

# DEVELOPMENT, EROSION, AND DISPOSSESSION IN A GHANAIAN LANDSCAPE

ELIZABETH CAREY

Residents in Kewunor, a fishing village on the outskirts of the Ada Foah township, carry the double burden of living in a picturesque and precarious landscape. As the estuary widens and continuously augments the shoreline, tourism and estate development puts pressure on remaining land, forcing involuntary resettlement. In 2013, Government of Ghana (GoG) leased land in Kewunor to Trasacco Estates Development Company Ltd. (TEDC) for resort and marina development. As the plans of this Italian-Ghanaian firm move forward, bolstered by a partnership with Hilton Worldwide, many residents refuse to leave. Despite the assent of the Chief of Ada Foah to land developers, community factions continue to agitate against their relocation, mobilizing a variety of legal strategies in defense of historic property claims.

My research probes the intersection of development, erosion, and dispossession, aiming to understand how these processes intertwine in the production of territory—in other words, how they produce a social order that manifests spatially. Supported by a Center for African Studies Pre-Dissertation Award and a Madelyn M. Lockhart Summer Research Award, I conducted eight weeks of ethnographic research in Ghana between June and August 2018. Through previous field trips and maintaining contacts on Whatsapp, I have followed this case since 2013.

After years of delays, TEDC began construction on fifty private beach chalets in July, 2018 at the edge of the delta. Despite skirting regulatory authorities like the District Assembly, Wildlife Division, and Environmental Protection Agency, the company's engineers and executives offer lofty promises to local residents, including short and long-term employment, a revived sea defense system, and relocation to 'modern' accommodations. The near-daily presence of TEDC workers and occasional visits by executives and local government officials provoked varied reactions among



residents and small business owners. Some seized the opportunity to take jobs as day laborers—women fetching water from the river to mix cement, young girls selling snacks to TEDC's construction workers and security guards, men digging trenches and moving wheelbarrows of cement to lay the foundation. Despite the recent fallout from a stymied attempt to sue TEDC, a small group of youth continues to protest the project, seeking the help of local NGOs, journalists, recording artists, and attorneys to protect communal land claims. These persistent efforts have earned them the disapproval of some of their most powerful elders and customary authorities. Whereas earlier research reflected apparently uncontroversial disdain for TEDC's project among residents and a widespread unwillingness to relocate, residents now comment that the community is divided, and some accuse their elders of being "compromised."

With the support of a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad award, I will begin a year of dissertation fieldwork in March 2019. An early goal of the research will be to probe these divisions within the community further to understand how they align with or cross-cut internal property claims and relations of authority. I will continue to follow youth efforts to unite the community behind a legal strategy to take TEDC to court and to trace the involvement of the many interested actors and institutions beyond the village. Long-term research will also allow me to more fully investigate the role of shoreline change and sea-level rise in the formulation and enactment of different actors' claims.

*Elizabeth Carey is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Anthropology and a former FLAS fellow (Akan-Twi).*