

REFLECTION DIARY

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

Colophon

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Welcome

Welcome to this Reflection Diary, an annexe to the master's thesis 'Unlearning the Coloniality of Planning: Reimagining planning through a decolonial perspective on urban informality in Old Fadama'. Where the final report of the master thesis contains the main body of the research, including reflections on the impacts and results of both the research and me, the researcher, this body of work is focused solely on reflections. It is a place where I will be completely open and honest, and display all the reflections I have written during the process of this master's thesis. No matter how big or small, quickly scribbled down or carefully thought out, the reflections have a place in research. I believe they are important, more important at least than Western standards in academia, especially in hard sciences and engineering, make them out to be. This diary, therefore, will display my experience, my thoughts, my doubts, and everything else during this research process unedited. I hope it will show how personal experiences, values, and feelings do indeed very much affect research. I hope it opens up the discussion on how we do research, and which conversations and narratives we disclose openly and which we hide away behind closed doors.

The reflections in this diary are varied. Some are larger, carefully typed, and thoroughly thought-through texts, while others are simple thoughts scribbled down on a post-it note. By added them all in this diary, dating them, and linking them to whichever part of the research or research process I was

working on in the moment of writing, I hope to create a more transparent research process that encourages openness, a holistic research approach that includes both thinking and feeling, and a sense of accountability as to what our work brings about in the world we live in.

phase 1

Formulating the research proposal

26/2/2025

Reading: Neglected? Strengthening the morphological study of informal settlements (McCartney and Krishnamurthy, 2018)

Informal settlements are seen as a problem; the inhabitants are there illegal on often 'stolen land' from the government and are therefore not welcome and, if they are not actively being evicted, mostly ignored by policy makers. However, a larger part of the problem is that informal settlements are often not safe and endanger also other, formal, areas of the city for natural disaster (since the floodplain is already taken and unavailable for water retention or something similar), pollution, and health risks. You could argue ignoring these settlements is even worse than spending money and time to improve them, as it will indirectly improve the state of the city as a whole. Removing these informal settlements however, causes other problems of distrust in government institutions, displacement, and resulting even more health and poverty issues. These people aren't going anywhere. Isn't it better to simply accommodate informal settlements as good as possible and make them a vital key vernacular of the modern city in the global south? Are informal settlements inevitable and if so, how can we make them successful?

1/3/2025

Reading: Spatial Planning in Ghana – Historical Origins and Evolution of Spatial Planning and the Planning System in Ghana (Acheampong, 2018)

Planning practices in Ghana and colonial Gold Coast have clearly been studied. Informal settlements and their development plans and strategies have also been studied. Have they been studied together tho? Have we before attempted to place development strategies for informal development within the legal framework instead of seeing it outside of the legal realm? Is this something I can vouch for? Explain how informal settlements are an inevitable result of repressed people in colonial planning which is inherited by younger generations and how in the light of human rights and the right to the city we should care for everyone equally, therefore informal settlements should be seen as fully legal and be the first priority in spatial planning schemes.

1/4/2025

Thoughts of reflection from the preliminary thesis plan

Reflection on the Planning Complex Cities studio:

My intended research project focuses on large societal themes such as decolonisation, spatial justice and socio-spatial (in) equality. Such themes are prominent in the Planning Complex Cities (PCC) studio, which focuses on projects with 'substantial societal impact'. I am interested in analysing informal urban development in fast-growing cities and societies and seeing which lessons on cultural sensitivity, needs and capabilities we can learn from these developments that exist largely outside Western-centrist formal planning schemes. By dissecting the planning process and uncovering the paternalistic, colonial, and Western-centrist patterns in our thinking and practice, I wish to find leverage points to move towards a more just and decolonised urban planning practice. I believe this can also have a significant impact on spatial outcomes in the built environment. This interplay of both physical outcomes in design and strategy, as well as the practice and process of urban planning itself, aligns with the character of the PCC studio. By addressing both the physical as well as procedural dimensions of urban planning, I hope to create institutional change towards a more just urban environment and to amplify the voices of neglected communities themselves, as there is great value in their experience and knowledge.

Ethical considerations:

As a highly educated, relatively rich and white person who grew up in a comfortable socio-economic position, it is easy to fall back into paternalistic and patriarchal patterns, exoticism and Western-centrist thinking. Critical self-reflection needs to be prominent in every stage of the project, and there should be a focus on Indigenous writers and firsthand experience in the literature review and theoretical framework (Kapoor, 2004; Attia and Edge, 2017). The necessary fieldwork in this project adds even more importance to critical review and upholding of ethical considerations as the communities in Old Fadama are in many ways very vulnerable and, rightfully so, might be distrusting of governmental or academic institutions. Any participatory and collaborative processes should happen ethically. Not only during the fieldwork, but also after, it is important to ensure the value for the community in Old Fadama. The project should not become merely extractivist, only enhancing dysfunctional power dynamics between informal communities and formal institutions (Kapoor, 2004).

phase 2

From research proposal to theoretical framework

3/4/2025

After a talk with Agustina, submission of P1 proposal, and a walk through Indigenous exposition in Oostserre

Although there is no spatial design in the project but scenarios in the final stage, I do want to very consciously design the narrative in the project, redesign our design and policy-making processes and rewire our way of thinking as academic professionals. Visualisation through art and picture is universal language to me and therefore ultimately suited for a narrative that challenges our rigid, western-oriented thinking, which is mostly shaped through text. I am inspired by drawing and tapestry art, like the example in the current Oostserre exposition. I am inspired by the example Irene showed me in our first meeting, I am still excited about my own methodology in the Gambia project* with the photography gallery. I want to strive for a provocative, telling, significant, compelling, visual project of complex written and imaginative (non-existent) boundaries and constructions in our society to make people see the experience of others, to make people see and experience how their way of knowing, doing, thinking, feeling, is limited.

*Referring to a previous (unpublished) research project on spatial inequality in The Gambia

17/4/2025

Reflective notes during Radical Imaginations workshop organised by Irene Luque Martin

~~that the world as designed~~
~~sometimes just bring something to the table~~
~~Anders Brögger's knowledge~~ → new framework
~~needed~~

~~if you stop at just the design's intention~~
~~you have a different~~ → problematic
~~you attend the present~~

~~Radical plural democracy~~
~~tactical conservatism~~

~~who is the audience of your drawings?~~
~~draw vs. map.~~

~~What is a Tyranny?~~

Struggle to not be too hierarchical always things open. You always have an hypothesis, you need to be honest with that, acknowledge your hypothesis & explore the extremes & bias & etc. of it.

~~Other funding incentives~~
~~Researcher's job~~

~~look at another or these solutions~~
~~reflect this on your own work~~
~~what you are the only one to make decisions with~~

85

~~collaboration should be about~~
~~collaboration idea of what a city should be~~
~~making way of work-stake in territory~~

maybe I'm not talking about the informed settlement but more the Right to the City.

This Country & this city would not & should not have existed.

~~contemporary from~~ → ~~your own knowledge~~

Shifting power dynamics

↳ putting the power and "action" of your academic towards these problems, towards deconstructing & declassifying the thing you are doing as a radical act.

~~Augustine: show development stages & expansion of "regional city"~~
~~show~~

~~that would this development & expansion~~
~~have looked like other work.~~

87

not what is, but what would have been

~~Map in the past~~
~~difficulty~~

↳ ~~recreate the~~
~~vision of designer.~~

question to answer:
who built this city (Asia)
how would larger (nat.)
structures have been

~~color & design~~
growth vs. ~~urban~~ ~~habitat~~
~~typology & resources~~

Brygg & Sharp

↳ if we don't do it, no one will or
someone else will.

There will be a generation that attempts
this and will fail, so that the next
generation will do it better

~~this generation?~~

~~focus on learning rather than critique~~

~~make & validate the system at the~~
~~same time~~

~~centralized~~
~~government system~~

~~system plan of development~~

the goal is not a productive
city

the goal is health, community,
safety, freedom to practice
culture

~~design patterns~~

~~PMMA/Asia.~~

~~urban realm~~
~~as product of map~~
~~city is to come~~
~~comprehend~~
~~well~~

~~how John Watson~~
~~has a job~~

~~where the camps exist~~
~~you want for me?~~

~~spatial resistance~~

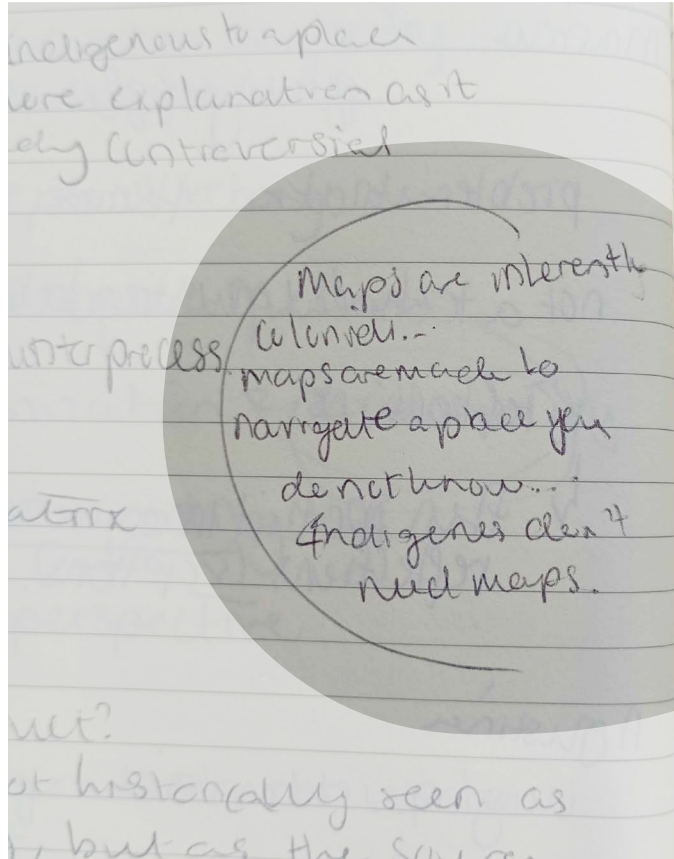
in a way the city is occupied territory
the shinn is the ~~perceived~~ people.

~~you don't need to found the world,~~
~~you need to plant seeds~~

22/5/2025

2/6/2025

Listening to fellow students' P4 presentations.



Positionality statement as in P2 report

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

who am I..?

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

Who am I..?

Who am I..?

Who am I..?

Who am I..?

Who am I..?

Who am I..?

Who am I..?

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 should be very conscious of their actions, their thoughts and opinions, and the effect those 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 always had access to quality schooling, healthy food, safe outdoor space, sports, and even cultural activities. I am also highly educated, finishing my Master's at the Delft University of Technology as this is written. 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 you simply cannot be fully objective, or neutral, or separated, because you are human, you welcome the integration of empathy into your work, transforming it towards a more ethical way of doing.

This thesis will be a testament to this critically reflexive approach to research. It will be a direct application of the very 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 researcher steer clear of topics around (de)coloniality and marginalised communities out of fear to do something unethical or harmful. However, if no one 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

9/6/2025

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 be committed to unlearning and transforming the unjust ways of Western dominance and Western-centrism in research and urban planning. And most of all, 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 do so as well.

Reflection from P2 report

Reflection on positioning thesis in Urbanism and AUBS

Constructing the informal is a thesis that critically addresses the complexities of urban planning. It states that there is significant power embedded in urban planning that can intentionally or unintentionally be used to create justice or injustice. The project also addresses the desperate need for decoloniality and critical reflexivity in urban planning. Large societal themes, such as spatial and social injustice and decoloniality, are central in the graduation studio Planning Complex Cities. The statement that our current urban planning practice is too Western-centric and not adequately equipped for all cultures and places where urban planning is applied, and the resulting call for decoloniality and critical reflexivity in urban planning, relates strongly to the entire Urbanism master track and the urban planning discipline beyond academia. The intended result of the project is, amongst other things, an initiated transformation of the urban planning practice towards decoloniality.

Reflection on positioning thesis in other areas of society

The project also relates to other areas of society, as decoloniality has a place in any discipline. In the mission to transform

the urban planning methodology, a direct effect will be a transformed outcome, the built environment, towards spatial justice. This, of course, could impact many lives of people in marginalised communities and people living in conditions of extreme poverty and urban informality.

The desired decolonial and reflexive transformation in urban planning can, and should, also be applied in research in general. This thesis will try to be an example of critically reflexive research in a traditionally more western-centric and engineering-oriented discipline. Western research in general can learn from non-Western knowledge systems to create a more just world.

Ethical reflections

The project concerns sensitive topics and vulnerable people. As a white person, I need to be very mindful of my own (un)intentional bias, and the power I hold as a researcher. Even if I have the best intentions, my bias might cause me to overlook negative effects of my actions, moreover, my own being might be a negative effect; as the project acknowledges, white researchers and planners, and the western knowledge system have done plenty harm in these places of exclusion. People can be wary of me, as I do show up as yet another highly educated Westerner 'analysing' their home and their culture and their way of doing. I have nothing to do in their home, but critically

review our own practices and attempt to transform them for the better.

Throughout the project, and especially during the fieldwork, I need to actively engage with the question "what am I exuding, and does this match my intentions?"

For the project to be successful, especially in an ethical perspective, the exposure of colonial structures, the transformation of the urban planning methodology, and the radical imaginations of decolonial outcomes in the built environment need to actually serve the communities I consult in the project. The information needs to be accessible for other planners to learn and hopefully achieve a larger-scale transformation of our discipline.

phase 3

Fieldwork

22/6/2025

Opening entry in dedicated research and reflection journal

22/6/2025

This journal is meant for me to reflect on my fieldwork, and honestly my whole project, here in Accra, Ghana.

It feels a bit weird, not the journaling itself, I actually journal on all my trips; a tradition that started when I read my mums travel journal from when she was backpacking through Indonesia before I was even on this earth and subsequently when I left for my trip to The Gambia and she gifted me my own empty journal that I completely filled with hours of writing every night.

I think it feels weird because this journal is supposed to be for my research, and not just for me. I never let anyone read my journals, besides the carefully curated sentences full of alliteration that I pick out to read aloud.

22/6/2025

New entry on 22/6/2025 in Accra

I am widely unfamiliar with being personal in work and research and it makes me feel uncomfortable. And vulnerable.

But maybe that is exactly what research, especially this research needs.

Logically and rationally, I know it is.

But to actually do it, to show yourself, your emotions, thoughts you normally wouldn't say out loud, and all the mistakes I am so likely to make feels like a whole other thing...

22-06-2025

'THE FEELING UNCOMFORTABLE'

Feeling uncomfortable has been a frequent feeling thus far. It is uncomfortable to be this open, this honest and personal.

It is uncomfortable to be in a new place, where I don't know anywhere or anyone;

It really shows you, you cannot hear or know a place from a map.

It is uncomfortable to feel unsafe and it is more uncomfortable to know that this unsafety is largely non-existent and only based on not knowing, misunderstanding and ugly preconceptions in my own mind.

It is uncomfortable to visibly be the stranger, the outsider. It is uncomfortable to research, to analyse, to document people's normal life as something "different" or interesting or "exotic" and it feels extractivist without a real way to give the eventual knowledge back to the community.

But to realise & reflect I should feel the uncomfortable

22/6/2025

New entry on 22/6/2025 in Accra, working on preparing meetings in Old Fadama

the uncomfortable can open my eyes.
the uncomfortable can keep me humble.
the uncomfortable can help me learn.
the uncomfortable will help me unlearn.



22/06/2025

In preparation of our first in person meeting and visit to Old Fadama to meet with ~~the chiefs~~, the council of Chiefs, Adjoa tells me the following:

"you should not act as if you are more important than them, we are just meeting like normal people."

I'm afraid it shows perfectly what generally tends to happen when outsiders and people from official institutions such as governments and universities come to visit.

23/6/2025

After first visit to Old Fadama and meeting with community leader

23/06/2025

Today we visited Old Fadama for the first time. We met with ~~Togbe Saba~~, one of the chiefs who hold a position in OFADA.

We met the council secretary at the square and he took us back into little alleys through buildings & dwellings to meet with the Togbe.

According to tradition, gifts were handed over and the proper introductions were made.

~~The Togbe~~ was happy to answer my questions after we properly introduced ourselves and said we could come back this Thursday to interview other chiefs and active members of the community he picks out.

He'll also inform people that I will be here taking photographs, which today was not allowed yet.

~~Togbe Saba~~ was exceptionally nice. He has a kind face. He explained the traditions that are important to him. He speaks with great admiration and love for his community.

It is clear that people that come in, uni professors, NGO's, especially governments, often do more harm than good.

~~Togbe~~ explains how Old Fadama has a bad rep, but that there is peace, and a strong community.

24/6/2025

Notes during interview with PhD student doing his project on climate change effects and adaptability in Old Fadama

informal is only informal compared
to the western example.
It is conditional and exists out
of stigma only.

26/6/2025

Written the night before the final visit to Old Fadama, which was an extensive tour and interviews throughout the community. Feeling confused and frustrated about opposing stories.

26-06-2025

I keep hearing different versions of the same story. So much that I don't know if people I'm interviewing could actually be lying.

A big contested thing is the number of people in Old Fadama. The PD census from 2009 said something in the 70000. This is also what some governments are working with. The planning department however, is saying there are updated numbers, around 90000. PD says the last big enumeration is still the 2009 one, which begs the question who gathered this new number of 90000... ~~...~~

We spoke to an Old Fadama tops everything with 152000. He also claims that government officials know this number although on the record clearly they don't want to share

Then there's the matter of what's actually happening in Old Fadama. According to the dep. of planning slum upgrading, such as fixing drains and paving roads is happening with some sort of acupuncture approach. According to PD, however, slum upgrading or redevelopment is actually pretty much ruled out due to the legal issues in Old Fadama. The crazy thing is that the same municipal government, but a different department, the dep. of social welfare & com. development, says the same thing. What is happening instead are social service plans, such as a daycare programme and education on topics like waste management. These programmes, however, are not specifically for Old Fadama (excluding the PD compost project) but for the whole city district. Presumably this could create problems with access for residents of

areas like Old Fadama, but also Nima, and Mensah-Guinea, etc. These projects also more or less follow an acupuncture approach, which would confirm and explain the complaints from ~~the region~~ they come in and do one thing and then they go, but one tree does not make a forest.

Either way, social services, or built development, structural change remains absent.

phase 4

Processing the data and writing
the research report

10/7/2025

Back home, a week and a half after returning from Accra, attempting to process the fieldwork into 'data'.

10/07/2025

I'm noticing it feels difficult to write about the fieldtrip. Even now, when it's been a good week since I've come back. Whilst I felt well prepared, there were still many things I did not expect.

Like the immense number of people living informally.

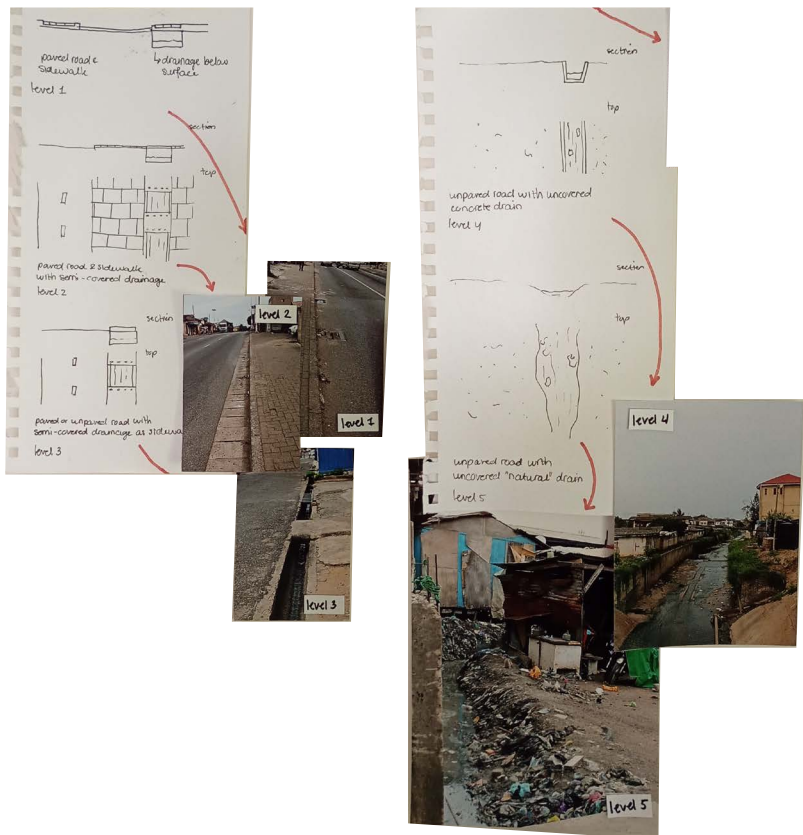
And like the lack of real distinction between many "informal" and "formal" parts of the city and the economy. The informal truly is something that we construct in our heads.

What also surprised me, or maybe shocked me a bit, is the what almost seems like disgust or aversion of anything "informal" by formal institutions. As if it is a choice made freely and as if their "formal" society does not also depend on their "informal" one.

Lastly, what shocked me was the normalcy of informality. You see it so much, it is so regular, I almost catch myself simply accepting this as a way of life. The standard shifts so fast.

21/8/2025

Processing the fieldwork data (photos, interviews, and observations) by mapping the experiences out on a posterboard. Reflecting on the categorisation of formal vs informal I tried to make based on drainage systems in Accra.



SOME REFLECTIVE THOUGHTS...

Looking back and putting this "categorization", which is really just a desperate attempt to define and distinguish the "informal" is actually quite shortsighted of me.

Maybe it makes sense that I can't find a physical manifestation of a construct we came up with to emphasize our Western superiority?

Almost as if the notion of "the informal" doesn't exist. Or, at the very least, shouldn't exist.
10-08-2015

I considered not putting these sketches and pictures on here, because it honestly feels degrading to me now, especially the levels that feel like rating why didn't I just call it types?). But I think it's important to show my own biases & learnings as well. Perhaps I am still more set in my Western academic ways than I'd like.

23/8/2025

During finally reading 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' by Paulo Freire (1970), which had been suggested to me since starting this project.

I was rather surprised by how intertwined the "formal" and "informal" really were, how hard it was to really make a distinction, as if the distinction only really exists on paper, and not in the real world.

(perhaps this is what Roberto meant with: you'll find a lack of planning all together)

you know I say it is a western thing, that I try to distinguish the informal from the formal, but it is not. In the interviews it was clear, there is a real border, a distinction, a culture of othering, and us vs. them. Especially within Accra.

23/08/2025
- whilst reading pedagogy of the oppressed by p. Freire -

I'm making my way through the entirety of ~~pedagogy~~ pedagogy of the oppressed by Paulo Freire, finally, after it was recommended to me 3, maybe 4 months ago. I won't lie, it's tough writing, but there are many meaningful phrases that lock me in, keep pulling me back to get another page, and are so (sometimes painfully) recognizable. Situations I've observed during the fieldwork, stories I've heard in interviews, including sometimes concerning words from gov officials, but also actions and reflections I notice in myself. The sentence that struck me to practically run back to my room and grab this notebook to write now, rather than wait till I've actually finished the book, was this one: "one of the methods of manipulation is to marinate individuals with the bourgeois appetite for personal success."

I think it might be the answer to the question I feel I know the answer to deep down, but have been struggling to answer since the start of this project, and honestly, before: what is the relation between colonialism & our current capitalist & neoliberal system?

24/8/2025

Reflecting on my own actions during the fieldwork as I am applying the data from the fieldwork in report chapters.

Frère put his finger on it perfectly. colonialism spread ideas of Western centrism and Western superiority and embedded them as the very core of our society, creating strong and deep dynamics of oppression. Whilst today's neoliberalism & capitalism might not as clearly express this racist backing, they are the very tools that not only ~~just~~ keep these dynamics in tact, but justify them, completely ignoring the layers of injustice that preceded today's socio-economic and political field. The promise of potential individual success for anyone and everyone is a lie in an arena where all the fighters are equipped differently, let alone unequally, or in some cases, not at all. Frère calls this promise manipulation, however, in order for something to be manipulation the manipulator must arguably be conscious of what they are doing. I doubt whether this is the case in our current, overwhelmingly neo-liberal society. Either way, however, whether consciously done, or unconsciously, it is an act of violence against the oppressed.

24/08/2025

Passing back through all the material from the interviews as I'm transcribing the recordings one by one, I am learning a lot more than the answers I was given. I am learning my own interviewing; the questions I ask, the tone I use, the things I say to whom, but also the things I choose not to say.

I don't know if I necessarily did a good job... or, at least, I think there is still a lot to learn and a lot I maybe wish I would've done differently. I am noticing myself being very reserved in some interviews, almost scared to ask critical questions. Scared of what, I don't really know. Perhaps of scaring people off from meeting with me? Perhaps of steering the answer, as more so in the interviews with experts by profession I hear myself sound as neutral and "politically correct" and unopinionated as I possibly can. I am not unopinionated though. I actually have quite a strong opinion on some of the things that are

28/8/2025

Some more carefully constructed thoughts on Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1970) after finishing it.

happening here. And as a matter of fact, the things that are indeed happening here aren't very "politically correct" either. Especially in the interviews with the people of Old Fadama, I wish I would've shown my opinion more. Shown more emotion, more empathy. I did a little.

Sometimes, or some interviews definitely went better than others. Maybe because I clicked & connected better with some people, or maybe because I just started feeling more comfortable and confident as the fieldwork went on.

If it's the latter, perhaps I just needed more experience, and training and prep before going out here and pulling these people in. It's unfair for them to be part of some learning process for me in a way.

Although of course this should be a learning process for me as well. The whole basis of this research is that we, as planners, but also as white people, are not all-knowing

As I was finally making my way through Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1972), I noticed many resemblances with different experiences and interactions I've had during my time doing field research in Accra. In his book, Freire describes how 'the oppressed' that are being oppressed by 'the oppressor' can break free out of their situation by first accepting their situation, and subsequently realising their situation are limiting factors that can be altered, giving them critical consciousness of their own position as well as power, leading to the motivation that is needed to free themselves. Freire emphasises many times that it is only the oppressed, not the oppressor, who can free themselves, and thereby also the oppressor. This, however, is of course easier said than done, as the oppressor does not only have power over the oppressed, but has in many cases also convinced themselves as well as the oppressed that this power dynamic is justified and legitimate; the oppressed become convinced of their own inferiority compared to their oppressors and vice versa. It's a phenomenon I was heartbroken to see in front of my eyes in Accra. The oppressed in my story would be the community of Old Fadama, and the oppressors the government and planning authorities of Accra and Ghana as a whole. When talking to planning professionals working for the government, it is painfully clear the language

they use when talking about Old Fadama, its residents, and informal aspects of the city, or the economy. The governments' narrative is dominated by arguments around "decongestion of the city", and even "cleansing the city", and "removing them", meaning street sellers and street dwellers. Rather than finding a solution to a city problem of overcrowding and a significant lack of affordable housing, the problem is seen as a migration problem. "Already, Accra is full, there is no more space for any other thing," a government planner told me in response to questions about the people in Old Fadama and whether they could stay, or had to move. According to many, they should simply go back to where they came from, obviously not taking into account that many were born here, and the place people came from was the very reason they decided to flee. More over, the arguments of decongesting, cleansing, and sanitising the city remind any reader of the very colonial tactics Mike Davis describes in his *Planet of Slums* (2006). It exactly the same type of superiority and inferiority complex we see today in a time of neoliberalism, as we've seen in the past in a time of colonialism that may have been more forward about it's racist roots. It is clear the rhetoric has barely changed here since the British left Accra. It makes sense, as Freire states, it is easy for the oppressed to become their oppressors oppressor, rather than finding humanity and stopping the cycle of violence.

On the topic of violence, I quite appreciated that Freire calls

every act of dehumanisation towards the oppressed 'violence' or 'aggression'. I think many people would not per se say that what is happening in these legal and political battles is classified as aggression; perhaps because it happens behind closed doors most of the time, or perhaps because it's being disguised as 'benefit for the greater good, or even help and support directly to the targeted community. But having seen the effects, it very much is aggression. There is no other right way to describe it. It is also important to remember this quote from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: "never in history has violence been initiated by the oppressed (Freire, 1972, p.41)." In the story of Old Fadama, acts of violence nowadays go back and forth; some in the form of policies, some in the form of demolitions, some in the form of protests. Either way, it is important to remember that the oppressed' actions and choices are in response to those of the oppressor. That they are often out of necessity, in response to the actions and choices of the oppressor. The oppressed often get framed and negatively stereotyped as bad, dirty, uncoherent, unmannered, lazy, loud, and more. Like the interviews in Accra showed, this is also the case for Old Fadama. It is important to realise that these are untrue stipulations, part of the manipulation strategies of the oppressors, may it be intentionally or unintentionally.

Thankfully, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* also speaks of hope, and ways to break out of these situations, cycles, of oppression, which is to reach critical consciousness about the limiting situation, to engage in dialogical education, and to

unity to liberate the oppressed as well as the oppressors from their power dynamic. This process holds space for different roles. There are of course the oppressed who stand up and revolutionise. There are the oppressors, who in their turn also need to be liberated. And there are, for example, the converts, those who are initially on the oppressor's side, but realise the injustice they are imposing and step down to join the oppressed in their revolution. In the process to liberation, they can act as a bridge to unite the oppressed and the oppressors, as both need to be liberated simultaneously to effectively break the cycle of injustice and oppression. I think this is how I see myself. I think it could help be to understand my role in this project. What to do, and tackle, and say, but maybe more importantly, also what not to. If I dictate what I think is right, even with the best ethics and morals at heart, I would fall into the same pattern of the oppressed and oppressors now: an outsider with tremendous privilege 'educating' (dictating) without meaningful discourse what the 'others' ought to do (Freire, 1972; Kapoor, 2004). It's not up to me. What is up to me is to trust the people themselves, to let them tell me what to do, and to execute it with them. It is up to me, not to tell the oppressed how they should act, or what they should do, or how they should change, but to tell my former fellow oppressors how we ought to do better, how we can transform, and revolutionise our role, for "the revolutionary process is eminently educational in character (Freire, 1972, p.133)."

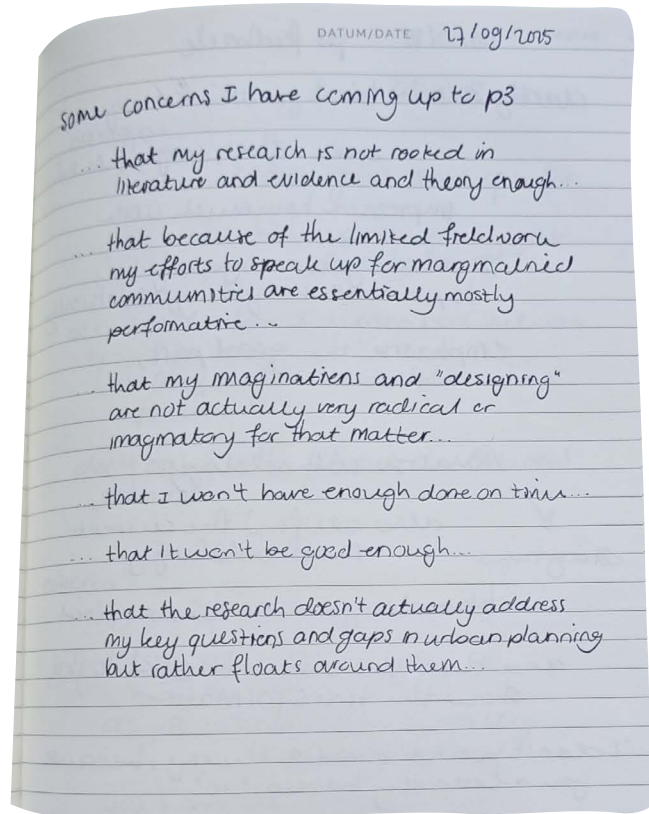
Davis, M. (2006). *Planet of Slums*.

Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Bergman Ramos, Trans.; 1st ed.). Herder & Herder.

Kapoor, I. (2004). Hyper-self-reflexive development? Spivak on representing the Third World 'Other.' *Third World Quarterly*, 25(4), 627–647. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590410001678898>

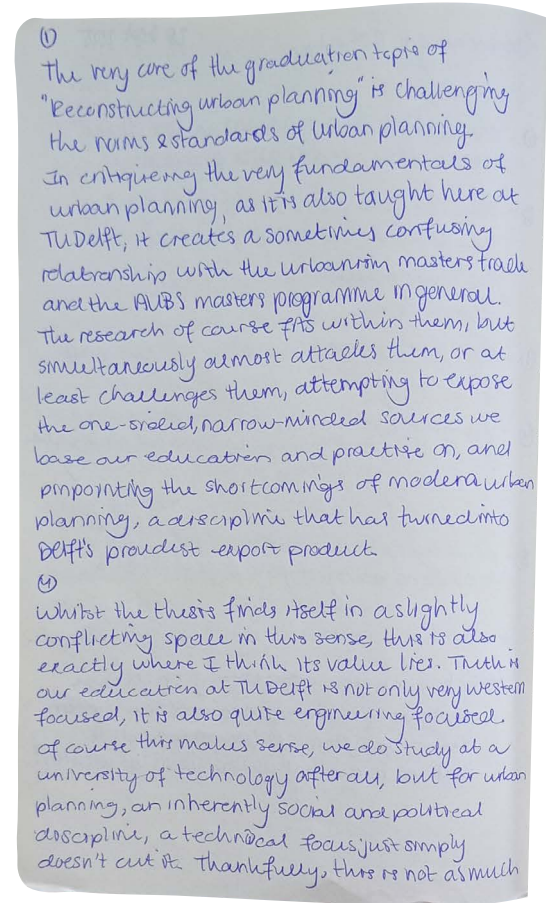
27/9/2025

Written in the run-up to the P3 deadline (more or less the half-way point of the project), feeling stressed and unsure.



28/9/2025

Comprehensive reflection regarding the entirety of the research process so far in the run-up to P3 (half-way point of the project).



of an original or controversial opinion as it once was, and many scholars and professors at our university are working hard to bring more nuance and balance into our research, practice, and curriculum. I hope to ~~contribute~~ ^{contribute} to this transformation through this thesis. Moreover, I hope to add another step, bridging theory and education to 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.

⑤ As the thesis grapples 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 this transformed urban planning 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, although especially those now marginalized.

⑥ 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 oppressing and find that even though you might not agree with them and

did not create them, you are an active part of the system upholding them. This is exactly why I feel it is important to tackle this project. As urban planners, but also as people part of a globally dominant culture, and privileged to enjoy an education, we collect more power than we might realize. I believe this power comes with a moral responsibility to truly try and understand the places you work in our work, and our position in society, is part of a much longer story as we build upon what others have built before us, good and bad. And likewise, our choices and creations, shaping little corners of the world and the realms of peoples' 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 anyone to take.

⑥ A key question that has remained throughout this project, however, has been, how can you

effectively challenge, unpack and deconstruct these large societal structures of those very structures are all you've ever known and been taught. This is exactly where the biggest personal challenge has lied on this project. It is the part that made me most scared and even apprehensive to try and approach this topic, because out of all people, who am I to attempt to do this?

White, blond, uppermiddle class, and highly educated whilst given my particular background, there might be many pitfalls, or critical lessons to be learned, this is exactly why someone like me should not shy away from topics like decoloniality and non-western knowledge and practices. Like Briggs and Sharp point out in their "postcolonial caution", the fear to make mistakes in sensitive social and cultural research topics turns many western scholars away from them. Yes, this makes it so that those mistakes aren't made. But it also makes it so that the research projects never happen, and advances in theory and practice remain 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 and for urban planning, yes, I think it has.

② 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. But 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.

25/10/2025

Written as a sketch 'transformed urban planning methodology' following chapter 6 in the research report.

25-10-2025 (Chlaablaedje)

Understanding decolonial planning
main lessons/principles/reflections:

- + planners have to engage in critical self-reflexivity to understand their bias and missing knowledge and to know the role they should assume in the planning process (to make room for alternative knowledge and practices)
- ② Situated, embodied & experienced knowledge (which includes ^{Indigenous} cultural and spiritual knowledge) should be at the core of planning
- ③ decolonial planning processes are community-led; the community has autonomy in every phase of the project.
- + as a western-born or western-educated planner you cannot fully understand or properly interpret all dimensions of Indigenous knowledge or culture or the ~~and~~ effects of their systemic oppression

not explicitly
* to engage in decolonial planning will always lead to some extent of perpetuating the cycle of enforcing the Western knowledge system to be and ~~universally~~ ^{app} marginalising communities that do not conform to that standard

* Above all, decolonial planning is about the mindset of a moral commitment to rectifying systemic injustices in the built environment and society. ~~It is~~ ~~not~~ ~~about~~ ~~the~~ ~~practical~~ ~~methods~~ ~~employed~~, but about the way of ~~with~~ which they are. It is a meta-methodology, rather than a methodology.

The final 'reflections for the decolonial planner' can be found in the main research report, chapter 6.

26/10/2025

Written to create clarity on how to continue the project, and choose a direction that combines multiple aspects and objectives of the project as we move into the final stage.

It feels like it's been a while since I've stepped back and calmly wrote some things down, thought some stuff through, about what the project should be, rather than thoughts about me and my learning (or are those two the same thing?). I'll take the chance to ramble a bit if you don't mind... It feels like the project is at a bit of a crossroads? I've been writing heaps, so much, just so much. I feel a bit drained, but deadlines keep inching closer and the project has got to get written. It's not all supposed to be about writing though... it was supposed to be about imaginations. It's a bit hard to figure out what the project needs to be, or wants to be, or should be, when different people on the team have significantly different views on this. I guess initially, when the project started, the plan was to develop policy recommendations. This has shifted rather quickly, however; making policy recommendations is simply not up to me, and is also just not the focus of this study anymore. Developing designs for Old Fadama and Accra, or at least imaginations of what the space could be is nice, but... in my freshly developed principles for decolonial planning I have very clearly found out that that has to be a collaborative project. Who am I to say I understand the conditions of the Old Fadama community? Who am I to interpret what they would want or need? Who am I to decide what that could look like. I am worried developing imaginations of possible futures for Old

Fadama, even if they are just that, imaginations, that it would work counterproductively. That it would not properly cover their experience and hopes. That it would one hundred percent go against what I'm preaching in terms of decolonial planning, still trusting in my own interpretation and instincts. What feels most natural now, is to use imaginations to stress my point that the community already holds everything you need to create a beautiful planned environment and society. They are already doing it, even in these circumstances of continuous neglect and injustice. It's just a shame I cannot develop these parts of the project with the community. In my search to an answer as to what is decolonial planning, I have made my project exactly not that. Isn't that just so hypocritical. Or is it just what life is like sometimes? That you try your best but the conditions simply don't allow for more than that? I suppose I said it at the start, that I would most likely make mistakes, but if no one ever dares to make those mistakes, no one gets to learn from them, and build upon them either. I said back then that it was okay that I would make mistakes. But actually making them feels like a totally different ballgame now. It would be so much easier, so much safer, to simply steer clear. To do only what I think I can confidently do right. But that's not really the point of research is it? the point is to try advance our knowledge and skill and understanding and really just everything else. Is that possible from within your comfort zone? And from within everything we already know? No, because that is exactly what makes us blind to everything that others know, and everything that we could know. So, then... is it okay for me to make these mistakes? Does

20/11/2025

it make it any better that I recognise them? Or is that really just the bare minimum? Probably. Clearly this is very productive. I think that maybe I should just think about it and come back to this (which I'll probably forget to do, sorry).

Written after writing the draft version of the main research question conclusion of the research report.

Suddenly it's a month later and I'm still asking myself the same thing... Actually, I think I know the answer, but I am a bit afraid of the answer. I think that my conclusion is clearly that designing or planning or writing policy is not okay outside of radical collaboration. A collaboration that I cannot practice. I refuse to think and develop contributions for a decolonial practice to then end the project by doing all the wrong things, making my conclusions worthless and unbelievable. However, my hesitation is, is it okay to say, I conclude that I cannot do it? Is this something we (read planners and academics) are going to accept? I'm afraid 'we' won't. It's a funny thing, trying to go beyond what is standard academia, when you are indeed enrolled in, and trying to graduate in standard academia. I think it's clear that even after all this research and reflection, and clearly being able to conclude for myself what is ethically right and wrong, it is still a separate thing to take action upon those reflections, especially as they lie outside of your frame of reference, or the norm, and the expectations. And most of all, your comfortzone.

20/11/2025

Comprehensive reflection as seen in the P4 research report.

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

The very core of the graduation topic of "Reconstructing urban planning" is challenging the norms and standards of urban planning. In critiquing the very fundamentals of urban planning, 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 modern urban planning, 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 in this sense, 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. But, for urban planning, an inherently social and political discipline, a technical focus 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 education to 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.

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 this transformed urban planning 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.

On the value of my research approach

Tackling this topic, or at least attempting to, had 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. As urban planners, but also as people part of a globally dominant culture, and privileged to enjoy

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 anyone 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, however, 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 where the biggest personal challenge has lain 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, blond, upper-middle class, and highly educated – to attempt to do this?

Whilst given my particular background, there might be many pitfalls, or critical lessons to be learned, 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 it has.

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.

As I learned 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 the original goals were to develop planning scenarios for 'slum' upgrading, or even policy recommendations for potential legalisation of Old Fadama, I learned 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 from me. 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, my own power, as an urban planner, a researcher, and simply a person.

On my transformed(/ing) positionality

At the very start of this research, I've written about my own

positionality, explaining how and why I see my role to take on this project and this topic, and to set out by hopes and objectives for the research. Evidently, 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 planning 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 be, and 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 that purpose, and following steps of the project can include a radically collaborative planning project with the people of Old Fadama, which is the kind of action they deserve.

phase 5

Finalising the report and finishing the project

13/01/2026

Written in the final week of report writing, before the official P5 deadline

I find myself reflecting less and less in these final weeks of the project. I would've expected it to be the other way around, but maybe that's a bit of a naïve expectation of the pressure and intensity of the final stretch of a project like this. Either way, the project is almost done, which brings the scary fact that soon it will be final and I cannot change anything anymore. This is the final format I have created to tell the stories of the people of Old Fadama. I hope I have done it justice, but I'm afraid there is no way to actually find out if I have. I'm very glad with how I have prioritised the people throughout this project. I definitely took me some searching, some being lost, and definitely some being confused. Often it felt like I was on a hopeless mission to bring compassion into a very harsh, technical, and honestly quite classist world. I am very grateful that I have found people who are willing to fight this fight, and teach me how to fight this fight with them. I will try my best to have this collection of knowledge travel to the hands of people in power, through social media, through exhibitions, and through other opportunities that might come up in the future. I think this reflection diary entry, which I felt compelled to write, is not so much a reflection, but more a pledge, that I will do what is in my power to hand over this work to the people that matter, and make sure it ends up in a place where it can actually make a difference and give back to the people of Old Fadama.

16/01/2025

Comprehensive reflection as seen in the P5 research report (only minor updates from the comprehensive reflection at P4).

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 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.

THANK YOU