

The Wild, Wild, West of E-scrap within the Politics of Informality in Urban Ghana

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Accra, Ghana has becoming the latest dumping ground for global e-scrap. A 2004 national law introduced zero duty on imported computers and opened the floodgates to e-scrap exports to Ghana. Most of this scrap has ended up at Agbogbloshie, the largest and most controversial slum community in Ghana, situated along a lagoon that is close to Accra's Central Business District. In the last decade, politics around Agbogbloshie centered on housing and "illegal" occupation of the site. However, stalemate on evictions allowed the settlement to double in size within the last five years so that 79,000 residents reside there currently. Within the last three years, a highly organized and visible and connected e-scrap yard has developed and its role in the urban economy is geographically extensive employing 10,000 individuals indirectly with controlling interests from members of the Diaspora. The sudden rise of the sector has caught the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) off guard. Only recently have a number of donors in consultation with the EPA and AMA commenced research studies into organizing and mainstreaming the e-scrap sector in Ghana. This paper considers the various scenarios and the raging politics of informality that is likely to ensure as livelihoods are threatened and NIMBY politics is ignited. A newer presence of international networks of e-scrap brokers and traders from other African states is likely to open up the old fever pitch debate about the Agbogbloshie settlement and rights to occupy the area. While residents may have stalemated evictions in the past around rights to the city, informal economic livelihoods arguments will entail a very different politics of informality.