neoliberalism, and modern planning is supported by tangible and practical examples. The research focuses on the case study location of Old Fadama, an informal settlement in Accra, Ghana, to illustrate the dynamics of exclusions, but also how the proposed decolonial planning meta-methodology could create a more just city for both formal and 'informal' dwellers.



Figure 1.1 Picture of exemplary street in Old Fadama
(Photo by Author)

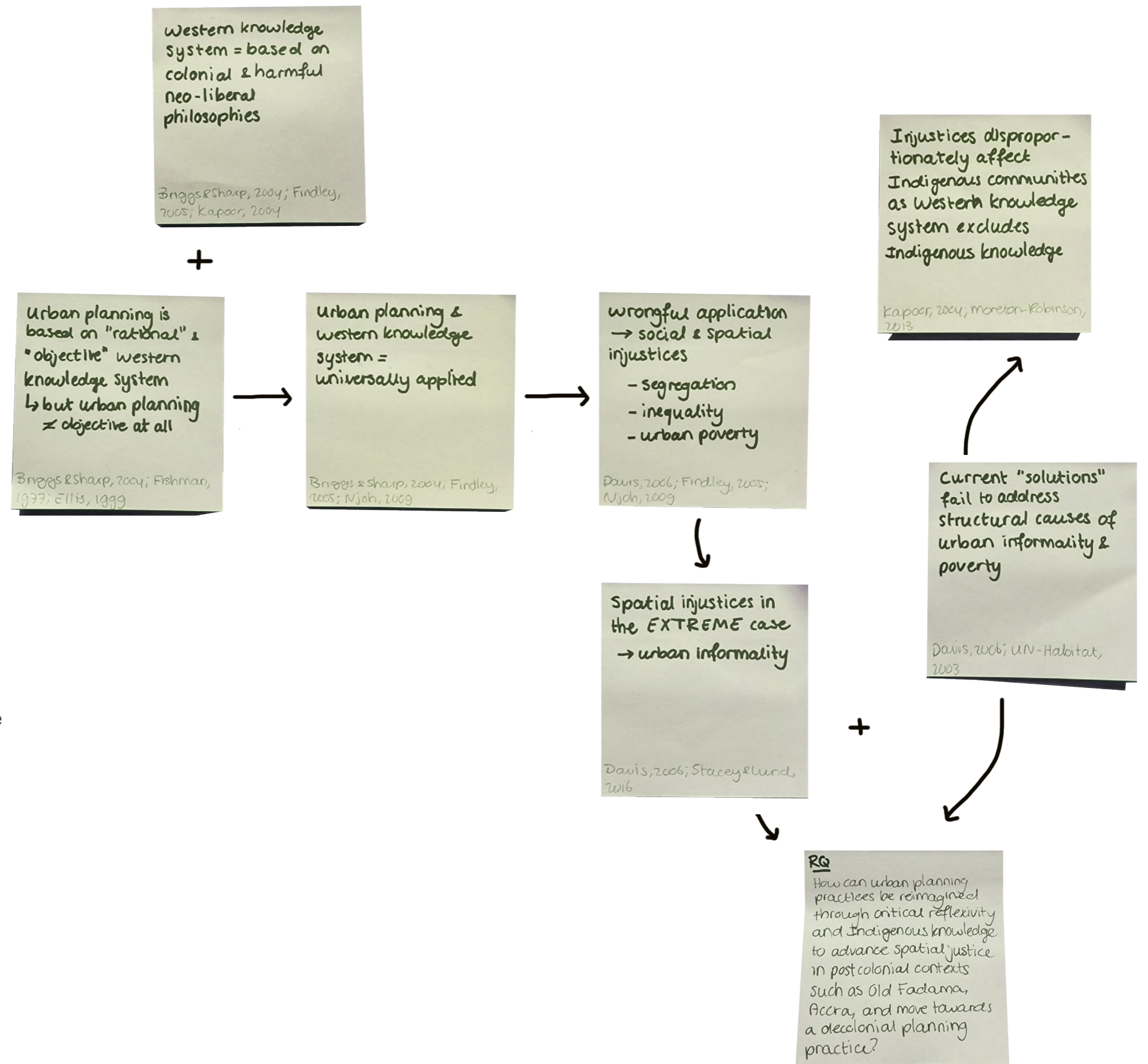
Problem statement

“ Urban planning is a product of the Western Knowledge system, in which knowledge is presumed to be rational, objective, and factual (Ellis, 1999; Fishman, 1977). The Western knowledge system, however, is largely based on harmful colonial and neo-liberal ideologies. This system, and the resulting planning practice, is unjustly universally applied anywhere on Earth, regardless of compatibility with local culture and values (Ellis, 1999; Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Njoh, 2009).

This wrongful application of the Western knowledge system, in urban planning specifically, leads to social and spatial injustices in the built environment and society as a whole. These injustices come to an extreme in informal settlements (Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Findley, 2005; Davis, 2006). Since the Western knowledge system only accepts rational and ‘objective’ knowledge as true, the majority of Indigenous knowledge is inherently neglected, resulting in Indigenous communities being disproportionately affected by the social and spatial injustices. Attempts to address the problems of urban informality, urban poverty, and social and spatial injustice thus far have failed due to their solutionist nature and inability to properly address the complexity of societal structures informality is a response to (Davis, 2006; United Nations Human Settlements Programme [UN-Habitat], 2003).

To meaningfully address these injustices, the colonial basis of our societal structures and urban planning practices needs to be addressed by broadening our scope beyond the Western knowledge system. This could be achieved by incorporating methods such as critical reflexivity and Indigenous standpoint theory, and engaging with Indigenous knowledge systems, moving away from exclusively relying on the Western knowledge system (Attia and Edge, 2017; Guilherme, 2019; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Foley, 2003; Briggs and Sharp, 2004).

This research gap and hypothesis lead to the main research question of this thesis: **How can urban planning practices be reimagined through critical reflexivity and Indigenous knowledge to advance spatial justice in postcolonial contexts such as Old Fadama, Accra, and move towards a decolonial planning practice?** ”



Problematization

Ever since the Industrial Revolution, and increasingly so since the second half of the 20th century, our migration patterns have been characterised by mass-urbanisation. Between 1960 and 2023, the global urban population grew from 1.02 billion people to 4.61 billion people; a 450% increase in urban dwellers. And there is no sign of slowing down: UN Habitat (United Nations, 2023) projects that by 2050, an additional 2.5 billion people will be living in urban areas, bringing the total urban population to 7.1 billion. However, our cities seem increasingly incapable of keeping up with the demand this increasing number of urban dwellers puts on their structures and services. Especially in cities in Asia and Africa, where the urbanisation rate is currently highest, cityscapes without informal settlements have become nearly unthinkable. Currently, 1.12 billion people of the 4.61 urban dwellers live in informal settlements. By 2050, the expectation is that of the 7.1 billion projected urban dwellers, 3.1 billion will live in informality. This means that not only the absolute number of informal dwellers is growing, but so is the proportion of informal dwellers as opposed to formal dwellers (United Nations, 2023; World Bank, 2024a, World Bank, 2024b).

Current approaches attempting to take on the challenge of mass-urbanisation, informality, and urban poverty, remain largely symptomatic. By not addressing the structural systems of oppression that are coloniality, Eurocentrism, and neoliberalism, they fail they fail to meaningfully address problems of urban poverty and injustice on a large and long-term scale (Davis, 2006; Ziorklui et al., 2024). Symptomatic approaches, such as titling and slum upgrading also do not address the epistemic notion of inferiority of the urban poor and informal dwellers, perpetuating the polarisation of formality and informality (Davis, 2006; Mignolo, 2011; McCartney and Krishnamurthy, 2018). The true problem, as I state in this thesis, lies not in the urban response of informality as a coping mechanism and active, insurgent planning practice, but rather in the structures that provoke these responses in the first place, such as an inherently unjust built environment, policy frameworks, and planning methodology. In order to address problems such as 'informality', urban poverty, and social and spatial injustices in the built environment, this structural layer needs to be addressed first. Subsequently, our understanding of informality ought to change. Rather than demonising informality, and designating it as something unplanned and unwanted, we should regard urban informality for what it is: a modern-day urbanisation strategy that very much relies on planned actions and behaviours. Moreover, urban informality exhibits valuable expressions of Indigenous, traditional, and decolonial planning practices that can advance formal planning towards decoloniality.

Even though we are continuously finding more evidence that cities are an ancient part of human history through the discovery of archaeological sites such as Uruk, Mohenjodaro and Talianki (Graeber, 2021), urban planning as we

practice it today is a relatively young discipline: it was scholars like Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier who established urban planning as a discipline separate to architecture and land management, and started developing holistic systems of living, strongly rooted in the values of neoliberalism and capitalism (Fishman, 1977). Today still, urban planning is a predominantly white discipline constructed around the presumably objective and rational Western knowledge system (Ellis, 1999; Briggs and Sharp, 2004). Urban planning, which is now increasingly understood to be a melting pot of Design, Engineering, Physical Sciences, and Social Sciences (Rocco and Gonçalves, 2025), originally stems from Engineering and Architecture; a very rational and factual Western Science background (Ellis, 1999; Briggs and Sharp, 2004).

Urban planning, as a discipline based on the Western knowledge system, has taken over the world through general globalisation, but most of all colonisation (Findley, 2005; Njoh, 2009). Even though it is ought to include the Social Sciences, its roots in the Western knowledge system that is based on rationality, 'facts', and objective truths, make the Social Sciences hard to incorporate in practice (Ellis, 1999). Moreover, urban planning is a highly situated practice; its methodology, results, and success are dependent on local topography, geography, socio-economic and political circumstances, and most of all, culture and values. Nevertheless, the Western planning tradition is universally applied all over the world (Briggs and Sharp, 2004). In places where the local culture and values differ from those of the Western context, this universal application creates problems. A dynamic of exclusion is created, and spatial injustice and inequality become ingrained in not only the built environment but societal and political constructions alike (Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Kapoor, 2004). In many cases, the Western knowledge system, due to its roots in Western culture, philosophy, and worldview, is inherently incapable of accurately and meaningfully interpreting Indigenous knowledge (Kapoor, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2013). This leads to Indigenous communities being disproportionately affected by social and spatial injustices, as their needs are systemically neglected, overlooked, and wrongfully interpreted (Kapoor, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Briggs and Sharp, 2004).

During colonisation, nations were not only robbed of their resources and people, but also of their decision-making power and ability to continue the development of their nation according to their specific cultural and societal values. Architecture and planning were used as an active strategy to disempower Indigenous peoples and segregate them to prevent the practice of cultural and linguistic rituals (McGaw and Pieris, 2014; Findley, 2005; Njoh, 2009). Not only did this significantly impact the collective memory of traditional and Indigenous knowledge in colonised nations, it also

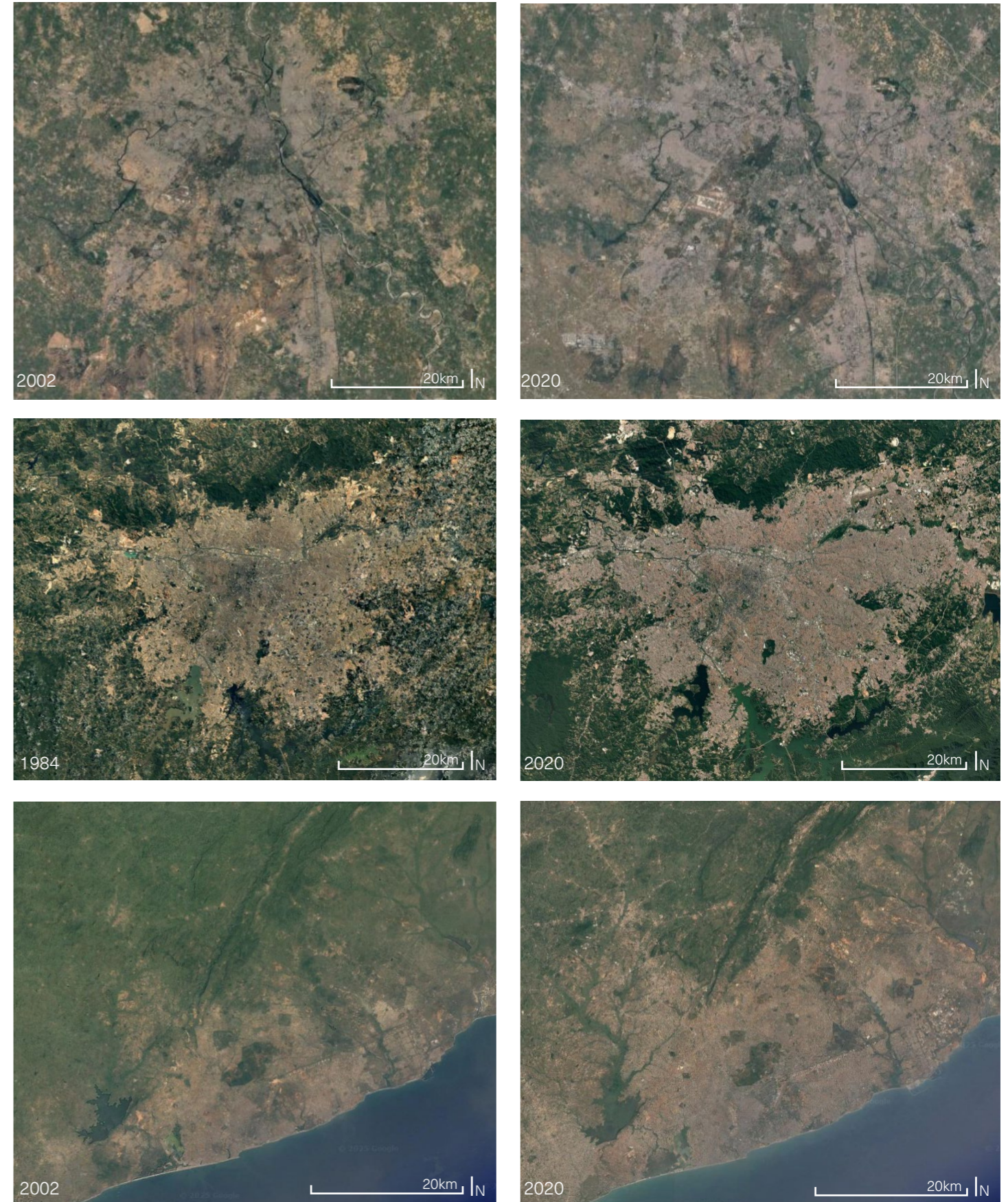


Figure 1.2 Satellite images of urban development of New Dehli, Sao Paulo, and Accra (Alphabet, n.d.)

embedded the racist, imbalanced power-dynamics in policy frameworks, the built environment, and people's minds as part of establishing the Western knowledge system as the dominant system (Davis, 2006). Today, the us/them dichotomy and naturalised Western superiority still shape planning and political discourse, and modern-day neo-liberal policies. Neoliberalism, which ultimately always benefits the people already in power, only further establishes and enables the unjust dynamics of exclusion and way of thinking as inherited from colonisation (Kapoor, 2004; Davis, 2006; Eisenstein, 1999).

Although urban planning, as previously stated, is a relatively young discipline, during colonisation, practices that we now consider to be part of modern urban planning, such as land management, resource allocation, infrastructure, and policy, were strategically used to the benefit of the colonisers and limited Indigenous elite, and, on the other hand, to control the Indigenous peoples (Davis, 2006; Findley, 2005; McGaw and Pieris, 2014; Njoh, 2009). The resulting dynamics of exclusion still remain present today. Social and spatial injustices in our built environment and governance frameworks come to

an extreme in informal settlements¹. Informal settlements can be regarded as a product of these urban dynamics of exclusion, as they emerge as a response to the inability of the government and urban structure to provide for the urban poor. Governmental neglect exacerbates segregation, spatial injustice, and inequality to an extreme extent. Due to these conditions, and the illegal status of informal dwellers, access to financial or social capital is minimal, and climbing out of extreme poverty and informality is near impossible (Davis, 2006).

Many projects to 'solve' urban informality and urban poverty have come and gone. Some popular approaches include: building a satellite city for the urban poor, titling,

¹ Informal settlements is a widely-discussed term with many different definitions, as well as misunderstandings surrounding the discourse. In this project, an informal settlement is understood as a settlement that is not recognised by the formal government as fully legal, and often lacks at least one of the following conditions: access to clean water, access to sanitation, sufficient and adequate housing, and stable tenure (Ritchie et al., 2024; McCartney and Krishnamurthy, 2018). The discourse around the term informal settlements will be further discussed in the analysis.

and demolition exercises. Although some approaches were of significant scale, length, and budget, take for example, the infamous Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS) launched by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in the 1980s, none seem to have any positive long-term or large-scale effect (Davis, 2006). A commonality of most approaches is the solutionist approach: they fail to address the complex interrelation of housing and economy, and hardly address the issue of human and civil rights for informal dwellers. Most of all, they do not address the underlying dynamics of exclusion as described above (Davis, 2006; United Nations Human Settlements Programme [UN-Habitat], 2003). The dichotomy between formality and informality that these solutionist approaches are based on is essentially senseless. The inclination to distinguish formal from informal is solely based on the presumed superiority of a Western epistemology, classifying urban development based on whether its production and management is institutional, and according to the Western standard. Our synonymising of informal development with 'chaos', 'digestion', and 'crime' is a testament to our conviction of Western superiority, and the survival of racist and colonial ideologies within institutionalised

spaces, as well as general society. Distinguishing and categorising informal and formal development does not advance planning practices in either of these arenas. The only accomplishment resulting from distinguishing formality from informality is a justification of governmental neglect, and expressions of violence from the oppressor towards the oppressed. Moreover, in the reality of Accra as can be seen in Figure 1.3 and 1.4, formal and informal development, and the formal and informal economy are thoroughly intertwined and interdependent, in such a way that separating the domains is nearly impossible, let alone undesirable.

Social and spatial inequalities and urban poverty are structural injustices that are carved into our built environment, governance strategies, and society. A symptomatic approach will not cure the root of the issue. To make any meaningful change, the unjust colonial basis of our societal structure, and planning and governance practices needs to be addressed. To do so, the unjustified universal application of the Western planning tradition needs to be transformed. Furthermore, the causes and lasting effects of the dynamics of exclusion need to be clearly defined and exposed to create an awareness and



Figure 1.3 Photograph of Accra roovescape in Kokomlemle showing 'formal' and 'informal' development intertwined in the cityscape (Photo by Author)



Figure 1.4 Photograph of Kokomlemle, Accra, showing 'informal' economic activity in a 'formal' part of the city (Photo by Author)

urgency to address the root cause. Many scholars have already philosophised and developed different schools of urbanism to produce just cities. However, most remain shackled by the societal structures of coloniality they exist within. This thesis combines learnings from contemporary schools and practices of urbanism with Indigenous and traditional knowledge and practices. By reimagining the urban planning practice, specifically in non-Western contexts, through adopting a decolonial planning meta-methodology that includes critical reflexivity (Attia and Edge, 2017; Guilherme, 2019), and Indigenous (feminist) standpoint theory (Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Foley, 2003), and centres Indigenous knowledge systems and lived, embodied experiences as key knowledge in urban planning (Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2013), the urban planning practice can transform into a more inclusive, just, and decolonial one.

To situate the discourse on the colonial basis of the Western planning tradition, and make the described phenomena visible and tangible, the case study of the informal settlement Old Fadama in Accra, Ghana is continuously incorporated into the research. Old Fadama is a remarkably large and dense informal settlement, with an estimated 100,000 to 152,000 residents on a mere 31.3 hectares (Housing the Masses, 2010; Yogri and Hong, 2019; Boersma, personal communication, June 23, 2025), in very close proximity to the city centre of Accra. The settlement has existed in this order of magnitude for four generations and has therefore developed an intricate planning and governance system, as well as a distinct local culture, all largely existing outside of the formal institutions and frameworks (Stacey and Lund, 2016). Old Fadama is in that way in particular an example of both the way that inherited tangible and intangible dynamics of exclusion lead to social and spatial injustices, as well as the value-based responses rooted in decoloniality that can emerge in response to these injustices. The case-study location is also used to apply the proposed decolonial planning meta-methodology to develop imaginations of a more just and dignified Old Fadama and Accra.

These research objectives lead to the main research question of this master's thesis: **How can urban planning practices be reimagined through critical reflexivity and Indigenous knowledge to advance spatial justice in postcolonial contexts such as Old Fadama, Accra, and move towards a decolonial planning practice?**

To answer this main research question, the thesis is split up by multiple sub-research questions, starting with: (1) How have colonial and neoliberal planning legacies shaped contemporary spatial exclusion and informality in Accra?, (2) In what ways are these exclusionary legacies expressed in the built environment and governance of Old Fadama?, and (3) Which alternative knowledges and spatial practices from Old Fadama and literature examples exist that go beyond the colonial and neoliberal frameworks of modern Western planning?

The learnings from these sub-questions are then bridged towards practice. The realisations of the oppressive systems that lie beneath urban planning, and the strategies we can employ to eradicate them and rectify their resulting injustices form lessons and reflections that contribute to developing a decolonial planning meta-methodology. The research thus continues with the following sub-research questions: (4) How can insights from these practices contribute to a critically reflexive, value-led planning methodology that fosters spatial justice?, and (5) What principles or design values emerge for planners seeking to decolonise practice in similar contexts?

Besides contributing to the theoretical body of decolonial planning, this research is also a very personal journey of reflection and unlearning of the coloniality in my own planning education. Once again, to bridge the gap between theory and practice, but also to engage in embodied learning, the final step of this research aims to apply the newfound lessons and reflections of decolonial planning to the case of Old Fadama, and imagine value-based and community-led planning in an accepted and enhanced 'informal' environment. The final sub-research question is therefore: (6) How can this reflexive and value-led planning methodology be applied to re-imagine decolonial futures for Old Fadama?

2. IN CONCEPT: RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

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Theoretical framework

To answer the research question of this thesis, the research is situated in specific urban planning, governance, and developmental studies theories and connects to a clear moral and ethical positioning. This chapter will discuss and explain the main theoretical framework and key concepts.

The main theories embedded in this research can be categorised by content and role in the research. The defined categories, and the theories and concepts organised within them, are:

1. Theories concerning the ethical and theoretical positioning underlining the research methods, objectives, and outcomes
 - Right to the City (key authors: H. Lefebvre, D. Harvey)
 - Spatial and Social Justice (key authors: D. Harvey, E. Soja)
 - Decoloniality (key author: R. Vazquez)
 - Meta-methodology (key authors: B. Dick et al., V. Udoewa)
2. Theories concerning the understanding of urban planning as a discipline and as a product of societal structures such as coloniality, neoliberalism, and capitalism
 - Western knowledge system (key authors: C. Ellis, I. Kapoor, J. Briggs, J. Sharp, A. Moreton-Robinson)
 - Urban informality (key authors: M. Davis, S. McCartney, S. Krishnamurthy)
3. Theories and concepts concerning alternative planning and research epistemologies
 - Standpoint theory (key author: A. Moreton-Robinson)
 - Autonomous design (key author: A. Escobar)
 - Value-based design (key authors: A. Auzins, U. Chigbu, R. Rocco, A. Thomas, M. Novas-Ferradás)
4. Theories concerning a transformation of urban planning methodology
 - Positionality (key authors: A. Holmes, M. Attia, J. Edge)
 - Critically reflexive research and design (key authors: M. Attia, J. Edge, A. Holmes)
 - Radical imagination (key authors: M. Haiven, A. Kashnabish)

Ethical and theoretical positioning of the research

In the master's thesis *Deconstructing Urban Planning*, I attempt to tackle what I believe is the very core of urban planning: a responsibility to shape our world to be better. I state that given the rooting of urban planning as a discipline solely in the Western knowledge system, both the methods as well as the outcomes are inherently unjust, as we overlook large portions of the people we plan and design for: the people that do not fully align themselves with Western culture. The question of what it means to shape a better world has no single, and no objective answer. It is therefore important to situate and position this thesis.

Right to the City

Embodying both the anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberalist nature of this study, one of the key theories in this research is the Right to the City. The right to the city is a theory initially invented and developed by the famous Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henry Lefebvre. In his book *Le Droit à la ville* (1968) he introduced the term in the title, and explained the theory not as the right to possession in the city, but rather the right for everyone to take part in the democratic processes that ultimately shape the city. The city is a treasure of opportunities, and according to Lefebvre, everyone should not only have access to these opportunities, but a role in shaping them to their needs as well. More recently, the theory has gained new momentum with well-known scholars like David Harvey popularising the philosophy, which can be considered quite radical in today's capitalist and neoliberal world, once again (Harvey, 2015).

The right to the city, or the theory itself is not subject to discussion or critique in this thesis. It is rather considered as a crucial foundation to ethical considerations around urban informality. This thesis is aligned with the philosophy of the right to the city, and potential recommendations on governance and planning in the future will be made with the right to the city as a core value.

As Marcuse (2009) elaborates on the Right to the City in his paper on critical urban theory, he reflects that the theory might need additional specification as to whose right and what city we are talking about. He states that the Right to the City does not simply advocate to everyone's right to merely the physicality of the city, but rather the right to the opportunity and services of our society that the most marginalised, the most vulnerable, the most oppressed communities have been cast out of. This is exactly the space this thesis aims to fill; in the case of Old Fadama, the community, whilst citizens, have been excluded from public services, state protection, and subsequently from life opportunities. Rather than creating solutions that shape a city for all, the thesis focuses on creating solutions to give the city back to the marginalised community specifically.

Spatial and Social Justice

The basic ethical stance in this project, that opportunities

in life as facilitated by the dimensions of the tangible and intangible dimensions in our cities and society, should be equitable for all, are explained and supported by Spatial and Social Justice theory.

Nowadays, spatial justice theory is considered one of the key conceptual theories informing ethical design and decision-making in urban planning. The theory was initially conceptualised by David Harvey (2009) in his book 'Social Justice and the City,' initially published in 1973. The theory was further vocalised and developed by Edward Soja, who was at the forefront of popularising the relatively new term 'spatial justice' (Soja, 2009).

Spatial justice intentionally focuses on the spatial and geographical aspects of justice. Not to deny other aspects, such as economic or social ones, but to create the opportunity for specific insights, actions, and theorisation on the tangible spatial implications of injustice for traditionally spatially inclined disciplines and beyond (Soja, 2009).

Spatial justice theory recognises that space, and those who design space, have the power to create either opportunity or oppression and exclusion. This is a reciprocal relation; oppressive spatial structures produce injustice, and vice versa, injustice produces oppressive spatial structures as well, without intervention, creating a vicious cycle (Soja, 2009). However, if injustice can be produced, so can justice.

Thus, the intentional emphasis on the spatial aspect of justice not only opens up new opportunities for actionable solutions and theories on injustice but also creates an awareness that we can actively design and shape our built structures, and thereby indirectly our societal structures, towards justice (Soja, 2009).

Decoloniality

As mentioned before, this thesis states that the unilateral focus on the Western knowledge system and Western culture produces an urban planning discipline that will inherently create unjust structures. A large part of the reason for this is that the current Western knowledge system and Western culture contain structures and systems that perpetuate colonialist and imperialist philosophies. Through the domination of Western culture and the Western knowledge system, expressing itself through structures like neoliberalism, the oppression of vulnerable communities, like many Indigenous peoples, persists. Exposing and deconstructing this relationship by embedding a transformed urban planning methodology in decoloniality is a main objective of this research.

Decoloniality and decolonisation are often used interchangeably; however, there is an important difference in meaning. Decolonisation is a term everyone is a well-known and integrated term referring to the political process of liberation from colonial rule. It refers specifically to the political process and procedural affairs connected to this process. Decoloniality, however, refers to the much broader

and all-encompassing process of transforming institutions, structures, narratives, and societies away from coloniality towards justice (Vazquez, 2022; Bottom-Up Initiatives for Social Change University Utrecht, 2023).

Decoloniality is about active engagement with methods, theories, and concepts as described before that challenge the Western-centrist norm in areas and disciplines beyond just politics; it encompasses politics as well as ethics (Vazquez, 2022).

This project addresses the different dimensions of injustice and inequality caused and continued by coloniality and attempts to expose and dismantle these structures by actively engaging with decolonial theory, Indigenous knowledge and critical reflexivity. By writing the thesis and conducting the research, I am practising decoloniality and contributing to decolonising research, education, urban planning, but most of all, my own practice and mind.

Meta-methodology

In this research, the Western planning tradition and alternative planning approaches are reviewed and evaluated. The reflections and conclusions from this evaluation form the input for a decolonial planning meta-methodology. Key here, is that decolonial planning is regarded as a meta-methodology, rather than a methodology. The "meta-" prefix signifies that the term is self-referential. Meta-methodology can therefore be explained as a methodology concerning methodology. It is a foundational framework within which multiple methodologies and methods can be applied and assimilated (Dick et al., 2015; Udoewa, 2022). In this research, the decolonial planning meta-methodology, built up from 'reflections for the decolonial planner', describes a decolonial method that allows planners to carry out any planning method in a decolonial, reflective, and therefore just manner. A meta-methodology transcends and precedes any given methodology. It represents a way of doing things, rather than the exact actionable method.

The planning methodology we employ at TU Delft, Research by Design, lends itself to be regarded and used as a meta-methodology given its inherent iterative nature and flexibility to specific cases and contexts (Nijhuis et al., 2016; Dick et al., 2015). By regarding decolonial planning as a meta-methodology, an umbrella process that is flexible and iterative, and can adapt to any specific planning context, the results of this research (a defined decolonial planning meta-methodology) become more relevant and generally applicable rather than situated (Dick et al., 2015).

As urban environments expand and become more complex, so do the methods, perspectives, and schools of urban planning we subscribe to to decipher and (re)design them. This has resulted in an exponential growth of many approaches, perspectives, and methods for urban planning. Most of them are very situated, and therefore only locally applicable. I am in no way denying the importance and value of these situated

approaches; moreover, this research calls for a situated perspective of planning and centring situated, embodied, and experienced knowledge in planning processes. However, in an arena of ever-growing variety of methods and approaches, an all-encompassing and universally applicable meta-methodology to give well-founded guidance to these many approaches could be a welcome development in contemporary planning theory and practice.

Colonialism, neoliberalism, and urban planning

The first part of Deconstructing Urban Planning revolves around analysing, understanding, and deconstructing the relationship between colonialism, neoliberalism, and urban planning as a product of these societal structures. To understand these relationships, concepts, and phenomena, the key concepts are explained here.

The Western Knowledge system and Indigenous Knowledge systems

A knowledge system can be understood as the collection of generally accepted knowledge by a group of people, often a country or specific cultural group. The type of knowledge that is considered part of the knowledge system, as well as the medium through which this knowledge is documented and communicated is reflective of the respective culture and values.

In the Western Knowledge system, this translates into knowledge based on objective truths, or facts, that can be traced and proven through academic methods. Knowledge is often quantified in numbers, and money. Documentation and communication of knowledge is mostly through written text. Due to these factors, the Western Knowledge system, and resultingly Western Science, is heavily focused on the exact sciences (Ellis, 1999; Briggs and Sharp, 2004). Social Sciences sometimes experience a cultural stigma and are often regarded as inferior to STEM-related pathways. Alternative types of knowledge, such as lived experiences, art, stories, emotions, and memories, are undervalued, and sometimes not valued at all (Ellis, 1999). This automatically means an exclusion and disregard of many Indigenous knowledges other than Western, that are rooted in Storytelling, Dreaming, ancestral knowledge, and religious knowledge (Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2013).

The one-sided perspective in a knowledge system is not an inherent problem; a knowledge system ultimately develops according to certain cultural conditions by and for people who adhere to those specific cultural conditions. However, the Western knowledge system and Western science are virtually universally applied anywhere in the world (Kapoor, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Briggs and Sharp, 2004). Where the local culture and knowledge system do not necessarily adhere to the requirements and conditions of the Western knowledge system, this leads to problematic exclusion of local and Indigenous knowledge. The strong racial divide between the dominant Western knowledge

system and subordinate non-Western knowledge systems is reflective of (wrongful) ideas on racial superiority and power dynamics of control from colonial times. The continuation of the universal application of the Western knowledge system is a key component of remaining neocolonial power dynamics in our modern-day society (Kapoor, 2004; Briggs and Sharp, 2004).

The universal application of the Western knowledge system is especially harmful when no critical reflection of the researcher's own positioning, morals, ethics, and potential bias. The integrating of critical reflection and reflexivity in Western science leaves much to be desired. Research is considered to be rational and factual, as it is proven through repeatable, academic methods. The researcher themselves is considered to be purely objective and actively attempts to separate themselves from the research (Ellis, 1999). The understanding of the researcher as separate from the research leaves out any real need to actively reflect on the research and one's actions within the research. The reflection that does generally take place, is a rather superficial reflection of the methodology and practical processes the researcher experienced during the research. Critical reflection upon the researchers own positionality, how this positionality shapes the research, and how the research shapes the research back again, is necessary but remains limited (Attia and Edge, 2017; Nadaraj, 2007). While an argument can be made that this critical reflection and reflexivity is essential in any research, this is especially true in urban planning. As an urban planner, your decisions make a difference in the way people can or cannot live their lives. It affects their seemingly simple daily routine, as well as their access to higher stakes opportunities in life. Although an urban planner is someone who holds inherent power through discipline, they are not democratically chosen. Moral responsibility is therefore up for choice (Findey, 2005). Critical reflection would make the urban planner more aware of their influence and bias in research and projects, and encourage active interaction with the research, which is likely to result in a more nuanced research outcome and promote unlearning processes of harmful bias (Attia and Edge, 2017; Nadaraj, 2007).

Of course, there are many knowledge systems besides the Western knowledge system, that are similarly based on knowledge types and knowledge communication types reflective of the respective culture the knowledge system is a part of. These alternative knowledge systems are often grouped into the term 'Indigenous knowledge systems'. Despite a wide variety and diversity between different Indigenous knowledge systems, they tend to share that they are regarded as secondary to the Western knowledge system and are underrepresented in research and practice. Indigenous knowledge systems are often disregarded because the communication methods do not comply with the dominant Western standard of written, academically proven texts; verbal transfer of traditional and ancestral knowledge is much more common (Briggs and Sharp, 2004). Furthermore, the type of knowledge doesn't always rhyme with the narrow

Western standard either. Rather than purely factual, objective, and rational knowledge, knowledge in Indigenous knowledge systems can be based on ancestral Storytelling, cultural and religious rituals, and deep connection to and inspiration from nature. It extends beyond the physical to the spiritual (Breidlid, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2013). It is exactly this wider understanding of knowledge that provides endless more tools for a more accurate and culturally appropriate understanding of circumstances, wishes, needs, and priorities in the urban planning discipline (Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2013).

Also outside of urban planning, Indigenous knowledge systems and the traditional knowledge that is within them, are incredibly valuable, as bodies of knowledge are often constructed over many generations of lived experience. This creates a very detailed understanding of natural processes, ecosystems, and relations between human and Earth of the area of the respective Indigenous community. This is often a level of understanding that Western methods cannot achieve (Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Breidlid, 2008).

One knowledge system can be differentiated from another due to its connection to a specific community, cultural values, and general situatedness. Therefore, as Briggs and Sharp (2004) state, strong argument can be made that the Western knowledge system should be regarded as an Indigenous knowledge system belonging to modern Western culture. In any project, critical reflection and analysis on what knowledge, methods, and tools to apply should be standard. By regarding the Western knowledge system as another example of a situated Indigenous knowledge system, an important step in decentring Western knowledge, and dismantling Western dominance is made. It would leave more opportunity for meaningful incorporation of local Indigenous knowledge systems, contributing to deconstructing systems of colonisation (Briggs and Sharp, 2004).

Urban informality

This thesis's theorisation of urban planning as a product of Western domination, colonisation and neoliberalism is brought into practice through focusing on urban informality as an extreme example of the confluence of injustices produced by these structures. Through analysing informal settlements, such as the research's case-study location Old Fadama, the connections with colonialist philosophies, policies, and built structures can be exposed in our current world, the real world we all live in.

Urban informality and informal settlements are both widely contested terms. They are terms that come with a lot of assumptions, misunderstandings, and stigmatisation, partially due to vague descriptions in literature and a large variety of what can be considered informal (Davis, 2006; McCartney and Krishnamurthy, 2018).

Urban informality exists in different morphologies and UNLEARNING THE COLONIALITY OF PLANNING

different degrees of legality. Informal settlements are usually stigmatised to be illegal, self-built squatter settlements (McCartney and Krishnamurthy, 2018). While these settlements do exist, much more goes on beneath the surface, and many other typologies and legal constructions of informality exist. Some informal settlements have a justified land claim and legal land titles, but illegally make use of service networks such as electricity and water. Other informal settlements are what is called 'pirate urbanisation,' meaning that while dwellers do hold the legal land titles, they are not adherent to respective zoning laws (Davis, 2006). Apart from various legal titling constructions, the morphology of informal settlements and dwellings can vary widely as well. As McCartney and Krishnamurthy (2018) describe in their work on the neglected morphology of informal settlements, six different typologies can be distinguished: (1) developer-built, (2) formally built family housing, (3) self-built permanent housing, (4) self-built semi-permanent housing, (5) existing formally built tenement, (6) self-built shack. The permanence of the dwelling exposes information about the materiality of the dwelling, as well as indirect information about the tenure type and legality. The more security people experience in their tenure, the more investment they are likely to make, increasing the permanence and quality of the dwelling.

Ritchie et al. (2024) use a clear and concise definition of informal settlements in their collective work on urbanisation. They describe an informal settlement as a settlement that lacks one or more of the following conditions: access to clean water, access to sanitation, sufficient housing, and durability of housing (Ritchie et al., 2024). This definition is concise and broad. It includes the typology of the available infrastructure, as well as the typology of dwellings. It does not, however, address the various legalities and illegalities that can occur in urban informality, as described above. What it does do, though, is leave enough room in the definition to apply to all different forms of informal settlements on this scale of typology and legality. With a small addition addressing the tenure and legality of informal settlements as seen below, it is therefore an excellent definition of urban informality to incorporate all versions of informality into the discourse, and dismantle the stigmatisation around informal settlements in popular culture as well as in literature.

The complete definition of informal settlements as adopted in this thesis is: A settlement that lacks one or more of the following conditions: access to clean water, access to sanitation, sufficient housing, durability of housing, stable tenure, and varying degrees of legality. (Ritchie et al., 2024; McCartney and Krishnamurthy, 2018; Davis, 2006).

The UN expects the urban population to grow with an additional 2.5 billion urban dwellers by 2050, bringing the worldwide urban population to 7.1 billion people (UN Department of Economics and Social Affairs, 2023). 90 per cent of this urbanisation is projected to occur in Africa and Asia, continents already disproportionately dealing with spatial and social injustice, extreme urban poverty, and urban

informality (Davis, 2006). Thus far, attempts to manage urban informality and extreme urban poverty have failed to make any large-scale and structural change (Davis, 2006). Without significant structural transformation of the root causes of this injustice, the expected additional urban population will likely be predominantly represented in urban informality (Davis, 2006, UN Department of Economics and Social Affairs, 2023).

A common alternative term for informal settlement in the vernacular is 'slum.' Slum, however, is a term that is often accompanied by many negative connotations and reductionist stereotypes. Already, McCartney and Krishnamurthy (2018) explain, the term informal is often used interchangeably with words like illegal, irregular, and even criminal. Moreover, informal settlements are synonymised with dirty, unhealthy, and disruptive. This all adds to the stigmatisation and polarisation around informal settlements and their dwellers, framing the dwellers as the villain rather than the victim (McCartney and Krishnamurthy, 2018; Stacey and Lund, 2016; Davis, 2006). Villainising informal dwellers only diverts attention away from the actual problem, the unjust colonial structures in society and the built environment that create the conditions and circumstances for urban informality (Roy, 2009).

For this reason, this thesis will exclusively make use of the terms informal settlement and urban informality from this point on. It holds more room for nuance and can encompass more typologies and legalities than the term 'slum' which already has a distinct meaning and negative connotation in the vernacular of popular culture.

The colonial traces that still shape today's urban planning, governance, and built environment create dynamics of exclusion in societies that marginalise vulnerable communities, such as religious minorities, migrants, and the poor. A community that is pre-eminently the victim of these structures are informal dwellers. Urban informality can be seen as a result of as well as a response to these unjust structures rooted in colonialism; on the one hand, these structures create such injustices and inequality that informal dwellers find themselves cast out of formal urban spheres, unable to access the services and opportunities the city ought to provide and on the other hand, informality forms a unique opposing force against these unjust formal structures through the (re) birth of alternative governance structures and planning frameworks as survival strategies of the informal (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Rocco and van Ballegoien, 2019).

Through analysing the governance and planning processes in informal settlements, as well as the possible clashes between this informal system and the respective formal system, Western-centric and colonial patterns in the urban planning and governance discipline can be exposed and subsequently transformed.

Urban informality, whilst an increasingly common phenomenon as survival strategy in response to

overpopulated and overloaded public service structures, are widely denounced by formal institutions, as well as many planners. This denunciation is a key example of our narrow-minded view of what our society and cities should look like: only the perfect, clean, and neatly organised city according to Western examples and standards is accepted, anything that deviates from this norm is considered 'underdeveloped' or even 'primitive'. Of course, urban informality has its problems, although those problems do not necessarily arise from the informal ways of organising and constructing the settlements, but rather from the governmental neglect and alienation from social networks as justified by the label 'informal'. In this thesis, the image of urban informality is challenged, arguing that informal settlements form unique living labs of alternative societies that exist largely outside of Western and neoliberal frameworks.

Alternative planning and research epistemologies

The second part of this research consists of examining alternative practices that work outside of, or apart from the Western norm that can eventually help to inform transformed urban planning practice, rooted in decoloniality. The theories, concepts, and practices that are at the core of this part of the research, are outlined below.

Standpoint Theory (Feminist Standpoint Theory and Indigenous Standpoint Theory)

Standpoint Theory is a methodology for analysis that acknowledges a positive bias that is shaping the research. It is in that way a direct critique of Western science that regards research to be objective and therefore denies bias, even though it affects the research (Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Attia and Edge, 2017). Standpoint theory can therefore be seen as an alternative research methodology to standard Western academia (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Whilst not traditionally developed with urban planning in mind, the concepts of Standpoint Theory can transfer to any discipline and any area of life.

In feminist standpoint theory, the community that the analysis gives intentional bias to is women. Many feminist scholars have contributed to analysing and documenting the inequalities women experience as a result of the default patriarchal systems in our society. Particularly Donna Haraway (1988), Susan Hekman (1997), and Sandra Harding (1997) have made meaningful contributions to constructing a feminist body of knowledge and guidelines for feminist standpoint theory (Moreton-Robinson, 2013).

Feminist standpoint theory, and standpoint theory in general, has received significant backlash in literature for favouring one group over the other. In this blatant favouritism, and the reflection and openness about it, however, feminist standpoint theory is effectively dismantling patriarchal structures that form the norm in modern-day society (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). As opposed to standard Western science, where the needs of white men are made universal without acknowledgement of favouritism, feminist standpoint theory focuses on the needs of women, but acknowledges this, placing the research in a comprehensive context for interpretation. In doing so, it exposes the wrongful universal application of the needs of man and the resulting inequality in standard Western sciences.

Feminist standpoint theory is a valuable methodological tool in this thesis on urban informality, as it is women and children who are amongst the most affected by urban poverty and experience significant inequalities in informal settlements (Davis, 2006). Women are besides their occupational work responsible for the vast majority of domestic work and the upbringing and education of children as well, they are more often the victim of (sexual) violence, and they are significantly more affected by the sub-par water accessibility and water quality than men due to different hygienical needs and modesty

standards. This not only affects their health and safety, but it also indirectly affects their mobility and education, further damaging women's quality of life in informal settlements (Davis, 2006).

Indigenous standpoint theory, similarly to feminist standpoint theory, is a research methodology with an intentional bias for a respective Indigenous community (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Indigenous standpoint theory is quite prevalent in Australia, New Zealand and Canada, but less so in other places in the world, although standpoint theory can be adapted to any location (Iddy, 2020); analysis can be constructed with any specific group or community at the basis. Where feminist standpoint theory attacks patriarchal structures, Indigenous standpoint theory is targeted at colonial structures.

Indigenous standpoint theory lends itself as an analysis tool that decentres the Western knowledge system and white people and shifts the focus to the often marginalised Indigenous communities (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). This makes Indigenous standpoint theory a valuable methodological tool in the context of urban informality as extreme urban poverty and resulting informality are largely caused by remaining dynamics of exclusion that originated during colonial rule. The vast majority of wealth and power in nations that were formerly colonised is in the hands of a small elite, inherited from the coloniser upon their desertion of the settlement. Colonial laws, procedures, and built inequality were never extensively undone. Furthermore, inherently colonial laws and procedures are still the status quo today (Davis, 2006). This leaves the normal people, the Indigenous peoples, as the marginalised communities. Especially urban migrants originating from rural areas find themselves unable to break into this system that is full of political, economic, and spatial boundaries. They are disproportionately cast out into the informal sector (Davis, 2006).

Since Indigenous communities are the ones that are hurting from these remaining colonial structures, and the Western knowledge system is still at the basis of planning practice and governance in these areas (Davis, 2006; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Kapoor, 2004; Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Breidlid, 2020), a research methodology that directly dismantles colonial structures can be an appropriate approach to care for these marginalised communities.

Autonomous design

Perhaps in the vein of standpoint theory, but rather applied in design disciplines, lies autonomous design. Autonomous design describes a design methodology whose main goal is to protect and facilitate the processes of autonomy and autopoiesis (meaning self-creation, or the process of self-creation and self-establishment through the existence of the system itself) of a particular community (Escobar, 2018). Autonomous design, like standpoint theory, puts the respective community at the core of the research or project. In autonomous design, this is taken a step further however, to the conviction that it is only up to the community to make

designs, or decisions, on matters that affect them. This conviction stems from the understanding that cultural history, ancestry, and worldviews can only be properly understood and interpreted by the community itself (Escobar, 2018; Kapoor, 2004). Therefore, it should be up to the community to investigate, explore, and eventually decide, which steps should be taken to create the appropriate opportunities in their daily lives, or ‘ways of being’, through urban design (Escobar, 2018).

Urban planners from outside the respective community that is being designed for, do still have a role in this design process, albeit mostly an educating and advocating role. They can take the position of co-designer, but the true decisions are to be made by the community itself (Escobar, 2018). This way, autonomous design trusts heavily on traditional and ancestral knowledge to inspire planning and design.

Autonomous design does not only relate to urban design, but also, for example, to the design of political systems of organisation, and therefore different shapes and forms of society. Since autonomous design has at the core of its concept that every person should be able to speak up and decide for their own specific experience of reality, it often creates very open and fair processes where power dynamics are balanced and decentralised (Escobar, 2018). This is exactly how autonomous design can be especially useful to not only imagine, but also realise, design concepts that lie outside of our ‘standard’ neoliberal, capitalist, and patriarchal frameworks.

Value-based design

A value-led approach is a design method that uses values as the main input and deciding factor for decision-making during the design process. Value-conscious, value-sensitive, or value-led design – respectively VCD, VSD, and VLD – are applied in many disciplines that encounter design for human interaction, perhaps most well-known in the IT sector (Manders-Huits, 2011). Especially in urban design and urban planning, where decisions directly affect the opportunities and limitations of people’s daily lives, values are a key factor in decision-making processes (Auzis and Chigbu, 2021). As this thesis states, urban planning methodology ought to transform to include more human experiences, perspectives, and aspects, such as cultural and socio-economic contexts; a value-led approach is particularly suitable to realise this transformation.

The values that form the input for value-led design and planning are generally identified by (1) analysing the project site and context, (2) identifying key stakeholders in the project, (3) asking the relevant stakeholders what values are important to them and (4) to what extent. Given that a value-led approach inherently starts the design process off by requesting core input from the involved stakeholders, it reduces the inclination to apply a pre-assumed end-goal of a Western-like city on non-Western project sites. Given that the right stakeholders are engaged, and that developers

listen to the values raised by said stakeholders, a value-led planning approach, especially one in a collaborative process, offers a promising opportunity to move beyond the Western knowledge system, and building and development standard that stem from Western culture.

Transforming urban planning methodology

One of the objectives, and the most tangible intended ‘product’ of this research, is to develop a transformed urban planning methodology that moves away from the objective application of urban planning as a Western, and largely technological practice, towards a more holistic practice that embodies the ethical positioning, and alternative ways of doing and thinking as described earlier in this chapter. The key concepts, theories and methodologies that are utilised to turn theory into actionable practice are described here.

Positionality

Positionality is an important aspect of research that is increasingly adopted across all disciplines. Positionality can be described as one’s own individual world view, shaping their perspective, opinions, thoughts and actions on matters (Holmes, 2020). One’s positionality is constructed by many aspects of one’s life influencing their current worldview, for example, identity aspects such as age, class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and dis/ability. On top of this, the level of education, professional discipline, and geographical location, all learned behaviours and aspects through nurture, create a unique frame of reference shaping one’s perspective (Holmes, 2020; Homan, 2023). One’s positionality, willingly or unwillingly, shapes one’s judgements, decisions, and actions, generally in life, but also very much so in research (Attia and Edge, 2017; Holmes, 2020).

Positionality, and resultingly reflection on one’s positionality and how it affects their research has been relatively integrated in social sciences, especially in qualitative research (Attia and Edge, 2017). Due to the Western understanding of a researcher as an independent, objective vessel of the research they are conducting, there is often a lack of acknowledging the researcher’s positionality and the influence it has (had) on the research. Given the dominance of the Western knowledge system and Western-centrism in all areas of society, this lack of accountability and reflective processes causes a harmful continuation of colonial structures (Attia and Edge, 2017; Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Kapoor, 2004).

Critically reflexive research

An increased attention for and application of positionality also creates more space for reflexivity in research. Numerous authors in development, urban planning, and even physical sciences field are calling for structural changes to Western academic research methods to integrate critically reflexive research (Attia and Edge, 2017; Guilherme, 2019; Holmes, 2020; Kapoor, 2004; Nadaraj, 2007). Critically reflexive research can be applied as a method or tool to engage with the research in a deeper and more meaningful way by acknowledging the researcher’s positionality, the way it shapes the research, and the way the research shapes the researcher back, in a very active way (Attia and Edge, 2017). It invites researchers to reflect on their own bias, and by actively engaging in reflective practices, unpack their bias as well. Reflexivity in critically reflexive bias, differs from reflection.

As Attia and Edge (2017) explain, reflection is a responsive and often retrospective practice, used to distil potential limitations resulting from bias after completion of a research project. It is too often a non-iterative and one-directional process. Combined with reflection being practised only upon (near) completion of the project, the process is often too superficial to meaningfully contribute to the research project. Reflexivity by contrast, is described by Attia and Edge (2017) to be comprised of two parts, prospective reflexivity, where one reflects on the effect of the researcher on the research, and retrospective reflexivity, where one reflects on the effect of the research on the researcher, together as an active practice to engage with. Reflexivity is the process that informs positionality and it is a constant process during research; a constant iterative ‘mutual shaping’ between the research and the researcher (Attia and Edge, 2017; Holmes, 2020).

Critically reflexive research is a method or tool to actively engage with one’s positionality, rather than just acknowledging it and using it to create a more complete context for others to interpret data with (Holmes, 2020). Especially in urban planning, a discipline with embedded power but no democratic election, engagement with bias is essential to bridge the gap from theory to practice. Acknowledging the inadequacies of our practice and knowledge is not enough to create systemic change. Whilst acknowledging one’s positionality is a great step forward that is slowly becoming common practice across numerous disciplines, critically reflexive research is what is truly needed to start unpacking and dismantling the biases Western-centrism creates in research and practice.

Radical imagination

Straying away from the exclusionary focus on the Western knowledge system and Western culture also opens up the opportunity to embrace different design, communication and exploration tools in design, such as radical imagination. Radical imagination can be split up into two parts: radical, and imagination. Imagination, for a large part, speaks for itself: imagining is the forming of new ideas, concepts, or visualisations of things that are not yet there. Although not necessarily evidence-based, or according to the laws of academia, imagining is part of many everyday practices: in politics, we imagine a different society, in urban planning, we imagine a different built environment, in philosophy, we imagine answers to questions we do not have. Radical has multiple meanings nowadays. In popular culture, radical means ‘extreme’, and unfortunately, comes with a lot of negative connotations (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2010). Radical in the sense of radical imagination, however, simply means ‘to the root’, or ‘fundamentally’. Radical imagination, therefore, is about forming new ideas that think beyond the fundamentals of our status quo. It means imagining outside of our current societal structures, such as the Western knowledge system, colonialism, neoliberalism, and capitalism.

As urban planners, it is our job to shape our world. Therefore, we have to imagine a different world than the one we currently live in, that is if we intend to break the oppressive cycles

causing injustice and marginalisation in our society and built environment. Imagination is what feeds any urban design or planning project. Radical imagination specifically invites us to do so more freely, and to imagine without the constraints of reality. This process, of course, does not lead to an actionable or directly applicable solution, let alone a realistic or feasible design. It does, however, lead to visualisations exposing unjust structures in our society, and visualisations portraying truly just versions of our future environments. From here, we can actualise how to get there without already inherently compromising on the end goal by shaping it to today's oppressive structures.

Radical imagination is often, and probably should be, a collective process (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2010). In this research, it is unfortunately not, due to significant time and financial constraints during the fieldwork phase. The imaginations, however, are inspired by the stories of the community in Old Fadama; they form a collective input for an individual imagination exercise.

Radical imagination in this thesis, is used as a powerful communication tool to help people realise that the structures, and thereby limitations and constraints, are not permanent or rigid. The imaginations will hopefully invoke critical discourse that challenges our status quo and dominant culture. As Paulo Freire states in the pedagogy of the oppressed (1970), oppression is especially successful when the oppressed think that their circumstances are permanent. Imaginations can help people realise, our current world is not permanent, it can change, and it should change. Realising the impermanence of your limiting situation is the first step towards liberation from your oppression (Freire, 1970).

...

Structuring the research

The different steps of the research, and correspondingly the different roles of the theories, concepts, and methodologies described in this chapter, are borrowed from the well-known Critical Urban Theory approach of expose, propose, politicise, by Peter Marcuse (2009). This framework is set up specifically with the aim of bringing theoretical advances in urban planning, or any discipline really, into practice, as, as Marcuse states, theory and practice are often implied to develop in unison, when in reality, they do not; theory often advances quicker than what practice can keep up with. With this in mind, extra attention to the implementation of theory in practice is in place. By connecting the theory of the connection between colonialism, neoliberalism and urban planning to practice by showing the physical manifestations of dynamics of exclusion in the case-study Old Fadama, I hope to contribute to bridging the theory-practice gap through this research. Moreover, the 'end-product' of this research, a transformed meta-methodology for decolonial planning, can be directly applied in urban planning practice. The step 'politicise', however, will remain only partially developed, as defining and deciding what exactly needs to be changed and implemented in non-Western contexts should not be solely decided by Western planners. Marcuse's Critical Urban Theory is, however, used to structure the research report, and methodology as found in the following sections of this chapter.

Figure 2.1 shows the interrelations of the theories and concept of the theoretical framework in a schematic representation structured according to Marcuse's Critical Urban Theory (2009). The scheme first shows the main theories of The Right to the City, Spatial Justice, and Decoloniality as the main components of the overarching ethical and theoretical context the project lies within. Then, according to the three steps of (1) exposing, (2) proposing, and (3) politicising, the remaining theories and concepts contribute to deconstructing and subsequently reconstructing urban planning methodology to transform from an unjust and unilateral methodology, to an inclusive, value-led, and reflexive meta-methodology.

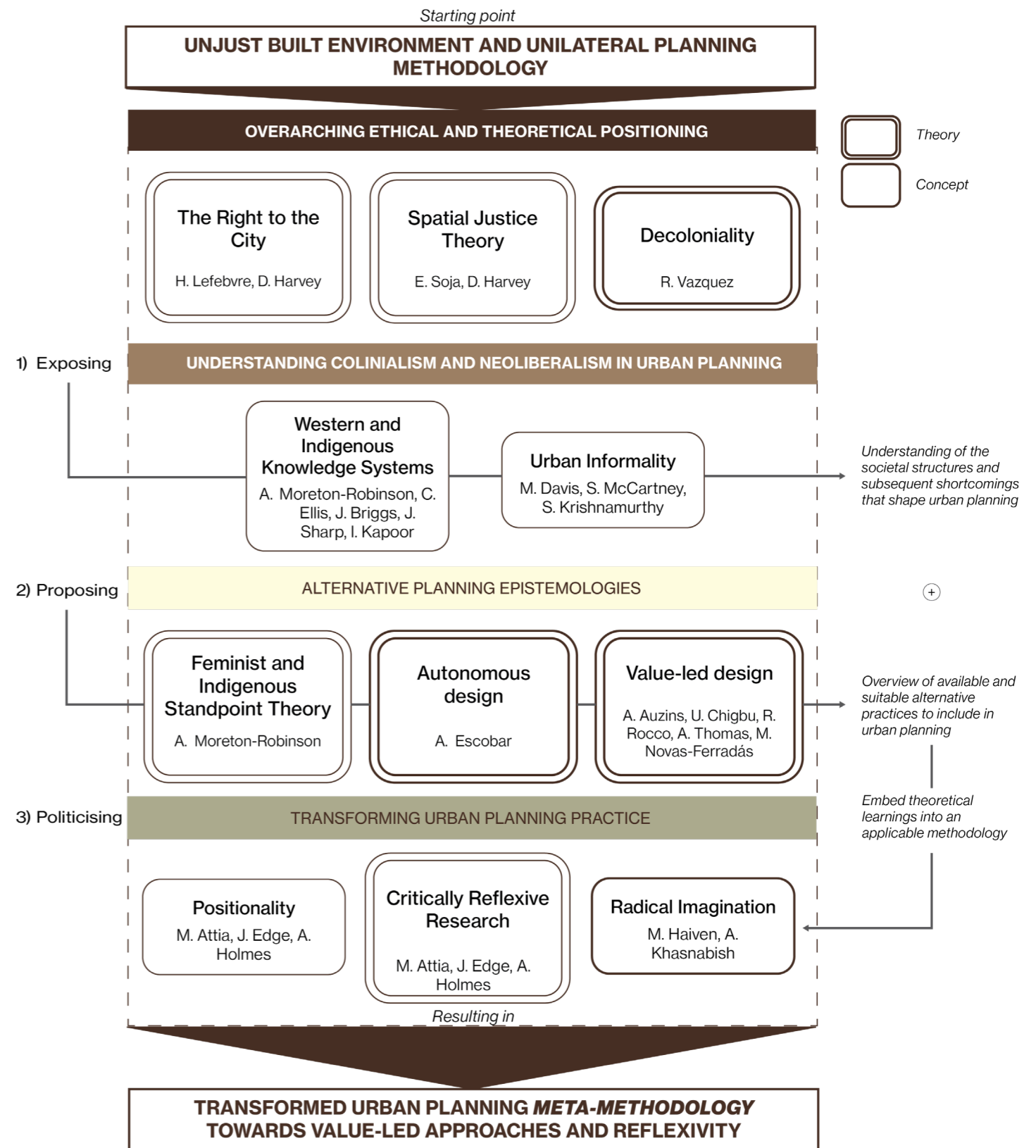


Figure 2.1 Schematic representation of theoretical framework and relations between theories and concepts

Conceptual framework

The theories and concepts as described in the theoretical framework form the basis for the theoretical context and ethical positioning of this research. In Figure 2.2, the theories are shown in relation to each other and the problem as described in the problem statement.

The main theoretical and ethical backbone of the project is shaped by The Right to the City theory (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey, 2015), Spatial Justice theory (Soja, 2009; Harvey, 2009), and the concept of Decoloniality (Vazquez, 2023), reflected in the outer triangular shape of the framework. At the crossroads of these main theories, different concepts, methods and actionable approaches to the identified problem of the colonial patterns in urban planning, especially in the context of urban informality, are reflected.

In the spheres of the Right to the City and Decoloniality you can find the decentering of the Western knowledge system and the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge systems, related to that, Positionality, and subsequently, Critical Reflection. This relates specifically to the intangible aspect of the urban planning meta-methodology (Dick et al., 2015) rooted in decoloniality as depicted in the centre of the conceptual framework. The intangible aspect of this urban planning meta-methodology refers to the unlearning and undoing of colonial structures and patterns in our urban planning discipline and personal actions that are not necessarily reflected in physical structures, but rather in imagined and societal constructions.

In the spheres of the Right to the City and Spatial Justice, on the other hand, lie the more practical and actionable theories of Indigenous standpoint theory and feminist standpoint theory (Moreton-Robinson, 2013), and Value-led design (Rocco et al., 2022). Applying these methods relates to the tangible aspect of a transformed urban planning meta- methodology rooted in decoloniality, as an intentional focus and bias on marginalised communities will lead to an urban environment that is better suited to their needs and priorities, therefore contributing to undoing the unjust colonial structures we still find in our built environment today. A value-led design practice creates the room for knowledge, needs, and priorities of all kinds to be at the basis of the design process.

In the spheres of Spatial Justice and Decoloniality, we find Autonomous Design (Escobar, 2018), and Radical Imagination (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2010), both more practical and applicable design tools and methods. This relates to both the tangible and intangible aspects of the transformed urban planning methodology, as changed methods both influence the thought patterns and social constructions within urban planning, as well as the decision-making and outcomes.

Furthermore, the tangible and intangible aspects of decoloniality influence each other, as is reflected in the centre of the conceptual framework. A changed personal understanding of decoloniality will influence decisions and

outcomes in the built environment, and likewise, a more just and equal built environment and therefore society, will create more balanced, and just and decolonised planning and governance processes.

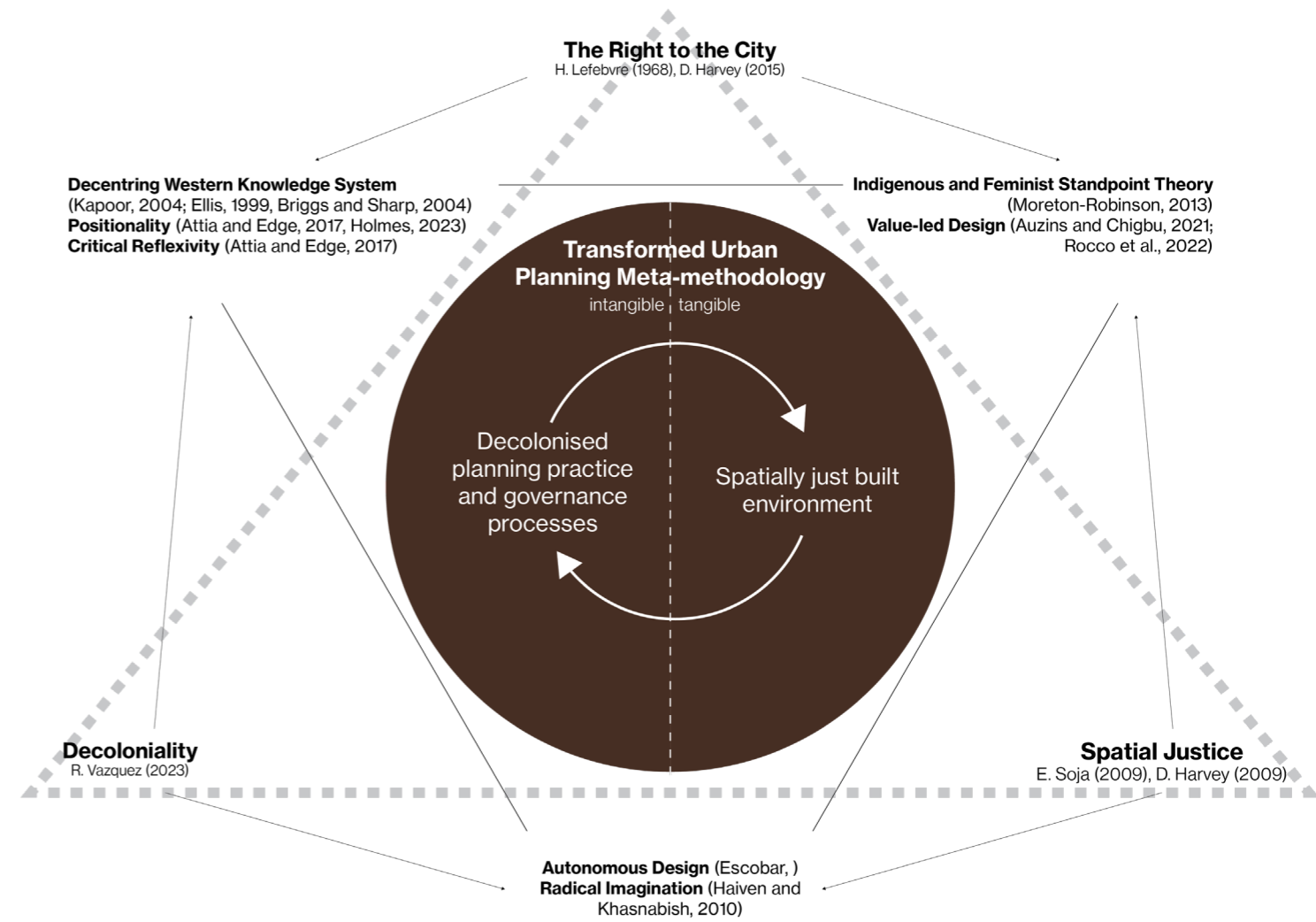


Figure 2.2 Conceptual framework diagram

Methodological framework

The methodology for this thesis project that mends theory and practice understandably consists of many various methods. Where the concepts and theories described previously are often linked to one of the steps in the Critical Urban Theory (expose, propose, and politicise) (Marcuse, 2009), the methods used in this research project often coincide and are iterated throughout the entire research process. Still, the methods can roughly be split up into three categories: (1) methods for theoretical analysis, (2) methods for data production in fieldwork, and (3) methods for synthesis. The research phases (expose, propose, and politicise), research questions, and related research methods can be seen in Table 2.1. Further explanation of the methods and of their application in this thesis project can be found in this chapter. Figure 2.3 portrays a schematic overview of how, when, in relation to which question the methods and phases in the project are used.

Literature review | Analysis of planning documents | Analysis of policy documents

Literature review of scientific articles, books, datasets, policy documents and planning documents form the theoretical basis to the project. It is used to explain the ethical and theoretical positioning of this research (scientific articles, books, and datasets), and to create an understanding of the historical shaping and current sustainment of the dynamics of exclusion caused by colonial philosophies in urban planning (scientific articles, books, policy documents and planning documents). The literature review also forms a key input for the stakeholder analysis (scientific articles, policy documents, and planning documents). Whilst the literature review is more likely to provide knowledge within the Western knowledge system, Indigenous authors are actively sought out to provide a local understanding of informality, and the coloniality of planning.

Comparative case study review

Comparative case study review is considered literature review, however, in this research project, comparative case study review is more specifically used in the second phase, the case study analysis of Old Fadama, rather than the theoretical background. Caste study reviews of other case studies of Old Fadama will be used towards the spatial analysis and understanding of Old Fadama, while caste study reviews of other cases can be used to understand the injustices and inequalities that play a part in urban informality overall better.

Spatial analysis

The second phase of the research that is characterised by the case study analysis of Old Fadama will contain a spatial and morphological analysis of Old Fadama and Accra. Mapping and photography will be central in this analysis, although documentation on Old Fadama is limited. The spatial analysis is used to find, understand, and expose specific injustices and inequalities in the case study location Old Fadama.

Community interviews | expert interviews

Semi-structured interviews are used to generate primary data that reflects first-hand experiences, as opposed to secondary literature. The interviewees exist of two main groups of respondents. (1) Professionals in planning and governance disciplines, and (2) residents of Old Fadama. The interviews are the main source of embodied knowledge and lived experience concerning Old Fadama. The data collected and generated through the interviews is used throughout the project. It supports the literature analysis in chapters 3, 4, and 5. Chapters 6 and 7 are primarily based on the fieldwork and interview data.

Synthesis

To achieve one of the goals of this research, answering the research questions and thereby uncovering the relations of colonialism, neoliberalism, and urban planning, all findings are synthesised in the final phase of the project.

Radical imagination

Radical Imagination, as a tool to expose, inspire, and critique is applied in two ways. On one hand, it is used to give extra visual insight into the injustice and shortcomings of our current systems; visualising and exposing the problem. On the other hand, it is used later in the project to give examples of a different world, a different city, and a different society. It is used as a tool to inspire and to invoke critical discourse on what our cities could be, and perhaps should be. Radical imagination in this sense is an important tool to help the reader realise our current reality is not necessary permanent; it is not our only reality.

Counter mapping

Counter mapping, mapping to challenge the socio-political status quo, especially in relation to colonial power structures and boundaries, is used in this project to expose unjust built structures and provoke critical reflection and dialogue around them. The technique is essentially an example of Radical Imagination. Counter mapping too is therefore not used as a design method, but rather as a communication tool, attempting to expose and make obvious the injustices woven into our built environment.

Critical reflexivity

Critical reflexivity as a method is thoroughly explained in the theoretical framework. It stands central in the thesis project, both as a recommendation for transformation of the urban planning discipline, as well as applied within the project itself.

	Theoretical Analysis				Data production			Synthesis			
	Literature review	Analysis of planning documents	Analysis of policy documents	Comparative case study review	Spatial analysis	Community interviews	Expert interviews	Synthesis of empirical findings	Radical Imagination	Counter mapping	Critical reflexivity
Expose	SQ1 How have colonial and neoliberal planning legacies shaped contemporary spatial exclusion and informality in Accra?	X	X	X		X	X	X			X
	SQ2 In what ways are these exclusionary legacies expressed in the built environment and governance of Old Fadama?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Propose	SQ3 Which alternative knowledges and spatial practices from Old Fadama and literature examples exist that go beyond the colonial and neoliberal frameworks of modern western planning?	X			X	X	X	X			X
	SQ4 How can insights from these practices contribute to a critically reflexive, value-led planning methodology that fosters spatial justice?	X			X		X	X			X
Politicise	SQ5 What principles or design values emerge for planners seeking to decolonise practice in similar contexts?	X			X	X	X	X	X		X
	SQ6 How can this reflexive and value-led planning methodology be applied to re-imagine decolonial futures for Old Fadama?				X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	MRQ How can urban planning practices be reimagined through critical reflexivity and Indigenous knowledge to advance spatial justice in postcolonial contexts such as Old Fadama, Accra, and move towards a decolonial planning practice?							X	X		X

Table 2.1 Overview of research questions and used methods

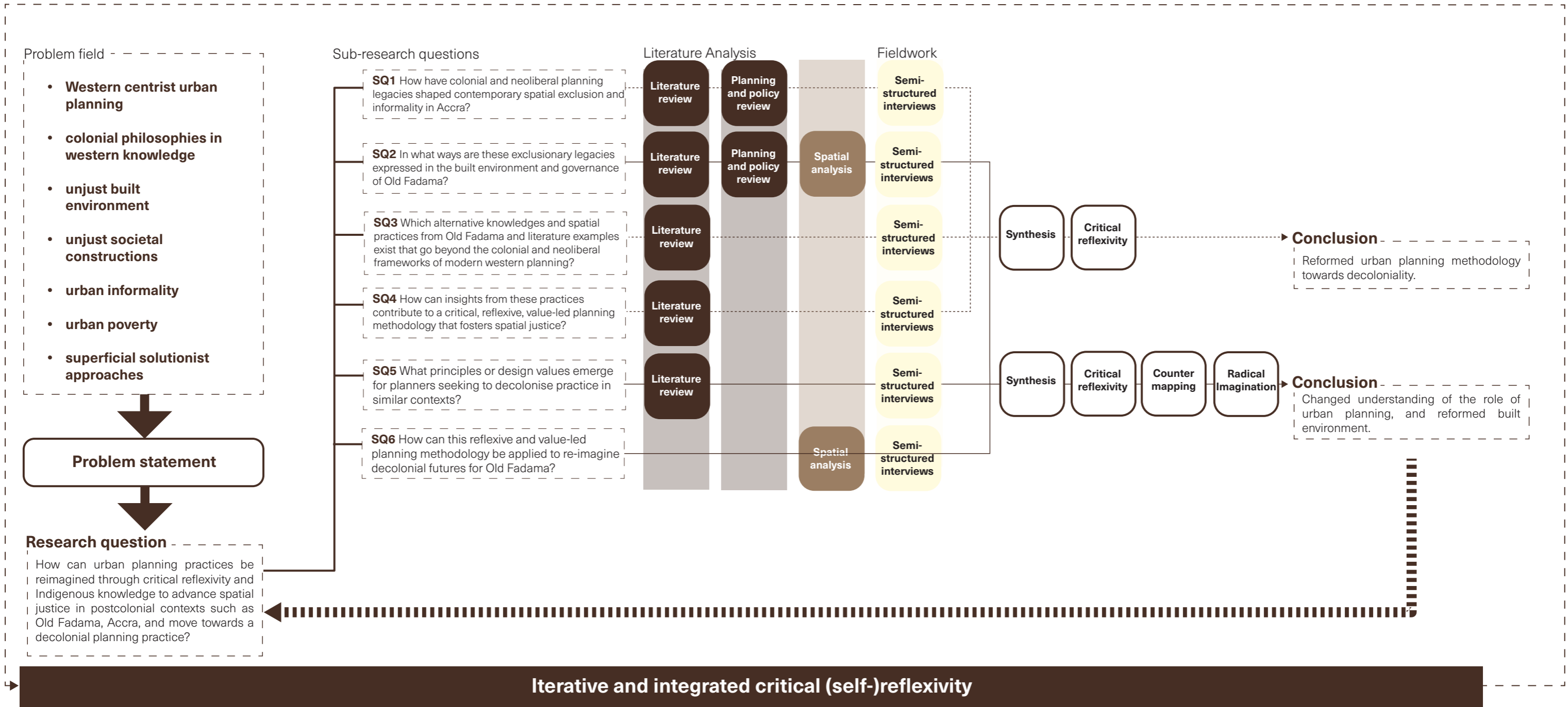


Figure 2.3 Schematic diagram of methodological framework

Reading guide

As has been mentioned multiple times, and as the methodological framework illustrates, this research aims to continuously link theory to practice to address a major research gap in planning. Because of this, the structure of this research report deviates from what might be considered the standard in academia. Rather than separating the theoretical and literature backing from the application and expression in practice through a case study location, the two are constantly intertwined throughout the chapters. The structure of the report is reflective of the research process, in which theory and practice too were intertwined and dissected simultaneously. It is, however, also possible to read this research in a more academically traditional way of theory first, and practice after. The two ways of reading the research report are reflected below and in Figures 2.4 and 2.5.

The first report order variant is reflected in Figure 2.4. It is to read the report front to back, as it is structured, with the text jumping back and forth between theory and practice. This way of reading the report is recommended as it reflects the research process of seemingly chaotic learning and unlearning.

The second way of reading the research report, as reflected in Figure 2.5, adopts a variant of the chapter order. This way reflects a more traditional academic approach of separating the theory that forms the literature background of the project from the application of the found methods or knowledge in practice. Whilst this is not the recommended way to read the report, this alternate report order can be useful for people only seeking information on colonial planning theory or Old Fadama respectively.

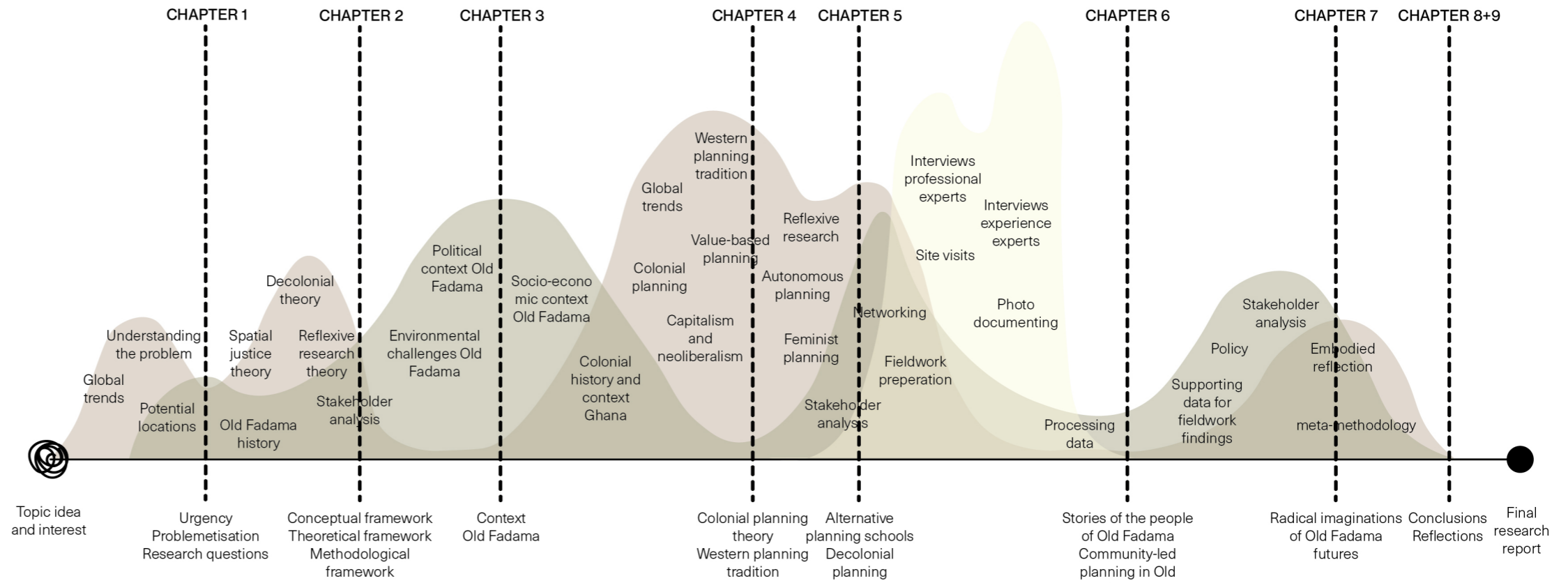
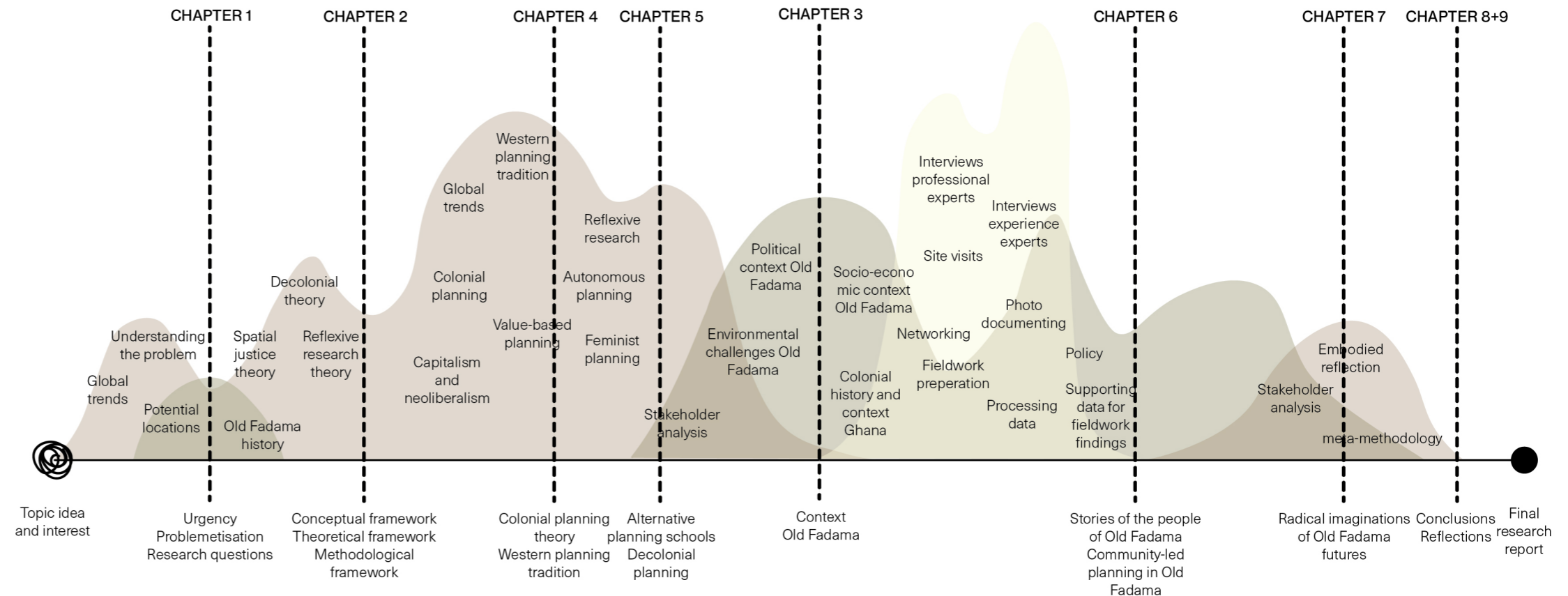


Figure 2.4 Process diagram intended report order

Figure 2.5 Process diagram alternative report order



- Literature research on planning theory
- Literature research on case study location
- Fieldwork

3. IN PLACE:

THE STORY OF OLD FADAMA

Introduction	46
Historical context	50
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Introduction

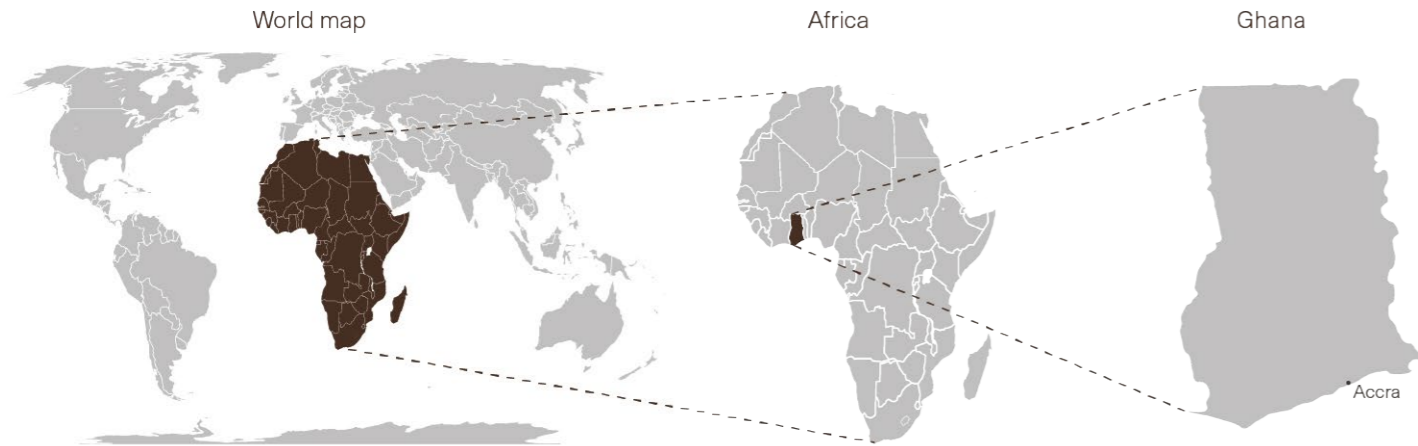


Figure 3.1 Location of Accra, Ghana in a global context

On the coast of West Africa, at the very southern end of the Sahara savannah and just to the west of the Akwapim hills, you find the beautifully diverse Republic of Ghana. Whilst the Republic is relatively young, gaining independence from British rule and first implementing the name Ghana in 1957 (Acheampong, 2018), the area, environment, and people of Ghana have a long and rich history, and tremendous cultural and environmental diversity. From the Sahara savannah in the North, to the Volta wetlands in the East, to the wildly forested areas in the central regions and the south, to the fishermen's coast where the land meets the sea; Ghana holds more environmental and cultural riches than some of us will get to experience in a lifetime. Perhaps even more special, the stories and wisdoms of all these different places come together as one, in Old Fadama.

Old Fadama is a settlement located in the heart of Ghana's coastal capital, Accra. The settlement is considered an example of informal urban development and is currently illegal under Ghana's state law. As residents do not hold official titles to the land they occupy, and the government has not zoned the land for residential use, the Old Fadama community is a squatter settlement (Stacey and Lund, 2016). Despite these legal challenges for the right to stay, the Old Fadama community has been remarkably resilient since the establishment of its current form in the 1980s, withstanding periodic demolitions and evictions (Stacey and Lund, 2016). Today, the community has grown up to 152,000 residents - according to the community leaders of Old Fadama, although, sometimes outdated, literature sources put the number between 70,000 and 100,000 (Amnesty International, 2011; Housing the Masses, 2010; Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 26, 2025). Unfortunately, the Old Fadama community deals with more than just legal struggles day by day. The area is incredibly densely populated, leading to health risks and compromised privacy and quality of life for its residents (Stacey & Lund, 2016; Davis, 2006). Its geographical location, sandwiched in between two river bodies, in combination with the lack of infrastructure and

services such as water drainage and paved roads, makes it extremely vulnerable to flooding as can be seen in Figure 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 (Stacey and Lund, 2016). On top of this, many residents of Old Fadama live off little income and are primarily dependent on the informal economy, making their livelihoods that much more volatile (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Davis, 2006; Daso et al., 2016). In this chapter, all these different aspects relevant to the development of Old Fadama, current treatment of the Old Fadama community by formal, informal, public, civil, and private stakeholders, and the experience of living in Old Fadama are discussed.



Figure 3.2 Muddy unpaved roads of Old Fadama and Agboghloshie markets create dangerous circumstances in combination with the heavy yam trucks that supply the markets (Photos by Author)

Figure 3.4 Flooding from rainfall in Old Fadama
(Photos by Author)



Figure 3.3 Flooding from rainfall has slashed away a dwellings foundation in Old Fadama (Photo by Author)



Historical context

The events described in this chapter are visualised in the timeline in Figure 3.7

Old Fadama has known different seasons, different functions, and different inhabitants over a long history of existence. In essence, when looking at the geography of the location, Old Fadama is a floodplain, sandwiched within the Korle Lagoon, which is connected to the larger Odaw River (see Figure 3.5). Overall, the common understanding seems to be that the land originally belongs to the Ga people, the ethnic group that historically inhabited the area (Addo-Fening, 2013; Stacey and Lund, 2016). During a long period of colonisation, however, customary land titles and traditional and historic land claims were not respected, to say the least. The Portuguese, Dutch, and Danish colonised multiple locations along the southern West African coast, renaming it the Gold Coast. Eventually, the British took control over the area that is now Ghana for well over a century, permanently disturbing the traditional organisational structure and way of life of residents of the area (Brukum, 2000).

It was the British who introduced urban planning, an intrinsically Western discipline, in Ghana (Acheampong, 2018). Their plans and policies, however, arguably did more harm than good. Some key transformations that have resulted from planning decisions by the British that to this day shape Ghana, and Accra, include large-scale extraction of resources, and people towards the coast, diverting the economic and political centre from the northern and central regions of the country and centralising it along the coast, in Accra (Acheampong, 2018; Mohammed, 2023; Addo-Fening, 2013; Yeboah, 2020). On top of this, the British deployed urban and regional planning strategies that not only clearly favoured European settlers over Indigenous communities but also prioritised the development of urban areas over regional areas (Acheampong, 2018; Yeboah, 2020). The effects of this are still tangible in today's built environment, as can be seen in Figure 3.6. These processes further accelerated after the British took control over the city of Kumasi and the Ashanti territories around it in 1901, following the Ashanti defeat in an almost century-long war with the British (Addo-Fening, 2013). As a result, a significant development gap between urban regions like Accra and Kumasi, and regional areas such as the Volta region, and northern areas of the country still exists today (Acheampong, 2018; Stacey and Lund, 2016; Yeboah, 2020).

In 1957, Ghana officially gained independence from the British. Almost immediately upon independence, the new government, formed by Kwame Nkrumah and his new party CPP, pushed for a 'self-government' and called for the British to leave (Mohammed, 2023; Biney, 2008). Whilst Nkrumah is widely celebrated for his political activism and bravery – although also revered for his later turn towards authoritarianism – and the establishment of Ghana as we know it today, a free and prosperous nation (Biney, 2008), the swift departure of the British and therefore abrupt transition



Figure 3.5 Location of Old Fadama in proximity to Accra and Korle Lagoon, Birdseye view (Figure by Author)

to a Ghanaian national government left him with big political, economic, and developmental messes to clean up. During their rule, the British had transformed Accra into not only a political hub, but an economic and industrial hub, catering to the extraction of people and goods through the main port of Ghana (Mohammed, 2023; Addo-Fening, 2013). In line with this objective, the area where today Old Fadama and Agbogbloshie can be found had been zoned for light industrial use towards the railways and the port. When Nkrumah assumed office, he decided to uphold this zoning (Stacey and Lund, 2016), even though a migration flow from regional Ghana to urban Ghana had already been set in motion.

The British legacy of an inherently unjust and imbalanced country, and the decision to uphold Old Fadama's industrial

zoning and governmental land ownership, meant the start of a lasting battle between old and new residents of Old Fadama and the government of Accra and Ghana. According to locals and professionals I spoke to in the interviews, even in these early days of Ghana, the imbalance between the underdeveloped rural regions of Ghana and the economically promising city of Accra urged people to migrate towards the city, many settling in informal settlements like Old Fadama. Initially, the 'issue' was manageable for the government. Settlements were demolished, people were evicted, and in some cases, like the workers of Agbogbloshie market that had settled in Old Fadama and were relocated to New Fadama, moved to an alternative location (Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025). In the 1980's, migration towards Accra, and therefore settlement in Old Fadama, soared as a result of the escalation of the Konkomba–Nanumba conflict, an ethnic war in the Northern region of Ghana that displaced thousands of people.

The Konkomba–Nanumba conflict is a long-lasting one, and one that is deeply rooted in the colonial inheritance of unjust political and socio-economic dynamics favouring certain ethnic groups over others (Addo-Fening, 2013; Brukum, 2000). Unfortunately, the conflict has escalated many times over the course of history, two considerable periods of war being in the early 1980s and in 1994, during which the population in Old Fadama grew considerably. The early 1980s is also when the Yam markets in Agbogbloshie were established, anchoring migrants even more so to the location of Agbogbloshie and Old Fadama. This was also confirmed by both interviewee groups in this research (Brukum, 2000; Stacey and Lund, 2016;

Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025). By the early 2000s, the markets and associated settlements were hearth and home to so many people, relocation or eviction, which was still the government's main objective for the area, became practically impossible without compromising human rights and people's safety (Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025). Compromising human rights and people's safety, however, is unfortunately exactly what happened. Violent evictions, forced relocations, and unannounced demolitions occurred frequently, according to the government, to limit the expansion of the settlement, and to rid the city of living situations causing physical risks and health risks, but likely also in an attempt to retain control over the community through these fearmongering strategies (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Tayler, 2011; Davis, 2006; Freire, 1972). Frequent demolitions and evictions are also likely to limit the permanence of the settlement; after all, if people feel like they can be violently removed any day, why pour resources, time, and effort into it at all?

Figure 3.6 Difference of public space quality between historically Indigenous (left, Jamestown) and 'European' (right, West Ridge) areas of Accra (Photo by Author)



pre-1980

Period of British colonisation shaping dynamics of exclusion in society and the built environment

Period of Political instability and extremely low rural development

1980

Period of Ethnic conflict in North of Ghana, resulting in substantial growth of Old Fadama

Nanumba-Konkumba war
1980-1981

1990

Nanumba-Konkumba war
'Guinea Fowl War'
1994-1995

2000

Period of conflicts and legal battles between Old Fadama and formal institutions for the right to stay

Establishment of Agboglobshie scrapyard and markets
1993

Eviction notice for Old Fadama and Agboglobshie by AMA
2002

May: eviction notice
June: SDI gets involved, classaction against AMA
July: high court rules against Old Fadama, eviction is legitimate, but alternative location needs to be provided

People's Dialogue on Human Settlements is founded in support of Old Fadama
2003

PD census 2009
79684

Violent demolition exercise
2015

>3000 dwellings in Old Fadama destroyed, causing riots and protests

Relocation and demolition of Agboglobshie Onion market and unannounced demolition of Agboglobshie scrapyard
2021

PD census 2007
48,000

Government and community census 2004
10,000-30,000

Estimated population in 1980s 10,000

OFADA census 2025
152,000

Population size of Old Fadama x1000

Time 0

Figure 3.7 Time line and population increase of Old Fadama

Significant change in the governments' treatment of Old Fadama came in 2002 when Slum Dwellers International became involved. Through what appears to be sheer coincidence, a representative of SDI was in Accra for other obligations during a time of high tumult between the government and the Old Fadama community. SDI became heavily involved in the following class action suit against the AMA government, where the community fought for the right to stay following an eviction notice (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025; Tayler, 2011). Together with the support of SDI, Ghana Federation of the Urban Poor (GHAFUP), and People's Dialogue, a newly founded branch of SDI, initially specifically to offer support for the Old Fadama community and create more reliable data in the court case, the community took the AMA government to high court, stating the eviction notice should be retracted as there was no ample time provided to organise a relocation on such a scale, nor was there a feasible alternative location for the community to move to, nor was the community consulted in the process (Tayler, 2011; Stacey and Lund, 2016; Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025). Despite their efforts and newfound global attention and support, the high court

ruled in favour of the government and stated that the AMA indeed had the right to evict. However, all eyes were now on Old Fadama, and eviction, let alone forceful eviction, without a viable alternative location and means of housing for the Old Fadama community, became undesirable for the government to say the least (Tayler, 2011; Boersma, personal communication, June 5, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025).

As newsreports, literature, and the first-hand experiences shared in the interviews in this research point out, ever since the court ruling, evictions and demolitions have slowly become less frequent, one of the biggest and violent last-minute demolition exercises in Old Fadama having occurred in 2015 (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Martin, 2009; Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025). However, even though active conflict seems to have dialled down, this does not mean the government's approach is truly sound. For example, in 2021, a large portion of the neighbouring Agbogbloshie markets, the Onion market, was demolished. However, a replacement market site has opened up outside the city. Vendors were supported in their move, and the new

market site has so far proved to be quite successful, despite some vendors returning to the original site of Agbogbloshie (Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025). However, during the demolition of the Onion market, which had been announced and properly prepared for, the AMA also took it upon themselves to demolish the Agbogbloshie scrapyard. It took military warning shots to maintain 'control' over many surprised businessmen and informal dwellers whose livelihoods, and those of their families, depended on income earned at the e-waste site (Grant et al., 2024). According to Old Fadama residents that participated in this research, just like the onion market, scrap-dealers have already returned to start up new businesses from scratch yet again (see Figure 3.10) (Boersma, personal communication, June 23, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025).

As the interviews with Old Fadama residents and relevant NGO's confirm, a similar relocation as the one of the Onion market for all of Old Fadama, or even all of the Agbogbloshie markets, does not only seem impossible, due to the number of residents – estimates vary between 79.000 to 152.000

people living in Old Fadama alone (Housing the Masses, 2010; Amnesty International, 2011; Stacey and Lund, 2016; Boersma, personal communication, June 23, 2025) – it seems undesirable given the governments reputation and status, as well as the cities wellbeing, as large parts of Accra's social and economic systems rely on the informal economy in Agbogbloshie (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025). Whilst the threat of imminent eviction may have resided, the residents of Old Fadama still don't find themselves in a situation that is anywhere close to stable. Their status is still illegal, and besides very few social welfare programmes, they do not enjoy any government services that we would consider to be part of basic living standards, such as access to potable water, sewage and drainage networks, paved roads, schools and hospitals (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Tayler, 2011; Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025). While eviction of Old Fadama may not seem feasible, desirable, or logical, it is still the governments main objective. This was clearly demonstrated in the interviews with government employees of the planning department of the AMA (Boersma, personal communication,

Figure 3.8 The Agbogbloshie markets in 2025 are of immense economic importance to Accra (Photo by Author)

Figure 3.9 Yam and onion markets of Agbogbloshie (Photo by Author)



Figure 3.10 New development and action after demolition in 2021 at the Agbogbloshie scrapyard (Photo by Author)



June 25, 2025).

Whilst often framed as spontaneous and unplanned, the emergence of informal settlements often includes conscious acts of planning and spatial organisation (Davis, 2006; Udoewa, 2022; Samper, 2014). The story of the emergence and establishment of Old Fadama can clearly be read as an act of urban planning. The people of Old Fadama do not merely act as a response to exclusion and oppression, their decision and journey to travel to Accra's urbanity, found markets and recycling businesses at Agbogbloshie, and establish an adjacent residential area in Old Fadama are distinct actions of urban planning, consciously planning and choosing sites and practices, to create a habitat within the city that previously held no room for them.

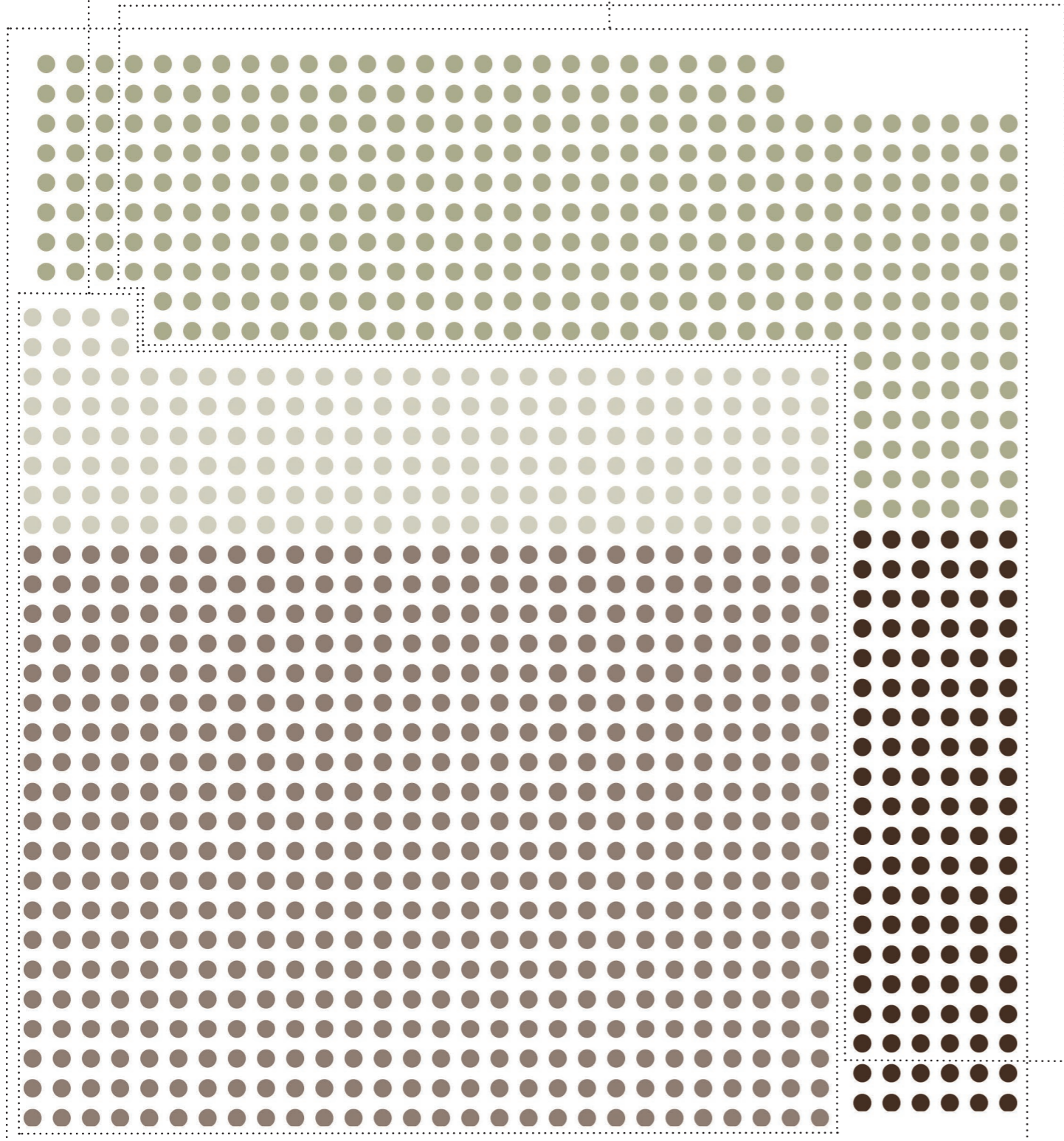
Economic context

As mentioned before, Old Fadama exists and operates in close relationships with the Agbogbloshie markets and e-waste site. Whilst both get a bad reputation, both in everyday life, as well as in academia, due to congestion issues and toxic pollution, respectively, they also contribute tremendously to the local economy of Accra (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Grant et al., 2024; Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025). Likewise, to similar markets and scrapyards in other informal settings, the Agbogbloshie food markets and scrapyard offer countless employment and business opportunities that support the livelihoods of most residents in Old Fadama, and beyond. In its turn, the residents of Old Fadama have become inextricably connected to the social and economic ecosystem of Accra, offering thousands of workers carrying out tasks in everyday life (Davis, 2006; Afful et al., 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025). The streets of Accra are unimaginable without food vendors to get a quick bite for lunch, Kayayei (head porters) to help you carry your heavy groceries home, and public transport drivers to get you to your next appointment.

The location, vast population size, and ever-increasing popularity of Old Fadama are strongly connected to the affiliated employment options. These income opportunities are the very reason people travel to Old Fadama, and the very reason they stay. It is their means of survival. Regardless of the informal sector being interwoven into every layer of society and culture, it seems to be the government's mission to formalise Ghana's economy as much as possible (Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025). Understandably, this is a transformation many countries in the Global South, that tend to have a large informal economy, are undergoing: to formal institutions, informal economies come with a multitude of downsides, such as missed tax revenue, reduced effectivity of policies, potentially high crime rates, and unclarity on the country's true GDP and productivity (Davis, 2006; Afful et al., 2025). There are multiple theories on why the informal sector occurs. Some say it is because the formal sector has too little jobs to offer for the size of the workforce (the dual theory of development theory), some say it is due to over-regulation and taxation, making informality more appealing and profitable (the institutional view), and some say it must be due to new globalised processes (Afful et al., 2025). In the case of Old Fadama, however, the answer is rather straightforward. Since residents of Old Fadama have an illegal squatter status, they are unable to apply to formal registrations, licenses and permits for jobs in most industries, as the community explains (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025). This forces them into the informal sector, even if they have the right qualifications (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025). In Ghana's case specifically, the informal sector seems to be disproportionately large. The African Development Bank estimated that Ghana's informal economic sector is responsible for 40% of the country's GDP, and contains up

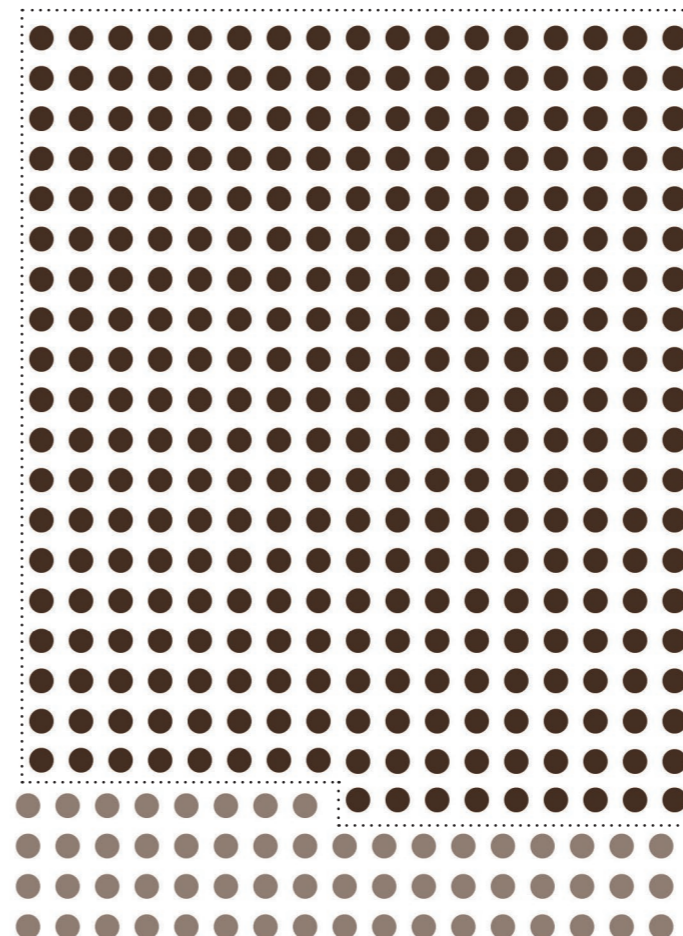
4.6 billion urban dwellers, of which 1.12 billion live in informal settlements in 2023.

7.1 billion urban dwellers, of which 3.1 billion live in informal settlements in 2050.



As of 2023, the world counts **4.6 billion** urban dwellers, of which **1.12 billion** people are informal urban dwellers. This is expected to increase to **7.1 billion** urban dwellers, of which **3.1 billion** people are informal urban dwellers, in **2050**.
(UN, 2023; World Bank, 2024a)

90% of this projected growth will take place in Africa and Asia alone.



Likewise, the informal economic sector also takes up a large portion of society. In Ghana, **85%** of the workforce is estimated to be employed in the informal sector, according to the African development bank
(Afful et al., 2025).

85% of the Ghanaian workforce is employed in the informal economic sector.

to 85% of the country's workforce, a considerably higher percentage than the 80% average of fellow African countries (Afful et al., 2025). Formalisation, however, is barely done in a responsible way for the many households dependent on informally generated income. As we have seen in Old Fadama in the past, markets and scrapyards have simply been swept away, often with minimal notice, without replacing the crucial sources of income with alternative employment opportunities. On the opposite end of the spectrum, in the case of relocation exercises where alternative housing is provided for informal communities, plans and designs barely account for creating the economic infrastructure needed to support said community. This segmented approach to upgrading and formalising informal settlements leads to the majority of projects failing, especially on any meaningful larger scale (Davis, 2006). Informality, and planning in informal societies, needs to be better understood as a holistic ecosystem with social, political, cultural, geographical, and economic aspects that all need to be accounted for in plans, designs, and policy.

Socio-political context

As can be seen in the discussion of the history and origins of the settlement, Old Fadama has been present in many shapes and sizes for a long time, finding its current form in the 1980s. Both literature and the community interviews make clear that the dynamics of oppression Old Fadama that is subject to have led to many cycles of demolitions, protests, (re-) organisation, and political revolutions within the community (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Tayler, 2011; Grant et al., 2024; Martin, 2019; Boersma, personal communications, June 23, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025; Boersma, personal communication June 27, 2025). Today, Old Fadama knows an extensive and well-functioning internal governance system that combines both customary law as well as state law. The main governing body in this governance system is OFADA, a union of all sixteen represented ethnic groups' leaders in Old Fadama. The council meets weekly to discuss various matters within the community, ranging from small disputes to important and large-scale decisions on (dis)agreements with formal institutions and development plans for the settlement (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025). Additionally, the kings, chiefs, and community leaders in OFADA fulfil an almost mentor-like role in their own community, offering support and advice where needed for their people. Besides the various community leaders in the council, many volunteer officers are working underneath them to help patrol and guide the community, their businesses, and contributions to the settlement. They also play a big role in picking up on any problems or disputes that occur in the community and help bring them up with the community leaders so that they can be addressed (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025).

OFADA was initially established with the help of People's Dialogue during the class action against the AMA in 2002 and 2003. Since then, PD has taken some steps back and changed its approach from very centred and specific to being more spread out and general, and OFADA is functioning well on its own (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Tayler, 2011; Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025).¹

The governance system that OFADA has established in Old Fadama is built on unity amongst the different ethnic groups in Old Fadama; a unity that elsewhere in Ghana, and the rest of the world for that matter, is often missing (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025). As the residents of Old Fadama themselves state in the interviews, there is peace in Old Fadama, something they all greatly appreciate and cherish. With OFADA's leadership style being very

¹ Stacey and Lund (2016) also point out critiques of OFADA, such as alleged political favouritism towards certain ethnic groups. Whether these critiques are still relevant today, and the exact extent of them falls outside of the scope of this research. During my own visits of Old Fadama and conversations with multiple parties from within and outside the Old Fadama community, these, or similar critiques have not come up.

aligned with customary law, and all community leaders bringing in the specific customs and knowledge from their respective communities, OFADA offers unique opportunities to solve disputes in a culturally appropriate way (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025). OFADA has proved to be especially successful in unifying the community's needs and aspirations into one voice to communicate more effectively and efficiently with external organisations, such as the AMA or NGO's. Not only the community members themselves, but also aligned NGO's confirm this (Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025). However, unfortunately, communication in the opposite direction, from external organisations and institutions to Old Fadama, still often overlooks the council of OFADA in their efforts to contact and enter the community, to the frustration of the community leaders themselves:

“So, anything that is coming, if they come, they shouldn't come to the people, they should come to the chiefs, so they can visit properly. [...] NGO's and government, when they come to Old Fadama, they tell us they're going to do something in Old Fadama, but they don't give account of what happens here, they see other people. Even though we will tell them they can't do something, but they don't account anything. So, after the thing has been implemented and there is an issue, they then turn back to us, to the chiefs.”

- Community leader in OFADA (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025)

Within Old Fadama, it seems as though the vast majority of the community accepts and respects the authority of the council of OFADA (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025; Stacey and Lund, 2016). A key structural difference that distinguishes the governance system established by OFADA from most formal governance institutions is that, according to customary law, the chiefs and other community leaders in OFADA do not own land themselves. This resembles the governance system in pre-colonial Northern Ghana, where chiefs who ruled over the community did not own any of the property their people used and lived on and they decided over. This way, the power of the chiefs versus the power of the people is balanced; the chiefs decide what to do, however, the people have all the power in terms of property and assets. It is therefore in the chiefs' best interest to truly do what is best for the people, not his own personal gain (Addo-Fening, 2013; Boersma, personal communication, June 5, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025). Important decisions for the community are often made through achieving consensus, not only by authority (Dampney, 1981; Odimegwu and Omazu, 2021). It needs to be noted, however, that today, this balance is deeply flawed, as in the case of Old Fadama, not only the chiefs, kings, and community leaders, but also the people of the community are exempt from owning property due to

their illegal squatter status. Whilst the communalist basis of social and political life is clearly visible in Old Fadama, the settlement exists in a larger neoliberal system, which promotes individualistic behaviour over communalist behaviour (Odimegwu and Omazu, 2021; MirafTAB, 2009).

Overall, Old Fadama knows peace, unity and a strong and stable governance system, albeit different from Western democratic governance systems. Nevertheless, the rich and very established socio-political culture in Old Fadama is often overlooked and is not appropriately appreciated by formal institutions, likely causing more conflicts and failed plans due to inadequate cultural appropriateness than necessary.

As is pointed out through literature, as well as the interviews within this research (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Boersma, personal communication, June 5, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 23, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025), outside of Old Fadama, however, the authority and autonomy of OFADA is not fully respected by formal governance institutions like the AMA and the national Ghanaian state government. Old Fadama is still considered to be an illegal settlement in the eyes of formal institutions in power, and since they do not acknowledge the legitimacy of Old Fadama as a customary body of governance, the settlement is subject to the neglect and oppression that comes with their illegal status.

The main stakeholders in Old Fadama's governance are shown in Figure 3.11. Many actors mentioned this section, as well as the historical context section, can be found here. A full overview of active actors and stakeholders in the governance system of Old Fadama can be found in Appendix 1.

As can be seen in the text as in Figure 3.11, there are many different stakeholders involved in the case of Old Fadama, such as the residents of Old Fadama, various businesses in Old Fadama and Agbobloshie, the customary body of governance Old Fadama, the citizens of Accra, the AMA, and even the national Ghanaian government. Which stakeholders hold power, however, is not necessarily related to their involvement. As the power/interest diagram of Figure 3.11 shows, the most power and authority lies in the hands of formal governments, who tend to behave as opponents to the community of Old Fadama as their main objective is currently to see the residential settlement and accompanying Agbobloshie markets evicted and demolished. 'Informal' stakeholders, such as the residents, businesses, and customary body of governance in Old Fadama are proponents of the community, and have a high direct interest and involvement. However, on paper, they do not have any power or authority (Mohammed, 2023; Acheampong, 2019). Note, however, that these stakeholders do have power according to the power/interest diagram, as these stakeholders do have authority due to their numbers and bottom-up practices and activism (Davis, 2006).

Figure 3.12 shows an additional analysis of the main

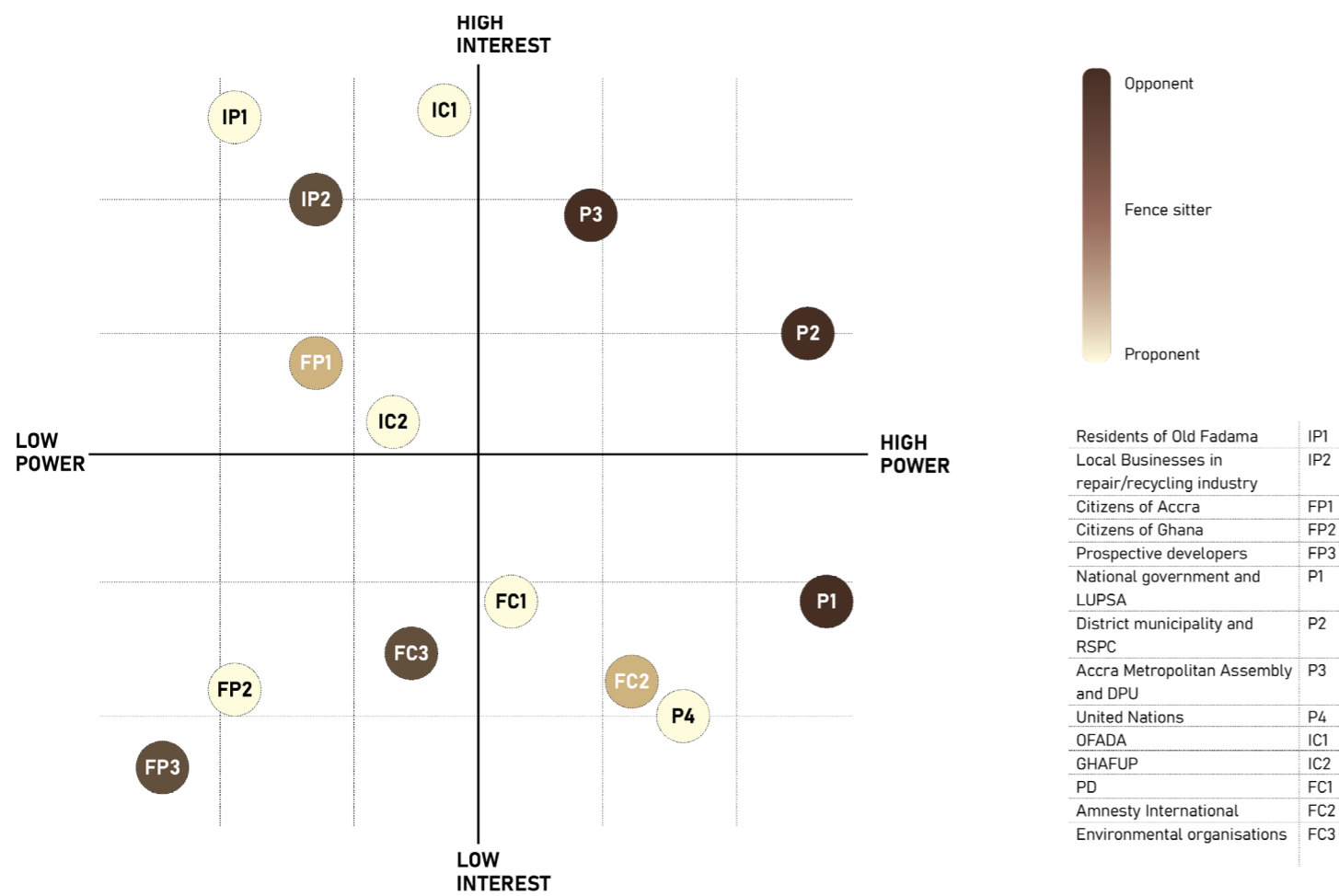


Figure 3.11 Power/interest diagram for the current situation in Old Fadama (Diagram by Author)

stakeholders in the case of Old Fadama. Here, the relations between different stakeholders in the field are shown. You can see how a relationship of conflict exists between most formal bodies of governance and informal stakeholders of any kind. The history of Old Fadama can attest to these conflicted relations, as does the current governance structure and active policy. Due to Old Fadama's illegal status, the settlement is excluded from the reach of policies and policies and government-led programmes the majority of the time. Policies or government decisions that do concern Old Fadama are focused on eviction and demolition of both Old Fadama and Agbogbloshie. This thesis focuses on a planning perspective on Old Fadama, rather than this legal perspective. Whilst valuable planning knowledge can be produced for Old Fadama through this planning perspective, implementation of this knowledge is dependent on overcoming the legal blockages between the formal governance institutions and Old Fadama.

Besides the conflicting relations, relations of 'untapped potential' are also shown in diagram 3.12. An example of this is the relation between the citizens of Accra and the community of Old Fadama. The citizens of Accra have indirect power through their influence over the democratic

government of Ghana and Accra, but they currently behave as opponents of the community of Old Fadama. Through the problematisation and analysis of this thesis however, the citizens of Accra too benefit from Old Fadama and are in many social and economic ways dependent on Old Fadama. Through exposing these dynamics, a shift in behaviour could occur, hopefully contributing to governance solutions and a more balanced stakeholder field.

In Figure 3.13 the diagram, modelled after Hofer and Kaufmanns' 'actors, arena's and aims' framework (2022), shows the key stakeholders that should be engaged for effective transformations towards justice in Old Fadama. The remainder of the report focuses especially on the Friend and Saboteur categories of stakeholders.

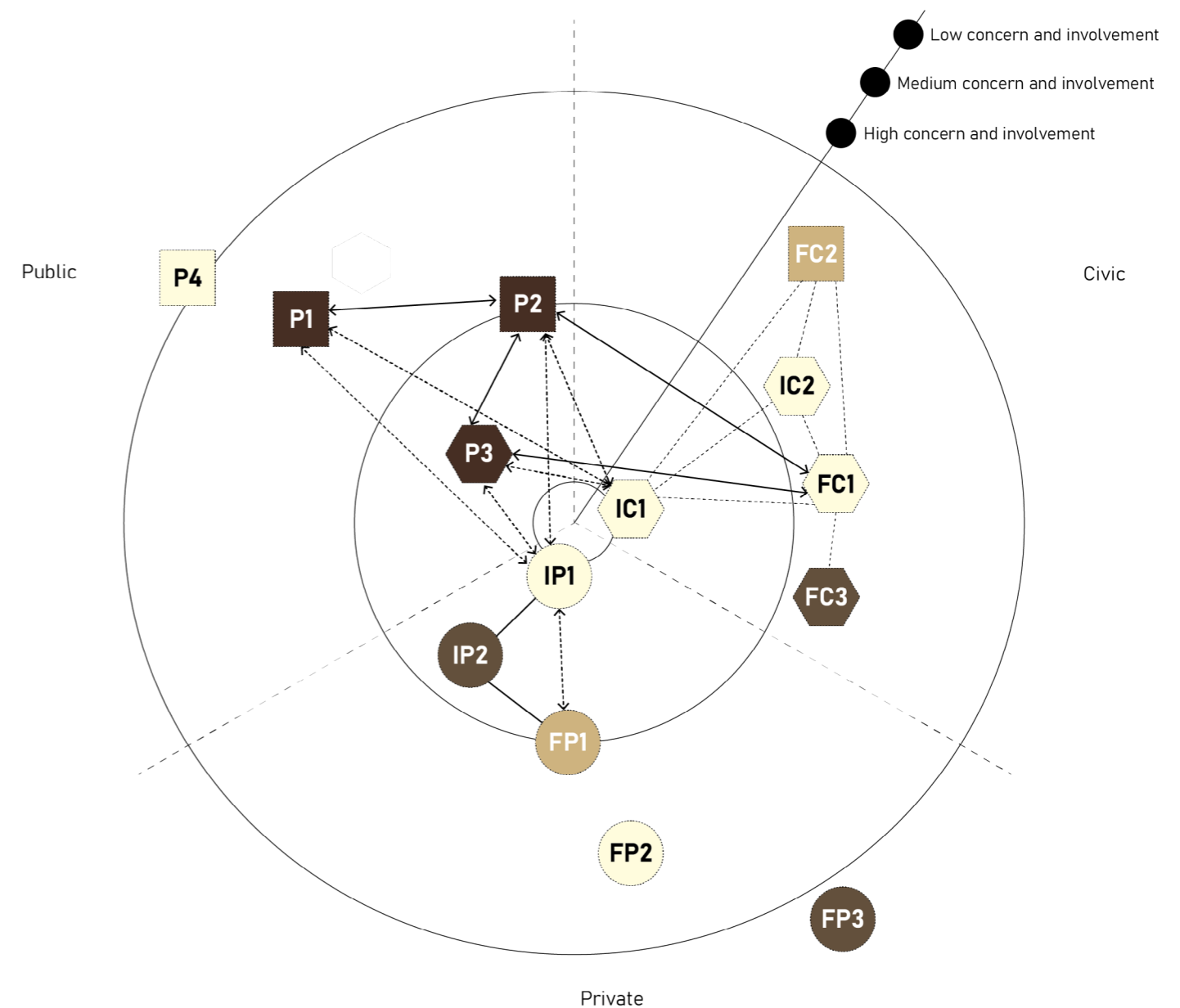


Figure 3.12 Stakeholder analysis diagram current situation and relations Old Fadama (Figure 3.12 uses the legend of Figure 3.11) (Diagram by Author)

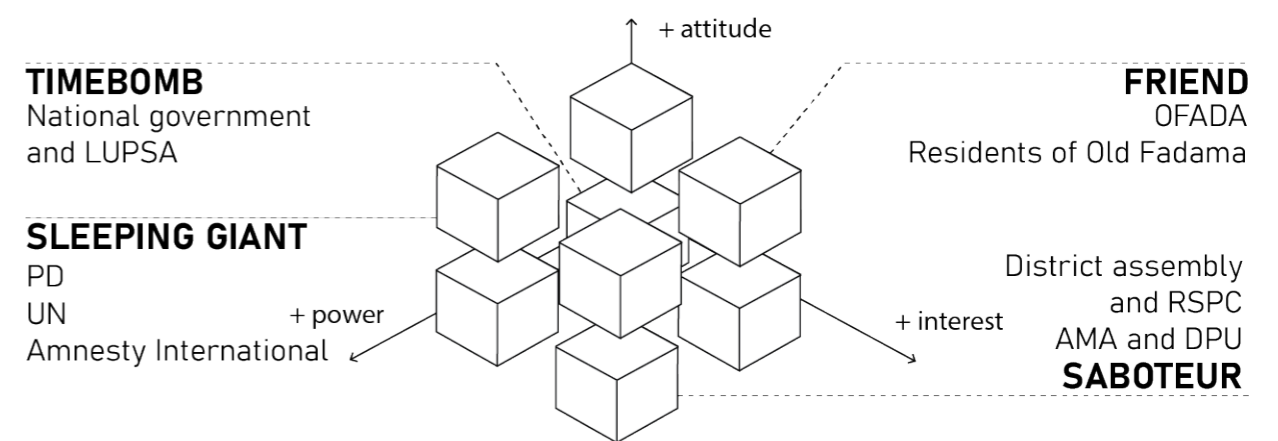


Figure 3.13 Identification and categorisation of key stakeholders according to Hofer and Kaufmanns' 'actors, arena's, and aims' framework (2022) (Diagram by Author)

Cultural context

The rich and varied backgrounds of the people who travel to Old Fadama, combined with the values and strengths found in the collective battle against formal institutions, have created a unique and invaluable culture that can only be home to Old Fadama. Many residents speak very appreciative of the culture in Old Fadama. Some of their statements are represented below.

“One thing we cherish in Old Fadama is togetherness. Looking at sister tribes all coming together to make sure there is peace in Old Fadama that is one thing we really appreciate and that we cherish.”

- Community leader in OFADA (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025)

“One thing I am happy with is the unity among the different tribes. On Sunday, we meet together and as we meet each other, I become so happy.”

- Community member and business owner in Old Fadama (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025)

“You see the area and why we like the area, you can see there is different languages, and different tribes, and like my brother was saying, going here, it has a cost for us, and when you go here, you get a place like this, and it is not like Accra, everything you want, you get it here”

- Community leader in OFADA (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025)

“As we are speaking, the drum is beating”

- Community Elder in Old Fadama (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025)

“When you live in Old Fadama, you feel your culture.”

- Community leader in OFADA (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025)

As these quotes show, one thing people appreciate about Old Fadama is the presence and public expression of different cultural rituals as opposed to Accra, or even Western cities, where cultural expressions happen mostly behind closed doors, in private. Due to the overpopulation in Old Fadama and the sheer density of the settlement, which is illustrated in the floor plans of dwellings in Old Fadama in Figures 3.15 and 3.16, privacy is rare, making it so that cultural expressions almost have to be carried out in public. An example of a cultural celebration carried out in public space can be seen in Figure 3.14. Public expressions of culture are largely unknown in the local culture of modern Western cities that are characterised by neoliberal individualism. It is exactly this expression of culture, however, that creates a sense of togetherness and community by enhancing solidarity instead of competition (Becker et al., 2021). Neoliberalism, and the resulting individualistic lifestyle in cities, is of course dominant in Western cities, however, the significant public presence of culture in daily life as in Old Fadama is becoming increasingly rare as a lot of cultural knowledge, languages, and spaces have been destroyed and lost during colonisation (Findley, 2005).

The solidarity in Old Fadama is responsible for a strong infrastructure of care within the community. Where formal institutions and organisations fail to offer the needed social and financial support for Old Fadama, the community itself has stepped in to create informal relations, networks, and safety nets wherever is possible:

“Working the school here, it’s government duty. The duty of the government is to establish a school, but we personally, we are doing it.”

- Teacher at Agape Mighty Trinity Academy (primary school) in Old Fadama (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025)

“If someone comes here and wants a place to lay his head, we will get a place for the person to sleep, because we don’t sell land in this Old Fadama community.”

- Community leader in OFADA (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025)

“Once you are in the community, if anybody comes here, it depends on us where the person will sleep, how the person will get peace, it all depends on us.”

- Community leader in OFADA (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025)

“If their villages are developed they wouldn’t have come to Old Fadama, because the place is not developed, that is why they are coming, so we cannot ask them to leave, we will always accept them.”

- Community leader in OFADA (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025)

“Most people are not here with their parents, so if someone is sick, I will take that person to the hospital. If someone dies in Old Fadama, we can’t take the body back tot he parents. It is us who make sure the person has a better place for rest. And if someone wants to come to Old Fadama, I am the person to help them get a place to sleep so they can start working.”

- Community leader in OFADA (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025)

“People find acceptance, that is the right word. Poor people, or people who are migrating to the city of Accra with no alternative, find acceptance in places like Old Fadama.”

- PhD student researching Old Fadama (Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025)

Whilst people are drawn towards Old Fadama by the promising business and employment opportunities in Agboghloshie and wider Accra, it is this infrastructure of care that makes them stay; that allows them to survive (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025). The community of Old Fadama and the culture that allows this community to grow is at the core of the ‘success’ of Old Fadama; it creates the conditions for survival in a world where rural development back home is too minimal to live on, and the urban conditions make you compete with a formal sector that has utterly neglected you. Living in Old Fadama is about housing, location, and employment opportunity, but it is community, solidarity, and care that stand at the core of the settlement.



Figure 3.14 Public expression of culture in Old Fadama, likely a funeral celebration (Photo by Author)



Figure 3.15 Aseye's (introduced in Chapter 6) dwelling in Old Fadama that currently houses 5 people, and is the heart of Aseye's water business (Photos by Author)



Figure 3.16 Kadeem's (introduced in Chapter 6) dwelling in Old Fadama that currently houses about 10 people, but has housed up to 20 people at the same time (Photos by Author)

section conclusions.

In conclusion, Old Fadama has a long history, especially compared to other informal spaces, that unfortunately has been characterised by legal battles for the right to stay and basic services and infrastructure. The standard of living in Old Fadama is downright poor. Besides the vulnerable and largely unsupervised construction in the area, and the sheer density of the settlement, there is no running water, let alone potable water, available, there are no paved roads, and there is no drainage or sewage system, leading to incredible flood problems whenever rain hits this floodplain in tropical sub-Saharan West Africa (see image 3.6 and 3.7). Electricity is illegally tapped from the net, through networks installed by the community themselves, not infrequently breaking down and causing fires (Stacey and Lund, 2016). The lack of sanitation and waste-management infrastructure, of course, also affects health and hygiene in an impactful, negative way. Furthermore, it affects women, who tend to suffer more from a lack of hygiene and privacy, even more, on top of their already increased burden of responsibility for income, as well as the upbringing of children, raising gender inequality in Old Fadama to an even more concerning level (Davis, 2006; Peake, 1992; Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025). Nevertheless, through the promise of a better life, Old Fadama has grown immensely popular, providing seemingly limitless opportunities for employment and businesses with not only the bustling city of Accra, but also the Agbogbloshie markets and scrapyards at your feet.

The result is an ever-growing community, now counting an alleged 152,000 people (Boersma, personal communication, June 23, 2025), on a mere 31.3 ha plot of land (Housing the Masses, 2009), that, perhaps against all odds, is appreciated for the life, community, and culture it holds within. The challenges Old Fadama deals with are largely created by a colonial inheritance of dynamics of exclusion that are still being upheld by current neoliberal policies and political negligence, may it be due to legal constraints or unwillingness.

When analysing places like Old Fadama, we, academic researchers and planners, often find ourselves comparing 'informal' systems with formalised ones; seeing how 'they' could be more like 'us', 'civilised' and 'successful'. However, what we fail to realise, what we fail to see, is the incredible value and knowledge that is within these places, and how 'our ways' can often do more harm than good. Moreover, we ought to recognise that the emergence and establishment of informal settlements require active acts of planning and is not merely a spontaneous and passive event.

This chapter has given a comprehensive overview of the different contexts of Old Fadama that will help link practice to theory in the further research so that we may see the shortcomings of our Western-centred approaches and knowledge and understand the effects we bring about in peoples' lives and worlds.

4. IN THEORY:

EXPOSING COLONIALISM AND NEOLIBERALISM IN MODERN PLANNING

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Introduction

Planning, in the context of urban planning, town planning, and regional planning, can be an incredibly broad concept. The word 'planning' itself merely means 'the process of deciding how land in a particular area will be used and designing plans for it' (Cambridge University Press, 2025). By this definition, this can include anything from shiny high-rise projects that take years of development and license approval from formal institutions, to a town layout naturally shaped to accommodate the community's specific kinship structure, or even the accidental creation of an elephant path in the schoolyard. The ways we shape our world, and therefore practice planning, are endless. However, what we oftentimes truly mean when we say 'planning' follows a much narrower definition. What counts as planning is often limited to the way we practice planning in modern Western society, which is planning carried out by 'official' planners, often part of formal institutions, such as the government (Dampney, 1981). It means official plans and designs, commissioned by a formal governance institution, carefully drafted by design and engineering firms, hung up on pending licensing approval for years and eventually realised by registered developers and contractors – everything according to the books. As an extension of this, we also subscribe to a rather narrow definition of development; again, the Western standard of paved roads, concrete and glass buildings, and straightforward streets prevails. The streets are clean, and the towns are tidy. It does not leave much room for any influence from outside of the Western knowledge system. Planning, in this narrow Western-centrist definition, however, is applied outside of the Western context. For non-Western communities, a Western planning system that does not always accurately understand their needs and priorities often leads to plans that fail their objective and only add to the marginalisation of these communities (Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Kapoor, 2004). Moreover, the focus on Western knowledge and the belief in the superiority of these Western planning methods creates not only a blindness for these effects, but also an incapability to reflect on and address them (Attia and Edge, 2017).

To expose this blind spot and the flaws of the Western planning system, the marginalising effects of this Western centrism in planning in a non-Western context are explained in this chapter. To answer the question 'How have colonial and neoliberal planning legacies shaped contemporary spatial exclusion and informality in Accra?', I investigate the link between this persisting Western centrism and colonial ideologies. It also explains how, on top of a planning methodology that is often unable to grasp specific cultural needs or include Indigenous knowledge in their respective planning, many non-Western marginalised communities are also already dealing with a colonial inheritance of 'dynamics of exclusion', even further exacerbating the injustice and inequalities the community deals with on a day-to-day basis. These tangible effects of colonialism in the built environment are explored for Old Fadama. The chapter also explores

the role of neoliberalism, which shapes policy enabling the continued oppression and marginalisation of settlements like Old Fadama, to answer the question 'In what ways are these exclusionary legacies expressed in the built environment and governance of Old Fadama?'

A planning system rooted in Western knowledge

Although planning has a long and rich history that combines cities, cultures, and knowledge from all places around the world and all times throughout history, urban planning, as we practice it today, is a relatively young invention (Graeber, 2021; Fishman, 1977). Most scholars and planners understand the discipline of planning, urban planning, or town planning to have been born through the groundbreaking work of thinkers and designers such as Ebenezer Howard and Frank Lloyd Wright, who were amongst the first to think of cities and towns as holistic living systems, rather than a collection of architected dwellings (Fishman, 1977). Since the 'invention' of modern planning by Western scholars and designers is quite a recent development, it comes as no surprise that modern planning is strongly rooted in Western culture, and almost exclusively based on the Western knowledge system.

Shaped by the Enlightenment and the Industrial and Scientific revolutions, the Western Knowledge system is based on factual knowledge (Ellis, 1999; Akena, 2012). That is, information that can be reproduced and verified through academic research methods. As planners, and as a Western society, we tend to celebrate rational thinking and, therefore, almost automatically exclude emotions and feelings from research and science (Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Ellis, 1999). The replicability and rationality of information and knowledge determine how we validate and value that knowledge; knowledge produced according to the generally accepted Western academic methods are valued higher than knowledge that is produced otherwise (Ellis, 1999; Akena, 2012). Moreover, knowledge that is produced otherwise, such as through ancestral stories, spiritual or religious production, or oral tradition, is often ridiculed and degraded. Knowledge produced and communicated through Western academic methods are, especially by people in Western society, often still perceived as superior (Ellis, 1999; Kapoor, 2004; Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Akena, 2012). Whilst the Western knowledge system has clearly been shaped by distinct local societal and cultural developments in the West, Western culture has dominated in many places outside of the Western context since the idea of Western superiority was spread through colonisation (Findley, 2005; Becker et al., 2021; Njoh, 2009; Akena, 2012). Rather than a locally relevant and situated knowledge system, the Western knowledge system is generally considered objective, superior, and therefore, a universally applicable knowledge system (Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Kapoor, 2004; Akena, 2012). This expresses itself in the continued rejection of Indigenous knowledge systems. Unfortunately, common narratives used for Indigenous knowledge are 'primitive, inferior, uncivilised or even savage'. Through devaluation and systemic erasure, Indigenous knowledge and other non-Western knowledge are continuously excluded from intellectual discourse, and thereby marginalising the respective communities because their needs, experiences, and knowledge cannot fully be

translated through Western language and accepted forms of knowledge (Kapoor, 2004; Akena, 2012; Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Over time, the exclusion and marginalisation of Indigenous knowledge will lead to the loss of this knowledge (Findley, 2005; McGaw and Pieris, 2014). This all clearly describes a persistent coloniality that seeps into many layers of life.

In line with the strong attachment to 'factual' knowledge and replicable methods, hard sciences (e.g. physics, maths, and chemistry) are often seen as more valuable than soft sciences (e.g. psychology or sociology). As Akena (2012) states, a large part of how we validate and value knowledge is connected to status and class. Since hard sciences more easily comply with the standards of Western knowledge production, disciplines that fall under this description will often get more praise and validation (Ellis, 1999; Akena, 2012). Vice versa, in more mixed fields, which combine aspects of both hard sciences and soft sciences, you will often find a stronger preference and priority for the hard sciences aspects over the soft sciences aspects. Urban planning is seen by many as a technical discipline, and therefore hard science, discipline. Modern planning as a standalone practice was born out of the discipline of architecture. Whereas architecture was perceived as a combination of both art and engineering, urban planning definitely emphasises the latter (Fishman, 1977), even though we now understand urban planning to be a combination of engineering, design, social sciences, and political sciences. The way we perceive urban planning is connected to our goal in urban planning. Whilst the first urban plans, such as Ebenezer Howard's Garden City, were seemingly aiming to improve the quality of life for its inhabitants, the true objective behind the plan was productivity, which is in accordance with the post-Industrial Revolution zeitgeist of the 20th century. It is only later, through thinkers such as Jane Jacobs, that ethics and social sciences became an integral part of urban planning, and the objective of urban planning shifted to human wellbeing in addition to the creation of wealth (Jacobs, 2011; Fishman, 1977).

Social and political sciences in modern planning

The belief that social sciences and political sciences are at the core of urban planning is still a controversial opinion, especially at a time when political division and growing neoliberalism create decreasing support for social services and anti-inequality policy. Current urban planning projects and research are predominantly constructed through engineering and environmental lenses, emphasising topics such as flood-risk reduction, clean air, and sustainable building methods. Social lenses in urban planning, on topics such as justice, accessibility, and human wellbeing, do not get the same appreciation. Looking back in time, however, there is no denying that urban planning is intrinsically linked with both social sciences and political sciences, as we have used that very nature of urban planning as a tactical weapon to marginalise, control, and erase communities during colonisation. For example, in Australia, planning policies and strategies were deliberately geared towards large, spread-out, detached dwellings to promote the privatisation of land and increase the pace and extent of displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples (Blatman and Sisson, 2023). Moreover, displaced Indigenous people were frequently housed apart from their family and kin, and separated from their Country, preventing them from performing cultural expressions, speaking their languages, and sharing and passing on knowledge (Findley, 2005; McGaw and Pieris, 2014).

Perhaps the most infamous example of deliberate use of power in planning to create injustice is Robert Moses's low-clearance bridges in New York. As a consequence, the public transport buses, the primary transportation of people of colour in New York at the time, were not able to access the New Jersey beaches. Although the deliberateness of Moses' assertion of power through designing only low-clearance bridges is contested in literature, many scholars believe it was deliberate. One of the most famous social justice movements in planning, led by Jane Jacobs, arose in direct response to this phenomenon (Jacobs, 2011; Manders-Huits, 2011).

Taking the story closer to the case study location of this research, in Accra, European colonisers occupied areas bordering Indigenous fishermen's settlements on the coast, denying the Indigenous population access to European areas, and restricting the expansion of their towns to accommodate population growth. Furthermore, planning policy was designed so that public services and infrastructures, such as drainage systems and waste-management services, were reserved for European areas only, as was also apparent in the fieldwork of this research and can be seen in photographs in Figure 3.6 in the previous chapter (Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025; Addo-Fening, 2013), creating lasting inequalities carved into the built environment between traditionally Indigenous areas and formerly occupied 'European' areas of Accra; this is a key example of how

colonial policy and planning creates lasting 'dynamics of exclusion' into our social and built urban fabric.

As showcased above, there are many examples that demonstrate in the course of planning history that we do not only understand that social sciences and political sciences are intrinsically connected to planning, we also know how to use those attributes to exercise power and control through planning. That being said, it is undeniable that personal ethical and moral decisions, for example concerning topics such as justice, influenced by planning decisions, are at the core of planning. However, a holistic perspective of planning, and the acknowledgement of personal influence and biases on planning decisions, is not standard in our modern planning practice.

It is a public secret that Western urban planning methods are somewhat critiqued in this chapter. It is important to clarify that this is not to scrutinise all urban planning, nor is it to insist that urban planning is independently responsible for the dynamics of exclusion in the built environment and society as described. In fact, the autonomy and decision-making power are increasingly debated and questioned, both in casual conversation, as well as planning theory (Roy, 2006). Urban planning is not the (sole) root cause, or active actor in creating structural injustices, however, it works in favour of unjust systems, indirectly adding to the marginalisation of vulnerable communities. The current standardised Western urban planning methodology, however, exists clearly within the dominant societal structures of coloniality and neoliberalism. By functioning within these systems, it is inherently impossible to create planning solutions that break outside of those systems to rectify its injustices (Roy, 2006; Escobar, 2018; Moreton-Robinson, 2013).

Detachment between the research and the researcher

A key characteristic of the Western knowledge system is a disconnect between the research and the researcher, or in the case of urban planning, the design, and the designer (Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Attia and Edge, 2017). The belief is that research should be purely rational. Therefore, a personified researcher who is too connected to the research will jeopardise the independence and rationality, and therefore credibility and validity of the created knowledge of the research. In order to guarantee the objective data our society values most, the researcher ought to act as a detached vessel, preventing any personal experiences or other biases from influencing the research. This disconnection between the research and the researcher, or the designer and the design, is perfectly in accordance with the body/earth split that characterises Western society and the Western worldview; we see ourselves, humans, as separate from nature, animals, and our environments. Therefore, we can also separate ourselves from our feelings, emotions, and personal experiences; regardless of one's personal opinion on whether we are successful at this or not. By contrast, the vast majority of Indigenous cultures and societies do not have a similar body/earth split. People live in harmony with their environment, and their knowledge, language, choices, priorities, and wishes reflect this alternate worldview. Unlike in Western knowledge production, the researcher cannot be separated from their research, nor can a designer be separated from their design, or even more generally, any maker be separated from what they have made (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). The fundamental difference between cultural worldviews helps us to realise how the Western knowledge system cannot possibly function as a universal knowledge system. Our understanding of the world, humans, and our environment, our very worldview, and therefore our language and decision-making processes, are not equipped to fully understand knowledge produced through a harmonic body/earth and body/mind worldview (Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Kapoor, 2004).

Besides adding to the justification and normalisation of excluding Indigenous knowledge from academia and modern planning, the detachment between the research and the researcher also minimises any opportunity for meaningful critical reflexivity in research or design processes (Attia and Edge, 2017). The notion of a detached researcher assumes that their research is not affected by their personal bias, making critical reflexivity senseless; after all, there is nothing to reflect on but the practicalities of the project. There exists no such thing as a completely detached researcher or an absence of bias. This reality, which Indigenous worldviews have always supported and which the Western academic community is also increasingly realising, is crucial. Moreover, as Attia and Edge (2017) argue, the more a researcher attempts to deny their influence on their research, the more their research is likely to be affected: complete ignorance of one's personal influence means there is no effort to recognise

and subsequently unpack potential harmful biases either. Especially in urban planning, a discipline we have seen holds power and affects people's lives, and on top of that, is sometimes performed by people of a different cultural background than the target community, processes would benefit significantly from critical self-reflection and reflexivity.

Important to note, is that critical reflexivity in research and design should not automatically mean that any personal influence must be dissected and filtered out of the research result or designed plan. Again, as various Indigenous cultures have long discovered, a connection with our environment and peoples contains value and strengths as well. A personal affiliation with a project, where the research is influenced by the researcher's personal experiences, moral stances, and even feelings and emotions, can be positive and add value to the resulting research or design. This is provided that adequate context about the researcher and the research process is added for others to recognise and interpret this influence. (Attia and Edge, 2017; Holmes, 2020). Stepping away from the overwhelmingly technocratic and 'objective' ways of doing research and design we are used to in Western academia allows for personal and human influence to bring moral values into projects. Especially in a discipline such as urban planning, which favours engineering and lenses in projects, a more value-based approach would lead to a more balanced project outcome that focuses on people's wellbeing and justice, rather than productivity and economic growth.

Neoliberalism in dynamics of exclusion

Even though colonisation has ended on paper, colonial dynamics of exclusion in the built environment and society have remained. Power dynamics and wealth distribution remain unbalanced, to the benefit of former colonising nations, a phenomenon that is often called neo-colonialism. However, the formal definition of neo-colonialism speaks of indirect control over a formerly formally colonised nation (Nkrumah, 1965; Rao, 2000; Langat, 2007). In addition, that control is mostly financial in nature. As this chapter has shown, however, the lasting effects born from colonial philosophies reach much further than merely financial. To this day, the Western knowledge system is applied universally across the globe, actively excluding Indigenous knowledge systems from academic and public arenas, leading to the continued marginalisation of Indigenous communities. This is especially true in the urban planning discipline, where Western planners are frequently appointed to design for non-Western communities and in non-Western contexts, risking grave misinterpretations of critical cultural needs and aspirations. This again leads to a perpetuation of the marginalisation of said communities. This is not an indirect effect; these communities live in a society that is dominated by the Western knowledge system every second of every day. Therefore, former coloniser nations still have a sizable and direct influence over former colonised nations. That influence goes beyond financial dimensions, into the social and political structures of our society, and the physicality of our built environment.

Besides this unjust colonial inheritance, both in physical and societal spheres, current political and social philosophies unfortunately maintain these dynamics of exclusion. Through globalisation and the domination of Western culture, neoliberalism has grown to be the dominant (political) ideology in most parts of the world (Becker et al., 2021). By encouraging self-establishment and individual responsibility for wealth and success, neoliberalist ideology leaves everyone to fend for themselves with 'equal' opportunity in life. However, equal does not equate to equitable. As this chapter has portrayed, given many historical and societal circumstances, not all people or communities start out with the same resources, skills, networks, and opportunities in life. Neoliberalism advocates for a society that operates according to the free market principle, meaning it is not effective in addressing the unequal starting points of different people and communities. Hereby, the ideology of neoliberalism increases inequality and injustice (Becker et al., 2021). The neoliberal societal system is incapable of adjusting unjust power dynamics and thus upholding the dynamics of exclusions established during colonisation.

Why we should look towards planning in search for decolonial solutions that rectify the structural injustices in our society and built environment, is because whilst planning in its current form is complicit of the oppression and marginalisation in our world, it simultaneously holds the potential of breaking

outside of these systems and creating just systems instead (Roy, 2006).

section conclusions.

Now that this chapter has created a better understanding of the connections between colonialism, neoliberalism, and modern planning, we can begin to answer some of the research questions regarding this topic. The first sub-research question of this thesis reads, 'How have colonial and neoliberal planning legacies shaped contemporary spatial exclusion and informality in Accra?'

Colonialism is seen as the starting point of the forceful spread of the Western knowledge system as a superior, objective, and universal knowledge system. The Western knowledge system subscribes to a narrow definition of knowledge; for knowledge to be accepted, it needs to be 'factual' and 'objective' and preferably created through replicable academic methods (Ellis, 1999; Akena, 2012). This inherently excludes Indigenous knowledge from consideration, as this knowledge often does not follow the Western requirements of production or communication method (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Modern planning is a Western invention and is therefore strongly rooted in the Western knowledge system. Much like the Western knowledge system, and Western culture, however, modern planning is universally applied both within and outside of the Western context. In non-Western contexts especially, the exclusion of Indigenous knowledge can directly contribute to additional marginalisation of vulnerable communities that already suffer under the colonial dynamics of exclusion, shaping the urban dynamics further into injustice. Neoliberalism comes into play not as a causal factor, but rather as an enabling factor to the already existing dynamics of exclusion (Becker et al., 2021). Given the free-market principle of neoliberalism, where the strongest tend to come out on top, neoliberalism is inherently incapable of adjusting imbalanced power dynamics and starting points, leading to increased inequality. This way, the effect of colonialism on the outcomes of planning, the urban dynamics, is twofold: (1) on one hand there is a strong tangible aspect of inherited inequalities in the built environment that originated through colonial policy and planning, and on the other hand (2) there is an intangible aspect of altered pathways in our thinking, dominated by the Western knowledge system, which also shapes our planning methods and practices.

Multiple examples of these tangible manifestations have been shown, and more will be shown throughout this thesis, both in text and visual imaginations. Whilst neo-liberalism might not be responsible for creating these unjust urban dynamics that lead to the marginalisation of vulnerable communities, the ideology is responsible for upholding these injustices and even increasing them. For us, to build a just city, we need to therefore not only decolonise our practice and minds but also think outside of the neoliberal society we currently live in to create true radical change.

Together with the knowledge of the contexts of Old Fadama, we can continue to answer the first sub-research question more directly applied to Accra, as well as begin to answer the second sub-research question, 'In what ways are these exclusionary legacies expressed in the built environment and

governance of Old Fadama?'

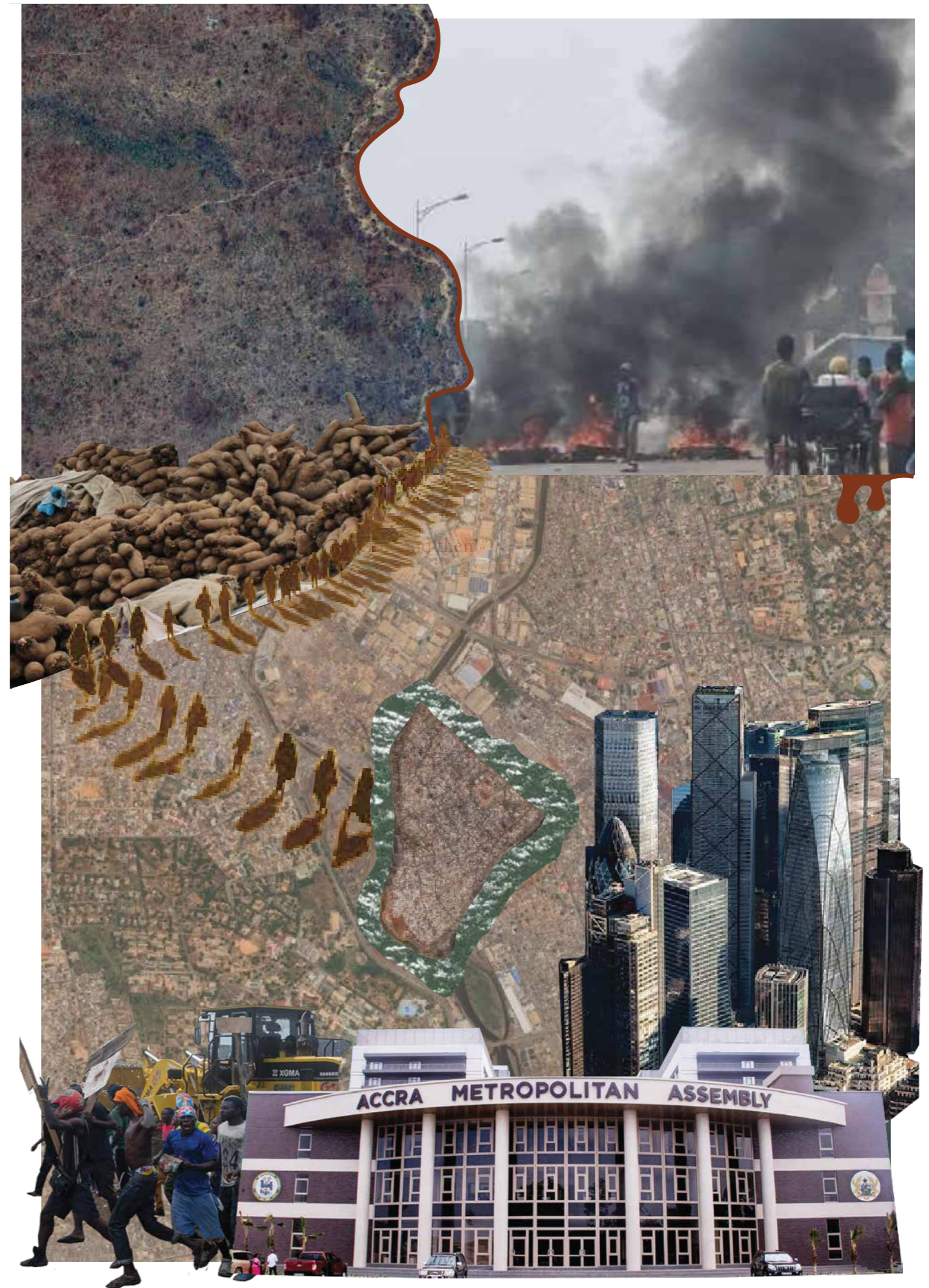
Accra falls directly into the twofold influence as sketched above. Accra has long been colonised and 'developed' by the British, who focused their planning and policy on 'European' parts of the city, denying traditionally Indigenous parts of Accra, such as at the coast, that are now home to informal settlements such as Mensah-Guinea and Jamestown, of public services and infrastructure. For a large part, these tangible urban dynamics still remain today: the city deals with notable deficits in the construction of waste-management, water-management, electricity, and internet networks for these traditionally Indigenous areas. The density and nature of construction of these settlements today make catching up with these deficits nearly impossible (Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025). Additionally, Accra is subject to the intangible effects of colonialism on urban dynamics. Just like in the majority of the world, the Western knowledge system and Western modern planning are dominant in Ghana, and thus in Accra. The communities living in informal settlements are mostly Indigenous to the area (e.g. Mensah-Guinea and Jamestown) or displaced Indigenous communities from elsewhere in the region (e.g. Old Fadama) (Boersma, personal communication, June 24, 2025; Stacey and Lund, 2016). As this chapter has illustrated, these communities are especially harmed by the universal application of the Western knowledge system and Western modern planning, as they often overlook and misinterpret their needs, priorities, and wishes, leading to their marginalisation. An additional way colonialism has a causal relationship with the occurrence, existence, and continued growth of Old Fadama specifically is the underdevelopment of Ghanaian rural regions, such as the Northern regions, and the Volta region. The British tireless focus of resources and attention on urban areas, such as Accra, left rural regions undeveloped, leading to increased migration towards opportunity-rich cities. On top of that, the lack of development in the Northern region of Ghana has been a strong contributing factor in the escalation of social conflict in the region, directly leading to many displaced people finding themselves a new home in Old Fadama. The government's occupancy of the area of Old Fadama and the subsequent zoning by the British that has been adopted by the first Ghanaian government, is still causing legal and political difficulties to develop the area and improve living conditions. Accra's current planning endeavours and policies largely exclude Old Fadama due to this reason. Moreover, Accra's inhabitants and planners are convinced of a very Western idea of a 'developed city', and find therein no room for the informality of Old Fadama. City planners advocate for a city without 'crowding', Kayayei (head porters), and traffic congestion, of which they see urban informality as the root cause (Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025).

In summary, inherited colonial injustices in the cities' built environment continuously lead to the marginalisation of Indigenous communities in Accra. Injustices between urban

and rural regions lead to large numbers of people migrating towards the city, where the competition with urban prices pushes them to informal settlements such as Old Fadama. The perspective of informality as 'dirty', 'bad', and 'primitive' is an expression of remaining colonial philosophies, and shapes planning action and policy, leading to continued marginalisation of informal communities. This is especially true since planning is inherently shaped according to the Western knowledge system, excluding Indigenous perspectives and knowledge.

Figure 4.1 Collage coloniality pt. 1 (left next page)
(Collage by Author, more information in Appendix 3)

Figure 4.2 Collage coloniality pt. 2 (right next page)
(Collage by Author, more information in Appendix 3)



5. IN TRANSFORMATION:

CONTRIBUTIONS TO A DECOLONIAL PLANNING PRACTICE

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Introduction

As mentioned before, many scholars, planners, decision- and policymakers have realised the singular and deficient nature of our standard planning practice, especially when applied in non-Western contexts. In this chapter, some of their reflections and subsequent advances in urban planning theory and practice will be explained, but also critically reviewed on their efficacy in undoing the harmful frameworks created by coloniality, and their potency in creating truly just urban environments.

The Western planning tradition

Modern Western urban planning has been mentioned multiple times in this research but has not yet been clearly defined. Modern urban planning practices, which evolved from the organisational logic of military strategy, developed primarily in the West. More recently, planning has been shaped by our need for organisation and structures in our settlements that present a complex convergence of physical, social, economic, and political aspects. Our cities, and the corresponding planning practice, is characterised by a seemingly ever-growing population and search of eternally growing productivity following the Industrial Revolution, technological revolution, and persistent neoliberal and capitalist policy (Mignolo, 2011, Roy, 2006; Fishman, 1977). This urban planning practice is wholly situated in the Western knowledge system; Western knowledge, culture, and development are often considered to be superior compared to non-Western alternatives. The Western knowledge system, mainly shaped by the Enlightenment, rationality, and a belief in the power of the market as a 'natural' regulator of human exchanges clearly shows in our reasoning and prioritising in planning as well; the main objectives of urban planning are to create a physically healthy population. A healthy population in its turn is a productive population, and therefore an efficient production and transportation system, again increasing the population's productivity once more. Both objectives also obviously show the neoliberal character of urban planning, with planning ultimately always serving to increase productivity and therefore enhance the economy (Fishman, 1977; Cox et al., 2024; Kapp and Baltazar, 2002; Davis, 2006; Njoh, 2009; Beunen et al., 2013).

Although urban planning has evidently changed – social sciences, and political sciences are now understood to be an integral part of urban planning, and population well-being and aesthetics get to enjoy the same type of prioritisation as capitalist objective get in some projects – the consideration of modern Western urban planning as described before is still very much at the core of urban planning education and practice today (Beunen et al., 2013; Rankin, 2010; Udoewa, 2022; Kapp and Baltazar, 2002). Of course, different schools of urban planning, different projects, and different planners, put their focus in different places, or might prioritise different objectives. Nevertheless, the generally accepted urban planning methodology of the Western planning tradition repeats the same steps in most planning processes:

Design or planning processes contain an established set of steps that are employed to address the initial starting point of the assignment, question or problem: (1) analysis, (2) diagnosis, (3) idea generation, (4) idea testing, and (5) decision-making, which eventually hopefully leads to implementation. These steps can be identified as 'design thinking', and are the way we generate new solutions for complex problems (Udoewa, 2022). Design thinking is not exclusive to institutional, expert planners. Everyone

can partake in design thinking, everyone can plan (Davis, 2006; Freire, 1970; Udoewa, 2022; Kapp and Baltazar, 2002; Dampney, 1981). In the Western planning tradition, however, planning processes are almost always initiated and led by institutional planners, commissioners, and decision-makers. The initial problem is derived through comparison of the project location with the Western norm. The city, as a Western settlement type, is seen as the standard, while many locations, especially in non-Western contexts, might present an urban logic that deviates from the Western settlement patterns that institutional planning prefers (Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Samper, 2014; Mbembe and Nutall, 2004). With this process being fully in the hands of institutional planners, the experts, misinterpretations of the problems and priorities among the community are likely. Equally, the project's objectives are shaped according to the Western knowledge system and culture, focusing on the neoliberal and capitalist logic and productivity narratives mentioned before (Fishman, 1977; Cox et al., 2024; Kapp and Baltazar, 2002; Davis, 2006; Njoh, 2009; Beunen et al., 2013). The rationalist view on planning that is coherent with the Western planning epistemology regards planning as an objective science, where correct answers and solutions exist. In this planning system, complex project contexts are at risk of being morphed into pre-existing narratives of Western 'success stories' in planning (Good et al., 2015). The generated ideas and planning solutions, as well as the subsequent decision-making, are also in the hands of expert planners and institutionalised developers. These steps of the process, therefore, also reflect the same neoliberal and often colonial values, resulting in planning solutions that are characterised by positivist and technological approaches. In line with the basis of urban planning lying in the Western knowledge system, urban planning tends to focus on physical aspects; employed approaches often consist of techno-scientific solutions, such as infrastructure development, and engineered climate adaptations (Brenner and Schmid, 2015). A radical focus on social or economic aspects in planning is rare, let alone a meaningful incorporation of cultural values of communities outside of the Western norm (Udoewa, 2022; Moreton-Robinson, 2013).

Of course, different planning traditions vary ever so slightly. In the case of Ghana, the most influential planning tradition has been the British. The British planning tradition is especially a testament to the rational, positivist and presumed objective Western perspective on planning. It focuses largely on land-use zoning and strong policy regulation as planning tools and roles, such as the surveyor. Especially at the time of British planning in Ghana, this resulted in little planning with social objectives in mind (Njoh, 2010; Njoh, 2009; Acheampong, 2018; Foley, 1960). Distinct planning traditions differ from each other in the nuances and focus points in planning. For instance, the French planning tradition is more focused on functionality and aesthetics than the British, while the Dutch planning tradition has embraced the combination of urban planning and urban design as one discipline (Njoh, 2009; Fishman, 1977). Nevertheless, planning traditions currently prominent in urban planning theory and practice remain

rooted in the Western knowledge system, leading to planners far too frequently forcing non-Western locations, peoples, and stories into the pre-existing narratives of the West, and applying presumed universal objectives and solutions (Good et al., 2015; Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Udoewa, 2022).

When taking a critical look at the steps in the planning process, above all, it becomes clear that the power to prioritise objectives, imagine solutions and alternatives, and decide on which ones to implement, as well as where and how, largely lies in the hands of 'expert' planners and institutional organisations. This makes the generation of planning and design ideas, as well as the subsequent decisions, fully dependent on the interpretation of the assignments, problems, and experience of the location site of the planners (Kapoor, 2004; Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Udoewa, 2022). Since planners are hardly ever part of the community they are contracted to design for, it is not hard to imagine they might not experience a location site and all its contextual complexity with the same depth as the local community might do (Udoewa, 2022). Many planners and thinkers have previously theorised this duality of planning, pointing out the potential of planning to bridge over inequalities and injustice and simultaneously emphasising the inherent complicity to oppressive neoliberal and colonial structures of institutional planners (Roy, 2006; Findley, 2005). Many alternative schools of urbanism, methodologies, and planning epistemologies have been developed in response to this mark on planning theory and practice. Whilst a thorough review of all planning epistemologies and ontologies would be useful, this is unfortunately beyond the scope of this research. However, various planning epistemologies have produced particularly interesting alternative perspectives on planning that attempt to deconstruct the inapposite universal application of Western planning frameworks and rectify injustices resulting from neoliberal and colonial societal structures. A few of these responses that are most relevant to the literature discussed in this research are reviewed here.

Alternative perspectives on planning

Humanist planning

Perhaps the polar opposite of the traditional technocratic and solutionist Western planning tradition is the tradition of humanist planning. Whilst Western modernist planning is the clear dominant planning methodology, or meta-methodology of planning, humanist planning has had a consistent and important space in the history of planning (Umemoto, 2017). Humanist planning describes a view of planning that centres the human experience as a key source for data production that influences planning decisions (Good et al., 2017; Lake, 2017). In doing so, it places a high priority on collaborative and participatory approaches, as it states that planning should be based on situated knowledge. Rather than basing decisions on abstracted, universal, and 'objective truths', as is general practice according to the traditional Western view on planning, humanist planning stresses the fact that truths are subjective, and planning decisions and solutions depend on individual, subjective experiences and local knowledge (Good et al., 2017; Umemoto, 2017; Lake, 2017; Harrison, 2017). Whilst the planner brings in academic expertise which can streamline planning processes, it is the respective community that holds the valuable knowledge of the project context that should influence the contents of the generated plans and decisions (Lake, 2017).

Humanist planning enables planners to make moral decisions, even in the absence of 'knowledge' according to the Western planning frameworks, and independent from religion and political trends (Good et al., 2017). By centring the human experience and local knowledge, it encourages planning to move beyond the limiting societal structures of neoliberalism and coloniality that shape the Western planning tradition and result in planning outcomes that marginalise vulnerable communities and minorities. Humanist planning also goes beyond the limited understanding of knowledge according to the Western knowledge system's definition. It promotes an embodied experience of place, and by focusing on real experiences, it reintroduces emotions, feelings, and empathy, which have previously been disregarded as they were deemed invaluable knowledge sources. In this sense, humanist planning approaches are welcoming more forms of non-Western knowledge production, inherently increasing the inclusivity of the planning process. Moreover, humanist planning approaches increase inclusivity simply because of the inherent centring of embodied experience, which often leads to incorporating local knowledge, perspectives, and developing collaborative approaches.

Whilst humanist planning offers very interesting viewpoints that challenge the shortcomings of the Western planning tradition, there are also multiple points of criticism. A common critique involves the language of humanism. Some theorists claim that the word 'human' in humanism is often misunderstood to mean a sole focus on humans in planning. They propose

a post-humanist planning that more clearly acknowledges the interrelatedness of species and ecosystems in our world, which all co-exist and therefore all need to be considered equally in planning (Harrison, 2017). Other critiques address the very core concepts of humanist planning. Whilst humanist planning aims to address the marginalisation caused by the Western planning legacy, the humanist approaches favour equal treatment and representation of all stakeholders. A fully equal, rather than equitable, treatment of stakeholders, however, has limited potential to rectify pre-existing inequalities and injustices, which leads to a perpetuation of marginalising cycles in planning (Harrison, 2017; Umemoto, 2017). Moreover, humanist planning continues to centre the urban planner as the key expert, alongside respective communities. Planning processes and applied methods therefore, often remain to be in line with the Western planning tradition, requiring non-Western communities to assimilate to Western communication and processes. Whilst their experience is centred in the planning process, it is often still subject to the planner's interpretation before their story is incorporated into planning solutions. The main role of the urban planner in humanist planning, is to position themselves as an advocate, and to prevent the objectification, generalisation, and assimilation to pre-existing Western narratives of Indigenous stories and experiences (Baum, 2017; Umemoto, 2017; Kapoor, 2004). Unfortunately, humanist planning has thus far been unsuccessful to break free from the neoliberalist, capitalist, and colonial structures that shape planning processes, making humanist planning a step towards the right direction, but not effective enough to create truly decolonial processes capable of addressing structural injustices in our built environment (Good et al., 2017; Umemoto, 2017; Harrison, 2017).

Feminist planning

More or less in the extension of humanist planning lies feminist planning. Feminist planning, too, is aimed at achieving inclusive, accessible, and just cities. Its concepts, preferred methods and methodologies, and moral perspectives share many commonalities with those of humanist planning just described, however, feminist planning differs in one fundamental statement: it unambiguously acknowledges the inherent inequality between sexes that exists in our world, and manifests in the built environment. Feminist planning approaches highlight the injustices the female sex is subjected to, and actively create strategies and planning solutions to rectify those. Feminist planning focuses on equitable planning, rather than equal planning, which is one of the main constructive critiques of humanist planning. Given that feminist planning's starting point is the acknowledgement of inequalities based on identity, feminist planning strategies are easily transferred to other forms of injustice and marginalisation based on race, ethnicity, or other identities affecting people's social status (Miraftab, 2009).

In their paper on feminist urbanism and humanist cities, Haas and Mehaffy (2024), state that feminist planning can

be of great service in planners' desire to achieve humanist cities. They frame feminist planning as a combination of three schools of urbanism: cultural urbanism, inclusive urbanism, and pluralist urbanism, as illustrated in Figure 5.1 (Haas and Mehaffy, 2024). Collectively, these schools reflect similar values as humanist planning: community and interaction, accessible public space and urban amenities for all, situated and ever-evolving planning practice, inclusive planning and design, and diverse planning and design (Haas and Mehaffy, 2024; Good et al., 2017; Umemoto, 2017).

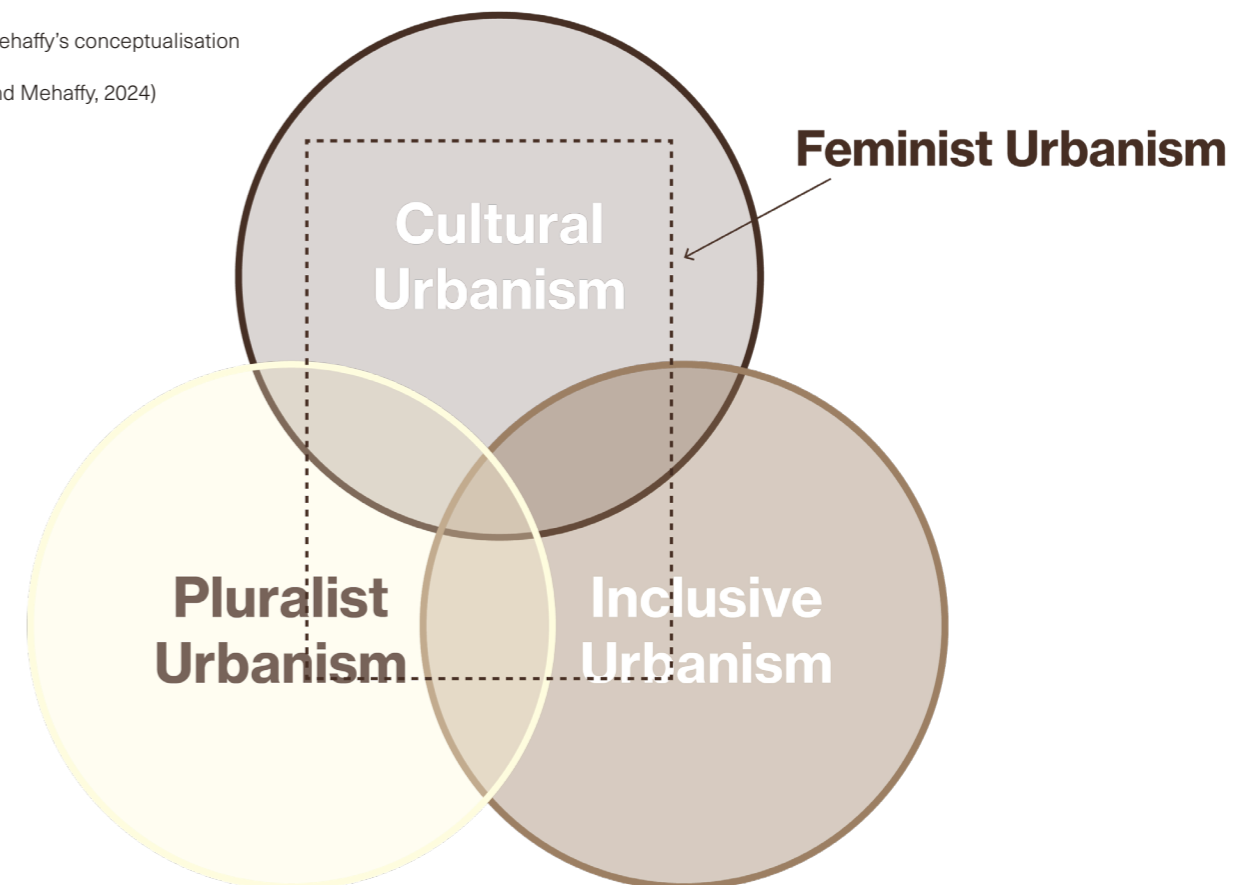
Whilst feminist planning often explicitly addresses gender inequality, the prominent methods in feminist approaches lend themselves easily to address other systemic injustices, such as the marginalisation of the urban poor, Indigenous communities, ethnic minorities, and informal dwellers. Approaches such as communicative urbanism, thorough empirical analysis, and value-led design are key in feminist urbanism, and are promising in decolonial urbanism as well. However, just like humanist planning, feminist planning maintains the top-down logic of planning processes, placing the expert planner on top of the design pyramid. This is disadvantageous to the narratives of personal experience and limits the effective influence this empirical analysis and focus have in eventual planning outcomes. Moreover, feminism itself has received increasing critique in the light of decolonial and postcolonial developments. Feminist pedagogies far

too often limit their understanding of feminism to Western feminist perspectives. Western feminism, just like the Western knowledge system, is largely based on ideas of human rights, secularism, and individual freedom popularised during the Enlightenment and thereafter (Persard, 2021; Sahaja, 2024). These values are universalised and presumed to be shared across various places and cultural contexts, which is not necessarily the case (Sahaja, 2024).

Participatory planning

Participatory, or collaborative planning approaches have gained popularity, as they are a key way to include the respective community you are planning or designing for in the process (Linnenluecke et al., 2016). Despite its increasing popularity and applications, participatory planning does not know one official definition. Many methods and planning activities can fit into the category of participatory planning: some researchers and practitioners consider the use of interviews sufficient for participatory planning, some undertake 'urban activities', some create a co-design process, and some compose a community review board. Besides partaking in the planning process, different co-management structures can also be considered participatory approaches (Udoewa, 2022; Kapp and Baltazar, 2012). More broadly speaking, participatory planning can be seen as a methodology, and even meta-methodology, that centres

Figure 5.1 Haas and Mehaffy's conceptualisation of feminist urbanism (Adapted from Haas and Mehaffy, 2024)



communicative planning and the belief that planning is, and always should be, a joint and collaborative exercise between experts and the respective community they are planning for (Healy, 1992).

Whilst this broad definition of participatory planning may allow for specific, situated approaches to be developed in consideration of the local context of a design or planning project, it is exactly this ambiguity that is the source of many critiques of participatory planning as well (Udoewa, 2022). The lack of a comprehensive and accepted definition of true, qualitative participatory planning leads to many partial participatory projects, where the participation in the process is not complete and profound enough to reach a satisfying outcome. Moreover, the lack of a clear definition of a qualitative participatory planning approach automatically means there is no evaluation process to systematically assess the quality of the participatory approach either; any minor input from a respective community can, in theory, be written down as a qualitative participatory approach (Udoewa, 2022).

As Kapp and Baltazar (2012) point out, even in cases where participatory methods are employed, a desired outcome is not guaranteed. It is rare that participation is carried out throughout the entire design process, and with true equal collaboration between professional planners and designers and the community; in most examples, participation remains partial, which only affirms colonial power imbalances that view Western objective and rational research and design methods over experienced knowledge production (Kapp and Baltazar, 2012; Udoewa, 2022; Cox et al., 2024). Kapp and Baltazar showcase the importance of participatory approaches to cover all phases and stages of the planning process through the real-life example of a project in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, where a participatory approach PGE (Plano Global Especifico, meaning Specific Global Plan) was implemented to upgrade and expand a favela neighbourhood. Whilst the community had input into some aspects of the design process, and to varying degrees in the decision-making and process management, the project ended up being a failure. The collaboration remained only partial; not only did the community not have a say in the final decision-making, they were not part of the development of design options either. They did not get to help decide which community members would be consulted, nor were they co-designers who had influence on what alternative solutions were being developed, and which values were central in those solutions. After completion of the project, the community members reported that they had lost values and attributes to their home that they did not previously realise shaped their lives (Kapp and Baltazar, 2012). This is a testament to the importance of placing Indigenous lived experience central in any planning process, as well as the difficulty of analysing, researching, and interpreting the values of a place. The people of Belo Horizonte showed that this is true even for residents, let alone for outsider experts who might be involved in a project outside of their familiar cultural context.

When participation is holistically implemented, and the community is engaged as a true co-designer, co-manager, and co-decision-maker throughout the entire planning process, it means the community has gained autonomy over the project (Kapp and Baltazar, 2012), and therefore (re)gain autonomy over their own home. Udoewa (2022) calls such a complete and successful participation, where institutional planning experts and community members reach true equality, Radical Participatory Planning. She identifies three dimensions of planning where the power distribution needs to be equal to achieve a desirable participatory process: (1) project initiation, (2) project participation, and (3) project leadership, aligning strongly with the shortcomings of participatory planning Kapp and Baltazar pointed out (Kapp and Baltazar, 2012; Udoewa, 2022). To reach desirable outcomes, the planning process needs to overcome the dependence on Western planning experts, pre-existing planning frameworks, and the limiting Western knowledge system. The only way to meaningfully include Indigenous knowledges and situated experienced knowledge, is to centre the respective communities we design for and divest the power of institutional planners so that the communities gain autonomy over planning processes and outcomes (Kapp and Baltazar, 2012; Udoewa, 2022; Cox et al., 2024; Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Adopting such an approach to planning creates an inherently value-led process that is not based on experts' interpretations of context, but rather first-hand empirical data of embodied knowledge and lived experience. If this knowledge is translated into the planning process through the respective Indigenous standpoints, rather than a universalised Western perspective, this creates a true situated planning approach. If the conditions for Radical Participatory Planning as described by Udoewa (2022) are achieved, this value-led practice becomes an autonomous planning process as well, laying the foundations of a decolonial planning practice (Escobar, 2018).



Figure 5.2 Collage Looking for radicality (Collage by Author, more information in Appendix 3)

Looking for radicality

The schools of planning and planning methods and methodologies described here all have one thing in common. Whilst these more innovative contemporary practices are undeniably a step in the right direction, they all remain to function within the colonial and neoliberal structures that are at the very root of the injustices planning efforts attempt to remediate; remaining complicit to the institutional cycles of oppression in society (Roy, 2006). By working within these oppressive frameworks that are at the root of spatial and social injustices, opportunities for lasting, large-scale, transformative change remain limited. Moreover, all described methods remain centred on expert planners at the core of the planning process (Davis, 2006; Escobar, 2018; Freire, 1970; Roy, 2006; Mirafteb, 2009). In most cases, this makes sense, as urban planners are the experts simply exercising their expertise, this is less so the case when planners find themselves outside of their own community and context; the phenomenon this thesis specifically addresses. To create urban environments that are truly just, the community itself needs to be centred and empowered in the design process. However, we have seen how the Western planning tradition depends on the planner's interpretation and understanding of the context, problems, objectives, and other related information of the respective location and community that is being designed for. When a planner is within their own familiar context, it could be trusted upon that their interpretation is correct, complete, and thorough. Can the same still be said when they find themselves in a foreign and to them unknown culture and context?

No matter how groundbreaking, applying methods within a broken planning system will always end up confirming the power imbalances of said system. We have seen attempts to address this planning system itself, such as Radical Participatory Planning. Udoewa describes RPD not as a method or methodology, but rather as a meta-methodology, as their success is dependent on the mindset you apply them with (Udoewa, 2022). In order to transform planning, we are not to transform the methods we apply, but rather the mindset we apply them with. The way we regard planning, and the way we position ourselves and our role as planners is vital in the decolonisation in planning, especially as Western planners planning outside of our own context. To further develop this concept of 'Decolonial Planning' as a meta-methodology, this chapter continues to outline key transformations in our planning attitudes, processes, and methodologies that contribute to centring Indigenous experienced knowledge in planning.

Transforming the behaviour and attitude of the planner

As shown in the previous sections, to transform urban planning towards decoloniality, we must address the transcending way we regard planning, and the way we, planners, position ourselves and our role in planning processes (Dick et al., 2015). This we can do by regarding planning methodology as a meta-methodology; a methodology for methodology, an umbrella process for urban planning. Through assessing and transforming our planning methodology towards decoloniality, our planning practices can follow.

A theory that allows us to start doing so by decentering Western knowledge and centring Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous knowledge production systems instead, is Indigenous Standpoint theory. Indigenous Standpoint Theory developed from Feminist Standpoint Theory, and states that current research and planning frameworks are structured through Western knowledge, Western knowledge production systems, and Western ethnocentrism (Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Cox et al., 2024). The often blind and unconscious assumption that the Western knowledge system is superior to alternative knowledge systems, leads to the continued systemic oppression of communities that do not adhere to Western culture, by rejecting non-Western modes of knowledge production and knowledge itself, leaving communities under-represented and marginalised (Kapoor, 2004; Davis, 2006; Udoewa, 2022; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Cox et al., 2024; Njoh, 2009). Indigenous Standpoint Theory calls for research that centres respective Indigenous communities in a way that provides them with autonomy over the research process (Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Cox et al., 2024). Urban planning and design are in many ways seen as a form of research: projects often contain problems that require 'solving'. The first key step of any planning project is analysis and data-gathering, and solutions are often tested (Rocco et al., 2022; Udoewa, 2022).

Whilst research and planning often naturally encompass engaging with the respective community, Indigenous Standpoint Theory takes this engagement further, to the level of autonomy, claiming that without autonomy in the process and outcomes, Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and lived experiences will remain being overlooked and misinterpreted under the Western knowledge system (Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Cox et al., 2024). This argument is reminiscent of the reasoning in Radical Participatory Design by Udoewa (2022). Radical Participatory Design, however, focuses specifically on participatory planning processes, whereas Indigenous Standpoint Theory is a more generic theory that allows itself to be applied to any project, discipline, or concept to be freed of a universal Western lens. It also lends itself to be adapted to any community or group to be centred within a research or planning project. While application of Indigenous Standpoint Theory in planning inherently results in a collaborative and communicative planning process in which the respective

community holds autonomy, similar to RPD and autonomous planning, Indigenous Standpoint Theory relates to a way of planning; a moral commitment to rectify systemic injustices in the built environment and society. This change in the attitude of planners, professional planners educated within the institutionalised Western planning tradition specifically, brings forth various changes in the planner's behaviour and the structure of planning processes (Udoewa, 2022; Cox et al., 2024; Mirafteb, 2009).

Planning processes that are currently the norm within the Western planning tradition are positivist and technocratic in nature. This leads to a planning practice focused on outcomes that often apply objective and pragmatic solutions to situated problems, overgeneralising the complex context of the project into pre-existing narratives. Rather than this problem- and result-focused approach, we need to transform planning practice to a value-led and spiritually and socially focused practice (Cox et al., 2024). Value-led design practices and autonomous design have a key role in such a planning practice (Escobar, 2018; Kapp and Baltazar, 2022).

Besides the nature of planning practices, the nature of the planner's role needs to be transformed as well (Udoewa, 2022; Freire, 1970). Even though Western planners are best educated to plan within their personal context, the fact is that Western planners, as well as the Western planning methodology, travel far beyond their home context. The planning knowledge produced by the Western knowledge system is not useless. There are valuable planning lessons, methodologies, and technologies, which can advance planning in any location. However, Western planning is biased and incomplete. To transform planning into a decolonial practice, planners need to engage with critical reflexivity as a core part of planning. Their expert perspective on planning then becomes situated within the Western knowledge system, allowing for bias in their reasoning and thinking to be recognised and unpacked where necessary (Attia and Edge, 2017). Planning too, then becomes a situated practice, with Western planning, and likewise the Western knowledge system, becoming a situated Indigenous knowledge on its own (Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Lake, 2017; Brenner and Schmid, 2015). This is often called provincialisation by planning theorists (Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Chakrabarty, 2009).

To transform planning practice that is currently focused on universal technocratic solutions and emphasises the authority of professional planners in the planning process into a communicative practice that recognises the value of alternative knowledge and lived experience and accepts community agency, Western planners must engage in critical reflexivity. While reflection, defined as retrospective evaluation of communications and the way events and processes transpired (Attia and Edge, 2017; Beunen et al., 2013), is common in research as well as planning and design projects, reflexivity is notoriously missing from at least the latter, if not all the aforementioned (Howe and Langdon, 2002; Attia and Edge, 2017). When reflection, as opposed

to reflexivity, is applied, it concerns the planning process or learnings about the planning location, rather than turning inwards onto planners' own actions, thoughts, and influences in the project. This can be explained through the solutionist, positivist, and technocratic nature of the Western planning tradition: self-reflexivity requires mixing the personal with the professional, which is an absolute no-go in rational Western research, as the researcher and the research, or the designer and the design, are seen as separate. Furthermore, reflexivity encompasses knowledge that is primarily produced through embodied experience as well as feedback from others' embodied experiences. This means knowledge instigating reflexivity often presents itself in the form of spiritual and cultural knowledge, emotions and feelings, or intuition; knowledge sources that are generally excluded from Western research and design practices (Ellis, 1999; Howe and Langdon, 2002). We know now that to move towards a decolonial planning practice, these sources of knowledge are vital and should be centred in planning processes. This applied specifically to the situated embodied experiences of the respective communities themselves. In order to centre those experiences, planners need to move beyond reflection, towards self-reflexivity.

Reflexivity conceptualises reflection as a continuous, systematic process that investigates the researchers or planners' positionality, how this influences their research, and how the research influences the researcher, or respectively the plan and the planner, in return (Attia and Edge, 2017; Howe and Langdon, 2002). By implementing critical self-reflexivity for planners as a core activity of planning, we allow planners to (1) realise and understand their own positionality in relation to the people they are planning for, (2) recognise resulting biases that their positionality is bringing into the planning project and actively unpack them as a decolonising practice, and (3) create space for Indigenous and otherwise alternative knowledges and modes of knowledge production within the planning process.

The call for reflexive planning is representative of the necessary shift of the planner's role when working in a non-Western context. The decolonial planning practice outlined in this research relies on the autonomy, and therefore design capacities and decision-making power, of the communities themselves. This means that the community members assume a large part of what has traditionally been the professional planner's role. In order to create the conditions for this much-needed shift, the professional planner therefore has to change their positioning and role in the planning process. A changed role of the planner has been proposed before, perhaps most notably by John Forester (1999; 1982) and Patsy Healy (1992). Although both authors theorise the role of the planner in collaborative processes to be that of a mediator, listener, and advocate, they too still rely on the expert planner's interpretation and translation of the community's stories (Forester, 1999; Forester, 1982; Healy, 1992; Pongsawat, 2012). In that sense, their proposed approaches fail to radically centre the respective marginalised community

(Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Kapoor, 2004; Cox et al., 2021; Udoewa, 2022).

Through critical self-reflexivity, planners can realise that they themselves cannot produce all of the essential situated and embodied knowledge that should inform planning in a decolonial planning process. Rather than a leading planning and decision-making role, the planner should therefore assume a facilitating and educating role, assisting the community with their expert knowledge to advance the planning process. The contents of the project, however, should be led by the community members themselves (Udoewa, 2022; Baum, 2017; Freire, 1970).

Traditional practices

In giving autonomy to the respective communities and incorporating spiritual, cultural, and embodied knowledge into planning discourse, space is created for traditional practices. Traditional practices, or traditional planning, can be defined as spatial interventions and organisation performed by traditional rulers (e.g. chiefs and elders of a community) (Dampsey, 1981). Traditional planning is often excluded from planning discourse, as planning activities executed by people other than professional planners, politicians and developers are not considered to be planning through the perspective of the Western planning tradition (Dampsey, 1981; Davis, 2006). As mentioned before, however, this research considers planning to be any act that attempts to organise place and land use or mould the environment according to a community's needs.

Traditional practices are inherently decolonial, because they originate before coloniality, and continue to be developed and transformed outside of Western planning and policy frameworks. That being said, it is important, particularly for Western planners, to refrain from blindly glorifying any traditional practice and from falling into fetishising Indigenous knowledge without critical thought (Kapoor, 2004; Briggs and Sharp, 2004). Simultaneously, it goes without saying that it should not be exclusively up to Western professional planners and theorists to evaluate traditional planning. The majority of cultural knowledge in Indigenous communities is transferred through oral tradition and therefore requires knowledge of language and cultural context to interpret (Odimegwu and Omazu, 2021). It is also important to note that Indigenous cultures, such as African cultures, have not stood still during the past centuries. Forced assimilation to Western cultures, the systemic subjugation of Indigenous languages and expressions of culture, but also natural cultural developments, have shaped and transformed African Indigenous cultures like any other (Odimegwu and Omazu, 2021; Kapoor, 2004). When examining traditional practices, it is important to assess their current cultural and environmental relevance.

Nevertheless, traditional practices can form a valuable source for decolonial planning, and can contain practices that promote Indigenous ways of living, rather than hinder them as Western planning practices tend to do. In the case of Old Fadama, there is no clear answer as to which traditions to turn to. While the settlement is not organised according to Western urban logic, the planning practices and outcomes do not provide a clear example of local traditional and Indigenous practices either. However, despite the fact that the community of Old Fadama is not Indigenous to the region they live in now, they are an example of an African Indigenous community living in a society and built environment dominated by Western culture and the Western Knowledge system (Samper, 2014).

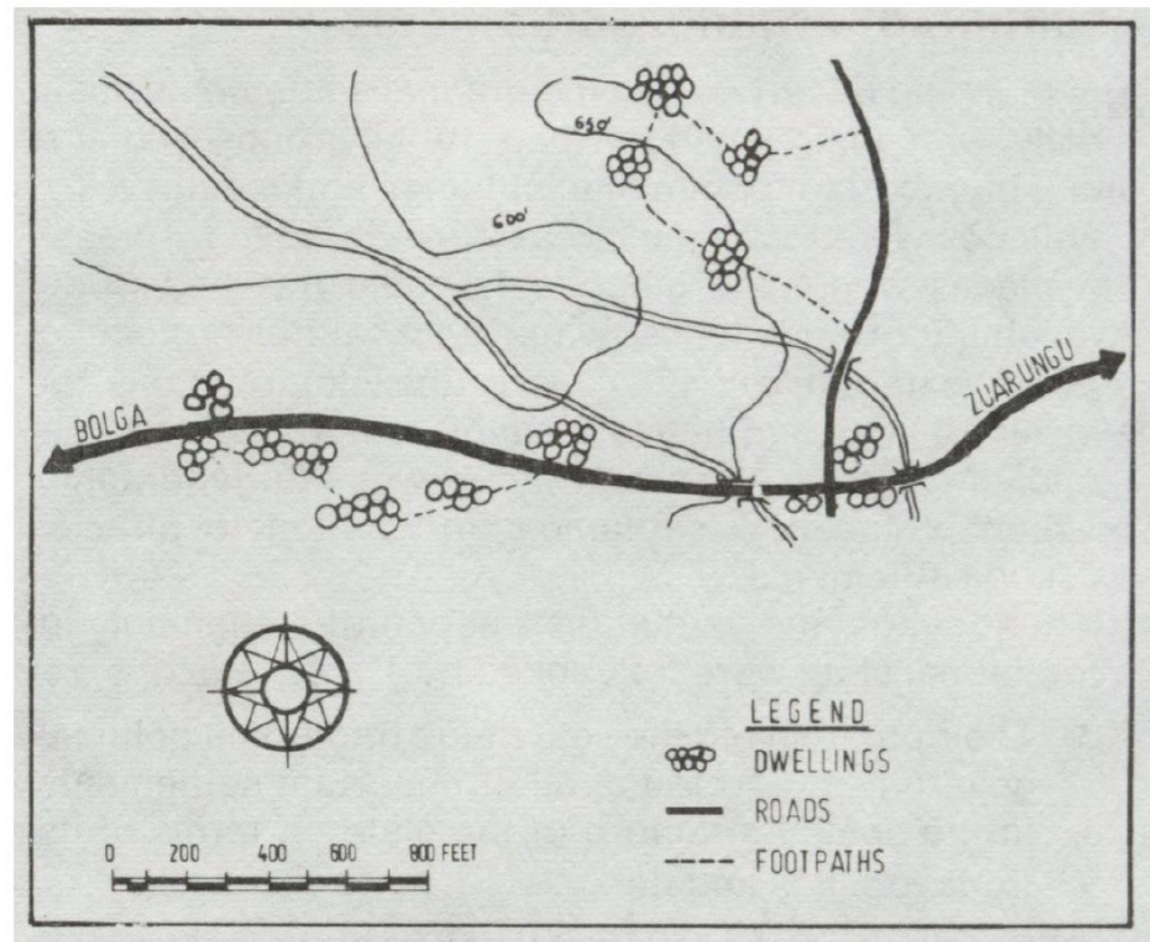
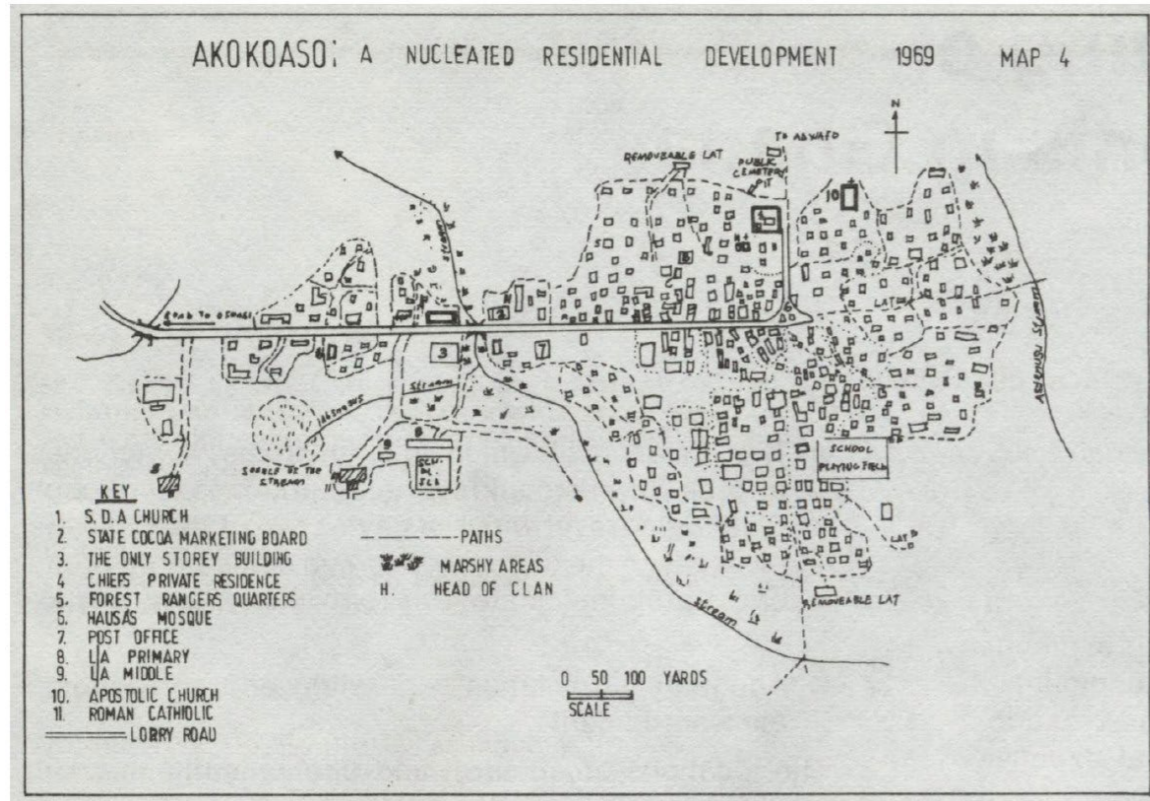
Potential environmentally relevant practices could be found in the tradition of the Ga people. However, the long-term

exhaustive occupation of the Old Fadama, and increasing effects of climate change have significantly altered the spatial and environmental conditions of the land (Amoako and Inkoom, 2017; Grant et al., 2024; Stacey and Lund, 2016). Culturally relevant practices could be found in many cultures, as Old Fadama is home to almost all ethnic groups in Ghana (Stacey and Lund, 2016). The initial larger-scale settling in Old Fadama, however, was initiated by Northern ethnic groups, such as the Konkumbas (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Brukum, 2000). In his 1981 paper, Nathan Dampsey reviews the three main settlement types of traditional (Northern) Ghana, and how they reflect the social organisations of life (Dampsey, 1981). There are three main types of development: (1) the nucleated type, where a settlement starts through older members' dwellings and younger members build there dwellings around the existing one, creating a dense nuclear settlement; (2) the scattered type, where individual dwellings are isolated and separated by farmland, with public spaces connecting them on the main roads; and (3) the string type (also called Huza), which is a settlement that develops by dividing a large plot along a stream (Dampsey, 1981). Especially the nucleated type, portrayed in Figure 5.3, is interesting to analyse further, as this typology shows a lot of similarities with the way Old Fadama is constructed. A settlement of the nucleated type grows over time, primarily due to natural population expansion. The physical pattern of the settlement is representative of social networks in the community. The nucleated type creates very dense settlements, with intricate and well-connected infrastructure, promoting social relationships, solidarity, and informal care systems that are prevalent in many African cultures. This description is also true for Old Fadama; the settlement is extremely dense, although this, of course, is also due to unwanted pressures. The dense and seemingly organic growth of a nucleated-type settlement creates a very tight-knit network, which can be difficult to navigate for outsiders. This too is a description, or verdict, Old Fadama has received repeatedly; the settlement is often, unjustifiably so, labelled as chaotic, disorganised, unplanned, and even uncivilised (Davis, 2006). The urban logic of informal settlements is not only severely underrepresented in academia but also underappreciated as a relevant research topic in general. The negative perspectives on informal settlements come from a lack of knowledge and understanding of non-Western urban patterns. However, to deviate from the dominant Western urban logic does not mean the settlement is not organised according to its own urban logic (Fishman, 1977; Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Kapp and Baltazar, 2002; Samper, 2014).

The density of Old Fadama or other nucleated-type settlements makes for a very high number of social interactions. Life in Old Fadama is characterised by a community care system. This can also be attributed to communalism, an ideology and way of social organisation prevalent in African cultures that prioritises the well-being of the collective as a way to guide the individual. Communalism is a way of life that is strongly rooted in community, a characteristic that is clearly visible in Old Fadama and that is actively realised through

spatial practices (Odimegwu and Omazu, 2021; Dampsey, 1981). Whilst communalism in African culture has also changed through centuries of oppression and assimilation, it is still seen as a key characteristic of African culture, and a highly valued attribute and quality of life by communities that experience it. Example given, the communality of life in Old Fadama was repeatedly mentioned as a positive aspect during the fieldwork interviews (Odimegwu and Omazu, 2021; Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025; Stacey and Lund, 2016; Davis, 2006; Kapp and Baltazar, 2002; Dampsey, 1981). The communal values and the spatial and governance strategies that establish them in the built environment and society highly contrast with the individual values that underpin the formal planning and governance frameworks of the West. This demonstrates once more how the Western planning tradition is often unfit to address planning questions outside of its own context. The planning practices in Old Fadama, and in other spaces, such as informal settlements that exist largely outside of the pre-decided Western narratives and societal structures, can be seen as insurgent and decolonial planning (Miraftab, 2009).

Figure 5.3 Traditional Ghanaian settlement types. Nucleated type (top) and scattered type (bottom) (Dampney, 1981)



section conclusions.

The exploration and evaluation of various planning perspectives and methodologies provide the opportunity to answer the second set of sub-research questions in this thesis, regarding the proposal of alternative and transformed urban planning practices. The third sub-research question of this thesis reads, 'Which alternative knowledges and spatial practices from Old Fadama and literature examples exist that go beyond the colonial and neoliberal frameworks of modern Western planning?'

As we have seen, contemporary urban theory already contains many urban planning schools and methodologies that challenge the rational, positivist, and technocratic nature of planning within the Western knowledge system, such as value-led planning, focusing on the values that inform planning, rather than the positivist objectives that traditionally shape the planning process; participatory planning, which emphasises the communicative and collaborative nature of planning processes that address marginalised communities affected by injustices in the built environment and society; and humanist planning, which acknowledges the importance of lived experience and embodied knowledge and deems it a key data source in planning (Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Udoewa, 2022; Njoh, 2010; Healy, 1992; Kapp and Baltazar, 2012; Haas and Mehaffy, 2024). However, as social scientists and decolonial theorists point out, this is not sufficient. The aforementioned methodologies can all be applied within Western planning frameworks, eventually depending on the expert planners to interpret, translate, and implement the knowledge produced throughout the planning process (Udoewa, 2022). Moreover, if knowledge is only sought and produced by these expert planners, many alternative knowledges and modes of knowledge production will remain overlooked (Kapp and Baltazar, 2012). What we learn here is that in order to meaningfully and radically transform planning to create the opportunity of going beyond the colonial and neoliberal frameworks of modern Western planning, we need to decentre the Western perspective where it is not applicable, and centre the respective Indigenous perspective that is applicable to the planning location. The planning process should be designed by the community itself, so that it inherently carries out the Indigenous knowledge, knowledge production systems, worldviews, and embodied knowledge that the Western knowledge system is unable to fully grasp (Udoewa, 2022; Kapp and Baltazar, 2012). We see this happening in Old Fadama. The settlement is often misinterpreted and denounced as chaotic and unplanned, while even though many of the planning approaches of Old Fadama are in response to the immense stresses and oppression the settlement is under, distinct and purposeful planning strategies and spatial practices are indeed present. Rather than following the Western urban logic we tend to prefer in institutional planning, the settlements follow a different urban logic, one that can be found in traditional and Indigenous spatial practices.

The fourth sub-research question of this thesis reads 'How can insights from these practices contribute to a

critically reflexive, value-led planning methodology that fosters spatial justice?' Through partaking in decolonial planning practice and implementing the transformative planning approaches as described above, spatial justice for marginalised communities is more likely to be achieved, because the proposed decolonial planning practice centres on first-hand experiences and knowledge, and establishes community autonomy throughout the planning process. This considerably reduces the misinterpretation, misidentification, and overlooking of respective communities' problems, needs, and priorities, which typically occurs when Western planners generalise unique and complex lived experiences into pre-existing planning narratives and objectives (Udoewa, 2022; Kapp and Baltazar, 2012; Cox et al., 2024; Good et al., 2015; Harisson, 2017). This misinterpretation and overgeneralisation are the main reasons urban planning fails to meaningfully address spatial (in)justice, as it causes plans focus on the wrong objectives, leading to the further diminishing of key community values, and therefore resilience, which in turn exacerbates the marginalising effects of colonial and neoliberal societal structures.

Lessons for planners

The evaluation of relevant alternative planning epistemologies, promising methodologies and meta-methodologies of a decolonial planning practice holds many important learnings, specifically for Western planners finding themselves outside of their own context. Reflecting on these learnings, the following six guiding principles for a decolonial planning practice can be derived:

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DECOLONIAL PLANNER

1.

Above all, decolonial planning is about the mindset of a moral commitment to rectifying structural injustices in the built environment and society. It is not about the practical methods that are employed, but about the way in which they are employed; it is meta-methodology, rather than a methodology or practice in itself;

Planners have to engage in critical self-reflexivity to realise their own positionality, understand their missing knowledge biases, and know what role to assume in the planning process in order to make room for Indigenous autonomy;

4

As a Western-born or Western-educated planner, you cannot fully understand or properly interpret all dimensions of Indigenous knowledge, culture, and the effects of the systemic oppression by the dominant Western knowledge system;

2

5.

The respective community must have autonomy in every phase of the process in order for planning to be decolonial;

3.

Situated, embodied, and experienced knowledge (which includes Indigenous, cultural, and spiritual knowledge) should be central in the planning process;

Not explicitly engaging in decolonial planning inevitably perpetuates the cycle of enforcing the Western knowledge system, and thereby the resulting marginalisation of communities that do not conform to that standard as well as reinforcing neoliberal planning objectives.

6

This set of reflections and learnings forms an answer to the fifth sub-research question posed in this thesis: 'What principles or design values emerge for planners seeking to decolonise practice in similar contexts?' While these 'principles' are the result of a rather personal journey of exploration and reflection upon planning knowledge, as well as personal experience, I invite fellow planners to evaluate and consider them too. The principles do not present a concrete methodology, but rather a meta-methodology, the umbrella process planning that can encompass and adapt to various planning methods (Dick et al., 2015). The meta-methodology describes a transcending perspective of planning in a decolonial manner that is applicable to many urban planning schools and contexts.

Learning in the context of Old Fadama

Old Fadama, an informal and illegal settlement that exists under the oppression of Western societal structures of coloniality and neoliberalism. Especially for Old Fadama, a significantly marginalised community that is disproportionately affected by the injustices created by these structures, the Western planning system that exists within these structures is insufficiently capable of addressing the community's needs. This has resulted in emergent planning and governance practices from within the community that exist largely outside of these frameworks due to systemic government neglect. The community-led planning and governance system can be seen as a real-world example of decolonial planning in action. In response to their marginalisation and systemic oppression by these unfit frameworks, they have gone beyond just survival and taken back autonomy, developing planning strategies, spatial practices, a local governance system, and a sub-society within Accra that is strongly intertwined with the formal system. Their resistance is a bottom-up, autonomous, and largely decolonial planning and governance system that should be valued and utilised accordingly. This can be done by implementing the decolonial planning practice as outlined above. This practice centres embodied experiences and Indigenous knowledge at the very core of the planning and design process, making the process inherently communicative and collaborative at every step of the way. This research project, unfortunately, does not allow for such an approach, due to time and financial constraints. Therefore, rather than developing designs or policy proposals for Old Fadama and Accra, this research will go on to illustrate the planning and governance outcomes that the community has already achieved through their autonomous practices. By understanding the values the community prioritise in their daily life, and seeking them out in the physical form of Old Fadama, the presence of decolonial planning in Old Fadama can be imagined. In the further chapters of this research, I attempt to imagine this reality of a planned Old Fadama, to offer an alternative perspective of the emergent urban planning practices in informal spaces. This alternative perspective is a direct result of adherence to the learnings and guiding principles for decolonial planning as described above.

6. IN CONVERSATION:

FINDING COMMON NARRATIVES AND VALUES

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Introduction

A fundamental part of this research has been the fieldwork in Accra and Old Fadama. While nowadays decoloniality in urban planning is a widely discussed topic, a rather significant knowledge gap in connecting theory to practice still remains. The visits to Accra and Old Fadama, and the involvement of Old Fadama as a case study in the literature review and theoretical discussion aim to understand how the dynamics of coloniality and neoliberalism interplay in the built environment and society, especially for marginalised communities, and bridge this gap between theory and practice. Moreover, in the journey towards decoloniality, enhancing Indigenous voices, firsthand experiences, and collaborative approaches are indispensable. By visiting the community and settlement, documenting their environment, and listening to their stories, this internal narrative is put at the centre of this research.

This chapter represents the final step of this research, attempting to apply decolonial planning practice, making the theoretical learnings in this research more tangible. As we move towards the last step in this research, representing the 'politicising' of newfound knowledge (Marcuse, 2009), this step also acts as a certain accountability for me; I am actively learning and reflecting upon my research by applying this knowledge in practice. At the start of this project, the eventual goal was to make policy and design proposals for Old Fadama and Accra, to improve the embedding of informal areas such as Old Fadama in the formal city network, connecting them to urban infrastructure networks, public spaces, and social services, and therefore indirectly increasing the opportunities in life of informal communities, rectifying the structural injustices that marginalise informal communities. However, throughout the course of this research, this objective has changed significantly, due to multiple realisations, reflections, learnings, and perhaps most importantly of all, unlearnings. Firstly, the conceptualisation of urban informality in this thesis rejects the dichotomy between the informal and the formal. The idolising of the formal dimensions of our world, be it in the economic sector, or built environment, is a manifestation of the presumed universality and superiority of anything Western and how coloniality is ingrained in our ways of doing, being, and knowing. Especially in the Global South, formal and informal sectors are intertwined in such a way that they cannot be fully separated. Our society has become dependent on both domains. The dichotomy of formal and informal is therefore completely constructed, out of the coloniality that remains in our practice and policy. This changed understanding, and also valuing, of informality negates the development of a design or policy where informality itself is posed as the problem factor. Rather, informality is a bottom-up approach to create urban planning solutions.

Secondly, through better understanding the way urban planning is complicit in perpetuating oppressive cycles and constructing the 'reflections for the decolonial planner', I want to commit to a changed role of the planner, as someone who

is committed to creating just cities. One main learning that is represented in the 'reflections for the decolonial planner' is that it cannot be solely up to the 'expert planner' to initiate the planning process, to develop design ideas and solutions, and to make decisions based on their interpretation of the intricate and complex contexts of peoples' lives and environments. Especially if this is done in isolation, without meaningful collaboration between planners and the community, in which the community has autonomy. Unfortunately, this research does not fulfil those conditions. Therefore, it would not be right for me to design explicit plans, or make concrete policy proposals, and present them as solutions or 'truths'. My interpretations and translations, even though they will be influenced and informed by the stories of the people of Old Fadama, will always remain only partially complete and correct.

Nevertheless, in this research process I was able to hear meaningful stories that are too often left untold or overgeneralised into a uniform experience of the informal. It is important to tell those stories, and to show the values that shape Old Fadama, so that we are to better understand the diverse ways of life that can shape our built environment in many different ways, without one being intrinsically better than. Most importantly, during my visit of Old Fadama, it was the one thing the community asked me to do: to share their stories, so that planners and people in power, who choose not to hear the community itself, would hear their stories nonetheless. Furthermore, this chapter will include imaginations of Old Fadama that build on pictures of Old Fadama, to show through a different, decolonial perspective, how the community's values are expressed through planning and governance, and how, contrary to the harmful assumptions about informal settlements, the insurgent planning practices of the informal community in Old Fadama carries through valuable knowledge and heritage, and immortalises it in the built environment. The imaginations are not intended as design proposals, nor are they meant to represent one true interpretation of place. Rather, they serve as an invitation to look at Old Fadama through a new lens.

Whilst the interviewees shall remain anonymous, in some cases to protect their already vulnerable status and social security in Accra, the people I spoke to, and the stories they had to tell are immeasurably valuable. They have directly asked me to share their story. Therefore, in this chapter, the interviewees are introduced under pseudonyms. Their stories and messages show strong communal narratives, expressing the values that shape life, and therefore inspire spatial planning and governance decisions, preferences, and needs. The key values are explained and connected to the statements of the people of Old Fadama, after which they are identified in the imaginations. First, however, the go-aboutings of the fieldwork are explained in more detail.

The fieldwork

It goes without saying that in collaborative approaches, longer and intensive visits, where a meaningful connection as well as a collaborative process can be created with the respective communities, are preferred over shorter 'fieldtrips'. Due to time pressures in a rather short graduation year, however, the fieldwork visit to Accra and Old Fadama in this research was limited to nine days.

Besides Old Fadama, other neighbourhoods in Accra, such as Jamestown, Nima, Asylum Down, Makola, Tudu, Adabraka, the Ministral District, and Dzorwulu were also visited. Besides the interviews in the Old Fadama community, the experts by experience, a total of six semi-structured interviews with seven experts by profession were also conducted and recorded. All interviews were preceded by written informed consent. A general overview of all interviewees can be seen in table 6.1. Examples of the professions of the interviewees are positions at the AMA planning department, positions at the AMA social welfare department, regional NGO's in the area, and PhD candidates working on related topics in Old Fadama and Accra. The data from these interviews is woven into the theory throughout this research report.

During my stay in Accra, I was able to make two visits to Old Fadama in which I toured the settlement with community guidance. Upon the first visit, according to tradition, complimentary Schnapps

were presented to the community leaders to formally ask them to welcome me, my notebook, and my camera into the community. After approval from the council of community leaders was granted, the community was adequately informed of the research synopsis, and what exactly our second visit would entail. We returned later in the week to tour the settlement once again, conduct interviews with community members, and take pictures. A total of seven semi-structured interviews with eleven community members were conducted and recorded. All community interviews were preceded by verbal informed consent.

Despite the interviews with the community members varying in length and depth, and the topic often being focused on things that need to change in Old Fadama, specifically concerning the involvement of the government, the residents of Old Fadama each spoke of their home and community with a clear love in their voice. Even though many improvements could be made to the tangible design and construction of the settlement, there is immeasurable value hidden away in the community, such as immense cultural knowledge, a strong sense of community and togetherness, and peace amongst different ethnic groups, that seems to have been lost elsewhere. Below, eight of the community members of Old Fadama, their words about their community, their way of living, and their home in Old Fadama are introduced to you, the reader.

	Interviewees	
	Experts by profession	Experts by experience
Civil	III (3)	### ## (10)
Public	IIII (4)	I (1)
Total	### II (7)	### ## I (11)
	### ## ## III (18)	

Table 6.1 Overview of research interviewees

MEET THE PEOPLE OF OLD FADAMA



Figure 6.1 Collage of 'The People of Old Fadama' (All photos by Author)

Meet the people of Old Fadama

This is Aseye, one of the water ladies of Old Fadama. She and her family are originally from the Volta region, but Aseye travelled to Old Fadama as a young adult about twenty years ago, with her mother. In her hometown, she was a hairdresser, but there was no business. This brought them to Old Fadama. Here, they managed to buy a house that they share with family and kin. In total, five people live in the approximately 7m² dwelling. The dwelling is largely filled with big top-mound fridges. Aseye has taken out a loan to buy bottled drinks and bagged water, and rents the fridges to keep the drinks cool before they sell. Due to the cramped space in the dwelling, most people have to sleep on top of the fridges.

Aseye has two children. One of them was born in the hospital in Accra, and one of them at home here in Old Fadama. They grew up and went to school in Old Fadama, but now that they are in senior high school, they have moved back to the Volta region to stay with family. This has multiple reasons: Old Fadama only has a primary school, and unfortunately does not offer any senior high education, and, as Aseye brings up, business in Old Fadama is poor, and she is unable to financially support her children by herself.

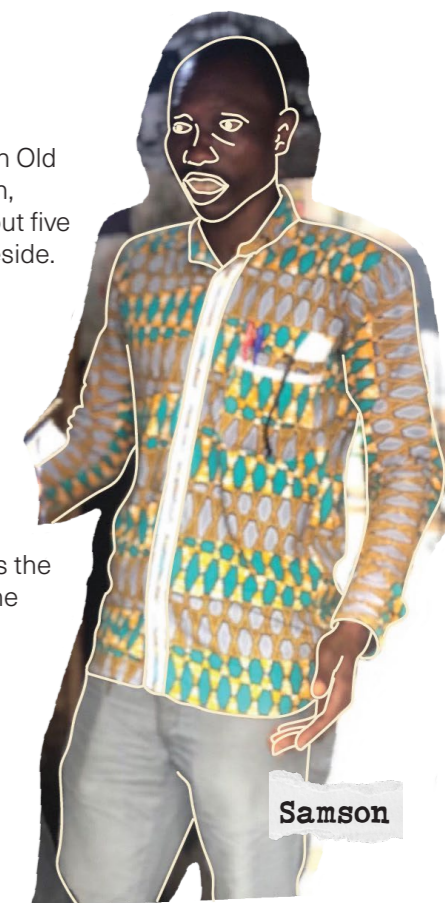
Aseye does think that they will return to Old Fadama after finishing their senior high school education, however. She mentions that the state of development and the economy in her hometown are still very low. She also mentions that her children love it here in Old Fadama: 'they get to roam free and be safe'. Aseye also brings up things she does not like about Old Fadama. She thinks it's too crowded, busy, and loud. On top of that, she craves stable employment and independence from creditors and rental schemes to run her business.



Aseye

This is Samson, one of the teachers in the Agape Trinity Academy, the primary school in Old Fadama. After completing Senior High School himself in his hometown in the Oti region, fifteen years ago, he moved to Old Fadama to find a job. He lived in Old Fadama for about five years, and then moved to Jamestown, where he, his wife, and their three children still reside. The school in Old Fadama is a family affair for Samson: besides him, his wife also teaches here, and their kids attend the school, meaning the whole family spends every day in Old Fadama, despite moving to Jamestown 10 years ago.

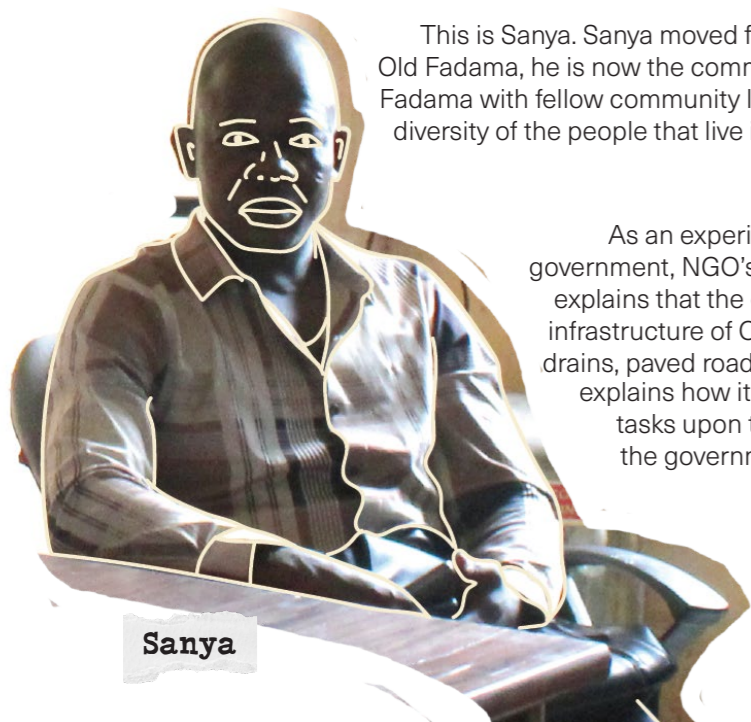
Samson speaks of Old Fadama with admiration and appreciation of the diversity and variety in the settlement. He claims everything you might need, like churches, schools, businesses, shops, and even clinics are all found here. At the same time, however, he acknowledges the shortcomings of Old Fadama, like the rainwater-induced floods that pester the area. Really, though, these are shortcomings of the government, as Samson explains. The government does not help nor do they come to visit and see the problems the community deals with with their own eyes. He even describes the contributions from the AMA as 'counteraid'.



Samson

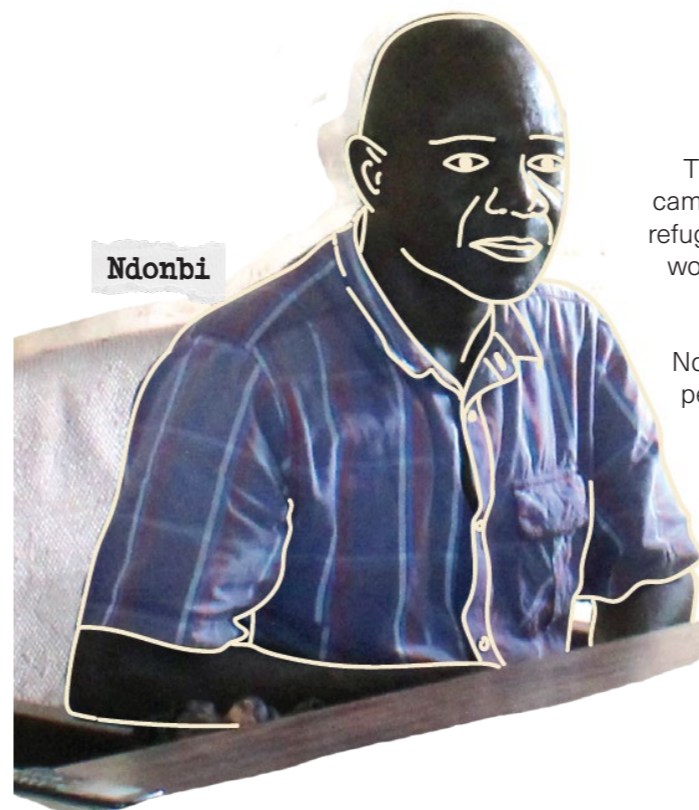
This is Sanya. Sanya moved from the Northern part of Ghana to Old Fadama in 1994. Here in Old Fadama, he is now the community leader for his ethnic group, contributing to governing Old Fadama with fellow community leaders. He speaks highly of his community, admiring the ethnic diversity of the people that live in Old Fadama, the languages they speak, and the cultures they bring with them.

As an experienced community leader, he is critical of outside 'help' from the government, NGO's and other organisations. Confirming the common narrative, he explains that the government does not aid them in developing and improving the infrastructure of Old Fadama. The community continues to struggle with a lack of drains, paved roads, no healthcare or schooling options, and sanitary facilities. He explains how it is hard for the people of Old Fadama to take such development tasks upon themselves due to the insecurity of their tenure; at any moment, the government could decide to evic them. At any moment, they could lose their home. Sanya is also critical of the help offered by NGO's, or people like me, researchers and tourists. He explains they mean the best, come in to see the problems and ask questions, but they hardly ever see any positive results from their queries in the community.



Sanya

Ndonbi



This is Ndonbi. Ndonbi is a community elder in Old Fadama. He originally came from the Northern part of Ghana to Old Fadama in 1982, as one of the refugees of the Konkomba-Nanumba war at just twelve years old. He started working at the Agbogbloshie markets as a welder and established a life for himself in Old Fadama.

Ndonbi enjoys living in Old Fadama. He greatly appreciates the diversity of people and cultures around him, and the fact that you can feel the culture in Old Fadama, which he and his friends insist you cannot feel as strong in Accra. In Old Fadama, there is always a community that will help you, and that will find you a place to rest your head, he says.

This is Imani. Imani spends her days at the vibrant Agbogbloshie markets running her business, in hair and beauty products and hair dressing. She came to Old Fadama about 20 years ago, when she was a young adult, all by herself, moving from the Northern region of Ghana. Imani used to work as a hairdresser in her hometown as well, however, business was incredibly low, making life hard. She came to Agbogbloshie after having heard a promise of business opportunities, and learnt about Old Fadama here, when she was looking for a place to sleep. Imani now has a family here, although her children live spread across the country, some staying with her in Old Fadama, some residing in Accra, and some having moved back North to the Gonja region.

Imani cuts right to the chase: she does not think living in Old Fadama is good. She says the work is hard and long, and there is no profit. On top of that, the road conditions, water drainage problems and lack of waste management services make the conditions for work and life even harder. Despite being unhappy with the living conditions of Old Fadama, however, Imani still stays. She tolerates her living and work conditions, because she has a dream of expanding her business and financially supporting herself and her family, something that is even more impossible to do elsewhere. What Imani does appreciate about Old Fadama is her community and the culture of care and solidarity. She describes a system that helps whoever finds themselves new and alone in Old Fadama find a place to sleep, and a community around her that knows unity and happiness.

Imani addresses the desire of the government to move both Agbogbloshie and Old Fadama to a new location. Given her opinion on the living conditions in Old Fadama, Imani says she will consider moving if the government comes up with a new location. Important for her above anything else, however, are the business opportunities and chances of sustained income in a potential new location.

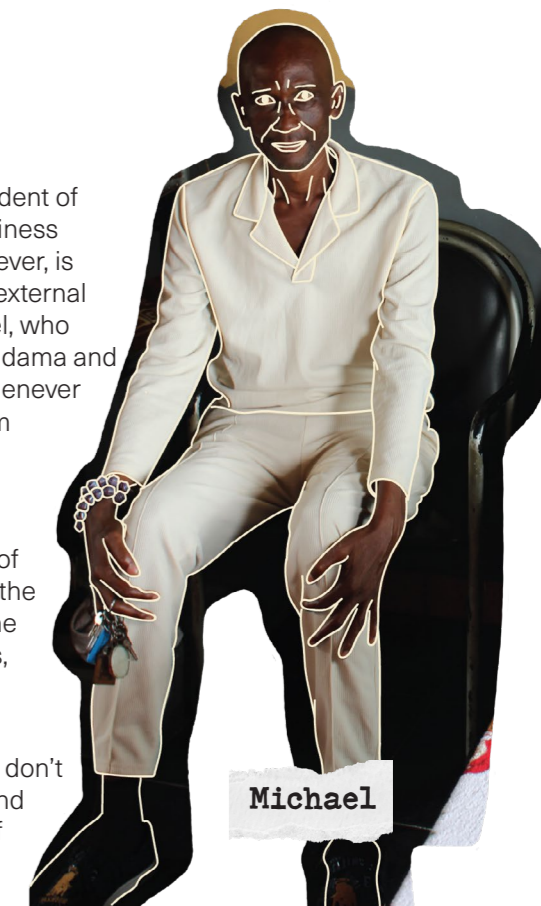


Imani

This is Michael. Michael is originally from the Volta region, but is now a proud resident of Old Fadama. Michael is a businessman in the settlement, picking up different business opportunities of (re-)selling various items whenever he can. Most of his time, however, is spent as a community leader, governing the settlement and communicating with external organisations and institutions. For example, I initially came in contact with Michael, who invited us to get acquainted and tour Old Fadama with him. Michael knows Old Fadama and its people like the back of his hand. He is a prominent figure in the community; whenever he is sitting at home or walking around his neighbourhood, people come up to him frequently asking for advice or support.

Michael has gathered a lot of experience working and negotiating with various organisations and institutions about Old Fadama, and has seen the development of Old Fadama in different stages. He knows like no one else the problems and risks the community deals with, like the critical flood problems, and the stifling density of the settlement, leading to many risks such as the spread of disease and fire outbreaks, which he has unfortunately seen happen in Old Fadama with his own eyes.

Unfortunately, his experience is that formal institutions, like the AMA government, don't often come to help. Between times of active evictions and demolition exercises, and simple neglect, it is up to him, fellow community leaders, and the community itself to attempt to develop and improve Old Fadama. And that they do. Michael speaks highly of all the different people, all the different cultures, that can be found in Old Fadama, living together as one and working together in solidarity to improve their home little by little against all opposing factors. He says the government sees them, the Old Fadama community, as a problem, but that this is a lie and a baseless bad reputation. He knows his people, and he knows them to be good people. Old Fadama, he explains, is celebrated among many as a peaceful, welcoming community.



Michael

This is Babu. Babu is currently one of the most prominent community leaders in Old Fadama. He has lived here for about 30 years, after moving from the North in search of stable income and job opportunities. He sees his role in the community as a uniting one. He aims to keep bringing the community leaders of different ethnic groups together to maintain peace in Old Fadama. He feels a strong responsibility towards the community, as he explains, the community leaders are the community's only support network. It is this togetherness in Old Fadama that Babu cherishes, especially coming from a place where the peace that exists in Old Fadama is not a given.

Babu too recognises the shortcomings in Old Fadama's built environment, such as the road network, waste management services, and availability of hospitals and schools. He points out the lacking role of the government in Old Fadama's development. He explains it should be the government's duty to aid the community in creating proper infrastructure and construction, alas, they don't. It is left up to the community to develop and govern itself.



Babu



Kadeem

This is Kadeem. Kadeem is one of the prominent community leaders in Old Fadama, governing the settlement, communicating with external organisations and institutions, and fulfilling a mentor-like role for the people of his ethnic group. Kadeem himself moved to Old Fadama over forty years ago. He now has a family here; all six of his kids were born in Old Fadama, he says proudly. About six years ago, he was able to buy a second house, besides his dwelling in Old Fadama, in Medie, which lies about 30 kilometres outside the city centre of Accra. Whilst he has moved his family to Medie, he still returns to Old Fadama almost daily to fulfil his role as community leader.

When Kadeem came to Old Fadama forty years ago, it was through a construction job that brought him to Accra. When the contract ended, Kadeem found himself without a job and was drawn to Old Fadama for better housing affordability. After a while, he was able to buy materials and build a house for himself in Old Fadama. Over the years, he has upgraded this initial wooden structure to a cement block structure. Even though his family does not live here anymore, the house now functions as a landing spot for new people coming to Old Fadama. They can stay here until they find a more permanent spot to live. Currently, about fifteen people are sleeping in the one-bedroom house, but Kadeem says the average number lies between ten and twenty people. In the corner, a stack of suitcases and bags from some of the people staying in the house can be seen.

The other corner of the room has a small collection of building materials, like corrugated sheets. Many people still come to Agbogbloshie and Old Fadama daily, looking for a job or a business opportunity, having no place to sleep. Kadeem is trying to build another floor on top of his house, so that he will be able to accommodate more people.

Kadeem takes his role as community leader, and especially as a mentor, very seriously. He explains that many people come to Old Fadama right after finishing senior high school,

some barely eighteen years old. They often have no family in Old Fadama, making people like him the designated people to look after them, take them to the hospital when they need to, offer them a place to sleep, help them find work, and talk to them about what they are trying to achieve here in Old Fadama.

Deriving values from common narratives

In the following section, eight values that have been derived from the individual stories of the people of Old Fadama whom you just met, are outlined. Values, of course, are highly personal, and the exact definition depends on someone's personal experience, positionality, and worldviews. The derived values in this research are directly informed by quotes from conversations with the people of Old Fadama. As the researcher, I have ordered the statements, experiences and aspirations as expressed in the conversations according to communal narratives, and given them a name, representing the value. The values are depicted in no particular order, as they work together and sometimes depend on each other in how they shape life in Old Fadama.

The following section will go over the meaning of the values, display the interview quotes that informed these values, and then summarise the value definition. Some value definitions contain multiple distinctly separate aspects. In this case the quotes are linked directly to the aspect of the value definition they apply to.

self-establishment

Many people in Old Fadama describe a strong desire for self-establishment. Before moving to Old Fadama, many people in the community were already in severely marginalised conditions, often living in the underdeveloped rural regions of Ghana. Here, access to education and a variety of livelihoods are limited. Climate change, which is affecting rainfall patterns, leading to stress on the agricultural sector due to failed harvests. This not only results in increased economic instability and uncertainty, but higher rates of hunger as well. Many people, with the intention of self-establishment, and a strong drive to take matters into their own hands in the eyes of consistent governmental neglect, therefore decide to move to urban areas in hopes of better opportunities and living conditions. Self-establishment as a cultural value is the very reason Old Fadama exists.

"[I have been in Old Fadama for] 20 years, almost 20 years. Back at home [Northern part of Ghana] there was a war and due to the war there was no development, there was no job, and living in there became very difficult so we decided to come to Old Fadama. I was a hairdresser, and I still do hairdressing here."

- Imani

"I have been here for twenty years. I came here for business. I used to be a hairdresser, but now it is not moving, so now I sell water" [for which she had to take out a high interest loan].

- Aseye

"I am from the Oti region. [I came here] for business and a job."

- Samson

"[In] 1982, 80s, I came to the market. I came here very young, I came here to welder things. I was no more than 12 years. Just a little boy."

- Ndonbi



The value of self-establishment in Old Fadama is not exclusively expressed through people's motive to move to the settlement; it is also the heart of life once in Old Fadama. The access to housing, and opportunity of income, as well as the opportunity to found new businesses, and in that way take control over your livelihood, is at the core of the lived experience of the community in Old Fadama. A large part of this, is the location of the settlement: right in the middle of

Accra, and in extremely close proximity to the Agbogbloshie markets, and scrapyard. Old Fadama comes with economic opportunities that are almost unheard of elsewhere in the country. The vast majority of the residents of Old Fadama are employed at the Agbogbloshie markets and scrapyard (Boersma, personal communication, June 26, 2025). The stories of the people of Old Fadama also attest to this.

Self-establishment does not only relate to the individual. Community or communalism as explained in the previous chapter, is central to most African cultures (Odimegwu and Omazu, 2021), and so too is strongly palpable in Old Fadama. Whilst people come to Old Fadama to increase their access to opportunity in life, the fruits of their endeavours are often meant to serve their community at home.

"There are very many [people working at the Agbogbloshie markets that live in Old Fadama], they carry their things from the room to the market. Old Fadama is very dear to me, because if the roads are working you can just wake up and go to work."

- Imani

"It [quality of dwelling and job opportunity] is equally important, because if you are living in a good place, you are good to even go to your work you are going to think of productive things. You need a good place and a good job as well."

- Imani

Staying in Old Fadama is very good, it's very helpful. Because you can just wake up and find something to do.

- Kadeem

"We come here to find something, we come here to find business to do. So when they come here they have a target, like maybe okay let me be here and take care of my children, maybe after my children have completed and we have something we go back to my village and that is how the living is."

- Kadeem

"When you come to this area, you can stay here and start your business. There is a soft way to do business, so living from your area"

- Ndonbi

"People come to stay in Old Fadama because it's in the centre of Accra and it's very close to Agbogbloshie. So if that person is not having any job doing anything, he sleeps here and wakes up, he can walk to Agbogbloshie and do something and also get money for living. When you compare the development in Accra here and the development back home, let's say Northern region or Oti region, it is not the same. When you are rating it, Accra would be higher. Back home is always famine."

- Babu

"Those who are coming [to Old Fadama], they are here to stay forever. But some people are also here and they live here and they think they have achieved what they want and they will move back to their old town. Sometimes there are women here, they get to the level where they get married. Or sometimes back in their homes, there is someone who died, and then because of that they will need the person in Old Fadama to come back home to replace that person."

- Babu



The communal aspect of life, and the ties residents of Old Fadama remain with their origins and hometowns is frequently used to undermine the severity and urgency of the problems in settlements like Old Fadama. Considering Old Fadama as a temporary settlement, negates the need for significant structural improvements. Framing the residents of Old Fadama as visitors and fortune seekers in Accra's urbanity adds to the stigmatisation and thereby indirectly the marginalisation of informal dwellers and urban informality. Moreover, formal institutions and even NGO's in Accra tend to underestimate the number of residents in Old Fadama, relying on outdated census data, performed at the wrong time of day (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Amnesty International, 2011; Housing the Masses, 2010; Boersma, personal communication, June 23, 2025; Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025). This underestimation of the number of residents automatically bleeds into an underestimation of the severity of the problems in Old Fadama, as well as Old Fadama's affects on the larger society and economy of Accra.

Needless to say, this thesis does not support this perspective of a 'temporary' Old Fadama. It is clear that Old Fadama is here to stay, and that the people in the community of Old Fadama are here to build a sustainable life for themselves and their kin. While their motives for moving to Old Fadama are often connected to a sense of responsibility for their community, not many get the chance to fulfil those responsibilities in Old Fadama and return back to their home, due to the very nature of structural injustices and perpetuating cycles of oppressions that have been dissected in this research.

Hearing the stories of the community members of Old Fadama, the value of self-establishment refers to the following description:

Self-establishment in Old Fadama means taking control and creating autonomy over one's own life pathways and opportunities. This includes the motive to move to Old Fadama in the first place, for increased opportunities for income and accommodation, as well as the realisation of dwellings and businesses, and the opportunity to generate income due to the close proximity of Old Fadama to the Agboglobhie markets and scrapyards. Self-establishment is not just an individual value, but also a communal one.

Given that the vast majority of all ethnic groups in Ghana, and even some outside the borders of Ghana, into Togo, Benin, and Nigeria, are represented in Old Fadama, the settlement is incredibly diverse. Whereas often such diversity, especially in combination with the population density of Old Fadama, is cause for concern of conflict, the diversity, and the expressions of culture that come with it, in Old Fadama is widely celebrated amongst its residents. When asked about what people appreciate about Old Fadama, the diversity of the community is the most frequently mentioned aspect, and it is often the first aspect mentioned. Even though the residents of Old Fadama are not unfamiliar with the conflicts that numerous different cultural backgrounds living closely together can cause, everyone spoken to in this research emphasises that in Old Fadama, they have created peace and unity. A peace and unity that outside of Old Fadama can be hard to find.

Due to the high density of Old Fadama and the lack of private space within dwellings, many cultural events and rituals that are seen as a tangible manifestation of the diversity in Old Fadama are celebrated outdoors, in public space. This too is mentioned multiple times as a positive aspect of living in Old Fadama. Due to the diversity of Old Fadama, both in private and public spheres, the community feels the culture and is in touch with their (and others') culture in daily life, something they miss in 'the big city'. The fact that the lack of public cultural expressions in the westernised city is pointed out as a shortcoming is a testament to the assimilation to the Western standard that non-Western cities like Accra have gone through.

Besides cultural diversity, residents of Old Fadama also address the diversity of functions that take place within the settlement of Old Fadama. The exclusion of Old Fadama from the larger networks of Accra, including public service networks, has forced the community to create those functions itself. The result is a settlement that encompasses every aspect of social and economic life within it. Old Fadama is essentially a functioning town of its own. This does not only make life less complicated for residents, it also creates an ever stronger sense of community and unity amongst the community members, as their whole life happens within Old Fadama, and by the power of the community itself.

“Far better [things are in Old Fadama], even better than somewhere in town [Accra]. There is a lot of better things here. Churches, schools, businesses, shops, hospital or clinic. All of it is here.”

- Samson

“In Ghana itself, it’s an intercultural country. We like to be with different people, different communities, different origins.”

- Sanya

“One thing I am happy with is the unity among the different tribes. On Sunday, we meet together and as we meet each other, I become so happy.”

- Imani

“Every Sunday there is fun in this community, so sometimes it’s weddings, parties, that we cherish, so it brings us back to Old Fadama.”

- Kadeem

“When you live in Old Fadama, you feel your culture.”

- Kadeem

“You see the area and why we like the area, you can see there is different languages, and different tribes, and like my brother was saying, going here, it has a cost for us, and when you go here, you get a place like this, and it is not like Accra, everything you want, you get it here. So when you clear us from here, I don’t think we can enjoy it like here. Especially the hospitals, we do need that. So if you ask us about the challenges, that is why we want to live here.”

- Sanya

“One thing we cherish in Old Fadama is togetherness. Looking at sister tribes all coming together to make sure there is peace in Old Fadama, that is one thing we really appreciate and that we cherish.”

- Babu

“It’s unity. We have the unity here. So with the unity here, we are Ghanaians, with the unity, and then the normal people we are governing.”

- Michael

It is clear that diversity, and the peace and unity that the community has managed to create throughout all their diversity, is of great importance for the residents of Old Fadama. Whilst the community itself would be the last to pretend Old Fadama does not have any flaws, there is a clear consensus that in the midst of all the hardship the community has to deal with on a daily basis, it is the diversity and community that makes Old Fadama their home. Diversity is an aspect of living in Old Fadama people would not trade for anything; as you can read in Kadeem’s quote, even though he has moved out of Old Fadama, it is the culture that brings him back to Old Fadama. Sanya’s quote shares a similar sentiment: he acknowledges the difference between life in Old Fadama and life in Accra, and chooses Old Fadama over the latter because of the diversity and culture in his home.

As mentioned before, it is important to realise that the value of diversity is partially enabled through the high population density of Old Fadama, which not only forces people of different origins to live closely together, but also moves many expressions of culture into public spaces due to the lack of private space. Whilst the density of Old Fadama comes with many risks and problems, and is an aspect that would likely be one of the targets for upgrading projects, it is important to pay special attention to maintaining the social relations and pathways that enable the value of diversity.

Hearing the stories of the community members of Old Fadama, the value of diversity refers to the following description:

The value of diversity in Old Fadama is born out of the presence of many different ethnic groups and therefore cultures in one place. There is unity and peace amongst these different groups, and the presence of many cultures and cultural expressions that often take place in public space is seen as a positive aspect of life. The diversity of Old Fadama also encompasses the presence of all different functions of the city within Old Fadama, such as housing, employment, meeting spaces, governing spaces, food markets, mosques, churches, schools, and more. The self-contained nature of Old Fadama, although largely a result of marginalisation and oppression, further strengthens community bonds within and across ethnic and cultural groups.

“The difference between inside the town [Accra] or this place [Old Fadama]? As we are speaking, the drum is beating [from a celebration taking place right outside].”

- Ndonbi



care

As we just briefly touched on the communal lifestyle in Old Fadama, a logical next value to discuss is care. The culture in Old Fadama is characterised by a strong yet informal network of care throughout the community. This network works in multiple ways. First, care works in a practical way: it is the system of care that makes Old Fadama and Agbogbloshie grow. When people are struggling, they hear about Old Fadama, and find refuge there. Sharing dwellings, accepting newcomers, taking them to Agbogbloshie to earn an income

or start a business, it is all, whilst also a necessity under the oppression of neoliberalist systems, a form of care. In his book Planet of Slums (2006), Davis mentions economists cannot explain how everyone in (informal) urbanity survives. The numbers show it should be impossible. It is because of systems of care, that communities, not individual people, survive. Mpanje et al (2022) also prove the same, showing how aid from neighbours is an important coping strategy for struggling families in informal settlements.

The second application of the care system in Old Fadama is more intangible. Important hierarchal relations exist within the sub-communities and ethnic groups in Old Fadama, that take over an important mentoring, and sometimes even parenting role. Community leaders are sought out for advice, and vice versa, the community leaders seek out newcomers and people they know are struggling to offer them advice and support. Due to the high density and resulting tight-knit community, social cohesion and social control are high. These systems are therefore highly effective.

“When they [the OFADA council of chiefs] meet on Sundays, if anybody is having issues, they find out how they are going to help the person. They meet to ensure the peace for the community and for the betterment of the people.”

- Imani

“Most of the time, we sit with the people and advice them to know their reason of coming to Old Fadama, make sure you achieve it, that goal, so that when you are able to achieve your goal and you want to go back to your village, you go back in peace.”

- Babu

“When we came down to Accra, we don't have money to rent, and when you come to Old Fadama you can sleep in a room and it's very less so due to that we decide to come to Old Fadama. I came alone. I didn't know anybody in Old Fadama. There's people in the Northern part and they are coming to Accra and they go then to Ablogbloshie. So when I come down in Ablogbloshie, and I ask someone that you want a place to live, and the person introduced me to Old Fadama.”

- Imani

“Once you are in the community, if anybody comes here, it depends on us where the person will sleep, how the person will get peace, it all depends on us.”

- Babu

“If someone comes here and wants a place to lay his head, we will get a place for the person to sleep, because we don't sell land in this Old Fadama community.”

- Kadeem

“I don't think there is an area you can go and you can get a place to sleep, but here when you get to this community and you want a place to sleep, you can do it.”

- Ndonbi

“I have been a leader here, one of the key things I can do, is to tell people like you [researchers, NGO's, government agents] our needs, so I am the spokesperson. Some of the help I am doing, most people are not here with their parents, so if someone is sick, I will take that person to the hospital. If someone dies in Old Fadama, we can't take the body back to the parents. It is us who make sure the person has a better place for rest. And if someone wants to come to Old Fadama, I am the person to help them get a place to sleep so they can start working.”

- Kadeem



solidarity

As many studies have pointed out (Mpanje et al., 2022; Ziorklui et al, 2024; Osborne et al., 2016) social capital is a key factor in accessing opportunities in life, especially in the absence of significant economic capital such as in informal settlements. The strong system of care that exists in Old Fadama is an incredibly important source of social capital for the community of Old Fadama, and significantly adds to their direct quality of life, as well as their access to opportunities in life. Although the system of care is largely a result of the inherent communalism in African culture, and the intense pressures from colonial and neoliberal marginalisation the community is under that ultimately lead to extreme population densities, and the fact that a large portion of life takes place in the public realm of Old Fadama, the care system has now turned into an active act of community amongst the residents of Old Fadama. The value of care shapes daily life in Old Fadama and is vital for both the sense of home and pride the community has, as well as for bridging the injustices the community is burdened with.

Hearing the stories of the community members of Old Fadama, the value of care refers to the following description:

The value of care refers to the care system that shapes life in Old Fadama. This care exists in tangible and intangible ways, in the form of practical help finding housing and employment on one hand, and intangible advice and support structures within sub-communities and ethnic groups within Old Fadama. The care system of Old Fadama is vital to the survival of the community today, and will remain to be vital in the thriving of the community tomorrow, as the care system is an important source of knowledge and capital to bridge the systemic injustices the community is burdened with.

In the extension of care lies solidarity. While the two terms are easily confused, there is a distinct difference. Whilst every person in Old Fadama shared a unique personal story of their life, what brought them to Old Fadama, what their experience here is like, and what they hope to achieve, it is clear that many people's stories have been shaped by the same historical, political, and economical events. Even though their stories are unique, the oppression they face is shared. This creates a strong sense of solidarity amongst the residents of Old Fadama. Rather than being expressed in action, like the previously discussed value care, solidarity is a feeling. It can be seen as the motive behind the care system. Since solidarity is vital in shaping the local culture of unity, even across different cultural backgrounds, in Old Fadama, it is an important value. Expressions of solidarity in the interviews are often connected the common oppressors and shared suffering, as can be read below.

Now we see people fetching water from the rooms [after flooding due to rain, which happens often as there is no drainage network in Old Fadama]. When it's like that people cannot come to come to work or get food.

- Imani

"We are happy and okay for them [newcomers in Old Fadama] coming because if their villages are developed they wouldn't have come to Old Fadama. Because the place is not developed, that is why they are coming, so we cannot ask them to leave, we will always accept them."

- Babu

"Old Fadama is dear to me because in that place we are all managing with life."
- Imani

"We are not being paid and we are not getting any support from the government."
- Babu

"We believe that we can manage to stay in Old Fadama. And when it comes to the question, rent in Ghana, the rent for a month, you need to pay 2 years in advance. So for someone like me it is 20000 [Cedis] for rent, so I will be paying that much for rent. So, if I look at the challenge I do have the money to rent a comfortable place in town, but it is one of the challenges living in here."
- Sanya



Hearing the stories of the community members of Old Fadama, the value of solidarity refers to the following description:

Solidarity is the feeling of unity that characterises the local culture in Old Fadama, based on shared suffering, oppression, and challenges.

dignity

Dignity is another prominent value that was expressed during the interviews with the community of Old Fadama. Unfortunately, as opposed to some of the previously mentioned values, dignity is not a value that is already largely present in Old Fadama, but rather a value that has been mentioned as a key aspiration amongst the community. With dignity I mean specifically a dignified habitat; a decent place to live. A place that is safe, that provides privacy and shelter, that is clean and hygienic. Unfortunately, most dwellings in Old Fadama do not meet any of those requirements. As has been stressed many times before in this research, Old Fadama has an incredibly high population density. This means that houses are small, overcrowded, and placed in very close proximity to each other.

Given the continuous governmental neglect, postponing Old Fadama's connections to the internet and water network of Old Fadama, as well as the construction of a drainage system, the community is left to their own devices in trying to create a dignified habitat to the best of its abilities. There are organised clean-up systems, joint action to mitigate flooding after rain, and regulation systems to prevent dwellings from being built too closely together. The regulations are also there to ensure their construction and materiality are sound and get upgraded over time. The stories of the residents of Old Fadama I spoke to during the fieldwork attest to the bottom-up efforts of the community, but are also accompanied by a shared frustration about the lack of governmental support.

"We need the government to come in and develop the place. I want the government leadership and the community leadership to be fifty-fifty. It's not fifty-fifty, but we are here and we are working for the community. The only time the government is with the community is during election. It is very hard in Old Fadama like this when it has rained. So you need to tell the government to give us maximum attention. We need to construct roads for Old Fadama, and gutters."

- Imani

"There's problems also. Because the government is not helping. When it comes to water, when it comes to roads, when it comes to schools, when it comes to health, we have a big challenge."

- Kadeem

"Living in Old Fadama is not good. If there's anything that we could change, we need accessible roads in Old Fadama, and gutters that are covered. And since we have united, we make sure the people clean the gutters. If not every week, then every month, the leaders will make sure the people will clean the gutters, for easy access of water, so that the rainwater can go through."

- Imani

"Yes, we [the community] are working hard. It is our only things we can do. But with the rain, the moment the water comes, it floods. We can see it today. So our problem is this, the flood, only the water. And the roads."

- Samson

"It's not all that happy, but because I have nowhere to go, that's why I stay. There's flooding and the population is very high, and there is too much noise, as you can witness."

- Aseye

"I want the government to help us construct roads, schools, and hospital, because we are lacking it in Old Fadama."

- Babu

"When the rain is yesterday, because of the nature of the environment, the gutters, they will flood. This happens all of the time. We need gutters, we need accessible roads.

All of the time, it is very dense. The layout we talked about, we are the ones to do it, and have peace. We can bring the committee in order. Here in the community, we lack schools. We don't have enough toilets. These are some of the things we need."

- Sanya



The living conditions in Old Fadama at the moment of writing this research report do not meet the standards to provide a liveable, healthy, let alone dignified, living environment. As evidenced by the quotes from the community, for example Aseye's statement, many people want to leave Old Fadama, or at least improve their living conditions, however, their resources do not allow this. As Kadeem and Babu point out, besides comfort, Old Fadama also lacks hygiene. Due to the lack of drainage, and resulting frequent floods, waterborne diseases are common. Previous outbreaks of Cholera have been traced back to Old Fadama, and also diseases carried by mosquitoes, such as Dengue and Malaria, are big issues in places like Old Fadama (Stacey and Lund, 2016; Davis, 2006). Moreover, Old Fadama is severely polluted with plastic, electronic, and organic waste, as can be seen in Figure 6.2, which further compromises the hygiene of the settlement and also endangers the health of the larger ecosystem of Accra and the Korle Lagoon. The overpopulation and extreme density of Old Fadama add further to the health risk Old Fadama is under, increasing the chances of contamination. Furthermore, the density with which the settlement is constructed, which can clearly be seen in Figure 6.3, creates additional danger to the population due to the increased speed at which fire can spread. Since Old Fadama is not connected to any formal electricity or gas network, households are dependent on open fires for their cooking and heating, creating a high risk of fire (Stacey and Lund, 2016). This too has unfortunately occurred in Old Fadama in the past, and has resulted in many casualties as well as significant material loss for households that are already amongst the most vulnerable.

Hearing the stories of the community members of Old Fadama, the value of dignity refers to the following description:

Dignity in Old Fadama focuses on creating a dignified habitat, meaning a safe, healthy, liveable, and comfortable living environment. Old Fadama's current lack of connection to public services and infrastructure networks leads to a living environment that does not meet those descriptions: the settlement regularly deals with flooding, is severely polluted, is overcrowded, is not safely constructed, and does not contain adequate facilities such as schools, hospitals, and lavatories. Whilst the community works hard to create appropriate living conditions, their resources are limited, and governmental support is needed.



Figure 6.2 Pollution in Old Fadama
(Photos by Author)

justice

The final value discussed in this thesis is justice. Unlike the other values derived from the interviews, justice cannot be created by the community itself. It needs to come from institutional organisations, such as the government, which is currently responsible for the neglect and oppression of Old Fadama. The oppression of Old Fadama is a result of a long history and accumulation of colonial, capitalist, and neoliberal thinking and planning. The neoliberal policies of today, and the resulting lack of planning and provision of public services for Old Fadama still uphold these dynamics of exclusion that perpetuate the marginalisation of Old Fadama. Justice, therefore, in the eyes of the people of Old Fadama, means the same governmental treatment that other communities that are considered legal by formal institutions receive. This includes urban planning that provides accessible infrastructure, clean drinking water, adequate drainage, and waste management, but above all, it consists of the right to stay.



Figure 6.3 Extremely dense construction of dwellings in Old Fadama (Photo by Author)

“It’s the leaders, they are not helping. They are not trying their best. They don’t come here, they don’t come at all, they don’t come to supervise what is here. They don’t come to notate any problem. You see the community, you are seeing the problems. But they, they don’t visit the community. They don’t come. If they come, they will see it is very wrong.”

- Samson

“We ask that government should give consent to Old Fadama [to stay], because we are also Ghanaians, and what the government is doing for other communities, the government should bring some of that attention to Old Fadama. Government should come to us, as well as the NGO’s who also look at the chiefs, especially the chiefs, because they don’t own land, they don’t work, but they have kids, they have family.”

- Babu

“There is unity here, they have registered Old Fadama, and even the chiefs have alliances from the governments being recognised as chiefs. But even us, we cannot do the work, we need people like you, people like NGO’s, to draw the attention of governments to them. We need legal approval from the government that we should stay here, that we shouldn’t go anywhere.”

- Kadeem

“Because anytime the government they say ‘we have come to sack you, we are going to sack you...’ Sometimes we get scared to develop the place because of the notion that the government can sack you at any time. We need government to make here legal.”

- Sanya

“We are also Ghanaians. In Old Fadama we respect the law. The state law and also the traditional law. When you have a father and the father has children and decided to discriminate between them, sometimes they expect violence. So that is why sometimes the Old Fadama community, they come up and fight for their rights, because they are being neglected by the government.”

- Kadeem

“Working the school here, it’s a government duty. The duty of the government is to establish a school, but we personally, we are doing it personally.”

- Samson

“Truly truly, they [the community of Old Fadama] don’t want to go, they want to stay. They want to stay here but their strength cannot match the strength of the government.”

- Kadeem



The insecurity of tenure that the people in Old Fadama are subject to clearly halts the development of the settlement, and restricts the opportunities in life for the residents. In the eyes of the community, the right to stay, and formalising, would create justice through extending the community’s rights in the eyes of formal institutions, legitimising their claim to governmental support. As has been mentioned before, there are multiple land claims on the land of Old Fadama. Giving the current community of Old Fadama the right to stay might not be justice to everyone. Still, similar actions of formalising of immigrant informal settlements have been performed before in Ghana, for example in Nima, Accra (Boersma, personal communication, June 25, 2025; Ziorkluis et al., 2024). Multiple parties have also pointed out that relocation or eviction of Old Fadama is not only nearly logistically impossible, it would also not be desirable. This is true for the community of Old Fadama, but also for the larger city of Accra and its residents as the city is in many ways dependent on Old Fadama and Agbogbloshie. The most just thing then might just be to allow Old Fadama the right to stay.

As the people of Old Fadama, specifically Kadeem, also mention, Old Fadama has had to learn how to survive under the pressures of structural oppression, marginalisation, and governmental neglect. In doing so, the community has developed not just peace and unity, but a functioning governance system that respects both state and customary law. The ways of Old Fadama, and the traditional knowledge and practices that characterise life and governance in the community, ought to be respected, as they are too for other ‘legal’ communities (Boersma, personal communication, June 5, 2025).

Hearing the stories of the community members of Old Fadama, the value of justice refers to the following description:

Justice for the people of Old Fadama means that they have the right to stay, that they get to enjoy the same governmental attention and investment in terms of development and planning, and that their governance system, knowledge, and autonomy is recognised and respected by formal institutions.

VALUE GLOSSARY

THE VALUES OF OLD FADAMA

SELF-ESTABLISHMENT

Self-establishment in Old Fadama means taking control and creating autonomy over one's own life pathways and opportunities. This includes the motive to move to Old Fadama in the first place, for increased opportunities in income and accommodation, as well as the realisation of dwellings and businesses, and the opportunity to generate income due to the close proximity of Old Fadama to the Agbogboshie markets and scrapyard. Self-establishment is not just an individual value, but also a communal one.

DIVERSITY

The value of diversity in Old Fadama is born out of the presence of many different ethnic groups and therefore cultures in one place. There is unity and peace amongst these different groups, and the presence of many cultures and cultural expressions that often take place in public space is seen as a positive aspect of life. The diversity of Old Fadama also encompasses the presence of all different functions of the city within Old Fadama, such as housing, employment, meeting spaces, governing spaces, food markets, churches, mosques, schools, and more. The self-contained nature of Old Fadama, although largely a result of marginalisation and oppression, further strengthens community bonds within and across ethnic and cultural groups.

CARE

The value of care refers to the care system that shapes life in Old Fadama.

This care exists in tangible and intangible ways, in the form of practical help finding housing and employment on one hand, and intangible advice and support structures within sub-communities and ethnic groups within Old Fadama. The care system of Old Fadama is vital to the survival of the community today, and will remain to be vital in the thriving of the community tomorrow, as the care system is an important source of knowledge and capital to bridge the systemic injustices the community is burdened with.

SOLIDARITY

Solidarity is the feeling of unity that characterises the local culture in Old Fadama, based on shared suffering, oppression, and challenges.

DIGNITY

Dignity in Old Fadama focuses on creating a dignified habitat, meaning a safe, healthy, liveable, and comfortable living environment. Old Fadama's current lack of connection to public services and infrastructure networks leads to a living environment that does not follow those descriptions: the settlement regularly deals with flooding, is severely polluted, is overcrowded, is not safely constructed, and does not contain adequate facilities such as schools, hospitals, and lavatories. Whilst the community works hard to create appropriate living conditions, their resources are limited, and governmental support is needed.

JUSTICE

Justice for the people of Old Fadama means that they have the right to stay, that they get to enjoy the same governmental attention and investment in terms of development and planning, and that their governance system, knowledge, and autonomy is recognised and respected by formal institutions.

section conclusions.

This chapter stands in the extension of the conclusions of chapter 5, where the question 'What principles or design values emerge for planners seeking to decolonise practice in similar contexts?'. Where chapter 5's conclusions speak of reflections for the decolonial planner and produce a universal decolonial meta-methodology for planners, which can be applied in any planning project or context, this chapter produces values that are unique to Old Fadama. By applying the decolonial planning meta-methodology, and creating space for the community of Old Fadama to take the lead, the core values that shape life and therefore the built environment of Old Fadama are derived.

The values of Old Fadama, self-establishment, diversity, care, solidarity, dignity, and justice, are significantly different that the values that shape the modern Western society. The main Western values have been described earlier in this research report as productivity, efficiency, comfort, and wealth. This striking difference in fundamental values of society and culture are a testament to the importance of applying a decolonial planning meta-methodology. It allows planners to become aware of their own bias, recognise the learning and unlearning they should do, and make space to those who ought to be central in the planning process.

The following chapter builds upon the six values derived from the stories of the people of Old Fadama. In the absence of governmental support of any kind, let alone planning, Old Fadama forms a unique execution of decolonial planning, as the only planning for decades has been community-led, autonomous planning. Through the built environment of Old Fadama one can therefore distinguish the values that shape, and have shaped it.

7. IN PRACTICE:

EXPRESSION OF VALUES IN OLD FADAMA

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Introduction

As has been concluded in the previous chapter through the reflections for the decolonial planner, decolonial planning needs to be a radically collaborative project that not only engages Indigenous communities, knowledges, and practices, but centres them through decentring the unilateral and autocratic position of the Western planner. When I started this project, my objective was to develop planning scenarios or policy recommendations for Old Fadama; to 'solve' informality. As has been explained previously and will be touched on extensively in the further sections and the reflection of this research, however, my objective has changed quite a lot. It has been influenced significantly by my transformed and still transforming understanding of urban informality as well as the role of the urban planner in a colonial and neoliberal world that confirms the formal/informal dichotomy. Instead of developing planning scenarios or policy recommendations, which, with the reflections for the decolonial planner in mind, I would say is not my place to do, I want to use this research to illustrate and emphasise my personal learnings about urban informality: urban informality requires active acts of planning, which are often informed by extremely undervalued Indigenous knowledges and practices.

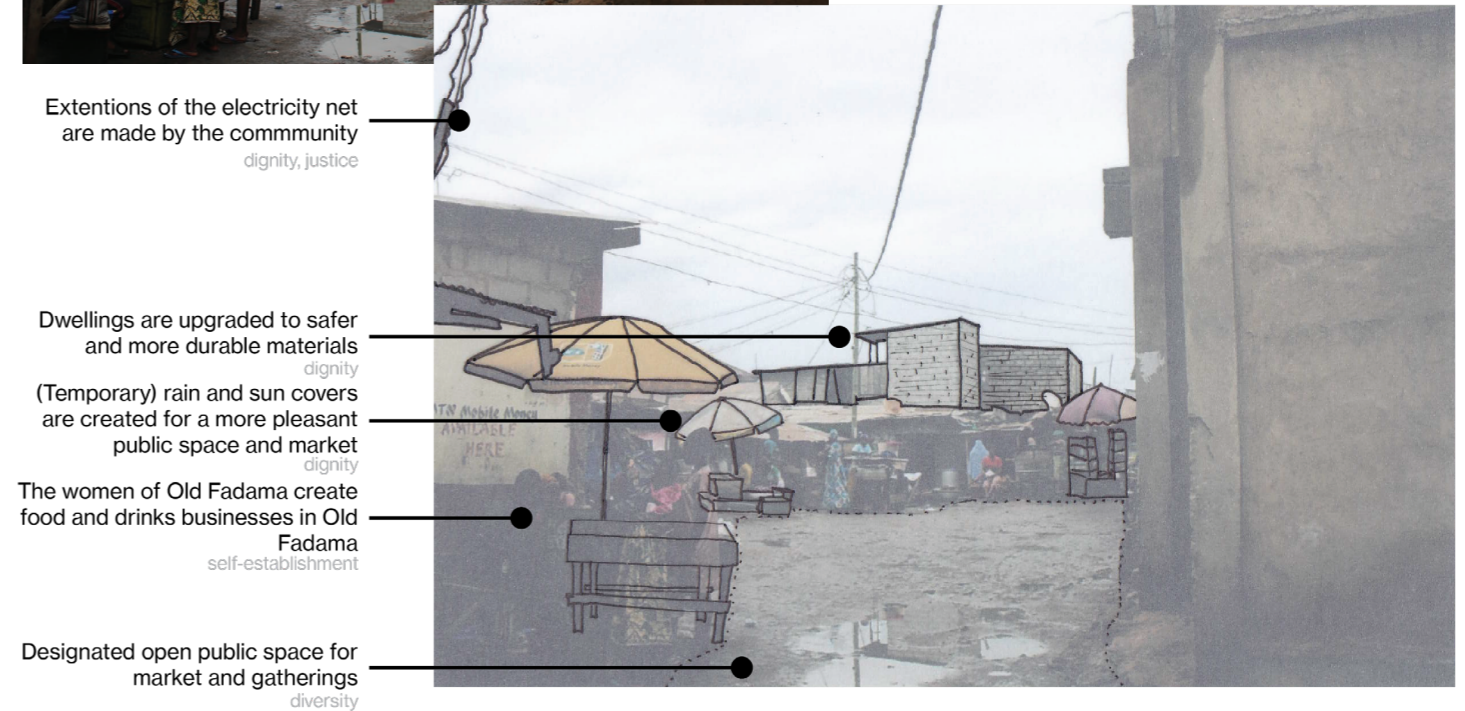
In the previous chapter, we have learned about the values that shape life in Old Fadama and how they often deviate from the Western cultural standard. The community of Old Fadama carries these values with them through their planning, building, and governance practices. In the following section, I try to show how the values as described by the community already shape and characterise the built environment of Old Fadama, through the planning actions of the community. By developing imaginations based on photographs made in Old Fadama, I show that urban informality is not a spontaneous, coincidental, forced, and chaotic confluence of conditions. Rather, it is the result of valuable and inspiring planning. It can be an example for us, Western planners, to learn how to plan, design, and exist outside of the pre-existing narratives of the Western planning tradition.

In the following sections, pictures of different places and people in Old Fadama are shown. The pictures are overlaid with sketches, pointing out the physical expressions of the values of Old Fadama. On the left or right side of the sketched overlay, the selected items are briefly explained and matched with one or more values.

Imagining the values of Old Fadama



Figure 7.1 Imagining the values of Old Fadama's public spaces
(Photo by Author)



A key place where many of the values derived from the common narratives are expressed, is Old Fadama's public space. Whilst Old Fadama is an incredibly dense settlement, there are open spaces that function as important public spaces, such as the space pictured in Figure 7.1. These spaces hold room for markets, creating diversity and business opportunities (self-establishment) for the people of Old Fadama who have less mobility. This is an important factor for many women, as they are disproportionately responsible for the care of children (Boersma, personal communication, June 27, 2025; Davis, 2006).

Figure 7.1 also shows a variety of materials used for the construction of dwellings and public buildings. The dwellings constructed out of temporary materials, often scrap metal and wood, are newer dwellings, inhabited by recent migrants. For the sake of construction integrity and fire safety the community strives to upgrade dwellings to more durable materials, such as cement blocks. This is an example of a clear planning strategy employed by the community to create a dignified living environment.

Figure 7.2 Imagining living at the Agbogbloshie scrapyards
(Photo by Author)

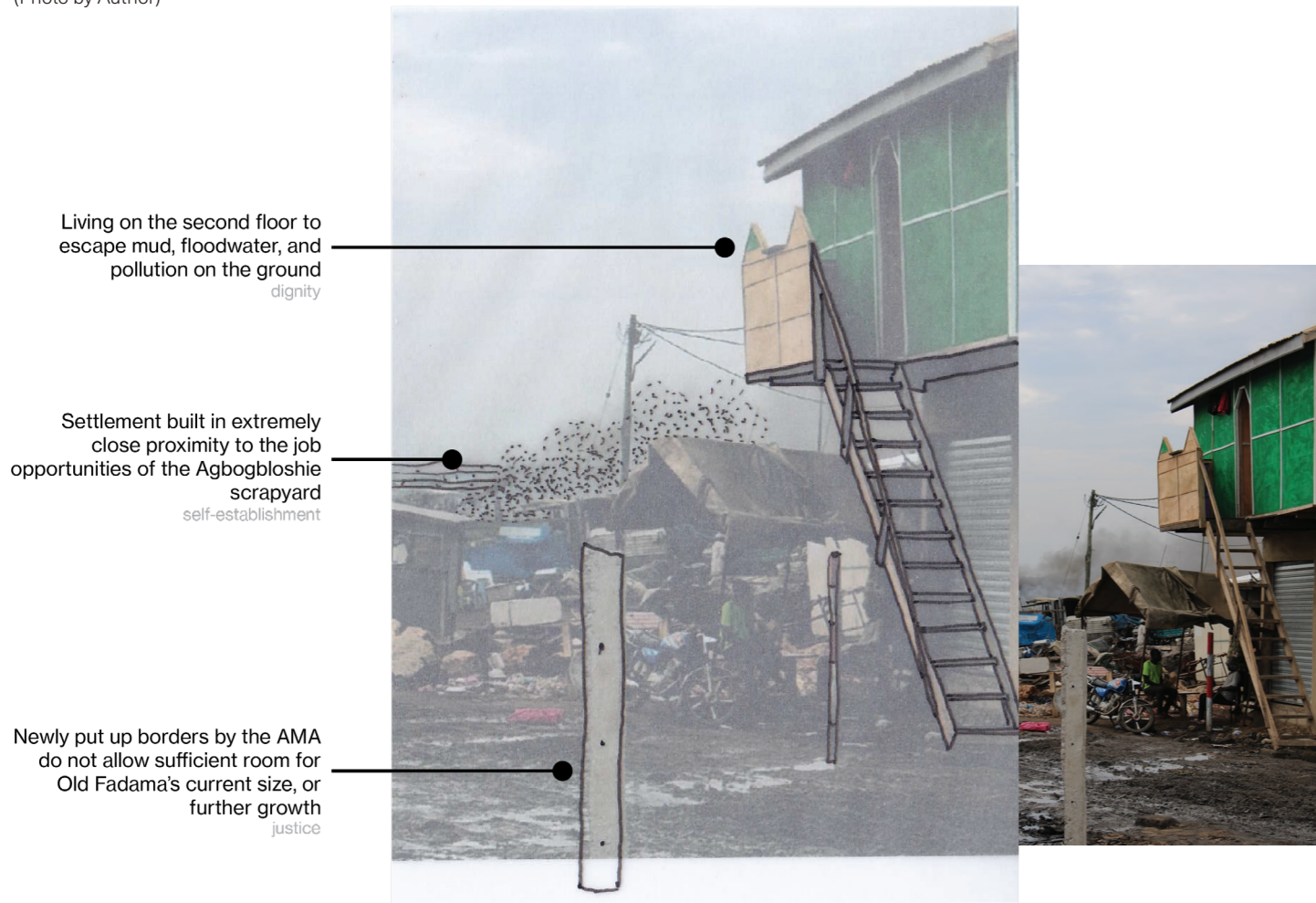


Figure 7.2 shows similar planning strategies that create a more dignified living environment through a distinct Old Fadama housing typology: many dwellings, especially those in areas significantly prone to flooding and areas that are very close to the Agbogbloshie scrapyards, position the living areas at least one floor above the ground. This is to escape the inevitable floods, as well as get away from the pollution and noise on the ground floor. Whilst living in such close proximity to the Agbogbloshie scrapyards comes with many seemingly obvious downsides (noise pollution, plastic pollution, air pollution), the upside of living on the doorsteps of the many income opportunities that Agbogbloshie has to offer, outweighs these disadvantages for many people in Old Fadama. As we have seen in the previous chapter, self-establishment is the main moving factor for people migrating to Old Fadama, and shapes day-to-day life for most people, as the vast majority of the community of Old Fadama is employed in the informal sector.

Figure 7.3 similarly shows the presence of the value of self-establishment in the daily life of Old Fadama: the many storefronts and food and drinks businesses on the street characterise the streetscape of Old Fadama. Just as in Figure 7.1, many self-made, semi-permanent rain covers and sunshades are put up to create a comfortable environment (dignity), as the streets of Old Fadama are not just for moving, they are a space of meeting (diversity). The same rain covers can be seen as built-on extensions of the residential dwellings, here in Figure 7.3, as well as in Figure 7.4 on the following page. Again, the different stages of material upgrades can be distinguished. These are all examples of community-led efforts to turn the living conditions of Old Fadama into a dignified, comfortable, and pleasant environment.

One of the main issues of Old Fadama that has been the topic of conversation in this research is the water. The settlement is situated on the floodplains of the Korle Lagoon and Odaw River, and due to the initial neglect of the area in regards to planning and development by British colonial rulers, and the continued governmental neglect of the 'informal settlement' by Ghanaian governments since Ghana's independence, Old Fadama is not equipped with any drainage or water management system. Especially during the rainy season, this causes frequent floods that shut down Old Fadama. The streets, and sometimes even the dwellings in the settlement flood. The many unpaved roads become nearly impossible to use, especially near the Agbogbloshie markets. Before daily life and work activities can be resumed, the community needs to deal with the water, often resorting to manually removing water from the worst flooded places. The construction of the settlement and the used housing typologies have been adapted to Old Fadama's flood-prone character. The built-on rain covers in both public and private spaces have been pointed out before in Figures 7.1 and 7.3. On top of that, Figure 7.4 shows more permanent adaptations, such as the retaining walls that are built alongside the streets in the most high-risk flood areas to prevent water from entering the dwellings. Unfortunately, without an adequate drainage system, the adaptations of the built environment are not always enough

Figure 7.3 Imagining the streets of Old Fadama
(Photo by Author)

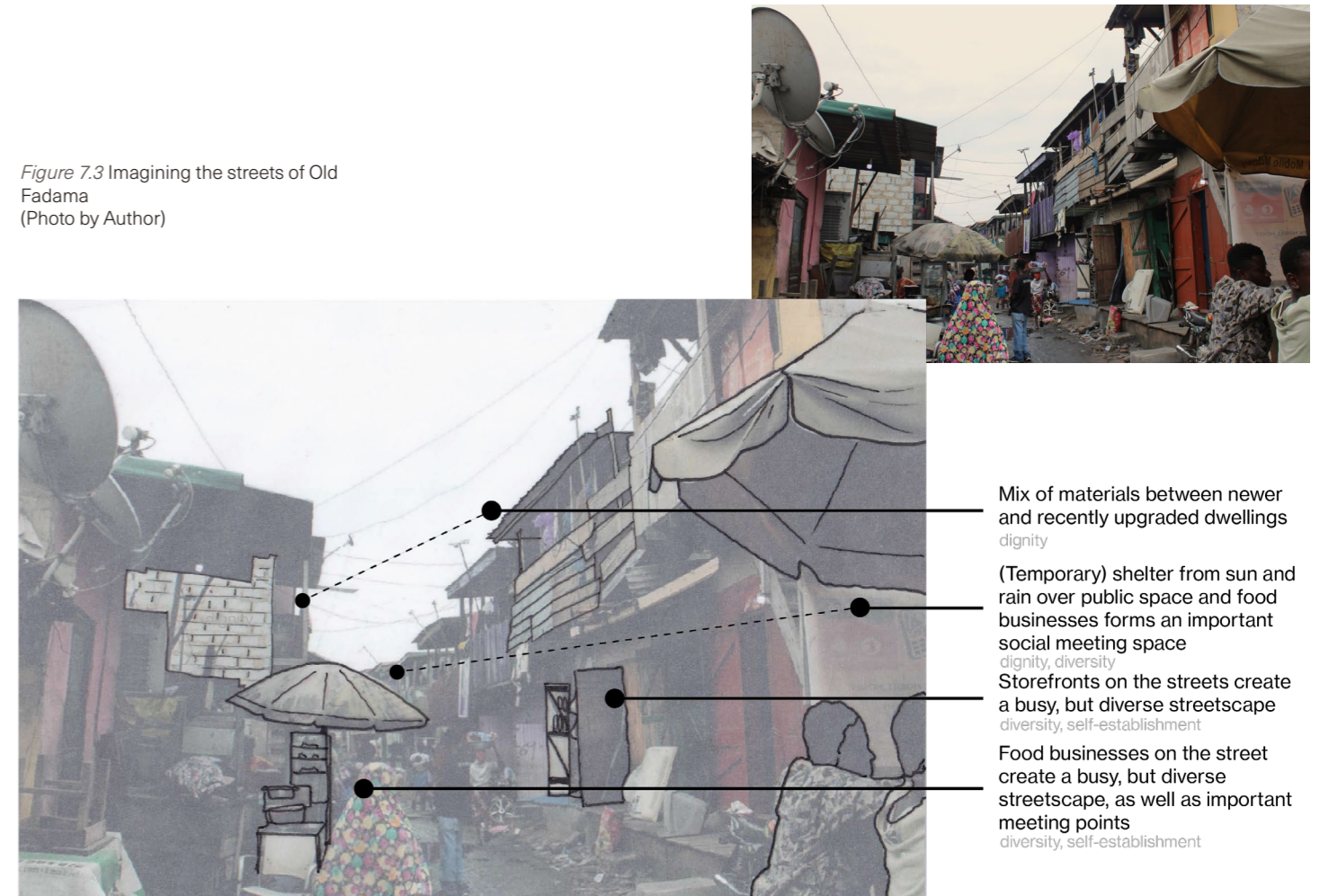
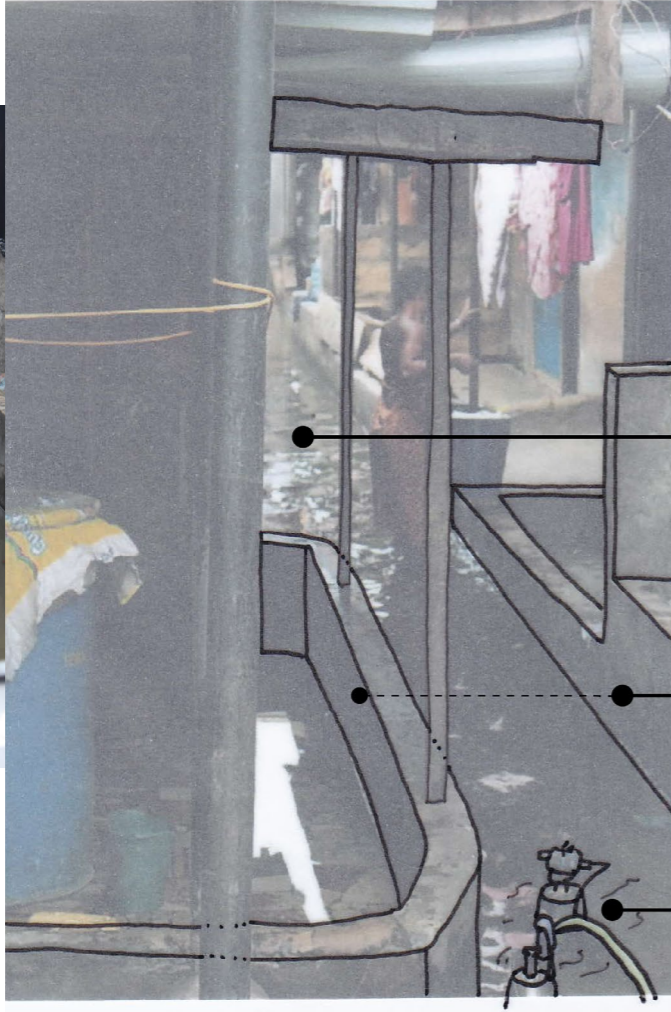


Figure 7.4 Imagining the water
(Photo by Author)



Awnings are built to create dry public, private, and moving spaces
dignity

Retaining walls are built around dwellings in the most high-risk flood areas to stop mud and water from entering the dwellings
dignity

The limited resources of the community are focused in the most severely affected areas
solidarity, justice

to withstand the seasonal rains of West Africa. Since the government offers close to no support, the community raises funds to help manage the water themselves. Figure 7.4 shows a water pump, the only one the community has thus far managed to acquire. Measures like these are organised collectively and applied where the conditions are currently worse. This is a testament to the communalism ingrained in Old Fadama's culture and the sense of solidarity amongst the community. Whilst the community is doing everything within their means to combat the disturbance from the water, their resources do not reach far enough to do so in a manner that allows daily life to continue as normal. It is unfair to expect they could; it is the responsibility of a government to implement adequate water management systems. The severity and frequency of flooding in Old Fadama are a painful reminder of the lack of justice towards the community.

flood hotspot. Besides the more 'extreme' measures of the water pump and the drainage pipe, throughout Old Fadama, the community has dug out gutters along the streets to help with water drainage. Figure 7.5, as well as Figure 7.6 on the following page show, however, that these gutters are not always able to take on the volume of water Old Fadama experiences. In the absence of top-down water management (justice), the community has also taken it upon themselves to adapt their building typologies and streetscape to deal with the water: wooden boards, or in the case of Figure 7.5, concrete slabs, are placed over particularly deep gutters to maintain a dry walkway and entryway for dwellings (dignity).

A similar community-led water management strategy is shown in Figure 7.5, where the community has combined resources to install a concrete drainage pipe at a particularly problematic

Dug out gutters in the streets overflow after rain, blocking traffic
justice

Community places concrete slabs and wooden boards over open gutter to create dry walkway
dignity

Concrete drainage pipe put in by the community to increase drainage capacity and speed in bottleneck locations
dignity, justice



Figure 7.5 Imagining water management practices of Old Fadama
(Photo by Author)

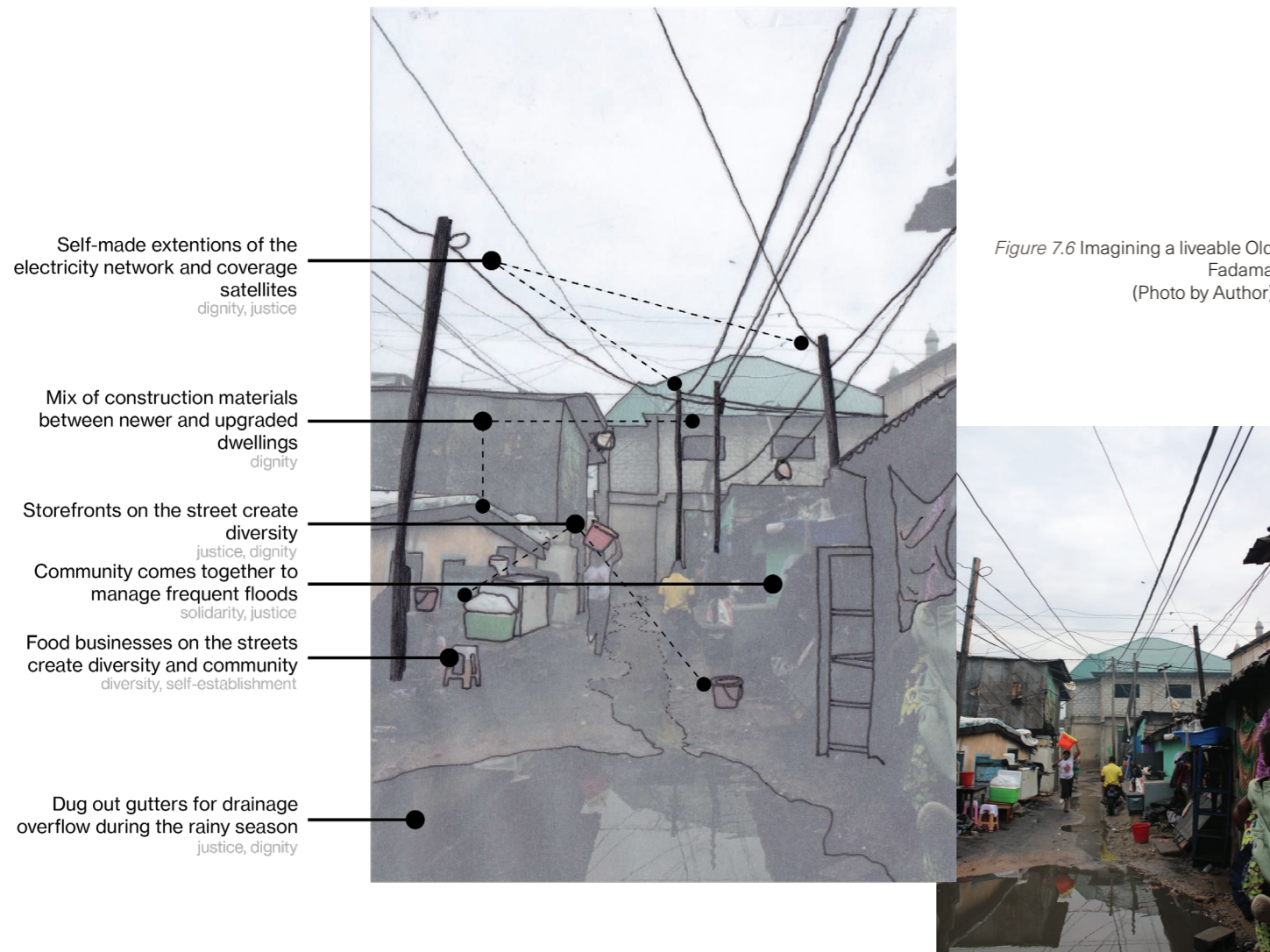


Figure 7.6 Imagining a liveable Old Fadama
(Photo by Author)

The expressions of values described through the imaginations of Figures 7.1 to 7.5 all come together in the picture of Figure 7.6, taken on one of the main streets of Old Fadama. Here it is always busy and lively, with people walking on the street and meeting with peers, businesswomen and men buying and selling their wares, and children playing. The values of Old Fadama, and the way they are expressed in the built environment, go beyond simply creating a comfortable living environment. They are about creating infrastructure to accommodate the physical and technical challenges of Old Fadama, such as the water and lack of a formal electricity network. They are about deliberate planning strategies such as adapted building typologies to create a more dignified, comfortable, and healthy lifestyle, in the form of shelters from sun and rain, covering flooded gutters, and creating living on the second and third floors to escape mud, water, and waste pollution. The built environment even holds signs of the valuable social networks of care and solidarity that live within the community. In Figure 7.6, for example, you can see how the flooding largely halts life in Old Fadama, as streets and dwellings flood, and the markets become inaccessible.

In times of rain, the community comes together to combat the water, oftentimes manually carrying it out of the worst flooded places. The many storefronts and businesses on the streets of Old Fadama also clearly show how the community creates a vibrant and diverse living environment. It is this diversity that creates the opportunity for strong social bonds within the community, as well as opportunities for self-establishment through businesses.

A value that the imaginations pictured so far do not necessarily represent, is care. The value of care exists mostly through social bonds in the community, as has been explained thoroughly in chapter 3 and chapter 5, as well as through the stories of the people of Old Fadama in this chapter. However, Figure 7.7 shows a rare, yet pronounced tangible expression of care: the Old Fadama primary school. As the story of Samson states, education is a government duty in Ghana. Old Fadama, however, is exempt from this rule, pointing out the lack of justice for Old Fadama once again. Therefore, the community has taken it upon themselves to found and run a primary school, so that the youngest children, who cannot safely travel outside of Old Fadama, can enjoy the vital first years of education they deserve. Not only does the school provide education, but they also make sure the students are fed during their school day through providing school lunches.

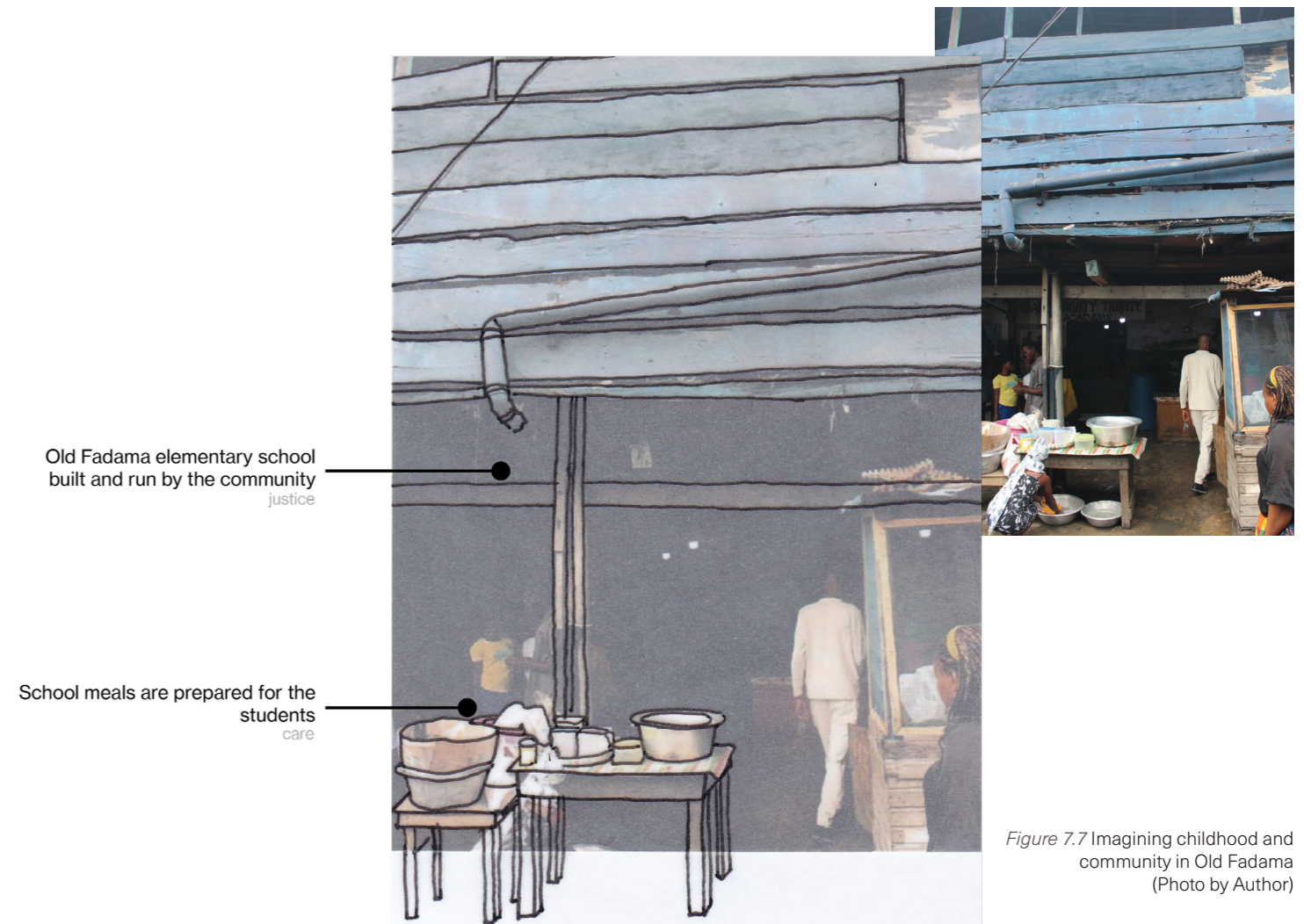


Figure 7.7 Imagining childhood and community in Old Fadama
(Photo by Author)

Another massively important aspect of Old Fadama that remains slightly underexposed in the imagination pictures and sketches so far, is the relationship between Old Fadama and the Agbogbloshie market. As has been discussed often in this research, the two exist in a tight reciprocal relationship; the residential area of Old Fadama exists because of the income opportunities at Agbogbloshie markets, and vice versa. Many people in Old Fadama thus depend on the markets for their income, but, important to remember, many people in Accra also depend on the Agbogbloshie markets too. In Figure 7.8, you can see the old market buildings, which are not sufficient to hold the current market anymore. Vendors are posted outside and build shelters from the rain and sun for themselves and their wares (dignity). Besides a key economic function, the markets also fulfil an important social function, forming an indispensable meeting point for community members, and thereby adding to the diversity that the people of Old Fadama so appreciate.

The markets themselves, however, become near unworkable in the rain. The rain turns the unpaved roads of the markets into dangerous, slippery mud pools, making it many times harder to carry wares and other equipment to the markets, let alone manage the heavy yam trucks that come through the area. Figure 7.9 clearly shows the struggle of vendors as they try to supply the markets with yams. It is easy to imagine an incident in these busy and slippery conditions, and, unfortunately, many traffic and yam truck-related incidents do happen around Agbogbloshie. Despite the undignified conditions for such a significant economic facility as the Agbogbloshie markets, both for Old Fadama and the rest of Accra, the government has no current plans to improve the market infrastructure. Instead, they see the markets as an opportunity to gradually relocate Old Fadama, by removing sections of the markets, hoping the vendors will follow. The community, however, supports each other in maintaining the markets and making sure businesses are run daily, even through the rain (solidarity).

Figure 7.8 Imagining the market square
(Photo by Author)



Temporary sun and rain shelters put up for stalls outgrowing the old market building
dignity

Variety of food, product, and service businesses, most by the Old Fadama community
diversity, self-establishment

Unpaved roads complicate market logistics and accessibility
dignity

(Temporary) shelter from rain and sun, and temporary furniture are carried to the market daily
dignity

Community helps each other to cope with difficult rainy conditions
solidarity

Unpaved markets cause obstructions, delays, and high risk for injuries and casualties
dignity, justice

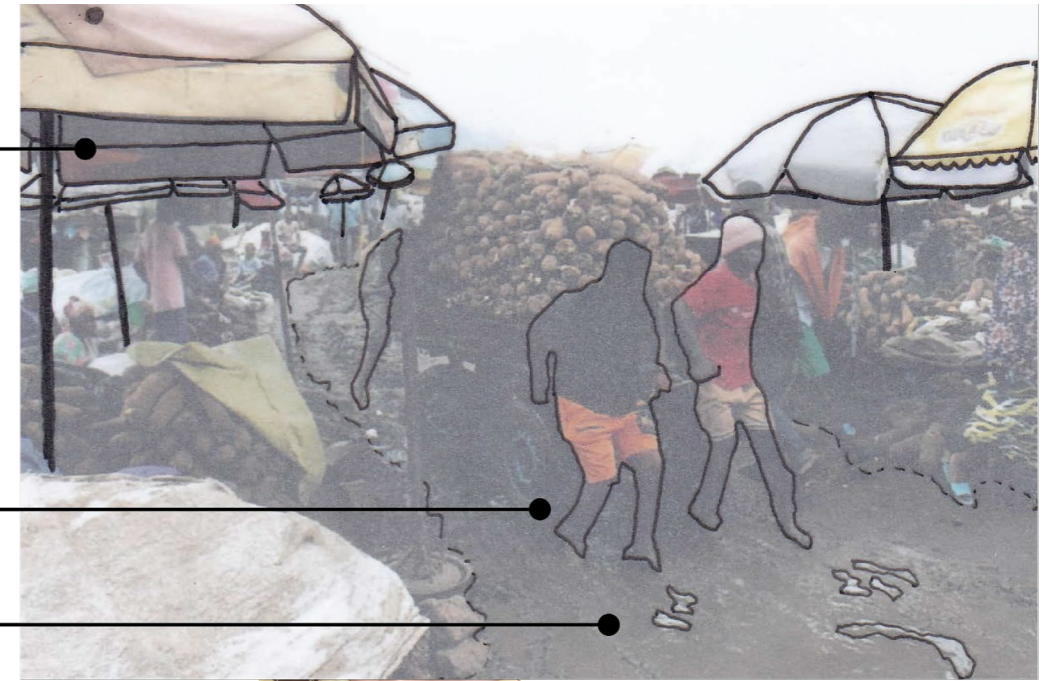


Figure 7.9 Imagining the markets
(Photo by Author)



Creating new stories and futures for Old Fadama

Figures 7.1 to 7.9 show clear examples of the community-led planning practices that shape the built environment of Old Fadama. Unfortunately, the resources and power of the community to make radical change in their living conditions are limited, mostly due to the lack of governmental support and economic capital. Figures 7.10 to 7.16 show further imaginations of Old Fadama that do not redesign but rather reimagine the results of the Old Fadama value-led planning practices in a world where Old Fadama does get the treatment, acknowledgement, and resources they deserve. What if the community were handed the tools they need to design and plan however they want? What could the built environment of Old Fadama look like then? As you can see, these imaginations are not drastically different from what Old Fadama looks like today. They aim to portray dignified and just version of Old Fadama without changing the core values that shape it.

Through these radical imaginations, new futures for Old Fadama, rooted in decoloniality and justice, can be imagined and visualised. In this chapter, examples of such imaginations are organised according to changed stories of the people of Old Fadama we met in chapter 6.

[We finally have a stable collaboration and union between the customary and state organisations in Accra and Old Fadama. With the support of the government we can finally realise things. They finally listen to us, I feel more respected.]

A changed story for the community leaders of Old Fadama

In a decolonial future of Old Fadama Babu, Kadeem, Michael, and the other community leaders in OFADA have set up a fruitful collaboration with the AMA. Together, they were able to realise a well thought-out and community-built water drainage system, much alike the water management strategies the community has been employing for decades. This water drainage system is easy to access and repair, creates clean and dry walkways, and room for the water to flow free underneath a lightweight construction that is feasible with the soil type and dense construction of Old Fadama.

[Now that the challenge of the water is managed, we can finally build towards bigger things. Our efforts are not going to go to waste anymore.]

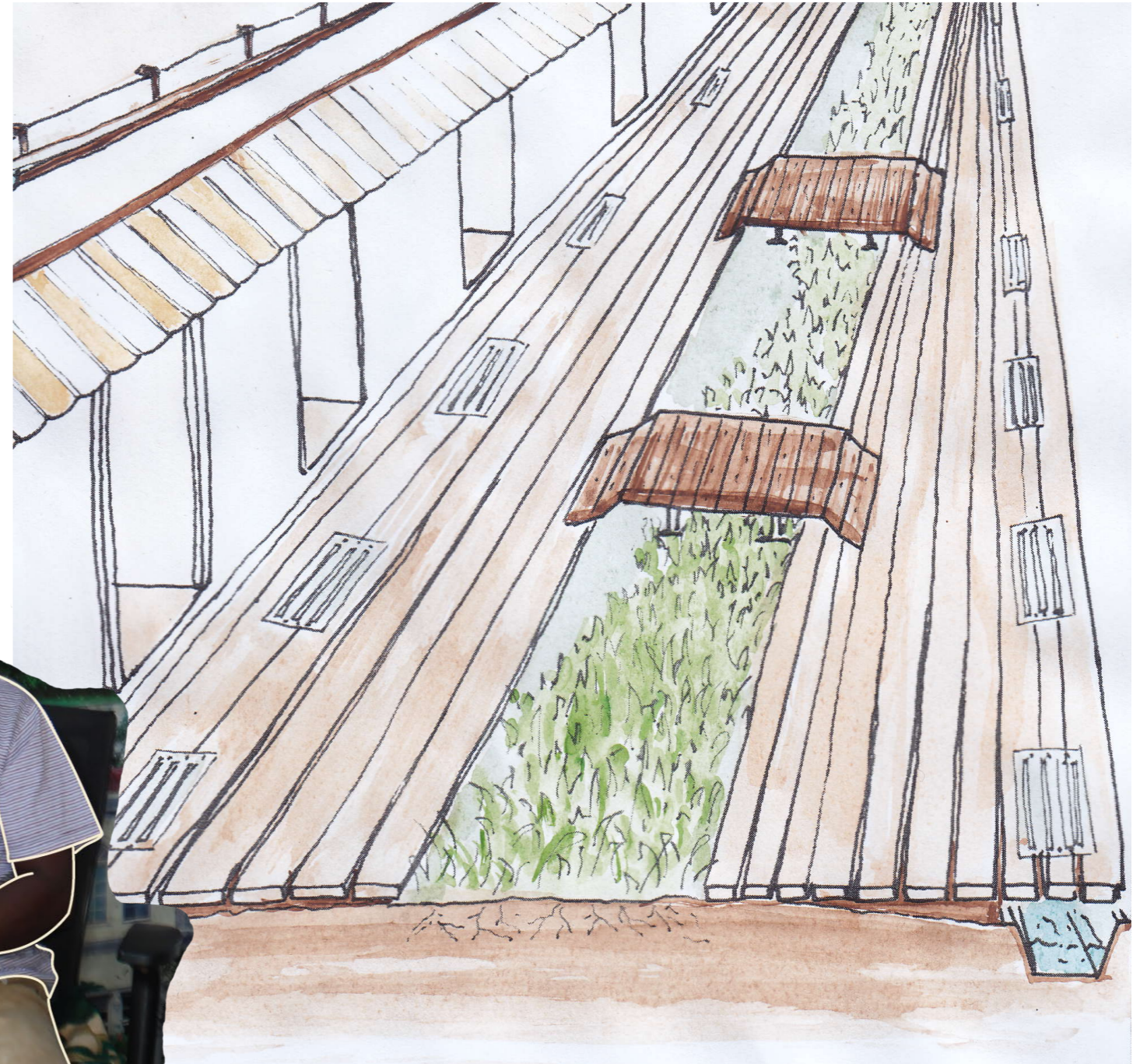


Figure 7.10 Reimagining a drainage system for Old Fadama (Made by Author)

[Our settlement is now embedded in the city of Accra and we have better connections to the rest of the city for people to go to work, and children to go to school. Our connection with the local state government is better in our work, but also in the city network.]



[Even though we are now better connected and in collaboration with the state government, Old Fadama is still run according to our principles, our values, and our culture. It still feels like home.]

Figure 7.11 Reimagining the embedding of Old Fadama in larger Accra
(Made by Author)





[We even have our own headquarters in the municipal district of Accra. Here, all different customary and state governance agencies are now represented and working in union. Our people can now advocate for ourselves in the place where it matters most.]

[Our authority is now accepted and respected. We are not banned to our own settlement anymore, we are now part of the city governance system. We are invited into the rest of the world, and we are recognised as a valuable part of society, like we always knew we were.]



Figure 7.12 Reimagining governance in Accra (Made by Author)

A changed story for the mothers of Old Fadama

With a changed infrastructure and culture of co-governance and peace with the state, life in Old Fadama can be about more than surviving and managing circumstances and the dynamics of exclusion. Reorganising the streets of Old Fadama would create a comfortable and dignified environment for the many businesses, meeting spots, and residential dwellings that exist in the settlement. Public space can be separated from residential space through creating a clear public plinth and a more private and tucked away first floor. The housing types in Old Fadama can be altered to fit the seasonal and quickly changing

population of the area by creating shared housing that accomodates this seasonal lifestyle. The public and productive plinth will still be busy, however, the infrastructure will now properly able to accommodate this type of vibrant and diverse culture that many of the residents of Old Fadama appreciate about their home.

[The streets are cleaner now. We don't have to worry about the water, we can meet on the street and be happy. It is still busy, of course, but that is how we like it.]

[The streets are way better organised now. The houses are better fit for the people. I don't have to live in the loud busy streetlife anymore. I can get rest at home now.]

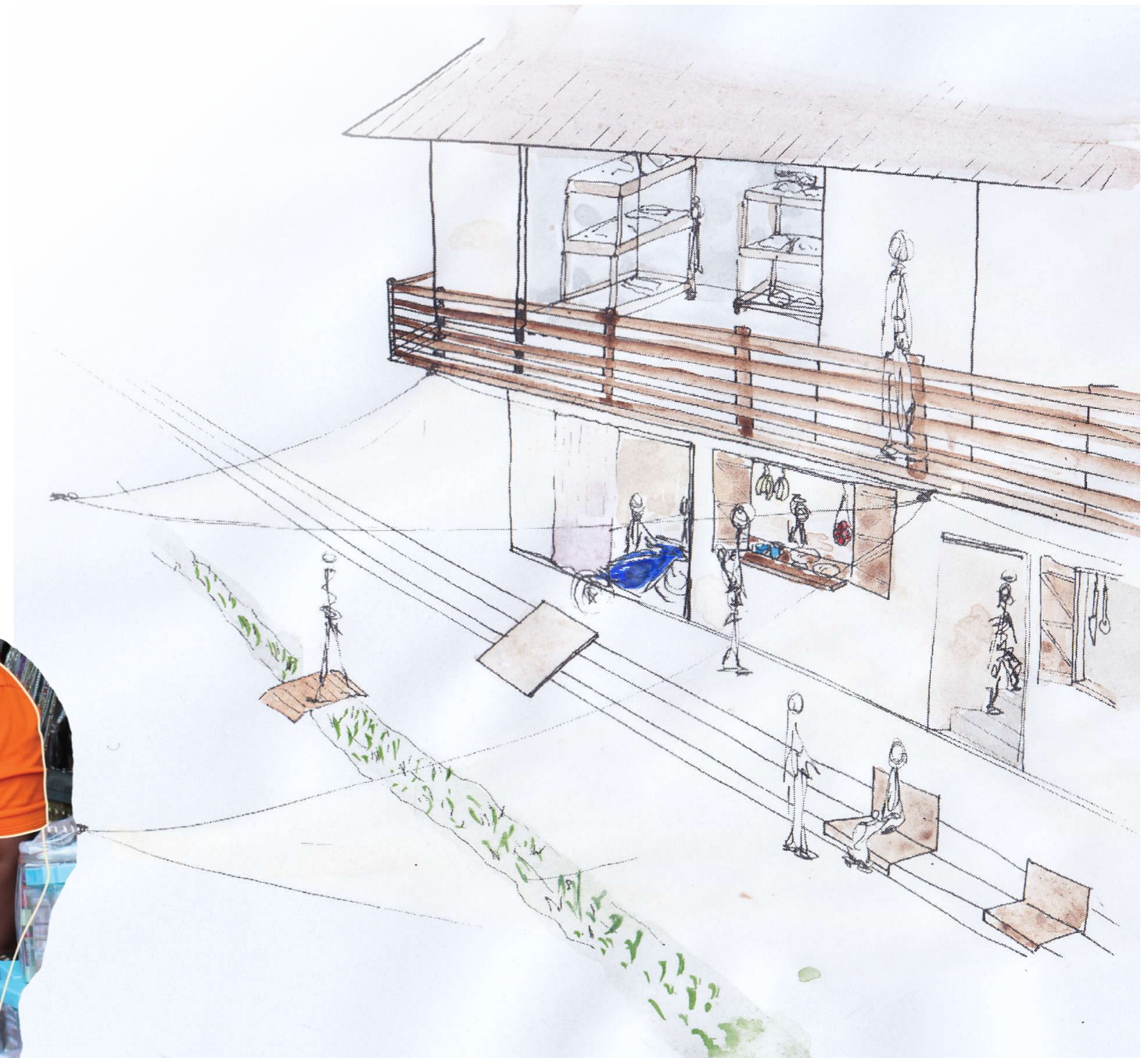


Figure 7.13 Reimagining communal living and privacy in Old Fadama (Made by Author)

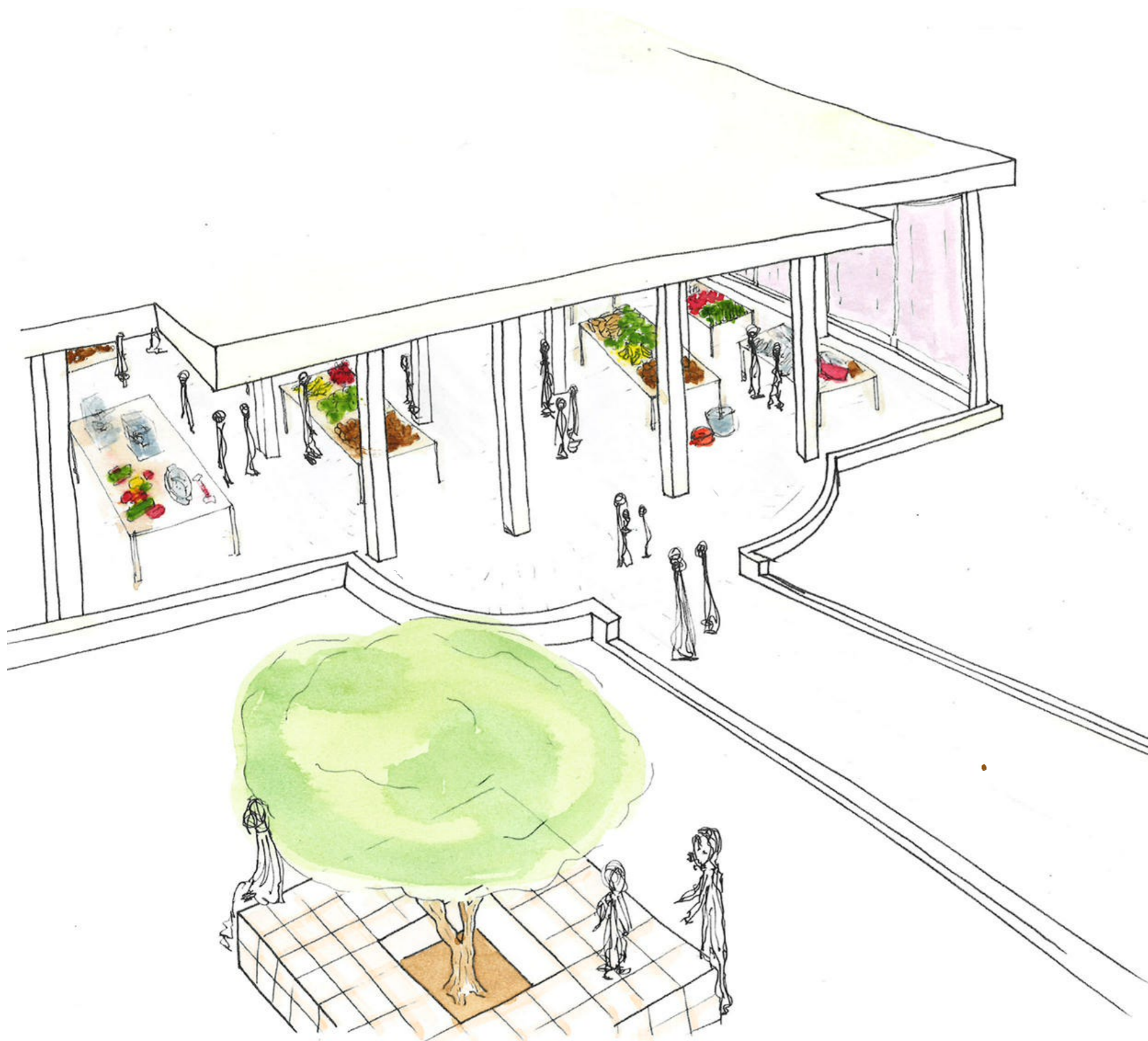
[I am happy we protected what is important in our settlement: the diversity of the people and the culture right on the street. We still have our space to hold important gatherings, but now we also have distinct furniture where we can meet, rest and shelter from the sun. The trees and the bantaba have become significant and recognisable places for our community.]

[The squares hold the opportunity to collect clean water now. My business in selling water has had to change, but I am glad I do not have to worry about the fridges and creditors anymore. The people are now happier to invest in Old Fadama and they can build up a life. My new business in recycled furniture is doing really well.]



Figure 7.14 Reimagining public space and facilities in Old Fadama (Made by Author)

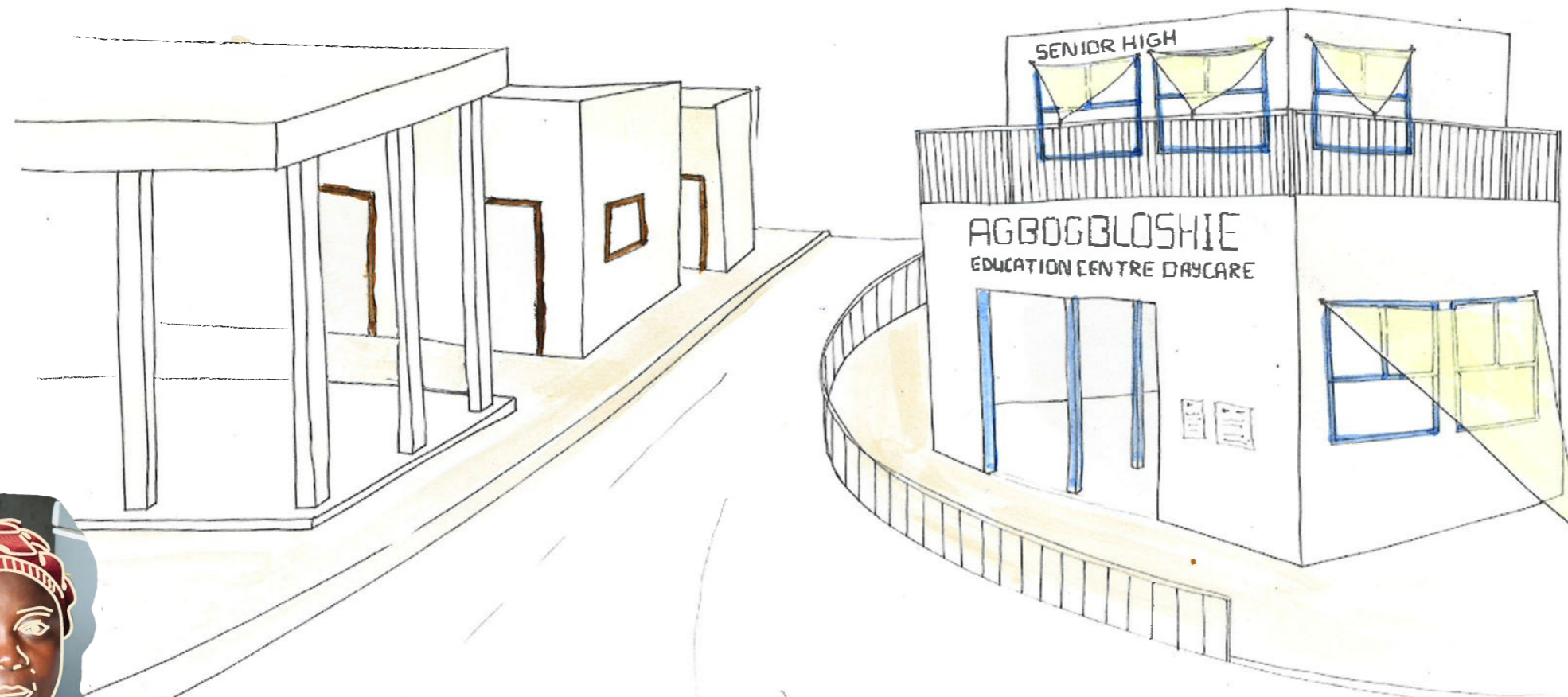




[I now have a proper stall in the market building for my hairdressing business. The markets have become much safer, there are less accidents because we don't have as many floods anymore and the roads are now paved and separate. More people from outside Old Fadama are now even coming to this market. I feel happy Old Fadama and Agbogbloshie get the recognition we deserve. We truly matter in the city now.]



Figure 7.15 Reimagining dignified Agbogbloshie markets (Made by Author)



[There are many more services available for us in Old Fadama now. Mothers can bring their young children to daycare right next to the markets when they go to work for their businesses. And my older kids can go to senior high here now. I am so happy my kids can now stay in a safe and healthy place with me.]

The stories, drawings, and statements here are of course examples of radical imaginations, not explicit designs or proposals. However, they are an example meant to serve as a communication piece or eye opener, to show that with little changes, lives could be transformed drastically. We do not need to redesign the settlement of Old Fadama, we should simply listen to what the people of Old Fadama want to do, and are already doing, with the place to turn it into a just and dignified home that is embedded into the city of Accra and its services and infrastructure.

Figure 7.16 Reimagining public services and infrastructure in Old Fadama
(Made by Author)

Embodied reflection

Throughout this project, reflection has had a core role, going beyond the compulsory reflection requirements connected to an urbanism thesis such as this one. Through critical self-reflexivity, planners can become aware of the biases in their practice and interpretations of local context and culture, and determine their exact role in the planning process.

Since this thesis has been an individual project, which does not comply with the definition of decolonial planning as I have constructed through empirical research as well as literature research, personal reflection has been one of the main activities in the later stages of this research. This reflection too contains valuable insights and lessons that can be communicated as outcomes. I have chosen to do so through an embodied reflection expressed in a tapestry (see Figure 7.17). The tapestry can serve as a conversation piece, but also a travelling communication tool, for example in exhibitions and during events.

Embodied reflection, or embodied research, can be defined as a method of active learning through, often art-based, bodily experiences (Martikainen et al., 2021). Embodied research methods can create important, and most of all, impactful learnings, as they stem from a personal embodied experience. Nevertheless, embodied research methods are extremely underrepresented in traditional academia (Martikainen et al., 2021). This is especially true outside of the Social Sciences.

The tapestry is, besides a form of reflection on the findings and learnings in this research, also another step of countermapping and imagination. The tapestry tells the story of Old Fadama through the spatiality of Accra, but through a lens of lived space rather than the objective physical space.

The medium of textile and fibre art was chosen for a variety of reasons. Firstly, to pay homage to the Ghanaian tradition of Kente. Secondly, because a similar tradition of storytelling through textile art can be found in most cultures among humankind; textile art can be a universal visual language that transcends the boundaries of linguistic translation. Lastly, the textile medium was chosen because of a personal connection; the women in my family have passed down the art of knitting, quilting, and embroidery through multiple generations. What I think makes textile and fibre art particularly suitable for a work of reflection, is the fact that fibre art is a slow paced mode of creation. Through every stitch, and every bead, I am contemplating the narrative that this tapestry should convey.

As mentioned before, the tapestry itself depicts the lived experience of Old Fadama and Accra. Down the middle of the tapestry, you can see the Korle Lagoon, crocheted in blue, splitting the city of Accra into different realms. In more privileged people's worlds, the water is narrow, shallow, and calm; an easy boundary to overcome. In a place such as Old Fadama, however, the water is an imposing and risky

obstacle. The crocheted river is a symbol of the invisible, yet to many very tangible, systemic obstacles that marginalise the community of Old Fadama.

The settlement of Old Fadama is clearly designed differently than the more privileged areas of Accra. For the people of Old Fadama, your lived world is small. Without access to the cities' amenities, services, and life opportunities, your own community becomes your world.

The more privileged areas of Accra, also physically positioned 'higher up' on the tapestry, however, enjoy an interconnectedness that is unheard of for Old Fadama. Their residents' worlds reaches far beyond their own communities.

The people that live in each of the neighbourhoods on the tapestry are free people; theoretically, they can move wherever they want. All the people are connected to their neighbourhood through a string. The length of the string represents the privilege, or disadvantages, a certain person is tasked with. The person belonging to Old Fadama, therefore, cannot move outside of their own neighbourhood; a tangible representation of the intangible hurdles and boundaries informal dwellers run into in day to day life.

As a planner, it can be up to you to try and challenge these injustices. Looking through the lens of lived experience helps tremendously in understanding how these injustices shape your world, daily life, and prospects in life for you, and for further generations. It can be up to us to cut the ties that limit people's worlds, and open up the spaces beyond.



Figure 7.17 Photo of 'Lived Space' (Tapestry by Author)

section conclusions.

This final chapter attempts to emphasise and make tangible the values of Old Fadama, expressed through the built environment. It aims to answer the final sub-research question: 'How can this reflexive and value-led planning methodology be applied to re-imagine decolonial futures for Old Fadama?' In the previous chapter, I concluded that, for me as an outsider and individual, it is not my place to plan, design, or decide for Old Fadama, if not through a radically collaborative and decolonial planning process with the community itself. Therefore, I have not applied any of the traditional planning activities, such as the ones described in chapter 5, or produced any traditional planning 'products', such as master plans or other scaled drawings. Rather, I have tried to demonstrate how an outsider like me can position themselves in a context where they should not have full authority or autonomy. Rather than designing, I have tried to translate the values, choices, and active expressions of planning practices that are already there (Figures 7.1 to 7.9). Furthermore, I have imagined the spaces of Old Fadama, based on the values that are already ingrained into the streets and lives of the community, in a world where Old Fadama gets to stay, where Old Fadama gets to enjoy the services they deserve, and where Old Fadama gets to be wholly part of Accra's metropolitan region (Figures 7.10 to 7.16). Whilst many things clearly change in the built environment, and in the streetscape of Old Fadama, the core values that shape the settlement remain the same.

To answer the sub-research question, the reflective and value-led planning meta-methodology that I have adopted through my learnings and unlearnings of the planner's reflections in chapter 5 can be applied. Through this new approach, I aim to shift the role and the objectives of the planner. My duty is not to redesign Old Fadama according to my frame of reference, or my (Western) culture and standard of living. My duty is to speak up for the community. Not to stand in their place, but rather to act as an amplifier to help spread their message and bring forward their knowledge. This I have done through uncovering the community-led planning practices in the built environment of Old Fadama, and through imagining new stories of decolonial and just futures for the people of Old Fadama. Also the tapestry, as a physical, travelling communication piece, adds to the goal of spreading the story of the people of Old Fadama. What exactly the planner's role looks like might be different in every planning project. Through the planner's reflections and through conversation with the respective communities, the specific needs for each project, and the exact extent of everyone's role can become clear.

8. IN SUMMARY:

CONCLUSIONS

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Introduction

In this thesis, I have attempted to develop contributions to decolonial planning knowledge. The thesis has been structured through three main steps, borrowed from Marcuse's (2009) critical urban theory: expose, propose, and politicise. First, I have investigated and exposed the lingering and harmful relationship between urban planning and societal structures of coloniality, neoliberalism, and a general Western-centrism that have infiltrated most places and spaces in the world (expose). Secondly, I have analysed and critically reviewed alternative planning methods, that offer opportunities to go beyond the pre-existing narratives of Western urban planning traditions, to contribute to a theory of decolonial planning (propose). Lastly, I have attempted to ground these learnings into urban planning methodology through planners' reflections and imaginations of the emergent planning practices in the informal settlement of Old Fadama as conscious acts of decolonial planning (politicise). The theoretic nature of this thesis has been linked to the case study location of Old Fadama, Accra, Ghana, throughout the entirety of the project, to contribute to bridging the gap between planning theory and practice. This gap especially present and problematic when it comes to decolonial planning. Linking the theory to practice through a case study location also creates the opportunity to make the exposed injustices in our built environment, society, and planning methodology 'real' and tangible for readers of this research and most of all fellow planners. Moreover, the fieldwork, which allowed for meaningful conversations with the community of Old Fadama, has strongly informed and influenced this research.

The main research question of this thesis is: 'How can urban planning practices be reimagined through critical reflexivity and Indigenous knowledge to advance spatial justice in postcolonial contexts such as Old Fadama, Accra, and move towards a decolonial planning practice?' Having walked through all the steps mentioned above, in this final chapter, I will address the main research question. Before that, however, the sub-research questions are iterated, and their conclusions summarised.

Sub-research questions

SRQ1: 'HOW HAVE COLONIAL AND NEOLIBERAL PLANNING LEGACIES SHAPED CONTEMPORARY SPATIAL EXCLUSION AND INFORMALITY IN ACCRA?'

In this thesis, colonialism is theorised as the starting point for a worldwide forced spread of the Western knowledge system, which has since grown into the dominant, and often considered superior, knowledge system. Due to the Western knowledge system's inherent focus on 'factual', 'rational', and 'objective' information, preferably communicated through written text, Indigenous knowledge, which is often a combination of spiritual, experienced and embodied knowledge, and tends to be verbally passed down over many generations, is largely excluded. The Western urban planning tradition, which too is applied globally, is rooted in the Western knowledge system, and carries out the same objective and rational perspective. This creates positivist and technocratic planning solutions that overlook social, political, and economic aspects.

This unilateral and non-situated approach of planning leads to (1) Indigenous and non-Western communities' needs being overlooked and misunderstood, adding to their marginalisation, as planning solutions do not adequately respond to the structural injustices these communities face, and (2) unsuitable technocratic planning solutions and objectives, shaped by the capitalist and neoliberalist policies that planning is subject to, leading to further marginalisation and oppression of vulnerable communities as injustices grow bigger. Whilst neoliberalism is not a strong causal factor in the initial creation of the dynamics of exclusion in our built environment, the ongoing capitalist nature of policy enables the processes of marginalisation by not addressing structural injustices.

This question is more thoroughly addressed in chapter 4.

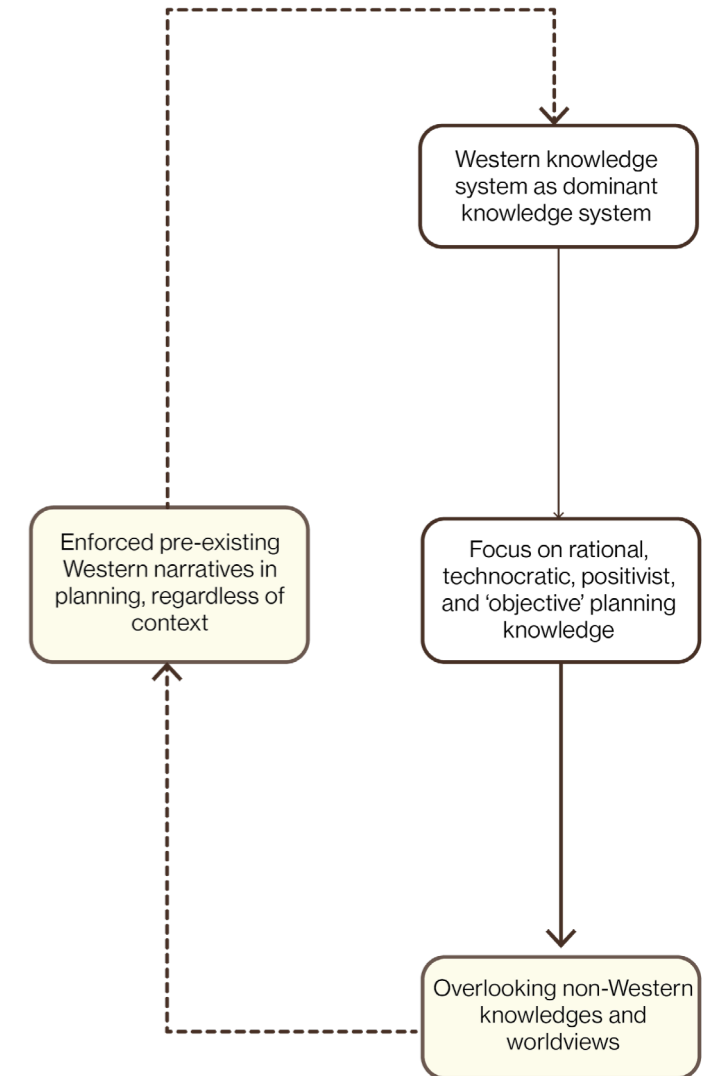


Figure 8.1 Diagram illustrating the twofold effect of colonialism on modern urban planning

SRQ2: 'IN WHAT WAYS ARE THESE EXCLUSIONARY LEGACIES EXPRESSED IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND GOVERNANCE OF OLD FADAMA?'

Colonial and neoliberal legacies interplay in multiple ways to create the dynamics of exclusion that shape Old Fadama. One way is a physical, tangible, colonial inheritance of an already unjust built environment upon the creation of Ghana at the moment of independence in 1957. The planning and policy of British colonisers prioritised areas historically meant for European settlers over those inhabited by the native population. This still shows in today's built environment through a lack of infrastructure development, sewage and drainage systems, and connection to the electricity net in Indigenous and African migrant communities. There is also a significant difference in the availability of public services, such as schools, hospitals and health clinics between historically native areas and historically European areas.

Another way Old Fadama is shaped by the colonial legacy of Ghana, is through the enforcement of colonial laws. Due to the hasty nature of Ghana's formal decolonisation, many laws and plans made by British colonisers were upheld by Ghana's first government. This includes the zoning plans for Accra, which label the land of Old Fadama as government property, rather than honouring the Indigenous ownership of the Ga people, and making residential use of Old Fadama illegal. Old Fadama's illegal squatter status is the main justification for the continuous governmental neglect and violence the community has experienced.

Like many places in the world, Accra too is governed through a mainly capitalist and neoliberal perspective. This means that the structural injustices in Accra's built environment are not structurally addressed; communities are largely left to their own defences to improve their socio-economic situation. This too is the case for Old Fadama. This way, neoliberal policy allows spatial and social injustices to increase through benefitting the already wealthy.

Lastly, the unequal treatment between historically native and European areas of Ghana during British colonisation was also present on a larger, national, scale: British development focused significantly on developing urban areas. Rural regions of Ghana were, like the native areas of Ghana's urbanity, largely neglected. This led to a significant lack of development, which still results in a low economy, depopulation, exploitation, and even violent conflicts in many rural areas of Ghana. This lack of development is a driving factor behind the high urbanisation rates of Ghana, and therefore also for the continuous growth of Old Fadama, and similar settlements across Accra and Kumasi, further increasing the competition for resources in Ghana's urbanity. The continued development gap in rural

Ghana is a main factor for growth in Old Fadama and thereby contributes to the extreme density and competition for resources within the settlement.

This question is more thoroughly addressed in chapter 4.

SRQ3: 'WHICH ALTERNATIVE KNOWLEDGES AND SPATIAL PRACTICES FROM OLD FADAMA AND LITERATURE EXAMPLES EXIST THAT GO BEYOND THE COLONIAL AND NEOLIBERAL FRAMEWORKS OF MODERN WESTERN PLANNING?'

In search to alternative planning methods and methodologies to the standard Western planning tradition, different schools of urban planning are discussed. Humanist and feminist planning are considered useful, as they focus on the human experience, creating opportunity for a more situated and value-based, rather than solution-oriented, planning approach. Feminist planning also explicitly acknowledges the structural injustices of the built environment and society, calling for equitable planning solutions, over equal ones. Because of the starting principle of an inherently unequal world, Feminist planning theory lends itself perfectly for topics of spatial justice in informal settlements. Participatory planning is also extensively discussed for its potential to create a truly situated, as well as collaborative planning process, that engage the community itself in the process to offer insights planners cannot create themselves. However, it is concluded that these methods do not offer enough potential towards decolonial planning, as they still largely depend on the interpretation, translation, and validation of 'expert' planners, who are predominantly trained according to the Western planning tradition.

More radical examples of planning outside of colonial and neoliberal frameworks are sought, and found, in value-based planning, and autonomous planning. The key difference is that through focusing on value-based planning, the neoliberal and capitalist solutionist nature of planning is addressed. The process now revolves around the core values of the community that is being planned for. A focus on autonomous planning, which can be achieved through radical participatory planning, guarantees that the community's knowledge, and perspective are not just engaged, but centred throughout the entirety of the planning process. This necessitates a shift in the expert planner's role and attitude; Western planning knowledge is not inherently unvaluable in non-Western contexts, however, critical self-reflexivity by the expert planner is required as a core planning activity to understand this knowledge's role in the respective planning context. In many cases, this would mean the expert planner's role shifts from a main planning role to a facilitating and educative role, to enable to community to lead the planning process and centre their knowledges and perspectives.

This question is more thoroughly addressed in chapter 5.

SRQ4: 'HOW CAN INSIGHTS FROM THESE PRACTICES CONTRIBUTE TO A CRITICALLY REFLEXIVE, VALUE-LED PLANNING METHODOLOGY THAT FOSTERS SPATIAL JUSTICE?'

In this thesis, I have theorised the persistent structures of coloniality and neoliberalism as a key cause of lasting, and even increasing, injustices in the built environment and society, as these societal structures contribute to the oppression and marginalisation of vulnerable communities such as informal dwellers. The Western planning tradition exists within these structures and through pre-existing narratives and technocratic, positivist planning solutions tends to reinforce patterns of Western dominance, and misinterpretation of non-Western knowledge and communities, as well as exclusion of non-Western knowledge and communities.

The alternative practices of value-led planning, autonomous planning, and critical reflexivity radically address the role of the Western 'expert' planner, and the default planning methodologies and planning solutions we tend to rely on, within and outside of the Western context. By regarding Western knowledge as situated knowledge, centring communities' experiences and Indigenous knowledges, as well as providing the community has autonomy throughout every phase of the planning process, the communities' needs are explored, heard, involved, interpreted, and represented properly, rather than getting lost in translation and assimilation to Western planning and development standards. This radical improvement in the planning process will lead to planning outcomes that better represent the exact needs and priorities of the communities, making them more successful in creating liveable and comfortable neighbourhoods, whilst maintaining important social and cultural connections, and realising access to opportunities in life. Adopting the decolonial planning principles derived from the alternative schools of urban planning discussed in this thesis brings planning one step closer to creating truly just environments, and rectifying the injustices many marginalised communities are subject to.

This question is more thoroughly addressed in chapter 5.

SRQ5: 'WHAT PRINCIPLES OR DESIGN VALUES EMERGE FOR PLANNERS SEEKING TO DECOLONISE PRACTICE IN SIMILAR CONTEXTS?'

Although the initial objective of this thesis was to theorise a clear methodology for decolonial planning, one of the main learning of this research has been that decolonial planning is not a matter of methods or methodologies, but rather of a meta-methodology; a transcending perspective on urban planning, a methodology for planning methodology. To still answer the research question, however, I have compiled six main 'reflections for the decolonial planner' that I believe are to be the basis of a decolonial approach for planners originally educated according to the Western planning tradition. They represent the reflections necessary to create the shift in the role of 'expert' planners as described in sub-research question three. A summary of the six 'reflections for decolonial planners' is written here, the full reflections can be read in chapter 5.

Chapter 6 builds upon this theoretical answer to the sub-research question through producing planning knowledge for Old Fadama. Through the common narratives in the stories of the people of Old Fadama, the core values that shape life, society, and the built environment of Old Fadama are derived. They are: self-establishment, diversity, care, solidarity, dignity, and justice. Through applying the decolonial meta-methodology for planning as described in the former part of this section, context-specific planning knowledge such as these six core values for Old Fadama can be produced.

This question is more thoroughly addressed in chapter 5 and chapter 6.

1. Decolonial planning is a meta-methodology; a moral commitment to rectifying structural injustices in the built environment and society;
2. Western-born and Western-educated planners cannot fully comprehend non-Western knowledge systems and worldviews, or all dynamics of systemic oppression by the Western knowledge system;
3. Situated, embodied, and experienced knowledge should be central in the planning process;
4. Critical self-reflexivity should be a core planning activity for Western planners in non-Western contexts;
5. Decolonial planning must be autonomous planning;
6. To not engage in decolonial planning, and therefore to practice Western planning, in non-Western contexts will always lead to reinforcing colonial and neoliberal dynamics of exclusion.

SRQ6: 'HOW CAN THIS REFLEXIVE AND VALUE-LED PLANNING METHODOLOGY BE APPLIED TO RE-IMAGINE DECOLONIAL FUTURES FOR OLD FADAMA?'

In this research, I have applied the learnings and unlearnings about planning methods and the role of the planner through the 'reflections for the decolonial planner' by actively stepping back from designing, planning, and developing policy, as this is not my place as an individual outsider to Old Fadama. Rather, I have positioned myself, as the expert planner, as an amplifier, aiming to stress the values and planning knowledge that is already expressed in Old Fadama through community-initiated planning practices. These values, self-establishment, diversity, care, solidarity, dignity, and justice, are underlined through the imaginations overtop of pictures from Old Fadama as pictured in Figures 7.1 to 7.9. Furthermore, I have created key imaginations of important places for Old Fadama in a world where Old Fadama gets the treatment (especially from formal institutions) it deserves, and fruitful decolonial planning projects can be realised. Through this 'what if' scenario, potential decolonial futures and altered stories for the people of Old Fadama can be imagined. This is not to serve as a design, but rather to serve as a wake up call and conversation piece for Western planners.

The main way the developed 'meta-methodology' of decolonial planning therefore contributes to imagining futures for Old Fadama is through shifting the role of the expert planner, and focusing on spreading the values, and knowledge of the community itself, as well as the gravity of the injustices the community is subject to and the urgency to make change in these dynamics of exclusion. In this project specifically this has meant that I have refrained from designing or planning explicit outcomes for Old Fadama, as a radically collaborative and autonomous planning process was not feasible. Rather, the research outcomes, the sketches, imaginations, and stories of the people of Old Fadama, aim to address the necessary learning and unlearning of fellow Western planners.

This question is more thoroughly addressed in chapter 7.

main research question.

MRQ: 'HOW CAN URBAN PLANNING PRACTICES BE REIMAGINED THROUGH CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE TO ADVANCE SPATIAL JUSTICE IN POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXTS SUCH AS OLD FADAMA, ACCRA, AND MOVE TOWARDS A DECOLONIAL PLANNING PRACTICE?'

This research has explored the different dimensions of planning and how planning, knowingly or unknowingly, influences people's lives. As we are in transformation towards a decolonial state of being, planning, which is still heavily influenced by exclusionist colonial ideologies, ought to transform too. Through learning and unlearning and critical self-reflexivity, this research has attempted to restructure the narrative of planning as a Western discipline, and conceptualise planning as a situated, decolonial practice. In order to accomplish decolonial planning, planning needs to be reimagined in multiple dimensions.

1. PLANNING NEEDS TO BE REIMAGINED AS A PRACTICE WITH INHERENT POWER THROUGH WHICH PRACTITIONERS CAN DO HARM AND GOOD SIMULTANEOUSLY AND UNKNOWINGLY.

As planning shapes the built environment, it can create, or take away, the accessibility and availability of opportunities in life for the people we plan for. Planning outcomes are often romanticised; only focusing on the bright creations that planning brings forth. This perspective leaves us largely oblivious and unaccountable for the negative effects that our planning actions cause, despite all the good intentions at our core. With the realisation that planning is a practice that holds inherent power that can, and has been, abused, planners also need to realise that their practice is biased. It does not matter who you are. It does not matter where you come from. It does not matter where you have been. The experiences and perspectives of one individual can never encompass all of the possible experiences of the world we live in that there are in this universe. Realising our practice is biased does not equate to disregarding all we think we know about planning and our world. It is simply the first step towards accurately and radically evaluating whether that knowledge is valuable, or harmful, in the particular planning contexts we find ourselves in throughout our career.

2. PLANNING NEEDS TO BE REIMAGINED AS A RADICALLY SITUATED PRACTICE.

The Western knowledge system has spread across the globe and taken up a dominant position, making it so that other knowledge systems are excluded from academic and mainstream discussions. This is also true for planning; the generally accepted discipline of planning centres the Western knowledge system and the ideas and decision-making by Western 'expert' planners. This results in planning projects being forced into pre-existing (Western) narratives and planning solutions. Planning becomes technocratic, positivist, and solutionist, and we as planners often become blind to the embodied knowledge and experiences from the people that have lived the problems we aim to resolve through planning. Instead, planning should centre these experiences and respective Indigenous knowledges in an autonomous community-led planning process.

3. PLANNING NEEDS TO BE REIMAGINED AS A VALUE-LED PROCESS.

The technocratic, positivist, and solutionist nature of the Western planning tradition makes planning a very solution-oriented practice. Of course, planning will always aim to create solutions to problems in our built environment. However, by primarily focusing on the outcomes, pushed to do so by the neoliberal pull for universality and efficiency, essential dimensions that lie in the fundamentals of planning are overlooked. We tend to be so convinced of the superiority of Western planning examples, that we don't stop to think whether the same values we as planners subscribe to at home are applicable in every specific planning context. By shifting from a solution-oriented planning practice to a value-led planning practice, the situated experience of the community will be at the core of planning.

If planning is to be reimagined in this way, we create room for expert planning knowledge to inspire and facilitate planning processes where local knowledge and values are centred. This necessitates a significant shift in the planner's role, behaviour, and attitude. Through constant critical reflection, the planner needs to ask themselves, 'what is my role in this moment?' and 'how do I act out this role proper?'. Asking these questions is not new. However, imagining this type of critical self-reflection as a core planning activity is not currently standard practice in the Western planning tradition.

Reimagining planning in a postcolonial context is therefore not to dismiss institutional planning knowledge, nor is it to relinquish any and all responsibility for rectifying the injustices in society and the built environment that are largely shaped by colonialism and neoliberalism in the first place. It is to find the exact balanced relationship between different

involved actors, their roles, and their knowledge in each planning context so that marginalised voices can be heard, and the institutionalised voice can take accountability and responsibility by amplifying the marginalised voice.

These conclusions can largely be generalised and applied to other planning contexts than this research's case study location. The Western planning tradition is, as of now, universally applied, and follows a similar colonial logic everywhere in the world. How this logic is expressed, and how this logic oppresses and marginalises vulnerable communities depends on the context of every individual situation. A reflective and radically participatory analysis process is therefore essential every time. Critical self-reflexivity is a continuous process, and is therefore never finished, yet always relevant. The reflections for the decolonial planner as presented in chapter 5 of this research report form the basis of a universally applicable meta-methodology for decolonial planning. The reflections inform a meta-methodology of planning, not the direct outcomes in the planning process. They allow expert planners working in a non-Western context to turn inwards and identify the correct process, attitude, methods and activities for them in their specific context. I strongly encourage the application of these reflections also in planning projects within the planner's familiar context, as colonial contexts and oppression exist everywhere, and therefore need dismantling everywhere. I especially challenge planning students and fellow aspiring planners at the start of their professional or academic path to adopt these reflections in their work and planning meta-methodology. If there is one thing the decoloniality movement needs, it is growth from highly biased spaces such as academia and institutional planning.

Besides the findings on a decolonial planning meta-methodology, this research has also generated knowledge about Old Fadama and urban informality in general. This research has explored the meaning of informality by examining literature on informal settlements, reviewing the treatment of informal settlements and communities in policy, and most significantly, by visiting Old Fadama and hearing the first-hand experiences of the community. Where formal institutions often depict urban informality as spontaneous and therefore unplanned settlements, this research emphasises the conscious and valuable acts of planning that are expressed in the built environment of informal settlements. Depicting informal settlements, and thereby informal communities, as spontaneous and unplanned – or in more negative cases chaotic, primitive, and uncivilised – is beneficial for formal institutions who want to rid their cities of informality. If the general public agrees with their objectives, getting approval for plans becomes that much easier. The negative framing of informal settlements and individual dwellers unfortunately plays a large part in their marginalisation. This research has therefore aimed to rephrase, and reimagine, informality. By understanding the urban logic, oftentimes based on Indigenous planning traditions, and different values than the

ones that shape Western society, we can begin to see the value and knowledge that is within informal settlements. In trying to discover and understand the values that shape Old Fadama, a lot of planning knowledge about the community has been generated. The six values that have been derived from the interviews, self-establishment, diversity, care, solidarity, dignity, and justice, explain the main motives and current state of affairs for the people in Old Fadama, as well as their priorities and aspirations for any future planning. By listening to these six values and incorporating them into the built environment and governance structures, like the community-led initiatives are currently already doing, a settlement with adequate living conditions and access to urban services and life opportunities can be created. Examples of this have been imagined in the latter sections of chapter 6. Besides the values of Old Fadama, the most pressing challenges and planning priorities of Old Fadama have also been further clarified and substantiated with empirical data. We can conclude that water and flooding are amongst the main challenges, as they not only affect people's health, safety and comfort, but also directly influence people's ability to generate income. Another great challenge, as vocalised by the people of Old Fadama themselves, is the availability of sustainable employment options. Whilst this challenge is largely economic, the communities' ability to work is largely connected to the severity of water-related problems in Old Fadama and Agbogbloshie, the lack of paved roads, and the outdated infrastructure of the Agbogbloshie markets themselves. The last great challenge is the right to stay. The community of Old Fadama has endured decades of violence, as governments continue to attempt to remove and relocate the settlement, against the people's will and without a proper alternative. Certain aspects of Old Fadama, such as the high density of the settlement and the close proximity to the very busy and polluting Agbogbloshie markets and scrapyard, are used as an argument to vilify Old Fadama, whilst exactly these aspects are repeatedly mentioned as redeeming qualities by the people of Old Fadama. Whilst no one is denying the downsides of these characteristics, they also have a large role in the appeal of Old Fadama. The density of Old Fadama creates strong social bonds and is responsible for the diversity and care system that is mentioned multiple times as a redeeming quality of Old Fadama. The proximity to Agbogbloshie creates essential income opportunities for the otherwise marginalised and isolated community of Old Fadama. In solving the issues related to these Old Fadama characteristics, the valuable attributes need to be protected and enhanced in order to create an appropriately improved built environment.

discussions.

Whilst this research holds many definitive learnings, and perhaps more important unlearnings, for me personally, it has only scratched the surface of the injustices and dynamics of exclusion that oppress informal communities in Accra, let alone elsewhere in this world. This research represents the meta-methodology of a possible way to ethically go about approaching the topic of decolonial planning in informal settlements. The development of concrete designs, plans, and policy have however fallen outside of the scope of this research, as an appropriate radically collaborative and community-led process in line with a decolonial planning meta-methodology was not feasible. Logical next steps in this research would contain exactly that, steps towards realisation of a decolonial planning process for Old Fadama, and eventually, the outcome of a just built environment. This process would start with stakeholder engagement. The community seems willing to collaborate with formal planning institutions, and excited to finally see the governmental neglect the community is under ending. The AMA, however, is still subscribed to the idea of relocating the people of Old Fadama and the Agboghloshie markets. Before any plans can be developed for Old Fadama, all stakeholders need to agree on whether Old Fadama can stay, and in what capacity. Whilst this research does not publish any explicit recommendations or proposals on legal matters, this research does contain arguments for the significance and importance of Old Fadama. I believe that properly embedding Old Fadama in the urban fabric of Accra, whilst remaining to honour the values of Old Fadama, offers the most potential for successful planning outcomes for Old Fadama, as for the larger city of Accra.

A lens that remains slightly underexposed in this research, is that of the legal matter of Old Fadama's (il)legality. Old Fadama's current illegal status is a large reason for the continuous governmental neglect, and subsequent marginalisation of the community of Old Fadama. Simultaneously, titling is not always a simple option. In the case of Old Fadama, multiple land claims exist: the government owns the land according to colonial expropriation, the Ga people belong to the land according to their Indigenous connection to the area, and the people of Old Fadama have resided on the land for generations and are dependent on it. Investigation of the possibilities of legalising, or even titling, Old Fadama is a necessary step towards rectifying the injustices in the built environment and society of Accra, however this discussion would benefit from policy and law professionals, on top of planning professionals.

9. IN REFLECTION:

REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST YEAR

Reflection

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Reflection

On the relation between my research, the mastertrack 'Urbanism', and the master programme

The very core of the graduation topic of “Unlearning the coloniality of planning” is challenge to the norms and standards of urban planning. In critiquing the very fundamentals of urban planning in the Western planning tradition, as it is also taught here at TU Delft, it creates a sometimes confusing relationship with the Urbanism master's track and the AUBS master's programme in general. The research, of course, fits within them, but simultaneously almost attacks them, or at least challenges them, attempting to expose the one-sided, narrow-minded sources we base our education and practice on, and pinpointing the shortcomings of the Western planning tradition, a discipline that has turned into Delft's proudest export product.

On the academic and societal value of the research

Whilst the thesis finds itself in a slightly conflicting space – between being part of, and simultaneously challenging, the systems and structures of the Western knowledge system, planning, academia, and neoliberalism – this is also exactly where I think its value lies. Truth is, our education at TU Delft is not only very Western-centric, but also quite engineering-focused. Of course, this makes sense; we do study at a technical university after all. However, for urban planning, an inherently social and political discipline, a technical focus alone just simply does not cut it. Thankfully, this is not as much of an original or controversial opinion as it once was, and many professors at our university are working hard to bring more nuance and balance into our research, practice, and curriculum. I hope to contribute to this transformation through this thesis. Moreover, I hope to add another step, bridging theory and practice; a step often missing in the realms of education, where in our projects, we don't always have to adhere to all the challenges and limitations of the real world. This objective of the research, carried out through the continuous link between theory and Old Fadama and 'reflections for the decolonial planner' aimed to directly influence practice, speaks to the academic and societal value of the research. The thesis is actively positioned to reach both in a meaningful way, and to merge both the academic and social world to eliminate the gaps that exist between them.

On the transferability of the produced knowledge

As the thesis grasps large and broad societal structures and phenomena, the knowledge of this research can be applied throughout all of the urban planning discipline. No matter the topic, scale, or area of your specific project, in this

thesis, I advocate that the transformed urban planning meta-methodology, towards a value-based approach, embracing non-Western knowledge and traditions and critical reflexivity as core aspects of our practice, will benefit any recipient, especially those now marginalised. The 'reflections for the decolonial planner' are set up in such a way that they focus inward on the planner themselves, and can therefore be applied and used to create just and decolonial planning processes in any planning context.

On the value of my research approach

Tackling this topic, or at least attempting to, has been quite challenging. It is humbling and confronting to dive into the structures that create dynamics of exclusion and oppression and find that even though you might not agree with them and did not create them, you are an active part of the system that is upholding them. This is exactly why I feel it is important to tackle this project. It is a way of taking accountability that I believe is much needed in today's world. As urban planners, but also as people that are part of a globally dominant culture, and privileged to enjoy an education, we collect more power than we might realise. I believe this power comes with a moral responsibility to truly try to understand the places you work in and the people you work for. Our work and our position in society is part of a much longer story as we build upon what others have built before us, the good and the bad. And likewise, our choices and creations, shaping little corners of the world and the realms of people's lives, will continue to be part of that story for a long time to come.

Trying to understand the societal and physical structures that make our world and deconstructing the way we have intentionally and unintentionally created great injustices within it has helped me understand my role, my responsibility, and the effects of my choices a lot better. Although immensely uncomfortable, it is a journey I would advise everyone to embark on.

On my attempt to go beyond the societal systems of colonialism, neoliberalism, and Western-centrism in planning and academia

A key question that has remained throughout this project has been, how can you effectively challenge, unpack and deconstruct these large societal structures if those very structures are all you have ever known and been taught? This is exactly what has been the biggest personal challenge in this project. It is the part that made me most scared and even apprehensive to take on this topic, because out of all people, who am I – white, upper-middle class, and highly educated, in other words, privileged in almost every meaning of the word – to attempt to do this?

My particular background inevitable comes with many pitfalls and critical lessons to be learned. The more privilege, the more bias is usually how the story goes. This is exactly why someone like me should *not* shy away from topics like decoloniality and non-Western knowledges and practices. Like Briggs and Sharp (2004) point out in their 'postcolonial caution', the fear of making mistakes in sensitive social and cultural research topics turns many scholars away from them. Yes, this makes it so that those mistakes are not made. But it also makes it so that the research projects never happen, and very necessary advances in theory and practice are delayed until someone does take the leap.

Have I made mistakes during this process? Yes. But have they too contributed to important learnings, both for me personally, and for urban planning? Yes, I think they have.

On the reciprocal influence between the research and the researcher

Through my doubt and discomfort, this research has shaped me many times over. It has taught me to be humble, even when you think you know the answers or have the credentials. It has taught me to learn beyond a university setting, and that a professional or educational life is not separate from your personal one. It has also taught me to speak up. Even when you are unsure. To share your thoughts, your feelings, your full experience, because that is knowledge. I feel incredibly lucky to have learned these lessons now, and to be able to take this with me as I start my career in planning.

As I learnt more throughout the research project, specifically about how fundamental and prominent colonial ideologies still are in the Western knowledge system, and about the many pitfalls of Western planning approaches, no matter how true the planner's intentions might be, the objectives of the research shifted quite drastically. Where I originally set out to develop planning scenarios for 'slum' upgrading, or even policy recommendations for potential legalisation of Old Fadama, I learnt to understand that this was not my place in the planning process. It is not up to me to decide exactly what and how things should happen, nor is it up to me to decide *that* things should happen in the first place. What *can* be up to me, is to expose current injustices, especially to formal institutions and fellow planners, to inspire and imagine about what could be, and to contribute to mobilising and enabling the communities in their own autonomous planning process. This is exactly what I have tried to do with the interview data and the imaginations. This is also exactly what the Old Fadama community asked me to do. They do not need me to design, plan, and govern their own home and people. They need me to address my people, who are actively oppressing their community.

Having almost finished the project now, it is clear to me that my learnings were as much about planning theory and Old

Fadama, as they were about myself; about my own role, my own ethics, and my own power, as an urban planner, a researcher, and simply as a person.

On my transformed(/ing) positionality

At the very start of this research, I wrote about my own positionality, explaining how and why I see my role to take on this project and this topic, and to set out my hopes and objectives for this research. Evidently, as we have seen, these have changed a lot throughout the project. While I stand by my statements that it *is* up to white and Western researchers and planners to address the topic of decoloniality – as it is largely our biased planning that is upholding coloniality in our current planning outputs – and that mistakes will, and sometimes have to be made, I do wish I would have approached some parts of the project differently. Even though I acknowledged that I too was going to bring in bias and had a long road of uncomfortable discoveries about my own Western-centrism and a lot of unlearning to go, I still assumed my research approach was fit for the question. However, it was not. The research I initially set out to conduct, turned out to be not appropriate nor effective at all. I wish I would have taken more time to investigate what the way to go about this topic was. Or I wish this research was part of a larger project, in which case this research can serve exactly that purpose, of refining the appropriate research methods and questions, and following steps of the project could have included a radically collaborative planning project with the people of Old Fadama. That is the action they deserve, and the type of project that can pour the knowledge they provided me with back into their community.

Through this project, which was aimed at decolonising my formal education in urban planning, I have also noticed many other parts of by thinking have been transformed. Decolonisation is a concept that is relevant in any context, as colonisation has infiltrated almost all spaces in our world. I am beyond grateful to have had the chance to learn and unlearn about a topic that is so close to my heart and that is so allcompassing in different areas of life in such an immersive manner.

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11. APPENDIX

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appendix 1.

¹Data in this stakeholder analysis is mostly derived from Stacey and Lund (2016), Acheampong (2019), and Mohammed (2023) and is supplemented by general information on power dynamics and objectives from Davis (2006) and critical thinking. The analysis will be further supplemented and equipped with references with data from the interviews during the fieldwork phase of the project.

Stakeholder table

Table 10.1 Stakeholder analysis overview¹

STAKEHOLDERS	SECTOR & STATUS	INTERESTS IN PROJECT	PROBLEM PERCEPTION	OVERARCHING GOALS	ATTITUDE
RESIDENTS OF OLD FADAMA	See subcategories	See subcategories	See subcategories	Secure and protect livelihood and life opportunities	Proponent
MEN	Private (informal)	Desire stable tenure, stable employment, civil rights and access to city resources ;	They are not taken seriously by formal institutions and do not enjoy the same human and civil rights as other groups in the city. Old Fadama is an unsafe and unstable environment to work towards long-term life goals.	^	^
WOMEN	Private (informal)	Desire stable tenure, civil rights, access to city resources and protection of their livelihoods;	Their needs are not accurately perceived by powerful institutions, and they are not heard. They are underrepresented in economic and formal spheres and do not enjoy proper human and civil rights. Old Fadama is an unsafe and unstable environment to work towards long-term life goals.	^	^
CHILDREN	Private (informal)	Desire a higher quality of living and better urban environment. Need better access to city resources, and safe transport and public space;	Life opportunities are limited. Safe public space is limited.	^	^
LOCAL BUSINESSES IN REPAIR/RECYCLING INDUSTRY	Private (informal)	Want to continue their stream of income based on waste found in Old Fadama;	Recognition and redevelopment of Old Fadama would result in decreased freeflow of waste and decrease business	Secure livelihood and increase income and business. Expand business to formal sector;	Opponent/fence sitter
CITIZENS OF ACCRA	Private (formal)	See Old Fadama as an “eyesore” and prefer removal of the settlement. They do profit from Old Fadama’s contribution to the local economy;	Old Fadama is an eyesore and should be redeveloped. It is also polluting the environment and the larger city. Recognition of Old Fadama would mean even more competition over city resources.	Maintain (and improve) standard of living;	Fence sitter
CITIZENS OF GHANA	Private (formal)	Want opportunity in life in Ghana;	Lack of legal protection and upholding human and civil rights for all creates risk of ending up cast-out of society for all.	Maintain standard of living, access to city resources, and equal access to life opportunity;	Proponent
PROSPECTIVE DEVELOPERS	Private (formal)	Want to redevelop Old Fadama/start industry or businesses in Old Fadama;	Area of Old Fadama is allocated as industrial use, so settlers are here illegally. Redevelopment of the area would create business opportunities and income.	Create business and income;	Opponent/fence sitter
NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND LUPSA (LAND USE AND PLANNING AUTHORITY)	Public (formal)	Wants reallocation and redevelopment of Old Fadama as industrial area and environmental reclamation area;	Area of Old Fadama is allocated as industrial use, so settlers are here illegally. An informal settlement this large is an eyesore and harms Ghana’s international status as a ‘developed nation’.	Generating income and capital through redevelopment of Old Fadama; upholding international status;	Opponent
DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY AND RSPC (REGIONAL SPATIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE)	Public (formal)	Wants reallocation and redevelopment of Old Fadama as industrial area and environmental reclamation area. Wants to limit demand for city resources, expenses, and social uprising or unrest;	Area of Old Fadama is allocated as industrial use, so settlers are here illegally. Redevelopment of the area would create more housing (in the formal realm) and industry to add to the formal local economy. Redevelopment would also create opportunity for environmental reclamation. District municipality has formal power, but no local authority.	Generating income and capital and city resources for the formal sector through redevelopment of Old Fadama; Removal of the informal settlement and eviction of its residents;	Opponent
ACCRA METROPOLITAN ASSEMBLY AND DPU (DEVELOPMENT PLANNING UNIT)	Public (formal)	Wants reallocation and redevelopment of Old Fadama as industrial area and environmental reclamation area. Wants to limit demand for city resources, expenses, and social uprising or unrest;	Area of Old Fadama is allocated as industrial use, so settlers are here illegally. Redevelopment of the area would create more housing (in the formal realm) and industry to add to the formal local economy. Redevelopment would also create opportunity for environmental reclamation. AMA has formal power, but no local authority.	Generating income, capital, and city resources for the formal sector through redevelopment of Old Fadama. Removal of informal settlement and eviction of its residents, whilst minimizing social conflict and unrest.	Opponent
UNITED NATIONS	Public (formal)	Wants to protect livelihoods and rights of residents of Old Fadama;	Informal settlements such as Old Fadama form big problems of social and spatial injustice which is not in line with the Human Rights Declaration or the SDG’s.	Achieve SDG’s; Safeguard human rights; Safeguard democracy;	Proponent
OFADA	Civil (informal)	Wants improved living conditions in Old Fadama, (legal) protection of livelihoods, and access to city resources; wants a seat at the (formal) table)	Livelihoods in Old Fadama are under threat from formal institutions. Needs and wishes are not accurately perceived nor listened to; Formal governance systems cancel out and limit their power to act while OFADA is the one with local authority.	Wants to increase (access to) life opportunities for residents of Old Fadama;	Proponent
GHANA FEDERATION OF URBAN POOR (GHAFUP)	Civil (informal)	Wants improved standard-of-living and protected livelihoods for the people of Old Fadama;	Dwellers of Old Fadama do not enjoy legal status or legal protection and do not get access to city resources, unfairly limiting their life opportunities.	Desires civil rights and improved standard-of-living for slum-dwellers in Ghana;	Proponent
PEOPLE’S DIALOGUE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (PD)	Civil (formal)	Wants settlement and livelihoods of Old Fadama to be protected and improved by gaining access to city resources and stable tenure types;	Old Fadama should be connected to city resources and resource networks for equal/equitable urban development.	Strives for equitable urban development in Ghana;	Proponent
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL	Civil (formal)	Wants to protect livelihoods and rights of residents of Old Fadama; Wants to formally recognize Old Fadama and connect it to Accra;	Segregation and lack of legal recognition of Old Fadama is against human rights declaration. Residents of Old Fadama live below minimum standard-of-living.	Decrease poverty; protect human rights;	Fence sitter (wants similar things, but often adopts very western/colonial approach)
ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANISATIONS	Civil (formal)	Want to remove informal settlement of Old Fadama to clean up the environment;	The settlement of Old Fadama is a large polluter and, therefore, highly taxing on the environment and local ecosystem	Improve environment and ecosystem, mitigate climate change effects, decrease climate disaster risk for larger city/district;	Fence sitter/opponent

appendix 2.

Fieldwork poster

The week of fieldwork in Accra was planned full of activities, site visits, and interviews, yet the approach to the fieldwork was intentionally left very open. I expected to find out many of the real challenges of Old Fadama and our understanding of informal urban development not from literature, but from the fieldwork. Therefore, instead of meticulously planning out all the details of the fieldwork, and what data I was after, I let the fieldwork itself guide this process.

After nine days of exploring Accra, I came home with hours and hours of interview recordings and over 700 photos. Many people had shared their story with me, and the experiences of the people in Old Fadama and the local knowledge of the interviewees in Accra had indeed greatly inspired me, and shaped the project into directions I was not necessarily expecting. However valuable, the large quantity of data was simultaneously confusing me; different stakeholders had told me different truths, some of them directly opposing each other. Moreover, besides learning about Old Fadama, Accra, urban informality, and planning, I was also learning about myself, realising through reflection and conversation with others that I too was more biased than I thought and hoped. To process all these learnings and unlearnings, I decided to take a step back and create a poster that reflected my journey through Accra, both literally, meaning my travels and activities in Accra, as well as figuratively, meaning my main realisations and reflections about my project and my own actions and knowledge.

The final poster can be seen in Figure 10.2. The different parts of the poster are elaborated on below.

Fieldtrip overview

To kickstart my more structured processing of the fieldwork experience, I created an overview of my first impressions, and what I found out to be the main challenges of Accra and Old Fadama. They can be seen in the top righthand corner of the poster (box 1). Different pictures are used to illustrate (1) housing, (2) pollution, (3) flooding, (4) density/overcrowding, and (5) lack of green spaces. One of my main learnings, connected to this overview, is that the what we call the formal and the informal domain, both in the built environment, and in the economy, are incredibly intertwined in Accra. Both domains are illustrated in the picture sketches in box 2. The interwovenness of formality and informality made distinguishing between the two, which I was attempting to do with my initial research objective of formalising urban informality.

Classifying formal and informal development

As I quickly learned how intertwined formality and informality are in Accra, I looked for other ways to try and distinguish between the two. In the top lefthand corner of the poster (box 3), my 'solution', to classify neighbourhoods into either the formal or informal category based on their drainage systems can be seen. I walked around the city for about one day, documenting 5 different drainage types, from an underground engineered system to complete absence to any manmade drainage, before realising that this method was not just quite senseless, but also classist. My reflections on this method are also visible on the poster. While I did not end up using this classification to any extent, I do think showing my own learnings, unlearnings, and missteps contributes to the overall learnings and progress shown in this research.

The interviews

The bottom half of the poster is dedicated to the interviews I conducted whilst in Accra. Again, two different groups of interviewees, the experts by profession and the experts by experience, are represented. The statements of the experts by profession are depicted through simple sketches and some key quotes, organised according to sector and function. The interviews with the experts by experience are more thoroughly represented on the poster, as they ended up shaping the project more significantly. The different members of the Old Fadama community are introduced with an alias describing their main characteristics, and their key quotes are written on the poster, supported by photos. Many of these photo's and quotes return in the research report.

The fieldwork poster has been an essential step in processing the learnings from the fieldwork, both the ones concerning planning theory and practice, as well as the learnings concerning personal reflection and reflexivity. Consciously stepping back to reflect on an impactful and intense learning period during the fieldwork helped finalising the narrative and main objectives of the research. It shaped my changed views on urban informality, as well as my views on the role of the planner in stories like Old Fadama's.

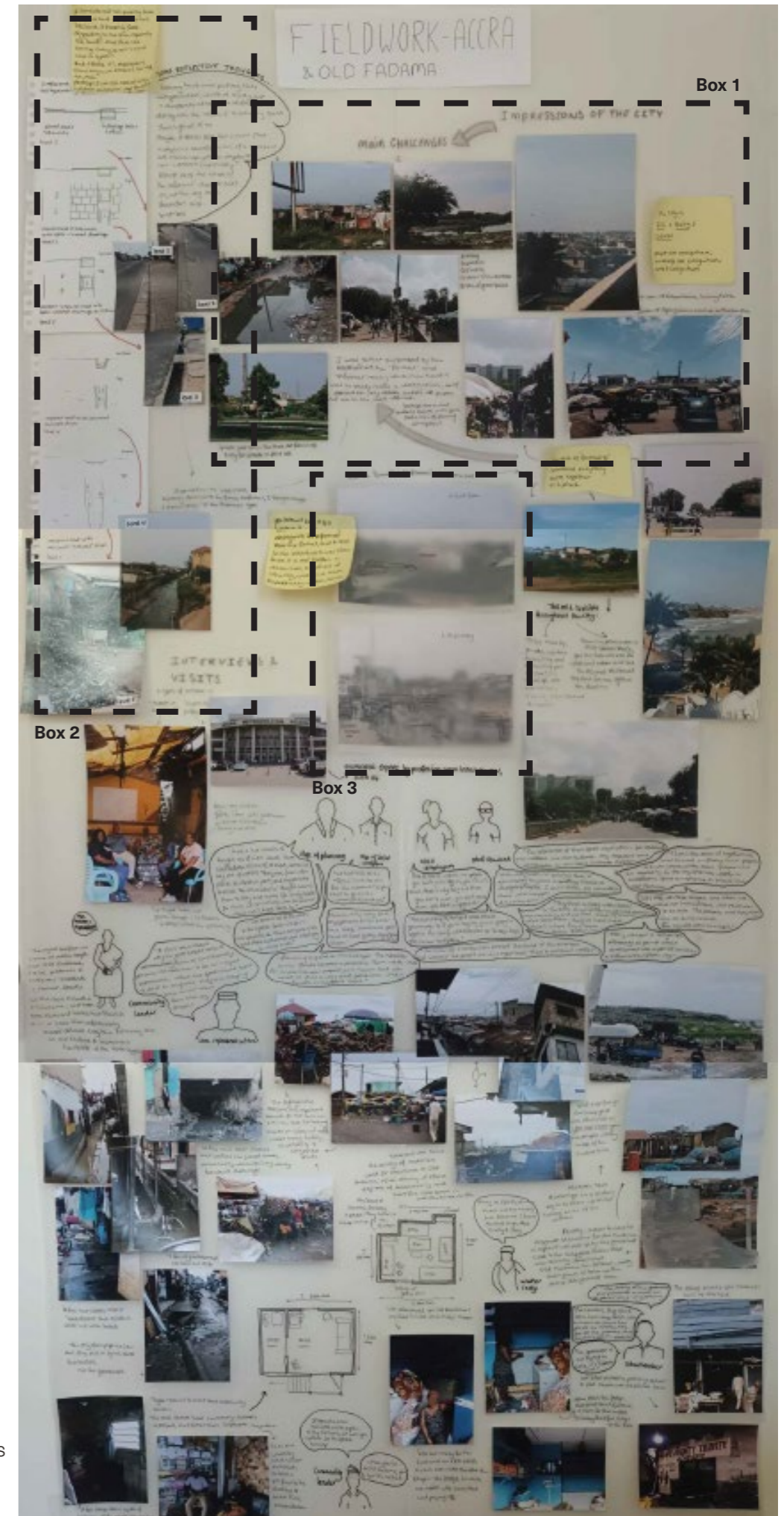


Figure 10.2 Poster of fieldwork data and pictures made to process the stories of Old Fadama

appendix 3.

Collages

The collages used in the research report serve a purpose of countermapping, aiming to visually and sometimes spatially express the invisible reality of the dynamics of exclusion that exists in our built environment and society. They are an invitation into an alternative perspective to the pre-existing Western narratives that are normally communicated through policy, planning, and academia. In this appendix, the three collages in the research report are addressed and further explained.

Coloniality pt. 1

The first collage in the research report can be seen in Figure 10.3, originally seen as Figure 4.1 in the research report, and is titled 'coloniality pt. 1'. It is originally depicted at the end of chapter 4, where the relationship between coloniality, neoliberalism, and urban planning is exposed. The first collage shows all the aspects, limitations, and constrictions of European imperialism of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century that we are all familiar with through the history books. The collage focuses specifically on Ghana and Accra, using pictures of British colonial maps of Accra, British royals and government officials shaking hands in 'the colony', and the Osu castle with the infamous 'gate of no return', located on the coast of Accra.

Coloniality pt. 2

The collage coloniality pt. 1 forms a diptych with the second collage, aptly titled 'coloniality pt. 2', depicted in Figure 10.4, originally seen as Figure 4.2 in the research report. This collage especially has an important role of countermapping, as it aims to visualise the remaining colonial power imbalances, as well as physical structures of coloniality in today's day and age. They are remains that are invisible for, or simply denied by, too many people. When looking at the two collages together, you can see that the structure of the collage, just like the structure of the built environment and society before and after 'decolonisation' is unfortunately much the same.



Figure 10.3 Coloniality collage pt 1 (Collage made by Author with use of own images and secondary images)

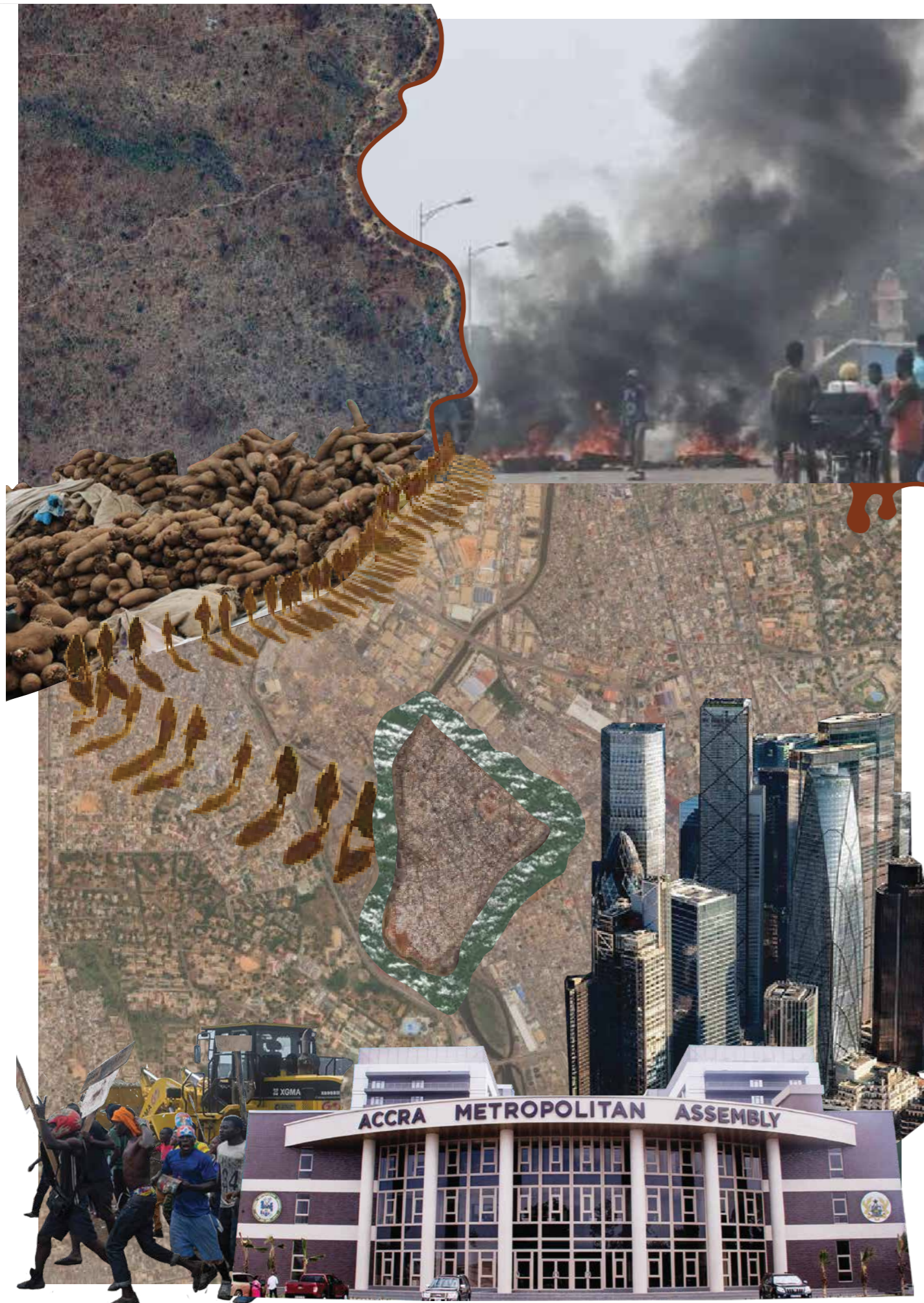


Figure 10.4 Coloniality collage pt 2 (Collage made by Author with use of own images and secondary images)

References

The references used for collage 'Coloniality pt 1' are:

1920 Johnson Official Guiggsberg Survey Map of Accra, Ghana (Gold Coast). (1920). Geographicus. <https://www.geographicus.com/P/AntiqueMap/accra-johnson-1920>

iStock. (2019, November 11). UK pound falling money crisis recession stock photo. <https://www.istockphoto.com/search/2/image-film?phrase=pound+note+stack>

HACSA Foundation. (2021). The Christiansborg Castle, Osu. Google Arts and Culture. <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/christiansborg-castle-exterior-hacsa-foundation/HAED6AhWTVmBOQ?hl=en>

Martin, W. (2019). One man's story of life in a Ghanaian slum. The GroundTruth Project. Retrieved June 5, 2025, from <https://thegroundtruthproject.org/agboglobshie-riot-photos/>

Photo by Author

Sarpong, G. (2023, November 27). West Africa's fisheries. Pulitzer Centre. <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/dark-seas-deception-unmasking-eu-fisheries-west-africas-troubled-waters>

Sir Alan Cuthbert Maxwell Burns. (n.d.). British Empire. <https://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/goldcoast/alanmaxwellburns.htm>

Shutterstock. (2019, May 24). Bright colourful sky, pale and pastel background texture. <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/bright-colourful-sky-pale-pastel-background-1406348795>

The references used for collage 'Coloniality pt 2' are:

Alphabet. (n.d.). Google Earth. Google Earth. Retrieved February 27, 2025, from <https://earth.google.com/web/>

AMA. (2025). AMA Headquarters Accra. <https://ama.gov.gh/contactus.php>

Braimah, F. A. (2025, August 28). Who Benefits from Ghana's Unending Conflicts? Modern Ghana. <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1427648/who-benefits-from-ghanas-unending-conflicts.html>

Freepik. (2021). Human migration. The Quantum Record. <https://thequantumrecord.com/science-news/ancient-dna-is-teaching-about-migration-contact-and-being-human/>

Freepik. (2025). Shimmering River Water Surface View From Above. <https://www.freepik.com/premium-video/shimmering-river-water-surface-view-from-complete-frame->

fill_1159517

Katsalidis, A. F. & DBOX. (2023). City of London. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-66294535>

Martin, W. (2019). One man's story of life in a Ghanaian slum. The GroundTruth Project. Retrieved June 5, 2025, from <https://thegroundtruthproject.org/agboglobshie-riot-photos/>

Photo by Author

Looking for radicality

The third collage of the research report, titled 'looking for radicality' (see Figure 10.5, originally seen as Figure 5.2 in the research report) was developed almost spontaneously. Whereas the first two collages were created very intentionally, with a clear objective and place in the research report in mind, the idea for 'looking for radicality' appeared quite naturally through my search for a fitting image for my frustration with the shallowness of current mainstream alternative planning epistemologies. The collage represents the journey of trying to break out of the Western frameworks of coloniality and neoliberalism that shape planning and the built environment itself. The vocal point of the collage is the spiral of violence, illustrating how we often default to fighting violence with violence, or in this research's case, injustice with more injustice. Be it knowingly or unknowingly, we just perpetuate the cycle we're in.

Alongside the spiral, however, are images depicting different stages and actions of resistance, such as riots and protests, activism, and finally, at the very centre, peace. This is all depicted against a background of a Kente, a traditional Ghanaian cloth used to communicate stories and heritage, in a way countermapping how the collages also aim to.

References

The references used for collage 'Looking for radicality' are:

Black Sheep Shoppe. (2014). Martin Luther King quote. The Black Sheep Shoppe. https://theblacksheepshoppe.blogspot.com/p/my-letterboard.html#google_vignette

Javirroyo. (n.d.). Violence brings violence. Pinterest. <https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/726768458660597673/>

Kente cloth. (n.d.). Pinterest. <https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/726768458660597992/>

Photo by Author

Smuggler, G. (2017, September 7). Protesters with No human is illegal sign. Renee Roederer. <https://reeneeroederer.com/2017/09/07/that-jobs-argument-is-weird-misinformed-and-nasty/>

Rawpixel. (2023). Poppy flower petal plant red. <https://www.rawpixel.com/image/12516993/poppy-flower-petal-plant-red-generated-image-rawpixel>



Figure 10.5 Looking for radicality collage
(Collage made by Author with use of own photos and secondary images)

Radical imaginations progress log

The start of the imagination process felt tough. To pick up imagination, whilst still in the middle of the writing (and learning) process seemed to early, however, it is important to allow ample time for testing, reflection, and iteration in any process, especially an imagination process.

For me, the actual process started by exploring what radical imagination was, how it could be used, and how it could specifically serve this thesis. In my research, I made the mindmap depicted in Figure 11.1. It contains knowledge about radical imagination from academic literature, but also from weblogs, and simply my own intuition. The mindmap proved to be very useful for multiple reasons. (1) To kickstart the imagination process when I was still hesitant, (2) to learn more about what exactly radical imagination is, and why we apply it in design, and (3) to reflect on what exact form of imaginations and visualisations would serve the thesis best. To continue exploring this third aspect, I created the collage depicted in Figure 11.2. The mindmap shows who I wanted this research, and more specifically the radical imagination part of the research, to serve. Many different groups and people are represented on the mindmap, such as the people of Old Fadama, but also a young me, resembling myself as a whole person, in private and professional life alike, and my fellow (student) planners from the TU Delft Masters programme. The main realisation I took away from this exercise, was that while I wanted the research to first and foremost serve the people of Old Fadama. To do so it should address planners like me and colleagues.



Figure 11.1 Radical imagination mindmap (Made by Author)

Imagining why? & for whom?



Figure 11.2 Imagining why and for whom? collage (Made by Author, Photos by Author)

To meaningfully address fellow planners, especially the ones that maybe don't already agree with the new urbanism this thesis is attempting to promote, I decided the imaginaries should be anchored in 'reality'. Therefore, I decided to create imaginaries that show scenes in Old Fadama and aspects of Old Fadama that are clear expressions of the community-led spatial practices that are already happening. These practices are often seen as bad, or less-than, however, this is not how I saw them. Through the sketch in Figure 11.3 I started testing how I could communicate the values that I saw in Old Fadama already, without our intervention. This ultimately led to selecting the pictures seen in Figures 11.4 to 11.13 and the sketches overtop of them that aim to show exactly what I see.

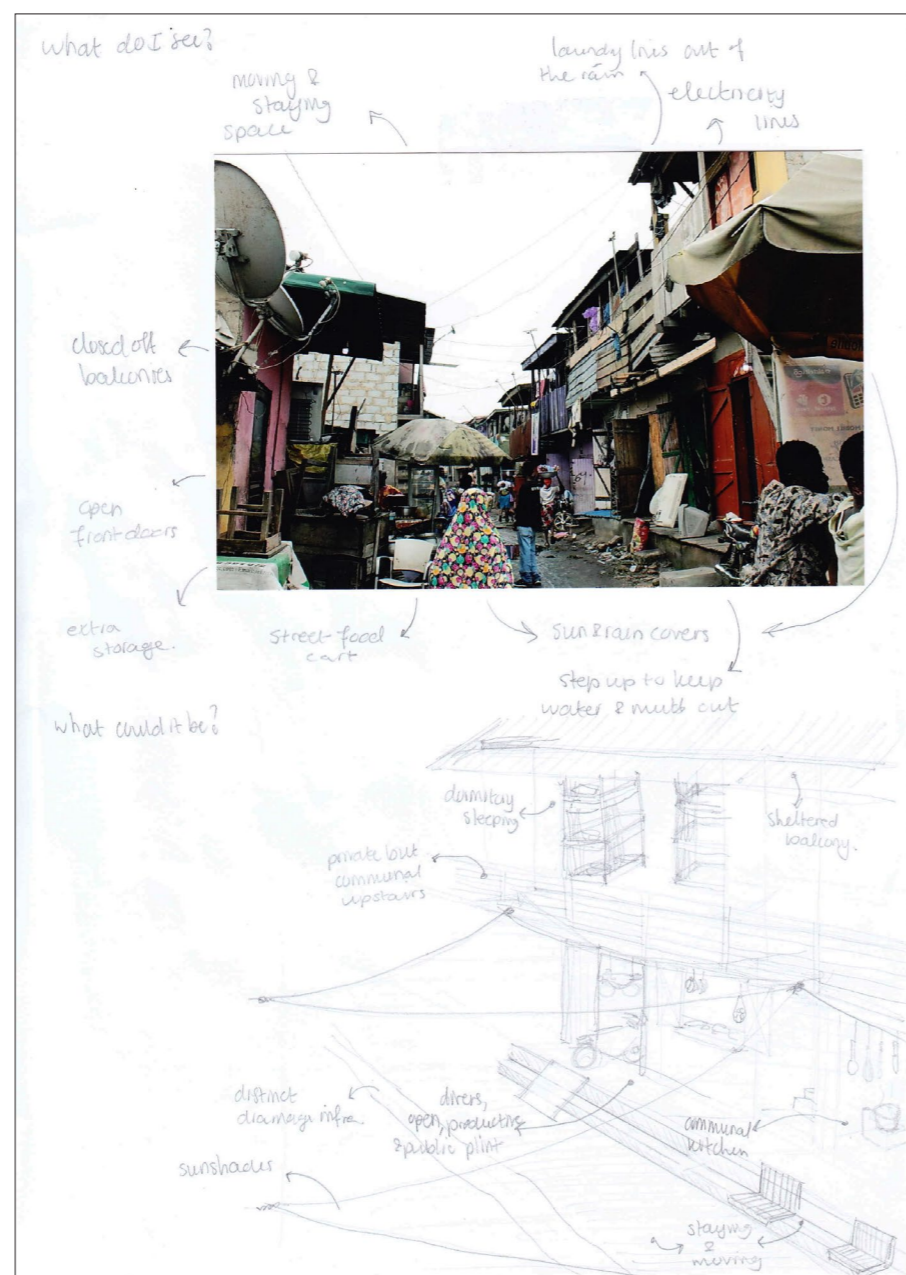


Figure 11.3 Sketch test for value imaginaries (Made by Author, Photo by Author)

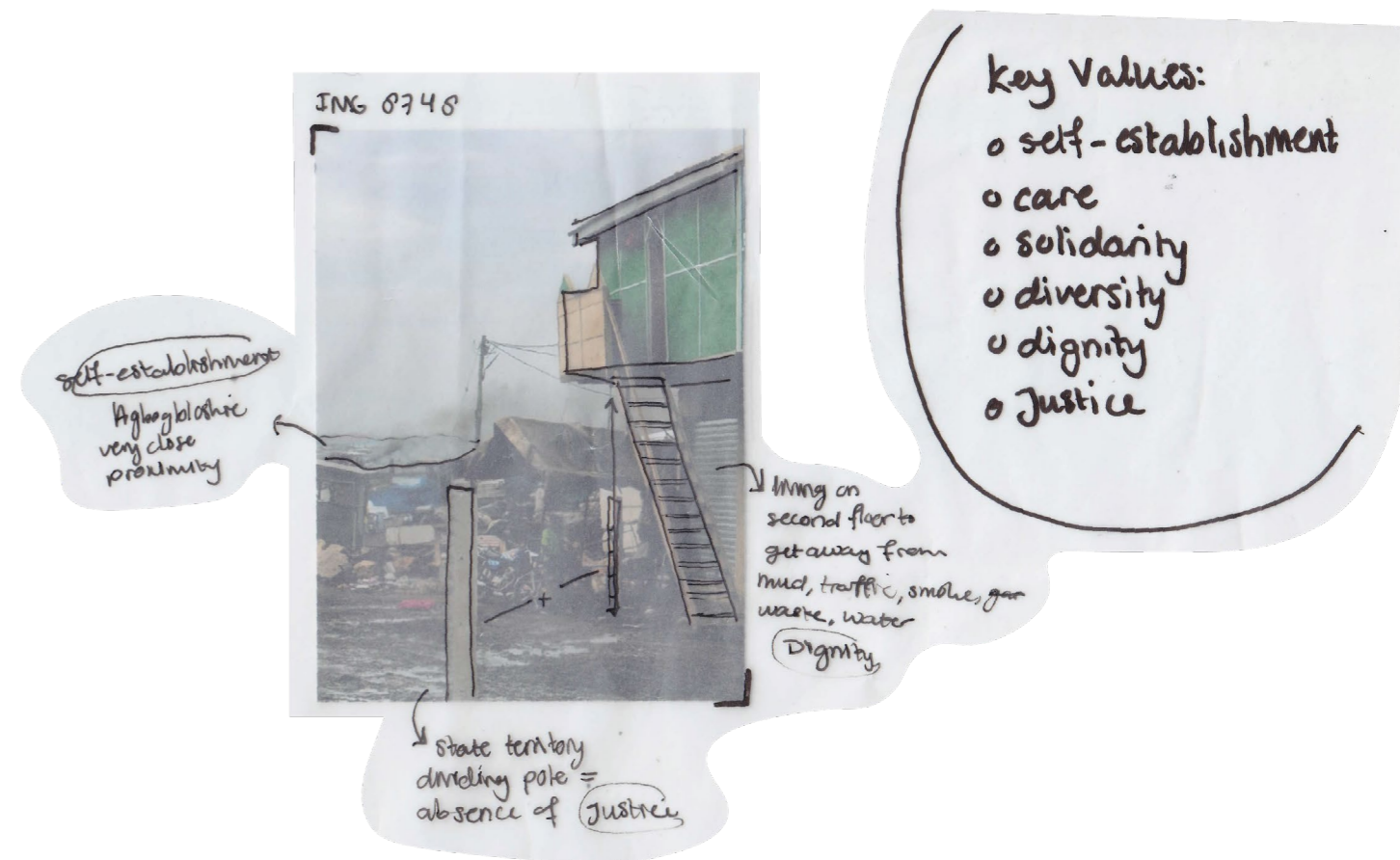
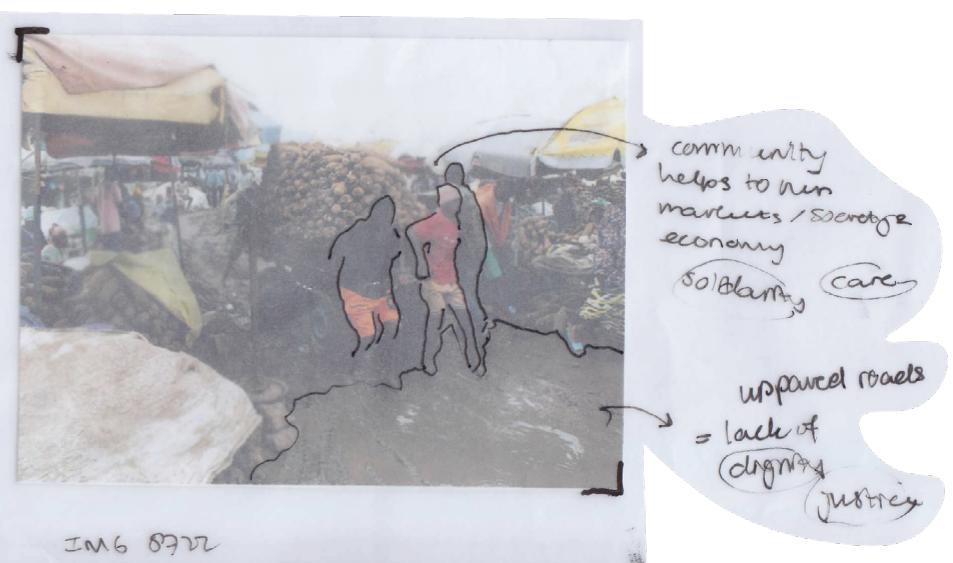
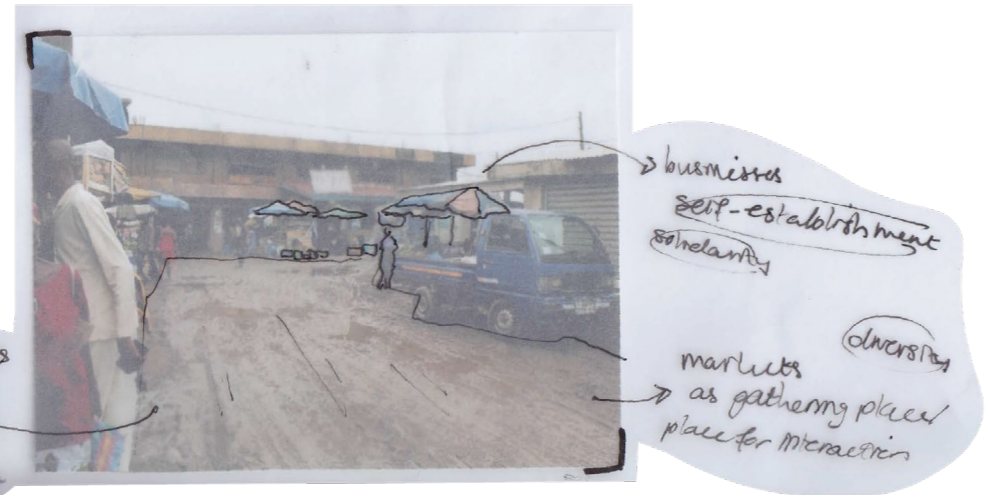


Figure 11.4-13 Picture selection for expression of values in Old Fadama (Made by Author, Photos by Author)



public/private gradient in planning and design



people sleep on top of the bridge due to lack of space
dissolving channel with community
solidarity
lack of dignity

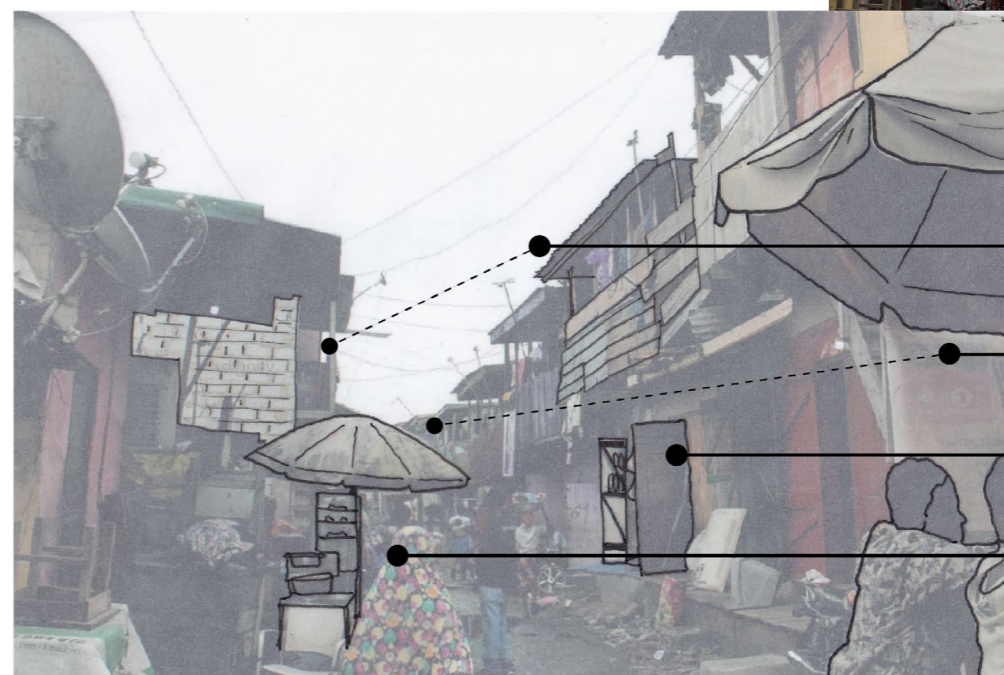


The sketches were eventually refined and used in the report to spatialise the values of Old Fadama. All the sketches can be seen in Figures 6.4 to 6.12 of the research report. One of the sketches is shown as an example in Figure 11.14. This sketch is based on the same picture as the initial trial sketch in Figure 11.3 and shows a clear transformation from first sketch to final drawing.

As a final step of the imaginaries, the built environment of Old Fadama is reimagined in a scenario where Old Fadama gets the justice and resources they deserve. Without changing the values that shape Old Fadama and that guide spatial practices, what could the place look like through a planner's lens?

An example of these imaginaries is shown in Figure 11.15. All the imaginaries are shown in Figures 6.13 to 6.16 in the main research report.

Figure 11.14 Imagining the streets of Old Fadama (Photo by Author)



Mix of materials between newer and recently upgraded dwellings
dignity

(Temporary) shelter from sun and rain over public space and food businesses forms an important social meeting space
dignity, diversity

Storefronts on the streets create a busy, but diverse streetscape
diversity, self-establishment

Food businesses on the street create a busy, but diverse streetscape, as well as important meeting points
diversity, self-establishment

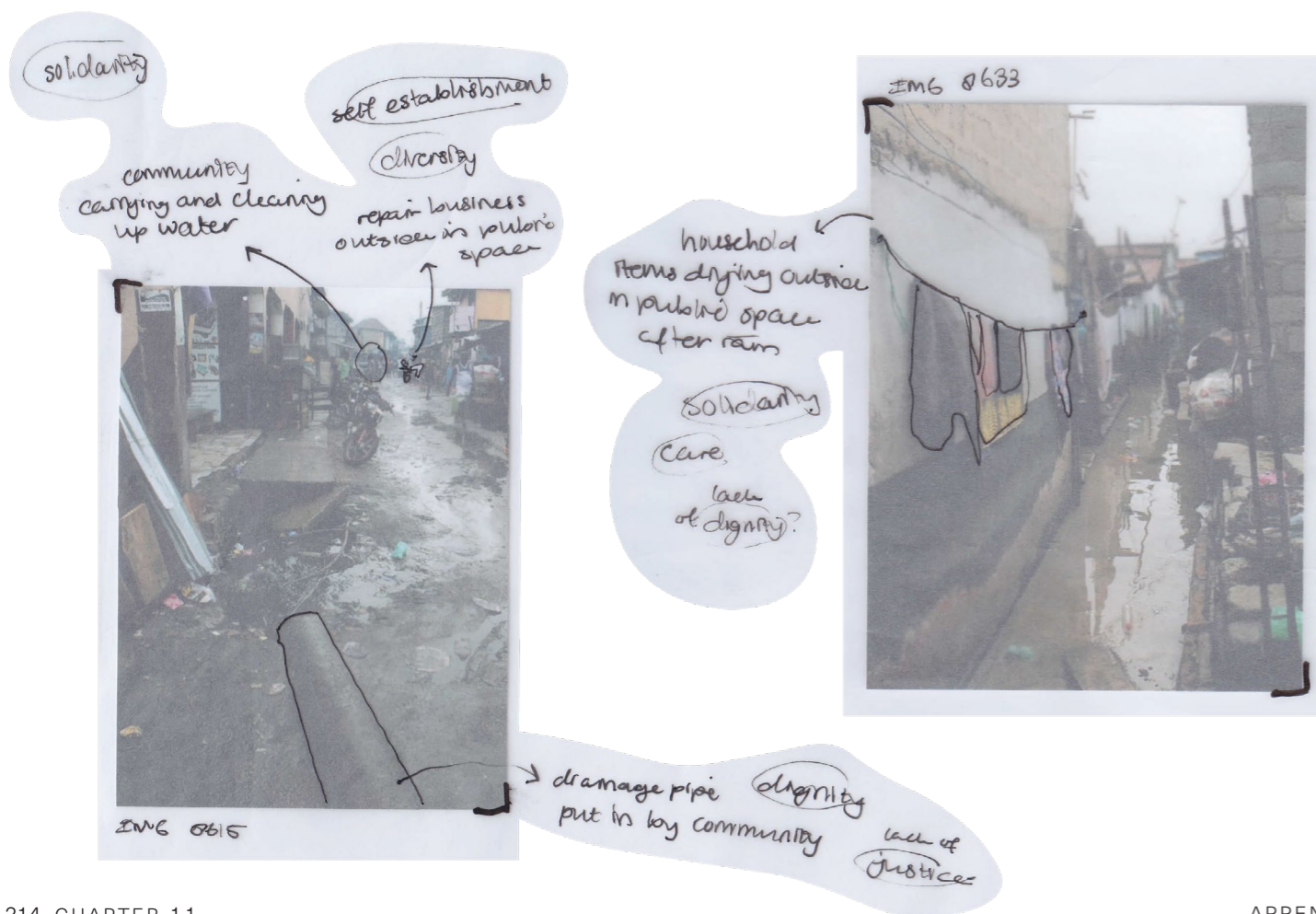
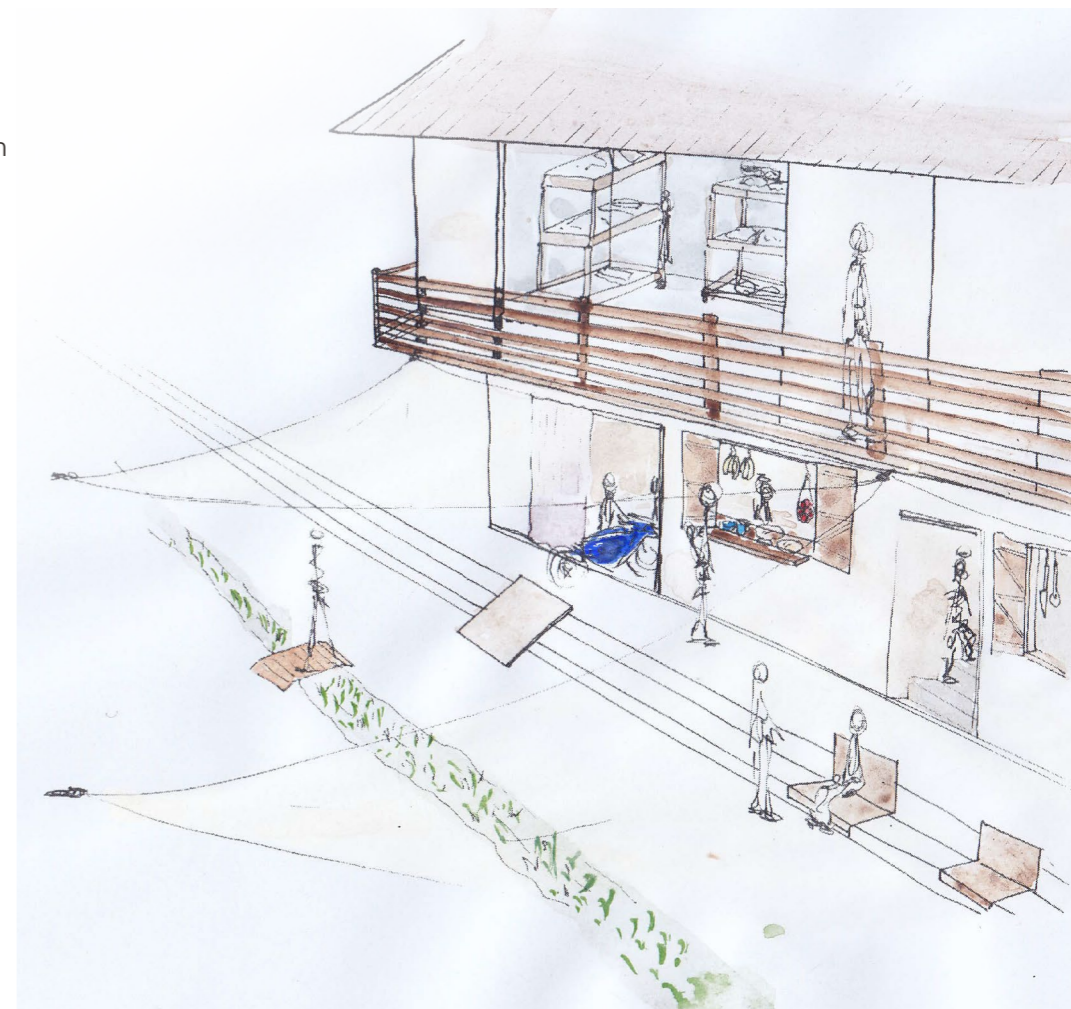


Figure 11.15 Reimagining communal living and privacy in Old Fadama (Made by Author)



THANK YOU

colophon.

Unlearning the Coloniality of Planning:
Reimagining planning through a decolonial
perspective on urban informality in Old Fadama

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Department of Urbanism
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