Reflections of Globalization: A Case Study of Informal Food Vendors in Southern Ghana

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Reflections of Globalization:
A Case Study of Informal Food Vendors in Southern Ghana

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
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by

Arianna J. King

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Abstract

In the context of rapid urbanization, globalization, market liberalization, and growing flexibility of labor in the post-Fordist era, urban environments have seen economic opportunities and employment in the formal sector become increasingly less available to the vast majority of urban dwellers in both high-income and low-income countries. The intersectional forces of globalization, and neoliberalization have contributed to the ever-growing role of informal economic opportunities in providing the necessary income to fulfill household needs for individuals throughout the world and have also influenced social, cultural, and spatial organization of informal sector workers. Using a case study and ethnographic information from several regions of southern Ghana, this research examines the way in which informal sector food vendors in Ghana are imbedded in larger global food networks as well as how globalization is experienced by vendors at the ground level.

Keywords: Ghana, West Africa, globalization, informal economy, informal food vendors, street food.
Chapter 1: Introduction

“When the music changes, 
So does the dance.”

~ Hausa Proverb

A Story

In the center of Abura Dunkwa, the district capital of the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese district in the Central Region of Ghana, a wooden table sits empty by the roadside. But each day as the sun bows down behind the hills, Abura Dunkwa relaxes from a busy working town—home to several district assembly offices, junior high and high schools, and a bustling district hospital—to a quieter village, and the usual crowd of food vendors descend upon the center of town to begin another busy night of service. Among these individuals is Lydia, a sturdy-looking woman carrying a large silver basin and a pink plastic basket to claim her place at that empty table by the roadside.

As Lydia removes the immense load from her head with the help of her “sister,” she carefully lays down a sheet of green plastic onto the same table she occupies each night. She places the silver basin on the table’s left side and neatly places the pink basket to its right. She disappears behind the adjacent cement wall belonging to St. Stephen’s Catholic Church and seconds later reappears with two well-worn benches, which she places in close proximity to what is now by any measure, her rightful place. As Lydia unties the knotted plastic bag that sits in the silver basin, another woman arrives with a case made of wood and glass containing stacks of small fried fish. The fishmonger places the case on the empty
section of the table and looks up to the small line of customers that has begun to form. Lydia’s *kenkey*¹ stand is now open for business.

![Kenkey seller in Southern Ghana, 2014](image)

Lydia reaches her hand into the large silver basin piled high with *kenkey*. As her hand emerges she places two steaming yellow mounds of corn dough wrapped in corn husk, into a blue plastic bowl and asks, “Do you want *okra*?” Seeing her customer’s head

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¹ *Kenkey* is a staple food throughout Ghana made from fermented white maize. Ground maize is first boiled, then wrapped in either plantain leaves or cornhusk and steamed. It comes in two regional varieties known as: *Fante kenkey*, wrapped in plantain leaves and usually served cold and *Ga kenkey* wrapped in cornhusks and typically served hot ("kenkey," 2005).
nod eagerly, Lydia takes a small spoon and deftly scoops three dollops of fiery red *pepe* and one spoonful of ground okra into the same blue bowl next to the *kenkey*. The customer then locks eyes with a woman standing next to Lydia and orders “10,000 fish,” meaning one Ghana Cedi\(^3\) worth of fried fish. The bowl is placed on one of the benches next to the table and the young man washes his hand over a small bucket of water near one of the benches, takes his seat, and begins his meal.

Lydia, a 30 year-old unmarried mother of one, is a graduate of the home economics program at Aburaman Senior Secondary School located in Abura Dunkwa. She was born in the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese district hospital and has lived no more than 3 kilometers from the exact place she was born all of her life. Although she has relatives in the nation’s capital city Accra, located just 100 miles from Abura Dunkwa, she rarely has the time or financial resources to visit. At first glance, Lydia, as well as her business, appear to be highly localized—rooted by culture, history, custom, and family to a single location—built on local relationships and local customs. And presumably Lydia’s *kenkey* business would not survive outside of Ghana, after all she serves only one thing for only a few hours of each day, a traditional Ghanaian food that has been a staple for Akan, Fanti, Ga, and Ewe people since well before Europeans arrived in the region (Bartle, 2014). However, despite the fact that the ingredients required to make *kenkey* and *pepe*—white maize, water, salt, tomatoes, hot peppers, garlic and onions—can like many traditional foods all be grown in Ghana, the majority of Lydia’s ingredients have traveled as far as 7,000 miles to reach her, the result of an increasingly globalized food system.

\(^2\) *Pepe* is a spicy blend of scotch-bell peppers, tomatoes, garlic, onion, and sometimes ginger. It is served with many Ghanaian dishes as a sauce in which to dip starchy vegetables.

\(^3\) In 2007 the Ghana cedi was redominated at a rate of 1:10,000, thus many Ghanaians still refer to prices in terms of the old currency.
The globalization of food systems is by no means a new phenomenon, although it could be argued that individuals like Lydia are a new kind of actor joining the growth and development of the dominant global food system. Lydia’s business, representative of informal sector food vending seen throughout the regions of Ghana inhabited by the Fanti, Ga, Akan, and Ewe ethnic groups, is becoming more connected to people and places outside of Ghana. Lydia has strong friendship and kinship networks that provide a reliable customer base, her business is a small-scale endeavor based in a single location, she has very little infrastructural investments, and she can easily stop or start selling her products based on market demand. Her enterprise exemplifies many universal qualities of informal food vending in that it has no name, no tax identification number, no permanent claim to the space on which it operates, and offers even the most loyal of customers no guarantee that it will continue to operate. Yet, just as sure as the sun will set over Abura Dunkwa, Lydia conducts business each night, providing an undeniably display of the ways in which, Ghana’s international economic relationships are permeating the realms of economic activity in the country, even the informal sector.

The Central Question

My interest in Ghanaian food vendors and the informal sector arose long before this research endeavor. It began initially during the 29 months of my Peace Corps service between the years 2009 and 2011, in Abura Dunkwa, located in the Central Region of Ghana. Lacking access to a kitchen, I became largely reliant on the food sellers in my community. I initially relied on the easily legible formal food businesses, which could be identified through familiar looking signs and structures with tables out front and a clear
menu of available items. However, as I became increasingly familiar with the spatial organization of my community, the rich underground food culture presented more convenient, delicious, and affordable options. I discovered that from bread to sweet treats, soups to basic staples, each home had a side business run by the matriarch of the household generating essential income for the family. This income was often used to pay school fees, provide food for children, and accommodate travel costs to and from nearby market towns.

The more I learned about my community and Ghanaian food culture, the more I discovered people in every part of town cooked and sold food out of their houses and compounds. Discovering first hand, the life-sustaining value of these businesses and their role in feeding not only myself but also, the many students, bachelors, and workers in the community, inspired a deep appreciation for the efficacy and “structure” of the informal sector.

During this time, I also participated in and observed other elements of the Ghanaian food system: farming with friends, preparing foods for sale, occasionally assisting neighbors at local markets, and offering individuals advice on how to start food-based businesses. These experiences equipped me with familiarity of local foods, marketing practices, seasonal availability, as well as the process by which foods are grown, processed, and eventually sold for profit. Furthermore, I acquired an introductory understanding for the culture, function and orientation of many markets in the southern regions of Ghana, particularly in Central and Western Regions where I spent the majority of my service. It was the combination of these experiences that motivated the additional study of scholarship on the informal economy and globalization in Ghana that in turn cultivated my
I embarked upon this research in hopes of answering the question: how are informal sector food vendors imbedded in larger and more formal global food networks and what do the reflections of globalization look like on the ground level? This research aims to contribute to scholarship of the informal sector in Ghana by highlighting how informal sector food vendors display increasing connection to the rest of the world.

Informal sector food vendors in Ghana display a highly developed set of social, spatial, and cultural relationships, which although ever-changing are reflecting globalization in ways not previously observed. People are using foreign made products, connecting with international distributors, and reorienting their businesses practices at a rapid pace. I set out to investigate these trends and informal food systems using informal sector food vendors in Ghana as a case study. In synthesizing census data, gathering foreign investment information, examining existing literature on the topic, and conducting nine weeks of field research in Ghana, I caught a glimpse of the many social, spatial, and cultural ways in which globalization echoes throughout informal sector food vending in a way not previously seen.

From the spatial influence of ubiquitous Chinese investment in market infrastructure, influencing the physical organization of vendors in market spaces, to the cultural influence of an increase in availability of products in the market due to new trade relationships around the world, informal food vendors in Ghana display signs of globalization in many unprecedented ways. And while past research has laid out eloquent discussions of globalization’s structural effect on labor and the economy, very few scholars have focused on the impact these global forces are having on informal food vending on the
ground level. While it is popular in the social sciences to aim blindly for the ground level, hoping to find that the devil really is in the details, I have chosen this ground level approach to collecting and sharing qualitative aspects of the effects of globalization on informal food vendors primarily for the purpose of providing additional perspective into the ways in which development strategies and trade policy is felt by the most vulnerable economic actors in the country. Ghana has recently adopted an urban development strategy focused on “supporting” the informal economy, thus I opted to focus on how that is actually playing out in the everyday lives of informal entrepreneurs. Focusing this research at the ground level provides an opportunity to not only criticize bad economic policy, but also to suggest more informal-economy-friendly approaches to the modernization and development of Ghana as a whole.

As more vendors buy ingredients sourced from outside of Ghana, wholesale vendor relationships, as well as the products Ghanaian vendors now have everyday access to, surface as bold reflections of an increasingly connected world. Furthermore, as foreign investment physically augments market spaces with new construction and additional infrastructure, spatial relationships among informal food vendors also become more globally oriented. These global influences and their immediate effect on the informal sector food vendors in Ghana is the focus of this inquiry.

**Thesis Structure**

This discussion focuses primarily on reflections of globalization in the informal economy, therefore, I will begin my argument in Chapter 2 with an essential overview of language surrounding “the unregulated, unmeasured, small-scale, labor-intensive, and at
times marginal economic activity found in most Third World, and to a lesser degree First World, cities” (Gladstone, 2005, p. 32) articulating this author's choice to employ the terminology “informal sector” or “informal economy” throughout my discussion. In Chapter 3, I will present the three theoretical paradigms dominant in past-scholarship used to explain the existence and function of the informal sector. This discussion is used to justify orienting my research around a perspective of informality, which perceives informal workers as primarily social actors, leveraging social capital to gain access to economic opportunity in capitalist markets. This orientation is critical to my research findings because of the ways in which I observed globalization to manifest in social, spatial, and cultural channels of Ghanaian markets.

Chapter 4 will give an overview of the social, economic, and political context of Ghana necessary to provide a proper framework for both the justification as well as the findings of this research. This contextual framing will be followed by Chapter 5, wherein I will confer the qualities of the informal sector in Ghana and common challenges to informal enterprise, which this research finds, globalization inevitably exacerbates. From here, I will move on to Chapter 6, examining a history of research methodologies employed in researching the informal sector, followed then by an in-depth explanation and justification for the research design and methodologies used in my research in Chapter 7. After the discussion of research methods, the findings and results of this research inquiry will be presented in Chapter 8, leading to the overall discussion and conclusions, which can be found in Chapter 9.
Chapter 2: What to Call “It”?

The History of the Term “Informal Sector”

This research seeks to address how informal sector food vendors are imbedded in larger and more formal global food networks reflecting forces of globalization. This discussion inevitably requires the establishment of some working definitions of informality. Thus inspiring the first of many questions: what constitutes economic activity as informal?

The informal sector, underground economy, unofficial economy, marginal economy, Do-It-Yourself economy, black market, petty capitalism, shadow economy and System D represent a short list of terms that seek to describe what the International Labour Organization (ILO) defines as “all economic activities by workers and economic units that are in law or practice - not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements” (ILO, 1972). Reference to this kind of economic activity was first made in the early 1970s when anthropologist Keith Hart embarked upon an investigation of a group of ethnic Ghanaians in the capital city of Ghana, using the term “informal sector.” Hart used this phrase, which had concurrently arisen in discussions of the International Labor Office (ILO, 1972), to describe the ways in which falling wages had forced urban residents to seek out informal income opportunities to counter “the chronic imbalance between income from wage employment and expenditure needs” (Hart, 1973, p. 65). Hart’s discussion focused on the variety of income generating activities he observed, which included everything from small-scale petty trading to large-scale enterprises that failed to register with proper government agencies.
Hart drew a clear distinction between legitimate and illegitimate informal income opportunities, acknowledging, “a consideration of income opportunities outside formal employment must include certain kinds of crime” (Hart, 1973, p. 68), but promoted the idea that most of that crime was failing to register, not paying taxes, or casually evading legal legibility as opposed to more commonly perceived notions of criminal activity such as: drug trafficking, prostitution, and theft. He encouraged the idea that many informal economic actors were decent people simply trying to make ends meet. “Hart’s main purpose was to show that these activities, previously denigrated as “marginal” or “black market,” could be seen as entrepreneurial in their own right, and thus as a potential source of development” (Cross, 2000, pp. 31–32). Throughout his discussion, Hart frames informal work in Ghana in direct relationship to the formal sector and although he makes it explicit that he does not desire to degrade or delegitimize informal income earning, Hart’s choice of terminology frames informality within a the modernist theory of economic dualism, presenting a problematic, which I will discuss more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

Since Hart’s (1973) initial exploration of the topic, the variety of terms used to describe the informal sector has grown and developed. The most helpful definition that I encountered was from scholar John C. Cross presented in the *Encyclopedia of Political Economy*. Cross explains:

>[The Informal Economy] includes the production and exchange of legal goods and services that involves the lack of appropriate business permits, violation of zoning codes, failure to report tax liability, non-compliance with labor regulations governing contracts and work conditions and/ or lack of legal guarantees in relations with suppliers and clients. Cross, 1999, p. 512
Because of the sector’s inherent lack of legibility, striving for a more nuanced description and explanation is at the root of all scholarship on the topic. However, the specific use of language to discuss these unregistered, untaxed, low-capital endeavors offer essential clues to not only a researcher’s theoretical approach to rationalizing the existence of sector, but also how to describe the sector qualitatively and quantitatively. This discussion presents several examples of scholarly naming choices and displays how the language chosen affects the framing of the research and why I chose to use the terms “informal sector” and “informal economy” in the context of my research.

In urban sociologist Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh’s (2006) investigation of small-scale economic activity in a Southside Chicago neighborhood, he employs several different terms to describe his observations including most commonly: shady economy and underground economy. His ethnographic investigations pertain to both legal and illegal activities in Maquis Park including everything from under the table payment for domestic help to illicit drug deals and prostitution rings. Despite outward appearances and probable danger, Venkatesh approaches the activities he observes with a kind of subversive support, which is reflected in the language he uses to describe and categorize his observations. His research uses the structuralist/neo-Marxist paradigm, examining the ways in which the urban capitalist economy of Chicago economically marginalizes the residents of Maquis Park. The term Venkatesh uses most often, “underground economy,” reflects his point that the many hustlers, dealers, home-workers, and entrepreneurs are structurally excluded from formal economic opportunity. Figuratively, their economic opportunities have been run underground and shaded from the light of the formal capitalist economy. He uses these

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4 See Chapter 3 for further discussion of structuralist/neo-Marxist paradigm.
terms to place the underground economic activity he observes in direct relationship with the formal economy, which the many community members he observes have difficulties in joining. Unlike Keith Hart’s initial employment of the term informal economy, which places informal economic activity in opposition to formal opportunities, Venkatesh articulates the interconnections between formal and informal, showing that frequently legal (and illegal) goods must be traded in illegal or extralegal ways, particularly when individuals have been structurally excluded from an economic system.

On the other hand, Benjamin & Mbaye (2012) present an investigation of productivity focusing on the structure and operation of informal businesses. These scholars offer a reasonable deployment of the term informal sector, acknowledging in their discussion that informality undeniably exists on a continuum as opposed to a more dichotomous assertion. While Benjamin & Mbaye acknowledge that common consideration for determining informality include size of operation, registration, honesty in financial statements, mobility of workplace, and access to credit, they suggest that it is better to see the sector as existing in various combinations of these things. Informality manifests in a myriad of different ways but is unilaterally agreed upon as outside formal governmental registration and measurement. This supports the argument that even formal businesses frequently rely on informal employment and thus appropriately presents a spectrum on which all economic activity lies relatively.

Scholars, Williams & Padmore (2013), alternatively, seek to draw attention to the limitations of describing economic activity as informal by adopting the term quasi-formal. Conducting research predominantly in high-income countries, Williams & Padmore argue, alongside Benjamin & Mbaye that informal and formal sectors are rarely discreet, often
linked socially and economically, and often display systems of organization and standardization within. In fact, in their study of 27 nations in the European Union they observed that many formal sector employees also engage in informal sector work at their places of work in order to close inevitable wage gaps resulting from flexible specialization and the globalization of labor (Williams & Padmore, 2013). They further observed that businesses of a multitude of scales also hire informal workers for some of their needs as well. The scholars research, unlike initial discussions on the topic (Hart, 1973; ILO, 1972), does not carry an undertone of economic dualism, but rather paints a portrait of an intricate web of economic interconnectivity, productivity, and interdependence. They are observing modern informality linked to globalization as well as trends toward more neoliberal trade and economic policy. Although their general description is well articulated, their use of the term quasi-formal runs the risk of alienating the research from other work on the topic because of a small semantic discrepancy.

A final example of differences in language around informality aiming to provide distinction comes from journalist and author Robert Neuwirth. He agrees with Williams & Padmore that the term informal has a loaded connotation but for different reasons. After experiencing difficulty explaining his research interest to Nigerian street vendors he was hoping to interview, Neuwirth adopted what he considers a simpler term to describe the economic activity he observed. Neuwirth employs the term System D, devoting considerable time to explaining the effect that the value-laden language has on our perception and acceptance of the sector. He explains, “System D is a phrase taken from French-speaking Africa and the Caribbean” (Neuwirth, 2011, p. 17) and that this term reflects, “[vendors] own social and economic reality. They say they are inventive, self-
starting, entrepreneurial merchants who are doing business on their own, without registering or “l'economie de la debrouillardise” or sweetened for street use, “Systeme D” (2011, p. 17). This language represents a clear departure from the language of Hart’s initial inquiry and even an improvement from Williams & Padmore. Were this term to be more widely used in existing scholarship, I would have employed its use throughout this research. However, in looking at existing literature pertaining to economic opportunities outside of wage employment, it has become clear that as attitudes and treatments of the sector has grown and developed more specific language continues to be developed to describe it. Unfortunately, the growing specificity in language has made it difficult for this research (and I imagine others) to comprehensively review scholarship on the sector because of its semantic dissociation.

Choosing language

Despite these limiting associations, the term ‘informal sector’ remains the most popular in the body of literature in which this research is couched. Well-regarded scholars of the subject such as Paulo Souza and Victor Tokman (1976), Hernando de Soto (1989), Saskia Sassen (1989), Madeline Leonard (1998), Jacques Charmes (2009), Gracia Clark (2010) amongst countless others, employ the term “informal sector” or “informal economy” in their widely varied analyses, without much detriment. As a result, for the purpose of this research, I will use the terms informal sector and informal economy. The decision to use this language over some of the other terms (i.e., underground economy, quasi-formal economy, System D) comes with full-realization that this language, although potentially limited by its historical usage, will ensure the association of this research with
the larger body of work. One of the enduring challenges in researching this subject is the many terms, which often serve to disassociate some scholarship from its topical brethren. Indeed any language may fail to capture the dynamism of the sector and encourages a limited or loaded approach to research, however in order to wage any sort of discussion sacrifices of this nature are often made.

**Defining Formality**

As I seek to explore the way in which informal sector food vendors are imbedded in larger and more formal global supply networks, an articulation of the term “formal” and the “formal economy” are also essential to this research. Throughout the majority of scholarship, the term “formal sector” is intended to mean registered, regulated, taxed, and therefore legally protected economic exchange and enterprise. This can be on the scale of a single firm such as is the case with the popular nightclub Citizen Kofi in Accra, Ghana, or on the global scale such is the case with a product like Coca-Cola. The formal sector in the realm of food sector vending in Ghana is generally employed to describe governmentally registered brick and mortar restaurants, found mostly in larger more urban areas; governmentally registered and regulated renters of physical market space; as well as transnational food franchisees seen throughout the large urban areas of Ghana. The emphasis on registration and governmental legibility are the most important characteristics of formality and the formal economy in the context of this research.
Chapter 3: Three Theoretical Paradigms

Regardless of the terms used to name it, the desire for description, categorization and explanation of the informal sector for researchers and policymakers is at the heart of all discussions on the topic. Theories justifying the existence and function of the informal economy remain varied and evolving with equal fluidity as the economic theories that govern it. This constant change poses a challenge to scholars interested in measuring, theorizing, and explaining the informal economy—an entity that is universally identified as difficult to measure, theorize, and explain.

In discussing these difficulties, many scholars and international organizations have found it helpful to categorize theoretical trends in research and scholarship on the informal sector. Recognizing that there have been large shifts in theories of the informal economy has lead some scholars break ideas surrounding it into a number of different categories. While the number of categories varies among scholars—be it three divisions, four or five—there appear to be some general underlying paradigms, which, for the purpose of my research I have sliced into three pieces. These three paradigms, synthesizing language from scholars Adom and Williams (2014), Bacchetta, Ernst, and Bustamante (2009) and Tamar Diane Wilson (2011), are the modernist, the structuralist, and the neoliberal approaches to understanding both why the informal economy exists and how it relates to the formal economy.

These three different rationales have sought to explain not only the existence of informal economic activity but also the reasons for its growth or development in the context of the global economy and under the forces of globalization. As supply chains become increasingly globalized, these paradigms offer competing justifications as to where
and why we might continue to observe informal economic activity. Understanding each of these theoretical approaches offers essential insight into not only the history and role of the informal sector but also the theoretical framing of the other scholarship pertaining to matters of informal economics. This research aspires to contribute to this body of work by organizing these paradigms for the reader to be used in the future as a kind of informal sector decoder ring. I will review each of these three different approaches not only to familiarize the reader of this thesis with the broad stroke approach to informal economic theory, but also to provide a contextual framework for my own findings on the imbeddedness of informal food vendors in Ghana.

**Paradigm I: The Modernist Rationale**

The first theoretical view to that became popular historically is paradigm structured around the modernist framework. This theory of the informal sector is grounded in economic dualism\(^5\) (Adom & Williams, 2014; Boeke, 1978; Harris & Todaro, 1970) and as a result is also referred to as the Dualist rationale (Bacchetta et al., 2009). The perspective places the informal sector in an inherently hierarchical structure reflecting a history of colonial development practice. In this framework, the informal economy is treated as temporary fixture present mostly in developing nations, destined for obsolescence as industrialization, market development, and technology create a maximally efficient and

\(^5\) Traditionally the dual economy, first proposed by J.H. Boeke in the late 19th century, consists of two parts: (1) an industrialized urban sector characterized by high-productivity and well-paid skilled labor and (2) a large primitive agricultural sector with minimally productive and poorly compensated rural workers.
fully formal economic climate. As Adom and Williams (2014) explain, “The belief is that given the choice, populations will opt to in engage in formal rather than informal work and that the continuing existence of informal work stymies progress and development” (2014, p. 429). This presents a dualist paradigm that focuses on competition between formal and informal sectors and assumes a dearth of dependencies between the sectors—essentially, as one grows the other shrinks and likewise.

The modernist paradigm was particularly popular in early scholarship on informality (Adom & Williams, 2014; de Soto, 1989; Harris & Todaro, 1970; Hart, 1973; ILO, 1972) and has since been largely rejected as scholars have observed highly developed informal economies even in advanced capitalist nations (Danesh, 1991; Gërxhrani, 2004; Gladstone, 2005; International Labour Conference & ILO, 2002; Leonard, 1998; Neuwirth, 2011; Offe, 1992; Portes, Castells, & Benton, 1989; Sassen-koob, 1989; Sassen, 2012; Williams & Padmore, 2013). It was the common occurrence of informal enterprise observed in the developed world that motivated scholars to push their considerations of the informal economy into new realms resulting in both the structuralist and neoliberal paradigms.

**Paradigm II: The Structuralist Paradigm**

After discovering that the dualist view was a somewhat limited approach, scholars began to apply structuralism to scholarship on the informal economy (Harvey, 1989; Portes et al., 1989; Sassen-koob, 1989). Instead of positing that formal and informal are both separate and in opposition to one another—adequate development eventually correcting the problem of informality—structuralism, also referred to by some scholars as the neo-
Marxist perspective (Wilson, 2011), provides for the enduring existence of the informal sector as part of the growth and development of the formal economy. In this neo-Marxist view, the two economies are not separate or in opposition to one another, but far more fluid and interdependent. The most basic contrast is that modernists “view the informal sector as the inferior segment of a dual labor market, with no direct link to the formal economy, while structuralists see it as comprising small firms and unregistered workers, subordinated to large capitalist firms” (Bacchetta et al., 2009, p. 40). As Adom and Williams explain, for structuralists “the informal economy is a conduit used by capitalist firms to produce and distribute goods and services and an inherent part and by-product of a new emergent mode of production” (2014, p. 430). This explanation is corroborated by my findings on the distribution channels of global products by transnational corporations, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 8 and then again in Chapter 9.

The structuralist or neo-Marxist theory maintains that informal and formal economies are inextricably linked through deepening capitalist connections and that “growth is unlikely to eliminate informal production relationships, which are intrinsically associated with capitalist development” (Bacchetta et al., 2009, p. 42). These connections provide essential opportunities for profit for those in the formal economy and opportunity for economic activity among those who cannot access the formal economy. As David Harvey points out relating this perspective to current trends in globalization, “the labour market has undergone a radical restructuring...employers have taken advantage of the pools of surplus (unemployed or underemployed) labourers to push for much more flexible work regimes and labour contracts”(Harvey, 1989, p. 150). It is in the context of this changing global climate—as supply chains become more globalized and economic linkages
more deeply intermingled that according to scholars of the structuralist paradigm, the impulse for informal entrepreneurship becomes most pronounced.

Opportunities for informal economic activity arise as capitalist firms increase their size and attempt to minimize input costs. In this paradigm, the gaps created by the formal economy naturally encourage informal sector workers to seek out opportunities for small-scale enterprise that offer ways of making ends meet for both consumers and producers. Although, structuralism denies that informal sector workers are autonomous agents, maintaining the hierarchy of value presented in the other two paradigms—formality above informality—Adom and Williams concur that this neo-Marxist paradigm supports their observations in the field that informal workers have ample space to grow and develop successful and profitable enterprises outside of taxation, regulation, and measurement.

**Paradigm III: Neoliberal Rationale**

Also a departure from the modernist paradigm is the neoliberal rationale, which gained popularity in the 1970s right along side the rise of neoliberalism itself. With the neoliberal paradigm came the inevitable reframing of the purpose and structure of the informal economy in terms of its relationship with government regulation and capitalist market intervention. Under the neoliberal rationale, also referred to by some scholars as the legalist approach (Bacchetta et al., 2009; Wilson, 2011), the informal sector exists as a space of triumph over the stifling forces of state-led market regulation (de Soto, 1989; Perry, 2007). Adom and Williams explain that the neoliberal paradigm envisions that, “informal entrepreneurs, are heroes rejecting the bureaucratic shackles of an over-regulated state and the growth of the informal economy is seen to be a direct response to
the over-regulation of the market” (2014, p. 430). This view was championed most popularly by Hernando de Soto in his work on informality in Peru, which will be addressed more in depth in Chapter 7.

The neoliberal paradigm further identifies the existence of informal enterprise and the resourceful informal entrepreneurs that constitute it as a kind of “popular resistance to over-regulation” (Adom & Williams, 2014, p. 430), framing these workers as a proverbial canary-in-the-mine indicating whether or not state-sanctioned market regulations are successful in creating a climate for economic growth. Scholars of the legalist perspective “see the informal economy as a hotbed of emerging entrepreneurs, constrained only by unnecessary, slanted and superfluous legislation” (Wilson, 2011, p. 206). As Bacchetta and co-authors note, informal actors under the neoliberal paradigm maintain that:

As long as the costs of registration and other government procedures exceed the benefits of being in the formal sector, micro-entrepreneurs will choose to operate informally. As such, they constitute a large reservoir for future increases in growth and living standards if only regulatory reforms and reductions in the tax burden could be introduced. Bacchetta et al., 2009, pp. 42-43

As a result, this paradigm is often employed by not only neoliberal scholars but also policy activists looking to improve the ways in which governments treat informal entrepreneurs from a systems level approach. Informal economic actors in this framework symbolize the prominent failures of state-led economic regulatory policy and represent a strong argument for more free and open markets.
Choosing a Theoretical Framework

In the analysis of these three main trends to the informal sector scholars provide critiques of each. For example, Adom and Williams utilize research from the Eastern Region capital of Ghana, which supports the rejection of the modernist rationale stating that the majority of the workers that they interviewed maintained that “informality was normality, and this would continue to be the case for the foreseeable future” (Adom & Williams, 2014, p. 435). According Adom and Williams, no longer do individuals see the informal sector as a symptom of under-development.

However, despite the almost popular dismissal of the modernist perspective, the structuralist and neoliberal paradigms are all strongly supported by the experiences of the informal sector workers on the ground in Adom and Williams interviews. In their analysis, they conclude that the majority of the informal entrepreneurs interviewed have many complimentary reasons for working informally most of which support the perspective that informality is an integral part of the growth and development of the formal economy especially in the developing world. Adom and Williams discover that navigating the process of formal registration may be a barrier to establishing formal businesses, but entrepreneurs are also inspired to start informal businesses because of social ties and opportunity created through the formal economy. This reality suggests that a hybridized theory—a mixture of neoliberal and structuralist views—is the most descriptive of real world conditions and motivations.

There are a multitude of subtle connections and intersections that comprise the deeply complex and personal nature of the informal sector as well as the importance of employing qualitative research methodology to contribute to its legibility. Scholars
interested in categorizing and naming these views, encourage a multifaceted approach to
describing and observing informal economic activity. Adom and Williams in particular
highlight that “only by combining together the perspectives, which previously seen as
competing viewpoints, that it is possible to achieve a finer-grained and more
comprehensive understanding of the complex and diverse relationships between formal
and informal work” (Adom & Williams, 2014, p. 441). In other words justifying the
existence of the informal sector with only a structuralist or neoliberal perspective may
limit the scope of research.

This research intends to adopt this approach by recognizing the wide variation of
the many social, spatial and cultural ways in which informal sector food vending in Ghana
has come to be and continues to endure. While governmental systems of business
registration and taxation are unnecessarily obtuse, which may explain some degree of the
pervasiveness of informal businesses, individuals are also highly motivated to engage in
capitalist endeavors through the utilization of social networks, which are imbedded within
the larger forces of globalization. The reasons for informal workers joining and
maintaining businesses in the informal sector presented in this research are widely varied
but universally have a strong undercurrent of socially motivated forces supportive of both
the structuralist paradigm and neoliberal paradigms (Adom & Williams, 2014; Bacchetta et
al., 2009). Because highlighting the importance of these social relationships and their role
in greater economic systems will contribute most significantly to theories of the informal
sector of both the structuralist and neoliberal traditions, I have chosen to ignore the
modernist approach and focus only on the paradigmatic frameworks of neoliberalism and
structuralism.
Furthermore, because my discussion pertains to reflections of globalization within informal sector food vending, the structuralist perspective offers the most perspective on modern capitalism and its role in the encouragement of informal economic opportunity among the urban poor. I have chosen to utilize the structuralist view due to its attempts at explaining some of the forces of capitalism, which in this analysis are being discussed in the context of globalization.
Chapter 4: In the Context of Modern Ghana

Africa Rising

In December of 2011 the popular weekly news magazine, The Economist, devoted an entire issue to the economic growth and increasing geo-political relevance of the continent of Africa. The issue, titled Africa Rising, represented a complete and total turnaround from the previous decade when the same news magazine published another issue entitled The Hopeless Continent (Economist, 2000) also referring to Africa, only this time focusing on ubiquitous civil unrest and pervasive political corruption. The magazine’s recent turnaround is exemplary of a popular consensus that the African continent, growing in population and in the midst of a period of rapid economic development, is entering the global economic spotlight. This heightened interest is major force in attracting foreign investment and transnational corporations (Kanbur, 2008). This openness to the possibility of business thriving in Africa is particularly apparent in the West African nation of Ghana (Byerlee, 1974; Campbell, 1994; Moller-Jensen & Knudsen, 2008). Ghana has long been a barometer of progress in the region since it became the first sub-Saharan nation to achieve independence from colonial rule in 1957 under the powerful leadership of Pan-Africanist Kwame Nkrumah and has maintained peaceful and democratic transfer of power since.

However, despite periods of economic growth and recent infrastructural developments, Ghana’s history is full of persistent economic challenges. Scholar Alison Brown explains, “At independence in 1957, Ghana had good infrastructure, a well-educated workforce, and a per capita income equivalent to that of South Korea, but by the mid-
1960s, the economy had collapsed” (2006, p. 62). This economic despair remained consistent until the early 1980s, when Ghana like many sub-Saharan African, followed the recommendations of the IMF and World Bank, to adopt a structural adjustment program (SAP)(Brown, 2006).

SAPs, the pinnacle of neoliberal economics, were a series of loans designed to encourage developing nations, like Ghana, to implement free-market policies that would support capitalist market development (Lopes, 2013). This would in turn encourage economic growth throughout the nation as well as the region by encouraging the establishment of international economic ties through trade and investment. Initially, Ghana’s SAP “had a dramatic macro-level impact, changing GDP from negative growth to an average of 5-6 percent...and reducing inflation from 123 percent...to 28 percent” (Brown, 2006, p. 62), however, at the individual level and especially among the more rural populations, it was experienced as the elimination of “over 300,000 public sector workers and unprecedented cuts in state expenditure on public services leading to a rapid growth in informal sector activities” (Brown, 2006, p. 62). This peculiar trend seems to be replicating in Ghana again today, indicated through the fact that while Ghana continues to see GDP growth, the living conditions and economic security of individual Ghanaians is rapidly declining.

Since the SAPs of the 1980s, the informal sector flourished alongside at times with Ghana’s formal economy. In November 2010, Ghana finally shed its status as a “low-income country” moving up the ladder of economic expectation to the status of “middle-low income country” (Osei-Boateng & Ampratwum, 2011), the first nation in the region to do so, even before the even more economically robust neighbor nation, Nigeria. And while this
measure may not be a wholly honest articulation of the recent changes afoot, the social, economic, and political elements are an important part of the framework of this research. This chapter aims to articulate those elements with particular focus on some of the processes of globalization in Ghana.

**Globalization and Ghana**

As this research seeks to address how informal sector food vendors on the ground in Ghana reflect processes of globalization, a discussion of what is meant by the term globalization is aptly due. Globalization is a popular topic in modern scholarship and thus it is essential that its meaning for the purpose of my discussion on informal sector food vending in Ghana is made plain.

Globalization in the most broad sense “encompasses all types of economic and cultural transfers between nations - including domination of the media and widespread use of the world-wide web” (Carr, Chen, & ILO, 2002). The World Health Organization sees globalization to involve two inseparable elements: “the opening of borders to increasingly fast flows of goods, services, finance, people and ideas across international borders; and the changes in institutional and policy regimes at the international and national levels that facilitate or promote such flows” (WHO, 2014), which is a reasonable description of the term. For the purpose of this research, I will use term globalization, in its most basic sense, meaning the increase of international cultural and economic connections amongst nations facilitated through state-promoted trade and policy.

Scholars have long focused on Ghana and globalization because of its rich colonial history and subsequent rise to independence, the first nation in the region to do so. Ghana
has displayed symptoms of globalization for centuries, from the arrival of the New World crops in the 15th century (Bartle, 2014), which are now utilized to make many Ghanaian staple dishes, to the adoption of English as the national language in its post-colonial years. Research that has focused on Ghana and globalization has in the past taken a broad-lensed structural approach to identifying the globalization in Ghana. One scholar focused on the ways in which the Ghanaian labor market is affected by global processes (Britwum & Martens, 2008), and another on how neoliberal trade policy affects the working poor throughout Ghana (Carr et al., 2002). And while this scholarship does an excellent job in providing insight into the recent trends in the neoliberalization of the global economy, the effects of globalization are rapidly changing especially on the micro-level. The growing flexibility of labor, which has resulted in the relocation of manufacturing jobs to countries in the Global South with loose labor laws and low wages, and the increasing openness of global commodity trade routes, which have had globalized many of Ghana’s once locally produced commodities, have had undeniable effects on Ghana’s informal sector. And although globalization in Ghana is not isolated to any one region, the southern regions of Ghana have certainly experienced more rapid changes at the hands of international investors and the liberalization of commerce.

Ghanaians on the move: Migration, Urbanization and Informality

Uneven development and its inevitable effect on migration patterns in Ghana have also supported the growth of the informal sector (Kanbur, 2008). The southern regions of the country (Eastern Region, Greater Accra Region, Central Region, Western Region, and the Ashanti Region), rich in mineral resources (e.g., bauxite, manganese, gold, oil, and
cocoa) and nearer to industrial shipping ports (i.e., Sekondi/Takoradi and Tema), have long been favored by business interests, attracting a disproportionate number of financial and human resources, which have resulted in better roads, schools, market infrastructure, and public utilities (Kanbur, 2008; Konadu-Agyemang, 2000). This trend of uneven investment in Southern Ghana has its roots even in the British colonial era, when as home to the majority of colonial administrative operations, the Southern regions of Ghana boomed with commerce and infrastructure, while the North remained largely undeveloped. More recently, with the discovery of oil off the coast of the Western Region (WNC, 2007) foreign investments continue to be concentrated in the southern regions of the country presenting opportunities for accelerated growth for communities and commerce in those areas.

Rural communities of northern regions of Ghana remain isolated from the economic activity as well the infrastructural growth and development dominating the south. This has an undeniable effect on migration patterns, which have in turn contributed to the rapid urbanization of Southern Ghana (Byerlee, 1974; Moller-Jensen & Knudsen, 2008). Rural residents from the northern regions (Northern Region, Upper East Region, and Upper West Region) of Ghana, motivated by economic opportunity are choosing to relocate to major cities in the southern regions of Ghana at a growing rate (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). According to the 2010 Census, Ghana is now a nation whose population is a majority urban, with 51% of Ghanaians residing in urban areas. Most of this urbanization is concentrated in the southern part of the country with the exception of Tamale, the capital city of the Northern Region.

The importance of the migration of northerners to the south and rural populations to cities to the context of this research is the enduring connection between globalization,
urbanization, unemployment, and the informal sector in Ghana (Hart, 1973; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & SourceOECD (Online service), 2009; Portes et al., 1989). As international companies seek out business opportunities in the southern regions of Ghana, Ghanaians migrate towards these economic opportunities. Even though Ghana’s southern cities are growing rapidly in population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012), the amount of available employment has not kept pace despite the rapid influx of transnational corporations and foreign investment. This has forced individuals to seek economic opportunity outside of formal employment through informal sector work distributing goods that global corporations import into Ghana in increasing quantities. In Ghana, globalization is running parallel to rapid urbanization, which relies on informal economy for its flexible labor and efficient distribution networks.

**The China Factor**

A crucial player in the influx of financial resources to southern Ghana and a central figure to the research pertaining to globalization and informal sector food vendors presented here is the nation of China. With regards to “economic cooperation, China has agreed to cooperate with Ghana in the areas of agriculture, investment, trade and infrastructure” (Dela Tsikata, Fenny, & Aryeetey, 2008), helping Ghana to improve and expand its markets, manufacturing operations, and trade routes. Most significantly, the partnership resulted in the formation of the China-Africa Development (CAD) Fund, which was designed “to support reputable Chinese companies to invest in projects in Africa that will create employment, foster technological progress and promote development” (2008, p. 5) and since its formation has been supplied billions of dollars for projects across Ghana.
The result of this partnership is particularly apparent not only in the growing presence of Chinese immigrants throughout Ghana (Ho, 2012) but also in the major infrastructural developments. These developments include the reconstruction and redesign of several of Ghana’s busiest markets like Kotokuraba and Kejetia in the Central Region and Ashanti Region, respectively. Despite these market development plans, the vast majority of CADs investments are concentrated near Ghana’s two deep-water shipping ports in the cities of Tema and Sekondi-Takoradi. These two cities have seen strategic infrastructure improvements, which have served to reduce traffic congestion and increase commercial activity. The industrial city of Tema, located just 16 miles from Accra and home to a heavy concentration of industry in the nation, supporting everything from value-added food processing facilities to oil refineries, is now home to the highest concentration of Chinese immigrants who operate and are employed in many of the nearby factories (Ho, 2012). Similarly, it is no longer unusual to see crews of Chinese contractors in the rural areas of the Western Region, supervising the improvement of the essential East-West highway, called by locals Fig. 2. President Mahama with Chinese Contractors, (photo credit: China Daily, 2013)
the *Elubo Road*. Globalization through this influx of financial resources and opening of trade routes brought about through the Ghana-China partnership is affecting having clear effects on the social, cultural, and spatial organizations of informal sector food vendors in the southern regions of Ghana.

**The New Urban Plan**

In May of 2012, the Government of Ghana (GOG) released the results of an extensive investigation of Ghana’s rapid-urbanization for the purpose of sculpting a long-term urban development strategy. Through a review of existing studies and interviews with key stakeholders, the GOG found that the rate of urbanization continues to grow throughout Ghana and that this growth presents major challenges that threaten national economic growth and development (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2012). Among those challenges are the concentration of urban growth to a handful of cities, weak urban economies, massive urban sprawl, environmental degradation in and around urban centers, high rates of urban unemployment, and rapid growth of urban poverty.

These concerns are addressed in Ghana’s first-ever National Urban Policy and Action Plan (NUP), which is the first of its kind in the region and reflects some important changes in the ways that the GOG sees economic activity and the potential for economic growth. The plan is a clear reflection of the influence of globalization on not only Ghana’s current conditions but in the way that the government intends to deal with it in the future. The policy plan and framework were developed by a variety of global actors, written and funded in partnership with Ghana’s Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, the German Development Cooperation, and the World Bank. The framework details 12 key
areas of focus and suggests inter-ministerial policy initiatives to address the identified problems. It suggests leveraging international relationships for funding opportunities as well as open trade routes and liberalizing economic regulations.

Most surprisingly is the plan's acknowledgement and treatment of the informal economy, making unprecedented mention of the crucial role the informal sector plays in the country's potential for economic growth. The plan articulates the GOG's desire to “[promote] urban economic development with emphasis on local economic development and informal sector” (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2012, p. 4). This position represents a dramatic turnaround from Gracia Clark's observations from the 1980s when “arrests, confiscations, demolitions and deportations, as well as direct policy statements, [testified] to the desire of many governments to reduce or eliminate unofficial trade” (Clark, 1988, p. 2). The New Urban Plan's approach to the informal sector reflects the reality on the ground that informal trade no longer represents marginal economic activity. In fact, according to the most recent national census 86% of workforce employment nationwide is in the private informal sector. (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). This is one of the highest rates in the. The informal sector constitutes a substantial proportion of employment in Ghana making it both an essential topic of investigation as well as a necessary part of any government policy looking to address the economic realities in Ghana.

Most central to this research, however, is the coming together of policy measures that both encourage globalization and claim to support informality. Scholarship on the topic, suggests this is an impossibility, that as countries become increasingly globalized reliance on the formal economy becomes more pronounced and the informal sector shrinks
(Bacchetta et al., 2009). In fact this has been the trend in sub-Saharan Africa for much of the last decade that although there has still been informal sector growth the rate of growth has slowed considerable as processes of neoliberal globalization arrest the region (Bacchetta et al., 2009). This is only to say that there are undeniable structural connections between the informal sector and globalization in Ghana, which present substantial motivation for this research investigation into the ways in which globalization is reflected through the informal sector food vending in the southern regions of Ghana.
Chapter 5: Qualities of Informal Sector Food Vending

The informal economy in Ghana has been a topic of scholarly interest since Hart’s landmark study in 1973. Within that interest, food vending has been a common lens used for analysis and examination of how Ghanaian culture and the customs of Ghana’s dominant ethnic groups engage in informal enterprise. Scholars from many different disciplines including anthropology, sociology, economics, and political science have focused not only on quantitative measures of the sector and its position within the Ghanaian economy but also the sector’s qualitative aspects. Qualitative characteristics of the informal economy in Ghana, while highlighting the wide variety of enterprises and endeavors articulate important commonalities, which contribute significantly to the framework of this research. Past scholarship has made clear that informal sector food vending in Ghana is: 1) dominated by women; 2) relies heavily on social networks for labor, security and on-going economic viability; 3) is marked by low levels of capital and investment in business infrastructure; 4) supports frequent entry and exit (Baah-Ennumh & Adom-Asamoah, 2012; Clark, 1988, 1994, 2010; Hanson, 2005; Hart, 1973; F. Lyon, 2003; Lyons & Brown, 2007; Lyons & Snoxell, 2005; Owusu & Lund, 2004; Dzodzi Tsikata, 2011). These ubiquitous characteristics help researchers not only in identifying informal enterprise but also in pinpointing the reflections of globalization on the sector in new and different ways.

Gracia Clark has presented substantial ethnographic information on market women in Ghana often focusing on the economic role of women in Ghanaian families and how informal economic opportunities support those roles (Clark, 1994, 2010). Through a series of life histories, Clark articulates the experience and perceptions of female informal
entrepreneurs and how social networks contribute to economic security in informal female-dominated business.

One reoccurring explanation for the prominent role of women in informal food enterprise, Clark explains is the matrilineal orientation of Ghana’s two most dominant ethnic groups: the Ga and the Akan (Brown, 2006; Clark, 1994, 2010). In traditional matrilineal households, women took responsibility for the production, procurement, and preparation of food for the entire family and thus, in the last few decades as the increase in living expenses has rapidly outpaced wages, it naturally follows that matriarchs seek informal economic opportunities in a context in which they are most familiar: food vending. Furthermore, “amongst the Ga of Accra, women and men traditionally live separately after marriage. Large-single sex compound houses in low-income urban areas facilitate informal work” (Alison Brown, 2006, pp. 62–63). The social and economic independence afforded to Ghanaian women by this matrilineal tradition certainly reflects forces of globalization as women have increased access to a more diverse array of foodstuffs at premium prices, which can be sold for profit in smaller communities throughout the country.

As women are central to informal food vending in Ghana, their international relationships with global traders offer evidence of the ways in which women in the informal sector are playing an active role in the globalization of Ghana’s economy. Ethnographic research on the informal sector in Ghana has contributed significantly to the evolving perceptions that highlight that not only is “informal the new normal” (Charmes, 2009), but that the sector, especially in sub-Saharan Africa is dominated by women (Baah-Ennumh & Adom-Asamoah, 2012; Clark, 1994, 2010; International Labour Conference & ILO, 2002; Owusu & Lund, 2004; Tinker, 1997) who are now more globally-connected than
ever. This makes women an important part of the past, present, and future of the Ghanaian economy.

Supportive of structuralist arguments conceptualizing informal workers as predominantly social actors, I observed that social networks dominate informal food vending in Ghana. These kinship and friendship networks have many important functions such as providing startup capital for beginning entrepreneurs, constituting social capital necessary to secure prime vending locations, offering on-going financial support in the form of unofficial loans as businesses expand and contract under market forces, as well as encouraging bartering systems wherein goods and services are exchanged with no money involved. And like many of the characteristics of informal food vending, these networks are become increasingly globalized, with family living abroad and helping to support informal enterprises back home. In his investigation of social networking in the Eastern region of Ghana, Kobena Hanson finds that “the interactions that take place between and within households, as well as the reciprocity networks and trust that people negotiate daily...are important assets that
reduce vulnerability and increase opportunities” (Hanson, 2005, p. 1294). The importance of friendship and kinship networks in informal sector food vending in Ghana is a paramount characteristic and one of the ways in which processes of globalization are becoming increasingly pronounced.

In addition to these kinship and friendship networks, scholars of the Ghanaian economy have observed more formalized product and trader associations for decades. Product associations are organized groups of informal vendors who work together to manage the market for a particular product. Each physical market may have 10-50 different associations that contribute to the organization and success of each individual product from tomatoes to t-shirts. With regards to the product associations governing food items female leadership is pervasive especially in the realm of foodstuffs. These associations of informal food vendors provide strong central leadership in the form of an *ohemma* (female leader) organized around individual products (Clark, 1994). There is an association for onion vendors, tomato sellers, and rice mongers alike.

The Queen of each of these groups has the essential role of facilitating and maintaining price efficiencies through otherwise inaccessible economies of scale as well as providing overall market utilities management, competition mitigation, and conflict resolution (Clark, 2010; F. Lyon, 2003; Lyons & Brown, 2007). In my research, according to customs of respect and honor, I first sought out contact with the *ohemma* at

Fig. 4. Low Infrastructure bread vendor, 2014
each market location before interviewing other individuals. The permission and approval of *ohemma* made finding vendors and conducting interviews with her permission less troublesome to vendors.

Another pronounced quality of informal sector food vending in Ghana are the financial magnitude of operations and infrastructural investments. Informal enterprise is characteristically limited in size by the strength and breadth of social ties (Clark, 1988, 1994). This is most commonly observed as consistently low-levels of capital invested and exchanged, minimal employees, and a dearth of permanent infrastructure on which the business depends (Clark, 1988, 1994; Neuwirth, 2011). This quality is directly connected to the frequent entry and exit to market that informal entrepreneurs engage in. Because of the low-levels of capital as well as little to no infrastructural investment informal workers often start businesses under profitable conditions and dissolve or adapt them when they become unprofitable (Clark, 1994, 2010). This adaptability, observed in the fluid entry and exit to a wide variety of markets, serves global trade networks efficiently. Transnational corporations, instead making costly infrastructural investments for retail sales need only focus on the wholesale level, allowing informal vendors to distribute products throughout already familiar market spaces and communities.

Fig. 5. Informal banana and groundnut vendor, 2014.
Challenges to Informal Sector Food Vendors in Ghana

Informal food enterprises face many challenges trying to maintain their viability in cities throughout Ghana. Challenges to these informal vendors have in the past been categorized into three primary spheres: social, spatial, and economic (Alison Brown, 2006; Clark, 1994, 2010). These challenges are best conceptualized and often observed in constant relationship with one another, meaning that the experience of one challenge usually signifies the experience of another. For example, if an informal food vendor experiences a social challenge with a disagreeable vendor on whom she relies for ingredients, she may then be forced to seek those items from an unfamiliar vendor, which may not afford her a favorable price, thus resulting in an unexpected economic challenge.

Challenges related to the social sphere include everything oriented around the individual relationships informal entrepreneurs rely on in order to maintain economic viability. This includes: inter-vendor conflict and competition, paying too much at the wholesale level, deliberate sabotage of products, as well as theft in the marketplace. The avoidance of social challenges plays a major role in carving out an individual vendor’s specific informal enterprise in that strong social relationships often provide both the foundation and encouragement to go into business in the first place.

Spatial challenges, on the other hand, are challenges that involve gaining and maintaining access to areas to conduct business. These challenges are often conflicts initiated by the state. They include displacement, overcrowding as a result of marginalization, or being restricted to limited traffic areas, which has obvious repercussions for business. Spatial challenges obviously have a direct relationship with the third category of challenges experienced by informal sector vendors, the economic
challenges.

This last category of challenge has perhaps the broadest scope but the most profound influence and the shape and experience of informal sector food vendors. Economic challenges encompass everything from a lack of initial investment capital to the scarcity of family resources needed for education and training. All three of these challenges present legitimate threats to informal sector food vending in Ghana. Due to the precarious legal status of informal enterprise, vendors are frequently displaced from public urban space, and even have goods taken by officials in violent and forceful ways. The tropical climate and poor roads makes storage and transportation of goods a problem, as is finding and maintaining a space to vend. The persistence of these challenges provide a strong basis for the systems of order and formality deployed and maintained by informal food vendors that this research seeks to contribute to the body of literature concerned with the informal sector in Ghana.
Chapter 6: Researching Globalization and the Informal Sector

Research on the informal sector has been a persistent challenge for scholars since the informal economy was first documented in the 20th century. While some scholars rely heavily on census data (Hart, 1973), others have preferred to use participant observation to couple economic analysis with qualitative data (de Soto, 1989; Sassen-koob, 1989; Neuwirth, 2011). And just as some prefer utilizing deeply qualitative ethnographic methods (Clark, 1994, 2010), again others employ in-depth economic analysis of formal businesses looking for the shadows of informality (Sassen-koob, 1989). The methods have been greatly varied, producing even greater results.

Difficulties arise in that the very quantities and qualities research seeks to discover and articulate lack standardized legibility, which would make them easily observable and explainable. These frequently changing and dynamic characteristics are in turn what makes the sector distinguishable from people and businesses in the formal economy. As Alfonso Morales explains, "whatever the variables we analyze, vendors innovate. They are continuously recreating the canvas we seek to interpret" (Morales, 2007). And certainly this dynamism is some of the attraction for researchers. In fact, observing the ways in which this adaptability interacts with other global process is what drives this researcher. However, finding the best research methods with which to approach this particular topic, required a two-part process. First, a review of past methodologies and the resulting data, followed by the design and implementation of Case Study to contribute to the body of work concerning informal sector food vendors in Ghana. As more researchers have turned their focus to informal sector activity it becomes important to recognize that "the various approaches to measurement are best viewed as complementary, yielding insights into
different aspects of the issue” (Gëxhani, 2004, p.32) rather than competing for empirical conclusions on the topic. Research methodology on the informal economy and its reflections of globalization must in turn be as dynamic as the subject itself.

Examining the Methodological History of Informal Research

In examining past research conducted on globalization and the informal sector, I began by selecting the work of several scholars whose focuses were locked onto the informal economy. I chose first Keith Hart’s work, not only for its foundational value, but also because it was based in Ghana, which had the potential to shed some light on field work challenges I could anticipate in my own work. Undoubtedly Ghana has undergone substantial changes since the 1970s, which provided a foundation for contrast that also motivated my selection of this research approach in forming my own. Secondly, I chose to look at the work of Hernando de Soto, who although working in a different region altogether, had a noteworthy approach to exploring the bureaucratic systems that he believed influenced the rise of informality. I then chose two more contemporary scholars, Gracia Clark and Fergus Lyon, who had both employed ethnographic approaches to informal sector research. I hoped that this array of research would help frame and inspire a more concrete research inquiry on the informal sector before examining scholarship on its intersection with globalization.

Keith Hart (1973) first glimpsed the informal sector as a mysterious shadow within employment data that surfaced in his extensive quantitative analysis of census data and quantitative data from other scholars working in Ghana. He observed huge portions of the population of Accra were considered unemployed or non-wage earning, yet still recorded
as economically active. As Ghanaian census data is self-reported, it became clear to Hart that although Ghanaians did not perceive themselves to be “employed” in the formal sense of the word, they still considered themselves of earning income and engaging in economic transactions. Hart interpreted this to mean that despite a high rate of unemployment in Accra, Ghanaians were engaged in other ways of earning income. Through the analysis of individual and household expenditure, Hart began to uncover that wage-employment was only one small part of household income and that many Ghanaians were filling in wage gaps with supplementary strategies. This inspired interviews and additional fieldwork to collect qualitative data on the types of informal income opportunities that were already at work. His triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data allowed him to paint a fairly detailed portrait of the function and structure of the informal sector in Ghana for the time. Hart’s research most effectively produced results on informal enterprises and their economic role in Ghanaian livelihoods, but neglected extensive inquiry into the lives and experiences of informal workers. He captured little information about qualitative aspects of informal economic opportunities and their context in the greater social and cultural fabric of Ghana.

Across the Atlantic, Hernando de Soto (1989), researching the informal sector in Peru more than a decade later, embarked on a critical neoliberal examination of the State as a barrier to formal enterprise. His research is particularly noteworthy because in conjunction with researchers from the Institute of Liberty and Democracy, de Soto “set up a fictitious clothing factory and went through the procedure- the bureaucratic maze- of establishing it legally” (Llosa, 1989, p. xiv). As a participant observer, de Soto navigated the systems of bureaucracy, which he conjectured were a main culprit in the growth and
development of informal enterprises in Peru. The data collected from his endeavor was combined with data from the business, manufacturing, housing, and transportation sectors to create a picture of the productivity and resilience of informal sector work in Peru despite bureaucratic strongholds. De Soto's inquiry, much like Hart’s was most prominently concerned with the characteristics and functions of informal enterprises as well as the challenges that state bureaucracy posed to the sector, over the qualities and experiences of informal workers.

The dearth of research focused on informal sector workers was central to what Gracia Clark, an anthropologist also investigating the informal sector in Ghana, sought to address when she began her research in 1978. Her research is concerned with both the qualities of informal sector workers and that of the enterprises they run, but succeeds most in telling the individual stories of Ghanaians working in the informal economy. Having spent a total of six years over the last three decades in Ghana engaged in rigorous fieldwork, Clark’s methodology investigated the topic with a strong relationship-based approach. As a result of these relationships and this closeness, the qualitative detail she is able to include in her publications is unparalleled. Using the ethnographic methods of participant observation and interviewing during her years of fieldwork in Kumasi’s Central Market in the Ashanti region of Ghana, Clark built relationships with food vendors who in turn provided her with insight and information into their experiences working in the market. Clark provides a glimpse into the depth of her relationships with her Ghanaian informants:

The privilege of working with them has brought companionship and built my career as an anthropologist in academic and development work. As a white, college-
Clark’s interviews and the resulting publications, focused predominantly on the qualitative aspects of market women, market culture, and distribution networks internal to Ghana. She investigated agricultural supply chains, which at the time of her research were largely domestic. Clark’s research succeeded in painting a vivid picture of the importance of women in the buying and selling of food throughout Ghana, but failed to anticipate the forces of globalization, which would come to change these entrepreneurs and their enterprises in many ways.

Fergus Lyon also engaged in ethnographic research on informal enterprise in Ghana but with a different approach than Clark. Lyon made observations and conducted interviews in four different market locations intermittently over the course of a few years. Unlike Clark’s approach of collecting substantial amounts of data from a single location, Lyon opted to present less comprehensive data but from a greater array of locations. Lyon also relied on relationships to gain access to his research subjects, however he describes employing the “‘lurking’ methodology” (J. Lyon, 2007, p. 166), a slightly more passive observation approach than Clark’s participatory method. According to Strickland and Schlesinger, lurking is when “the observer deliberately situates himself at the periphery of a social setting in such a way that he is “present” but is not required by the situation to interact extensively with others; he is thus relatively unobtrusive in terms of [his subject’s] performance” (Strickland & Schlesinger, 1969, pp. 248–249). In contrast to Clark’s imbedded approach, Lyon’s “lurking” strategy still remained remarkably affective in generating the data he needed for sound conclusions focused on many large cities in Ghana.
Despite a myriad of qualitative and quantitative approaches, scholars continue to struggle against the reality of attempting to measure and observe “the irregular and obscure conditions” (Gërxhani, 2004, p. 27) of informal sector workers and their enterprises and this research is no exception. Researching this subject undoubtedly takes not only time, but also a varied approach. Both of these characteristics are easier to imagine than implement. And although no singular method can offer a sound perspective, the quality and depth that the ethnographic methodology has provided historically, convinced me that it would prove the most successful approach to contributing additional clarity to the scholarly picture of informality and globalization in Ghana.

Scholarship on Globalization

As I set out to investigate past scholarship on the informal sector I also began my investigation of research pertaining to globalization to provide a platform for my own inquiry. In May of 1983, Theodore Levitt published an article for the Harvard Business Review, which is largely recognized as the initial use of the word globalization (Levitt, 1983). Since that time, countless scholars from a multitude of disciplines have researched and written on the ways in which trade, economy, food, and culture are becoming increasingly more connected despite national political borders. Although, it would be impossible for me to absorb and analyze all the scholarship pertaining to globalization, I chose an array, which seemed to provide the most reasonable context for this research.

Throughout this literature, scholars generally stuck to quantitative and theoretical analysis with the exception of the two anthropologists reviewed Richard Wilk and Theodore Bestor who provided excellent ethnographic perspective in realm of food,
globalization, culture, and the marketplace. Another anthropologist, James Ferguson, also discusses concepts of globalization and their applicability or non-applicability to Africa as a continent, which is also worth discussing. However, outside of the work of these three scholars, my assertion that ethnography would be an excellent methodology with which to further contribute to the topic due to the dearth of scholarship with that approach. I will provide a brief overview of some of the literature I reviewed pertaining to globalization here.

The first, scholar who has provided research both on globalization and the informal economy, is Saskia Sassen. In her books *Globalization and Its Discontents* (1999) and *Cities in the World Economy* (2012), she addresses the various intricate “global flows” that connect cities throughout the world in real estate, gold, coffee, oil, and information. She discusses the importance of these networks in including and excluding various nations in economic growth and development (2003, 2012). Her treatment and analysis of these global economic processes is well posited and largely cited by hoards of social scientists, and although her articulation of these global connections are astute and well organized, she presents little qualitative data on what these globalized circuits of trade and exchange look like on the ground, but aim to paint a broad but articulate picture of the ways in which nations are linked through capitalist exchange. The lack of detailed qualitative data, which was an inevitable shortcoming of Sassen’s analysis, remained a consistent gap throughout the literature on the topic of globalization.

James Ferguson aims to offer a more Africa-centric discussion of globalization aiming to unveil “the quite specific ways in which Africa is, and is not, ‘global’” (Ferguson, 2006, p. 27). He argues that Africa for the most part has been left out of discussions on
globalization because it presents a highly unpredictable and “inconvenient case” (2006). He criticizes Sassen for ignoring Africa completely in her book *Globalization and Its Discontents* by pointing out that “The enormous recent literature on globalization so far has had remarkably little to say about Africa” (Ferguson, 2006, p. 25). And although this statement was posited in 2006, I have also observed that the literature on Africa and globalization continues to play catch up.

In the meat of his discussion, Ferguson systematically reviews the “three elements usually identified as central aspects of ‘globalization’: first, the question of culture...; second, ‘flows’ of private capital (especially foreign direct investment); and third, transformations in governance and the changing role of the nation-state” (Ferguson, 2006, p. 29). He looks at the ways in which ideas cultural ideas like that of ‘modernity’, seem to circulate readily, but other elements, especially those concerning access to political power or the economic benefits of capital investments lag behind. These ideas were corroborated by my own research in Ghana, which I will discuss more thoroughly in the final Chapter of this thesis.

Another scholar Ann M. Oberhauser takes another approach eager to address globalization as a gendered process, which structurally excludes women especially women working in the informal sector in Africa. She presents an argument on the intersection of gender and globalization through the lens of how women are affected by global processes in Accra, Ghana. Her discussion uses intersectional feminist theory to argue that “while globalization has been constructed as a dominant and positive process by neoliberal thinking” (Oberhauser, 2010, p. 239), these processes fail to empower women socially or economically. Using broad examples and a case study methodology, Oberhauser presents the argument convincingly but similar to Sassen fails to imbue her data with qualitative
Dr. Sher Verick presents additional finding on globalization, which provided contextual relevance to my research. He investigates the way that globalization has affected the informal sector specifically in Africa. With the end goal of making policy suggestions, Verick uses empirical evidence to examine in depth “the winners and losers in globalized economy” (Verick, 2006, p. 2). He looks at the way globalization is affecting development in several different Africa nations and then posits some advice for policy makers on how to encourage a more equitable approach. While Verick’s argument is well formulated and he offers a detailed glimpse into the affects of globalization, particularly on the Shea butter industry in Burkina Faso, his qualitative data is thin.

Similarly, Marc Bacchetta, Ekkehard Ernst, and Juana Bustamante, in their 2009 report for the International Institute for Labour Studies and the International Labour Office, confer a mass of useful quantitative data on the effects of globalization on the informal sector, but offer little insight into what these effects look like at the ground level. The scholars successfully present their findings that globally, “high rates of informality are associated with less trade”(Bacchetta et al., 2009, p. 39) and alternatively that increases in global trade and global economic ties, leads to a reduction of informal economic activity. This relationship, however, is not parsed out in terms of what is happening on the ground level. Are informal entrepreneurs being hired in the formal sector, decreasing their reliance on informal economic opportunities? Or are transnational corporations exhibiting formalizing forces on informal vendors? None of these questions are addressed and thus I identified a substantial gap in literature on globalization and informality.

Even more appropriate to my inquiry into the ways in which globalization is
reflected among informal food vendors in the southern regions of Ghana in ways not previously observed, is the scholarship of Richard Wilk. Wilk’s work around globalization and national identity based on fieldwork in Belize was particularly helpful in offering a foundation for theories on how increased global connection affects food culture and national identity. In his discussion of two meals presented to him during his fieldwork he documents a distinct change in the items that were served to him. In the 1970s, Wilk describes being presented with a meal consisting of conspicuously globalized products: “a plate of greasy fried canned corned beef (packed, as I found out later in Zimbabwe), accompanied by...white bread, a small tine of sardines in tomato sauce, and a cool Seven-up with a straw” (Wilk, 1999, p. 245). Then two decades later, a period during which Belize continued to fortify its global linkages, Wilk sat down at the same table, in the same Belizean home to a much different feast. This time he was served: tortillas, beans, chicken, salad, cheese, and avocados, all of which his informants claimed “was produced in Belize and cooked to Belizean recipes” (Wilk, 1999, p. 245). Wilk’s example presents evidence that “local and national identities and global mass-market capitalism are not contradictory trends but are in fact two aspect of the same process” (Wilk, 1999, p. 244), a theory, which is corroborated in my observations of the presence of global products in the lives of informal food vendors.

Theodore Bestor’s ethnographic work on the Tsukiji fish market in Japan is also worth mentioning among the literature concerned with globalization as well. Bestor’s discussions focus on the relationship between local culture, globalization and the physical marketplace. Bestor provides ample justification for my research explaining that although markets are not often the focus of anthropological inquiry “corporations, cartels, and
markets should be as much interest to anthropologists as communities, clans, matrilineages. The critical issues of organizing social relations around production, commodification, exchange, and consumption...are no less anthropological significance than the study of a moiety" (Bestor, 2004, p. 13). He articulates the way in which economic relationships are imbedded in cultural and social norms that are in turn products of global processes. Bestor explains that focusing on the Tsukiji marketplace offers insight into

The large- and small-scale sector of Japan’s domestic economy, bringing into daily contact contrasting versions of economic culture: unself-conscious assumptions of capitalism as a natural economic and social order, jostled on the one hand by the impatient advocates of continual change, progress and modernization, growth and rationalization, and soothed on the other hand by those who insist that established economic custom, tradition, and institutional stability rather than transformation are the market’s guiding principles. Bestor, 2004, p. 37

Though my inquiry does not focus on markets of comparable scale to Tsukiji, the tensions, which Bestor articulates are still observable on the scale of my fieldwork in Ghana and thus worthy of including in the review of existing literature.

**The Reflexive Approach**

Having examined literature on informality and globalization, I began to imagine my own research approach. I thought first of the successes (and the shortcomings) of Clark’s and Lyon’s research approaches on the informal sector and an identified need for more qualitative data at the intersection of the informal economy and globalization. The complex social nature of ethnographic research has long been brought to the forefront of social
science research. As Miller points out, “ethnography is, de facto, fieldwork—as ethnographers, we want to find out what is happening in a natural (and frequently chaotic and disordered) environment, not an orderly and controlled artificial environment” (Miller, 2010, p. 139).

No longer do researchers defend their observations and interviews as isolated entities capable of unveiling pure scientific evidence in support of a research inquiry. Now it is widely recognized that, “as qualitative researchers engage in contemporary practice, [they] accept that the researcher is a central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection and interpretation of data” (Finlay, 2002, p. 212). Thus, social scientists are obligated by this knowledge to focus on the unique and ever-changing relationships between subjects of their observation and their own personal ideas, experiences, and biases. It is necessary to unpack these elements and lay them out plainly in order to further decode a researcher’s qualitative data and her resulting conclusions. When “the researcher moves beyond ‘benign introspection’ to become more explicit about the link between knowledge claims, personal experiences of both participant and researcher, and the social context” (Finlay, 2002, p. 215), the researcher is engaging in reflexive qualitative method.

This idea of reflexivity became inevitably central to my research. The concept of reflexive research acknowledges how the direct role that the researcher’s own individual contexts play into her observations. And because I employed an ethnographic approach my own personal context would inevitably dictate my perception of the emergence of those patterns. As one scholar explains:
The research process constitutes a (re)construction of the social reality in which researchers both interact with the agents researched and, actively interpreting, continually create images for themselves and for others: images which selectively highlight certain claims as to how conditions and processes – experiences, situations, relations – can be understood, thus suppressing alternative interpretations. Alvesson, 2000, p. 10

This research is no exception. Indeed, using the case study approach I sought to recreate images and ideologies, which are used to found my conclusions. Thus, it is important not only examine the findings and conclusions presented here, but also my own personal context and experience with Ghana and informal sector food vending.

The Opportunity for Fieldwork

Through a paid job opportunity with a Northeast-based summer enrichment organization in 2014, I was able to organize nine weeks of fieldwork in the southern regions of Ghana. The paid-work was such that I had obligations to plan meals, procure food and supplies, and organize excursions for a group of 17 American high school students, participating in service learning project in a small village in the Western Region of Ghana. In exchange, I received free room and board as well as airfare and a small stipend. The role offered autonomy but also the opportunity to engage in transactions that facilitated frequent market interactions. It also allowed for the freedom to conduct interviews and make observations in various market locations virtually undisturbed.

This freedom was particularly important because of my choice to approach the fieldwork portion of my research ethnographically, as ethnography takes time and
flexibility. Creswell describes in his discussion of designing and implementing mixed method research that effective research seeks to start from the “bottom-up, using the participants’ views to build broader themes and generate a theory interconnecting the themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 23). With a wealth of contacts, familiarity with the language, and an experiential interest in food and Ghana, a hands-on ethnographic research approach seemed inevitable. I desired to begin with these existing assets to form a foundation for observations from which, I was confident that patterns and insight into the relationship between globalization and informal food vendors in Ghana would emerge.
Chapter 7: Research Design and Methodology

Following Lyon’s lead, I resolved to prioritize diversity of location and observation over depth of inquiry in my own research approach. While I could have chosen a single location to conduct nine weeks of interviews and observations, similar to Clark’s more fine-point method, I chose to examine informal sector food vendors in an array of southern cities of various sizes to get a feel for the pervasive reflections of globalization throughout southern Ghana. This decision was an attempt at maintaining “external validity,” which Miller describes as “the generalizability of your findings” (2010, p. 112). The rationale is that observing a pattern in a single location may limit the breadth of applicability of the hypotheses and eventual conclusions to a broader context. Were I to have investigated a single city in a single location, my research would have been susceptible to both “population issues”⁶ and “ecological issues”⁷ (Miller, 2010, p. 112-3), which inevitably limit validity. However, if observed patterns are consistent in more than one location, the hypotheses and resulting conclusions have more validity. Observing the reflection of globalization in informal food vending relies upon the identification and delineation of connections; connections between regions, countries, and continents. Thus it seemed to follow that spreading the research out has greater implications for any reflections of globalization I observe.

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⁶ What Miller describes as issues concerning whether research could be generalized to a larger group. (Miller, 2010)
⁷ Issues concerning whether research conditions differ profoundly from a greater context. (Miller, 2010)
With some familiarity with Ghanaian culture and travel in Ghana, I was able to make a loose plan mapping the cities and towns, in which I was interested in conducting research. Due to limitations related to time and financial resources, I resolved to focus my research efforts in three of the southern regions namely the Eastern, Central, and Western of Ghana. The Eastern, Central, and Western regions were natural choices because of the many contacts I maintained from my years of residence, as well as familiarity with language and culture. That is to say, given the short period of time, I knew I would be able to find individuals willing to talk to me in areas I knew how to navigate. I also had arranged at least one volunteer assistant from a pool of former students and friends who were willing to provide translation and research support in each of these locations.

Interviews

I conducted interviews with vendors and made observations in large cities as well as smaller urban areas throughout the southern regions of Ghana. For the purpose of this research, large cities were classified as having populations greater than 100,000 according to the most recent 2010 census. I conducted two interviews with food vendors in each of the three cities: Koforidua, in the Eastern region; Cape Coast in the Central region; and Takoradi, in the Western region. Each of these cities represents a large commercial and governmental center in the form of regional capital.

The smaller urban areas, on the other hand, were classified as cities with populations of less than 50,000 according to the 2010 census. I selected these cities based on my familiarity with their locations as well as on my knowledge of their markets and individuals working in them. In the Eastern region, I selected Old Tafo in the East Akim
Municipal District located 20 miles Northwest of Koforidua. In the Central region, the
district capital of the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese, Abura Dunkwa was selected, which is
located roughly 20 miles north of the regional capital, Cape Coast. Finally, in the Western
region, I selected Agona-Nkwanta the capital of the Ahanta West district located
15 miles from Takoradi the Western region capital city. I also conducted one additional
interview (the only male interviewee in the sample, due only to the domination of women in food vending) with a fisherman in the small village of Cape Three Points, also located in the Ahanta West district. The opportunity

Fig. 6. Interview Locations, Google Maps, 2015
for this interview arose informally and fit within the parameters of my inquiry, thus I conducted the interview for additional data.

Identifying individuals to interview who were part of the informal economy provided a challenge due to the obvious fact that most informal businesses do not necessarily classify what they do as informal, nor do they use the terminology “informal sector” to classify their businesses (Neuwirth, 2013). Using the strategy of Robert Neuwirth, who has conducted substantial amounts of fieldwork in developing nations on the topic of informal economy, I identified informal sector food vendors by using language and phrasing that had worked for him in his research endeavors in Lagos, Nigeria. Instead of asking individuals if they were part of the informal economy, Neuwirth asked interviewees if they considered themselves to run “businesses that exist solely on their own effort, with no help from the government” (Neuwirth, 2013). This phraseology was generated by Neuwirth’s Nigerian research assistant and thus had many of the necessary imbedded cultural values. This phrasing proved very successful in my own research in identifying informal sector food vendors who wished to be interviewed. In addition to admitting to running “businesses that exist solely on their own effort, with no help from the government” (Neuwirth, 2013) all the vendors I interviewed also self-identified as non-registered sellers and claimed to not be the primary owners of the spaces wherein they conducted their business, which I considered to provide additional sufficiency for the classification of informal.

Interviews in both the large cities and smaller urban areas were conducted on a voluntary basis with vendors who agreed to be interviewed after I explained the nature of my work and receiving informed consent. I sought guidance from three different
counterparts (a different one for each region) in identifying interview subjects who would be willing to discuss informal food vending and their individual experiences with it. In the larger cities the interviewees were individuals I had no previous interactions with. However, in the smaller cities, I identified interviewees through relationships with Ghanaian counterparts I worked with between 2009-2011.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Location</th>
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<td><strong>City</strong></td>
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<td>Cape Coast</td>
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<td>Agona</td>
<td>Western</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Three Points</td>
<td>Western</td>
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Figure 7: Table of Interviews, 2014

Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour each and were conducted in English during business hours at the site of business. The majority of interviewees were not comfortable having their interviews recorded, so interview data was captured with pen and paper at the time the interview. Interviews were conducted with the help of a volunteer assistant who served as a language expert, offering support in the translation of certain words and phrases should misunderstanding or confusion arise during the time of the interview.

Interview locations included temporary stalls, transportation stations, and market
areas. As result of conducting the interviews during the workday, business transactions and frequent topical tangents often interrupted interview conversations. And while this immersive approach allowed me to interact with food vendors in a “natural” environment, focus and depth of conversation was undeniably limited. In her ethnographic work, Clark identified the challenge of interviewing vendors during the workday and as a result, for her ethnographic life history interviews, she conducted the interviews away from the market (Clark, 2010). While, this approach would have been ideal it would have required much stronger personal bonds with interview subjects as well as time and access to a suitable interview location, none of which I had access to. Thus, much like the work of informal vendors themselves, this research was designed to do the best it could with the available resources.

The interviews, although only semi-structured, centered around the general inquiries of:

- What is the daily experience of an informal food sector worker?
- How do informal food sector workers choose what to sell and where?
- Where do informal food vendors source their foodstuffs?
- How are informal food sector workers connected to other informal food sector workers?

These questions were asked with the idea that “the culture of the site is a critical element that needs to be used as an element in the understanding of the specific thing we are interested in” (Miller, 2010, p. 139). Answers to these questions left room for cultural, social, and spatial patterns consistent my research approach to emerge.
Observations

I conducted observations totaling 6-10 hours per large and small city (including interview time) over three consecutive days, one day of which was “market day.” This day is universally the busiest day for commerce; a time when many vendors from nearby municipalities travel to buy items in bulk at wholesale cost. “Market day” is the day of the week (or month in some areas) wherein many informal entrepreneurs flock to market to stock up on supplies required to their businesses, thus including it my observations was essential.

In each of the cities on each of the three days, I conducted up to one hour of walking observation, wandering around the market, inventorying available foodstuffs and mapping the layout of the markets. The remaining hours were broken into 20-45 minute intervals sitting with vendors in various locations and observing interactions between sellers as well as the flow of customers through the market. During this time I also asked nearby vendors general questions about their businesses and impressions of informal business in Ghana. As these casual conversations were neither structured nor voice-recorded, I marked only the most general impressions in my fieldnotes, along with particularly memorable quotations.

Fieldnotes and Recordings

In Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw distinguish the two main components of doing “ethnographic research: First hand participation in some initially unfamiliar social world and the production of written accounts of that world by drawing upon such participation” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 1). I have described the process by which I participated first hand and will now address the methods used to
capture my observations.

Taking fieldnotes was a bit of a challenge when it came to minimizing the amount of attention I received from people in market settings. To address this, I took an approach to fieldnotes that involved very little actual note taking while in the field but hours of reflection and note taking after my observation hours in my “home.” Although, I did have a very small pocket-sized notebook, which I utilized occasionally to record counts and some memorable quotations, for the most part I took very few notes during my fieldwork. At the end of the day, however, I would spend several hours each night recounting my experience and reflecting on the people and places of my research. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw articulate the motivation for choosing this particular note taking process mentioning that it “allows an intense immersion in daily rhythms and ordinary concerns, increasing openness to others’ ways of life” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 25). Because of the nature of this research, immersive observation was very important to maximizing field experience and translating those experiences into my eventual research inquiry.

I also collected data in the form of photographs, taking pictures of informal businesses setups, market areas, products for sale, and billboards and posters in public market areas. Because presenting a camera in a public market area comes with risks the photographic data is limited and was mostly collected outside of very visible public areas.

**Discourse/Content Analysis**

In addition to the interviews and observations, I also engaged in discourse and content analysis with regards to how informal businesses were portrayed in newspapers, billboards, and popular media throughout the country. The sponsoring of vendors by
transnational corporations is a very common practice and thus, I also made notes of these things as well.

The Accra Municipal Authority (AMA) has a history of planning and implementing “decongestion exercises” (Bob-Milliar & Obeng-Odoo, 2011) along with many other Region’s Municipal Authorities, mandating the leveling of and relocation of street hawkers in and around high traffic areas, which always receive extensive public attention in newspapers, magazines, and on Ghanaian television. The most recent “forcing out” (Adaawen, 2011; Addo, 2013) occurred shortly before the commencement of my fieldwork in 2014. This clearance event, like many other in the past decade, caused a flurry of newspaper articles, poster campaigns, and public announcements, which were still highly visible during the period of my fieldwork. Thus, particularly in the Regional capital cities of Koforidua, Cape Coast, and Takoradi, as well as in Accra, these popular sources were also included in my research.

Data Analysis

I housed the data collected through this research in one notebook, one password protected computer-based word processing document, and one SD-card containing approximately 100 digital photos. I used the notebook to record data from interviews as well as observations when access to electricity was impossible. Otherwise daily fieldnotes, I typed directly into a single digital document. At the end of the 9-week fieldwork period, once all data had been collected, I transcribed data in the notebook and consolidated it into the word document, thus resulting in a single document containing 9 weeks of interviews and observations.
According to Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw “reading notes as a whole encourages recognizing patterns and making comparisons” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 145), thus this was the first step of my data analysis endeavor. I read through the entire body of fieldnotes and reviewed the collection of photographs and newspapers as a way to familiarize myself with the data I had collected. In a qualitative research process, “qualitative coding is a way of opening up avenues of inquiry: the researcher identifies and develops concepts and analytic insights through close examination of and reflection on fieldnote data” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 151). Following this approach, I first used an open coding strategy, which is the process of examining “fieldnotes line-by-line to identify and formulate any and all ideas, themes, or issues...no matter how varied and disparate” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 143). Following the identification of any and all broad emergent themes, I then engaged in the axial coding method to begin linking the codes I had generated together conceptually. I took the opportunity to read through all of these fieldnotes and reviewed the digital photographs comprehensively two times to allow for correction and adjustment of codes as problems or inconsistencies arose.

I sorted data into several different word documents based on these common codes and analyzed in relationship to the initial themes as well as in the broader context of literature on the subject of informal sector food vending and globalization. The result was the identification of a singular broad impression on which this thesis is focused, followed by three consistent sub-themes, which served to bring a finer focus to my research.
Chapter 8: Social, Cultural, and Spatial Effects of Globalization

The fieldwork conducted for this research resulted in a sizeable collection of data pertaining to the people, products, and places that make up the informal sector food vending community in Ghana and the way in which globalization is reflected throughout. And while some of the data collected during the observation period was of a more quantitative nature such as: value of international investments, inventories of food items in market areas, the number of hours spent selling, and the ages of various sellers, this chapter of my discussion will focus primarily on the rich qualitative data I collected in an effort to answer my central research question: how are informal sector vendors imbedded in larger global food networks as well as what does the reflection of globalization look like at the ground level?

After a thorough analysis of interviews with informal sector vendors and many hours of observation and informal conversation in Ghanaian markets throughout the southern regions of Ghana, I identified three main categories, which most clearly reflected the influence of globalization. The three categories, which provided an organizational framework for the vast majority of my observations were: social, cultural, and spatial. By social, I refer to observations pertaining to interpersonal relationships; by cultural I refer to the customs and items used in everyday life by Ghanaian informal food vendors, and by spatial I refer to the physical organization of sellers in the physical marketplace. This chapter will focus on presenting specific findings according to these three categories and connect them to the ways in which informal sector food vendors are imbedded in larger global food networks.
Global Linkages and Social Relationships

Throughout this fieldwork, I observed that now more than ever, Ghanaian vendors are connected to people all over the world. Whether it be through the international business relationships and trade partnerships that were recurrently mentioned by informal vendors in interviews and observations, or the many friends and family members that now live abroad supplying substantial amounts of startup and maintenance capital for informal enterprises, Ghanaians are globally connected in ways not previous observed. Of the 10 interviews I conducted, all 10 of the vendors claimed to have family living and working abroad, who occasionally sent money to help with business. And although, only 3 of the 10 informal vendors described having direct relationships with wholesale vendors outside the country who they purchased foodstuffs from, nearly all of them understood that many of the ingredients in the prepared food available in the market that they either sold or consumed themselves did not necessarily come from Ghana. This increasing geographic scope of informal vendor relationships reflects increasing social and economic linkages Ghanaian food vendors have within the globalized food system.

In one particular interaction, I accompanied a kenkey seller to the market where she purchased her weekly ingredients. At each wholesale vendor we visited, I asked my informant to inquire about the origin of the produce we were purchasing. Of the 7 ingredients we collected that day: corn, tomatoes, onions, garlic, ginger, salt and cooking oil, less than half of the ingredients had come from within the country. After further investigation, my informant and I discovered that the tomatoes had traveled from Burkina Faso, the onions from Niger, and the garlic from China. The cooking oil was another story having been processed in Ghana by the transnational corporation Wilmar International,
who has operations in India, China, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and throughout Africa. My informant’s reaction to the global origin of the ingredients she used to make her regional dish, was of fascination but could not necessarily be classified as surprise. She explained her observation that the presence of international corporations in Ghana was obviously on the rise and that farmers too were always trying to find the best price, which sometimes meant selling their yields outside of Ghana, as is the case especially with cocoa, palm fruits, cashews, and shea nuts. What mattered most, according to my informant, was that she always bought from the same vendors, who knew her and would give her the best price for good quality ingredients.

Many of the vendors I interviewed, recalled just a few decades prior when they or their older family members had close economic relationships with only people from within Ghana. A few examples of these broadening and international relationships can be seen in excerpts from interviews in the Eastern and Central regions:

- “[The tuna and salmon] is from China. My sister in Tema has a China friend who sells to her and then she brings it to me to smoke.”
- “My mother, when sold tomatoes here, used to get them from her sister in Kumasi. Some sellers go all the way to Burkina to buy because the price is better.”

Fig. 8. Smoked fish vendor, 2014
• “We used to use corn from the farm here but now because we are selling so much, I buy it at market in Nyankumasi. I don’t know where it is grown.”
• “The garlic is not from here. It comes from far away, maybe China.”

These informal food vendors displayed not only an awareness that their ingredients and products were coming from further away, but also that this process was affecting the prices that Ghanaian farmers were able to receive for the same products. Especially in the case of the tomato seller, informal entrepreneurs displayed a concern for what they saw to be the increased sourcing of everyday foods from outside Ghana. One vendor explained that her concerns came from a livelihood perspective, “If you buy the tomatoes from Burkina, then how can your own brother in Tanoso* eat?” That is to say, if Ghanaian tomato farmers are having trouble selling their product because tomatoes from Burkina Faso are less expensive, then it is the Ghanaian farmer who will be bearing the bulk of the economic burden.

Global Products and Culture

In addition to my observation of the global connections ubiquitous in social relationships among informal sector food vendors, informants also reported experiences of significant and for the most part recent changes in access to global products, which are continually shaping culture as well as contributing to national identity. Canned and processed food produced by transnational corporations, manufactured outside of Ghana, have now become integrated into local recipes and have come to be seen as time saving innovations. The most easily observed global food product, which follows this model, now

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*A tomato producing town in the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana.
readily absorbed into the national food culture of Ghana is “tinned tomatoes”. *Salsa, Tasty Tom, Gino, Pomo,* and *Toma* are just a few of the transnational brands readily available throughout Ghana. Each of these tomato paste manufacturers has corporate headquarters outside of Ghana but manage to distribute their products in even the most rural areas within the nation. For example, the town of Cape Three Points, in the Western Region of Ghana, a very remote town accessible only by dirt road that supports a population estimated by locals to be less than 500 people, was home to a small provision store, one of only a few in town, which offered its customers three different brands of this tomato paste. This is an indication that although the transnational manufacturers of the product have invested little in forging their own distribution channels, they have certainly been the beneficiaries of the existing ones, many of which would qualify as informal. Furthermore, each of these brands has earned a reputation for its quality, pricing, and availability through not only advertising campaigns but more dominantly word of mouth. In my fieldwork, upon purchasing a can of *Salsa* brand tomato paste I was instantly criticized by my Ghanaian counterparts for “not getting the very fine one,” which according to them was the *Tasty Tom* brand. This global product is now so integrated into Ghanaian cuisines that a culture of preferences and associations has developed, which in turn has the potential to influences sales and availability even in the informal economy.

This connection between globalization and culture through the lens of food has been addressed thoroughly in past scholarship and has provided a basis for the ways that I have approached this intersection in my research. Scholar Richard Wilk’s work around globalization and national identity based on fieldwork in Belize was particularly helpful in interpreting my observations. In his discussion, Wilk presents evidence that “local and
national identities and global mass-market capitalism are not contradictory trends but are in fact two aspect of the same process” (Wilk, 1999, p. 244). Bestor also supports this idea in his investigation of Tsukiji market, which is also corroborated in my observations of the presence of global products in the lives of informal food vendors.

In addition to the omnipresence of processed tomato paste another global product (this time not a food product) surfaced as immensely important and actively affective of culture. Of the many informal vendors I observed during my fieldwork, I observed ALL of them to have at least one mobile phone, some had as many as three. These phones, the result of global trade, frequently interrupted our conversations, ringing and buzzing with calls from friends, family, and other vendors inquiring about business, life or in accordance with Ghanaian custom just “calling to greet you”. The cultural obligation to greet friends and family has long been identified in Ghanaian custom; these mobile phones have drastically changed the ways in which people carry out the order. In addition to fulfilling these obligations, vendors also used, them to talk to their own wholesale vendors, arrange sales, recruit assistance, and inform their families they were finished working for the day.

The prevalence of mobile phone also constituted a small part of business as well, selling phone credits or completing phone repairs. This was true especially of the younger informal workers who held secondary or supportive roles in larger informal enterprises. For example, the fisherman that I spoke to in the Western Region town of Cape Three Points, had a young boy who often helped him sell his daily catch. This young boy in addition to providing sales support to the fisherman also had a small bag, containing phone credits, which he sold throughout the community. In the sales interaction I observed with these individuals, a local woman purchased a large fresh redfish from the fisherman as well
as 1 Ghana Cedis worth of mobile phone credits from the young boy. This kind of joint venture clearly reflects the forces of globalization through the combined marketing of a hyper-local product (the redfish) directly alongside a globalized product (mobile phone credits).

Another way that global products surfaced in my fieldwork affecting the everyday experience of informal food vendors was the prevalence of and proclaimed dislike of polythene bags and presence of plastics everywhere. The informal vendor in Takoradi that I spoke with, who sold waakye, a prepared rice and beans dish, remembered in her childhood food vendors previously used natural materials like banana or plantain leaves to wrap up snacks for customers on the go. She also recalled gathering these leaves as a child in exchange for food and change that her grandmother, also an informal waakye vendor, would give her. This practice has been replaced by a veritable storm of small one-time use plastic bags, which have come to clog rivers, sewers, as well the soil of farmland in multitude. Furthermore the informal trader recalled using calabashes to scoop water and bathe with, both functions, which are now handled by plastic buckets.

Plastic and the disposal of it, according to several informants are a growing problem for farmers as well as Ghanaian market vendors, which many of them expressed through numerous complaints about the difficulties in disposing of refuse while in their vending spaces. As part of this case study, I investigating plastic bag manufacturers currently operating in Ghana and although I had trouble discerning exactly which companies were leading the charge, I did uncover 12 major transnational corporations who run plastics manufacturing facilities in Ghana, all producing goods for the local markets. These

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9 *Waakye* is a popular dish made of rice and black-eyed peas, traditionally topped with boiled spaghetti, spicy fish sauce, and a hard-boiled egg.
corporations are an obvious reflection of globalization in Ghana and the intersection of these transnational companies with informal food vendors can be seen in the recent changes in how vendors package and serve their foodstuffs.

Plastic manufacturers are not the only global businesses building markets on the ground in Ghana. There are a wide variety of global products that have been seamlessly incorporated into Ghana’s urban foodways. This list of global food corporations easily observable in Ghana as a sign of globalization is worth noting in my findings. Companies such as the American owned KFC, as well as South African companies such as Shoprite and the fast food franchiser Innscor, are all well established in the most high traffic areas of Accra. These businesses represent the growth of formal business in urban food vending, which are in competition with informal food vendors. As a result many informal vendors, illegally use the names and images of global corporations in order to attract business.

Fig. 9. Hand painted advertisements with global brands, 2012-2014
The Spatial Aspects of Globalization

In addition to the presence of these global products and brands as well as the many social and familial relationships Ghanaian informal food vendors now maintain with individuals outside of Ghana, I also observed the influence of foreign investment on the physical reshaping of Ghanaian marketplaces. In the last 5 years, the GOG in conjunction with regional and municipal authorities, backed by foreign capital, have begun major plans to expand and rebuild at least two regional markets. The first, about which I was able to speak to vendors, is Cape Coast’s center of commerce, the Kotokuraba Market. The second is West Africa’s largest market and the subject of Clark’s research, Kejetia Market. I was not able to conduct field research in or on Ketjetia Market, being able to review only newspaper articles thus, I will focus primarily the construction and concerns around the Kotokuraba Market.

The Kotokuraba Market rebuilding is a project that has been in the works since 2012 (AidData, 2012). Despite consistent protests from traders who occupied the market for decades, as well as a lawsuit to stop the reconstruction initiative, in December 2014 the Cape Coast Metropolitan Assembly (CCMA) in partnership with the Government of Ghana (GOG) began a forced clearing of all vendors and the entire demolition of the market space to make room for the new market. When my fieldwork concluded in August 2014, the market had not yet been demolished and thus, conversations pertaining to this major infrastructural reboot show evidence mostly of the anxiety and concern that large internationally funded projects, such as this one have on informal vendors.

During my fieldwork I spoke to several vendors in Cape Coast who had been selling food informally in or around the Kotokuraba market for over a decade about the
development project and their perceptions of it. When I asked who was sponsoring the market reconstruction, one vendor, a middle-aged Fante woman, born and raised in Cape Coast, explained the project was paid for by “the NDC\(^{10}\) and the Chinese”. She further explained that the market improvement was good because it would help with “congestion in the area,” referring to the ubiquitous traffic that surrounds the triangular shaped market. She also expressed distaste for the project voicing the sentiment that she did not believe the market improvement was meant to help informal hawkers, it was for the vendors “on the inside” who paid to rent “government” stalls. This Cape Coast informal vendor, perceived the project to have nothing to do with her business aside from “sacking us from the market”. She expressed disappointment in having to find a new place, establish new connections with nearby vendors, and in the meantime suffer a sizeable loss in sales opportunities. This Chinese-backed market improvement is an example of the way in which the burden of these spatial reorganizations, resulting from globalization, falls predominantly on the most economically vulnerable actors, the informal vendors.

Another vendor I spoke with was also weary of the Kotokuraba market improvement project’s ability to help her in her informal endeavor as a seller of pineapple and watermelon. This vendor, a Fante woman in her early 20’s, also a Cape Coast native, echoed two concerns about the new market, which I saw reflected throughout my other conversations as well as my analysis of the newspaper articles pertaining to the topic. The first concern was about the issue of the quality and quantity of temporary structures that were constructed to house vendors in the months (or years) until the new structure is complete. This fear was especially pronounced on the issue of where to relocate

\(^{10}\) The National Democratic Congress, the ruling party in Ghana 2012-2016.
“squatters,” or the informal vendors many of which were sellers of food items. The public’s anxiety was corroborated by the Ghana News Agency’s coverage of a 2014 lawsuit filed by a group of female market vendors voicing their same concern. According to GNA, after all the registered vendors with stalls in the existing market were relocated, “the squatters [would be] allocated an open space at the new structure but they had to wait for proper allocation after going through the registration exercise” (GNA, 2014). This process appeared, to many of the informal vendors, as a move to obliterate their informal businesses once and for all through a process of forced relocation and mandatory registration. In the end, the lawsuit to halt the project was dismissed and in December 2014 the Kotokuraba market was leveled, leaving many informal vendors with nowhere to sell.

The second recurrent concern I heard was about the organization of the physical market space as well. One informant mentioned over hearing rumors that the new
construction would be “like the shopping mall markets in Accra”. This concern was voiced so widely that Member of Parliament (MP), for Cape Coast, Kweku Ricketts Hagan addressed it publicly in January of 2015 in an interview with the *DailyGuide*. Hagan says:

I want to state that the Kotokuraba Market, when completed, would still remain a market and would never be turned into a shopping mall. I also want to state that the temporary market would not become a permanent market as people have been saying; and those who are at the temporary market would be moved to occupy the ultramodern market. Hagan, 2015

These concerns reflect an obvious tension that the insurgence of foreign capital brings to the many informal food vendors that rely on government marketplaces for their livelihoods. While infrastructural improvement projects like the rebuilding of the Kotokuraba market seeks to offer better amenities and a more efficient spatial organization for businesses and customers alike, it has an obvious formalizing effect reflected through the forced registration of all vendors. The fear that informal vendors will be further marginalized was echoed in all of my conversations and compounded by the reoccurring idea that this new project would result in a shopping mall, arguably one of the most formal arrangements for vending. The formalizing force of globalization in this instance is causing anxiety amongst the informal sector food vendors on the ground.
Chapter 9: Hidden Costs and Marginal Benefits

In the summer of 2014 I set out to investigate globalization and informal food vendors in the Southern regions of Ghana. My intention was to gather ethnographic data, which would answer questions about how are informal sector food vendors are imbedded in larger and more formal global food networks and what the reflections of globalization look like on the ground level. Through hours of observation, interview, and research I began to get a sense of the ways in which forces of globalization affect informal food vendors in social, cultural, and spatial ways, which I have articulated throughout this thesis, but one question remained. Why does this matter? What does an increase in global connectedness and the resulting ground-level changes mean for the future of Ghana and its informal workers? And why should we care?

Another Page of Ghana’s History

In an effort to gain insight into these bigger questions, I turned my attention to another page from Ghana’s history, which serves as a poignant metaphor for the ways in which global partnerships (the kind Ghana seems to be forging rapidly) can be mixed blessing. In the 1960s, shortly after Kwame Nkrumah lead the nation of Ghana to independence, he began to conceptualize development initiatives that would push Ghana into the modern and developed world. He believed that developing a robust industrial sector would help Ghana forge meaningful ties with the rest of the world all the while creating much need employment opportunities for citizens. The only problem was that industry required energy and most of Ghana was still without access to electricity. With
this issue in mind Nkrumah wrote a letter to United States President Dwight Eisenhower asking for help to build a dam across one of Ghana’s most valuable natural resources, the Volta River (Curtis, 1992). Nkrumah believed that the dam would provide enough energy to build and maintain the kind of industrial sector that would set Ghana on the path to economic stability and modernization.

Eisenhower invited Nkrumah to the U.S. and connected him with California-based businessman, Edward Kaiser owner of the Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation. Nkrumah and Kaiser developed what appeared to be a mutually beneficial plan: if Ghana built the dam, Kaiser Chemical would build an aluminum smelter and begin smelting bauxite (a plentiful resource in Ghana) into industrial grade aluminum to be used worldwide. Ghana would have power, industry, and the opportunity to become part of a global trade system. These benefits, however, never came. Kaiser built the smelter, which was in turn powered by the newly constructed dam, but out of fear of the Ghanaian government nationalizing the integrated aluminum manufacturing setup they had created, refused to purchase bauxite from Ghana, instead importing raw materials from America. During initial negotiations the Kaiser Chemical Company had bargained for a fixed (below market) rate at which to purchase electricity from the Volta River Authority to power its enormous aluminum smelter. The Volta River Dam failed to meet energy output expectations and produced barely enough energy to power the smelter let alone the surrounding communities or a potential industrial sector that Nkrumah maintained held the key to a brighter future.

This example, in the context of my research, is presented as a metaphor highlighting the hidden costs and benefits of global economic relationships, which run rampant in
Ghana. While in the case of the dam, the project was intended to be immensely beneficial to Ghana as a nation, in reality they received few benefits at all and paid all of the social and environmental costs.

Waiting for the Benefits

There is no doubt that in this neoliberal era, the informal sector in Ghana is changing. It is no longer dominated by agricultural business and it no longer represents a minority of the economic activity in villages and cities throughout the country. While it has been argued that government policy is the primary vehicle for support of the informal sector in an increasingly globally connected climate, this research highlights the fact that little consideration has been given to the ways in which this increasing globalization is actually experienced on the ground level in informal food vending. Hansen, Little, and Milgram point out in the introduction of an edited volume focused specifically on informality in the urban Global South that “The contraction of the global economy that has contributed to the expansion of informal economic activities in the Global South, as the urban poor seek out livelihoods, is making nuanced analyses of street vending even more important to policy makers and social scientists study economic and political phenomena” (Hansen, 2013, p. 10). The true costs and benefits of these global economic ties are still unknown. And just like in the case of the Volta River Dam, the positive results remain unseen, which is all the more reason to investigate the matter more vigilantly.

What is becoming clear, however, is that although Ghana is now more than ever part of the global economy, serving as a ready market for global commodities, the nation has yet to show distinctive signs of economic benefits. The Ghanaian cedi is currently the worse
performing currency in Africa, unemployment is rising, and economic growth is decelerating. In fact, since the discovery of oil off the coast of Ghana the per capital income of Ghanaians has fallen. I mention these indicators not as concrete evidence that no benefits have resulted from increased global linkages, but only to highlight the reality that economic benefits of global capitalism have yet to reach the shores of the Gold Coast.

Just as in the case of the Volta River Dam, foreign corporations surging into the Ghanaian marketplace are growing their wealth at record pace, while metaphorically speaking Ghanaians are still without electricity. As scholar James Ferguson reminds us, speaking more generally of the African continent: “Africa’s participation in ‘globalization,’ then, has certainly been a matter of simply ‘joining the world economy’; perversely, it has instead been a matter of highly selective and spatially encapsulated forms of global connection combined with widespread disconnection and exclusion” (Ferguson, 2006, p. 14). In this respect, while some of the effects of globalization have been helpful, giving informal food vendors access to global products, which have improved communication and in some cases made business or everyday experience easier, informal vendors are granted only marginal access to the benefits and wealth that result from this increase in global linkages.

From the increasing globalization of informal vendors’ social relationships, to the ubiquitous technology and global products influencing the way that informal food vendors do business, the forces of globalization are actively sculpting Ghana’s informal sector in ways not previously observed. This is not to say globalization is a new phenomenon. In fact, it is not. Since the days of British occupation, Ghana has long exhibited the symptoms of cultural and economic synthesis at the hands of global connections. Past research has
laid out eloquent discussions of globalization’s on-going structural effect on Ghana’s labor and economy, but very few scholars have focused on the impact these global forces are having on informal food vending on the ground level. In this neoliberal moment, global corporations are insatiably expanding their reach into new and untapped markets and while this expansion can in some situations come attached to improvement in infrastructure and access to global products as articulated in this research, these expansions come with vastly unequal benefits. Instead of creating job opportunities in Ghana, transnational corporations have found ways to hire as few employees as possible, relying heavily on informal distribution channels to expand their reach, with only marginal economic benefit to informal vendors. This research aimed to contribute qualitative perspective to our understanding of the ways in which the on-going effects of globalization are experienced by informal food vendors.

Towns and cities in Ghana are infused with these dedicated and charismatic informal food sellers, who employ local knowledge and local culinary customs to stay in business from a fresh coconut vendor, deftly chopping the tops off green coconuts with machetes at a popular traffic circle in Accra, to a young woman serving local fare in the evening hours. These entrepreneurs earn claim to key spaces, build relationships with preferable wholesale vendors, and actively maintain relationships with community leaders to ensure the viability of not only their individual enterprises but also of the businesses that surround them. However, under the forces of market liberalization, which has opened the lines of trade and encouraged inter and intra-regional commerce, these once highly localized relationships and formalized connections are becoming increasingly global. As scholars point out, “the people and activities thronging the city streets of sub-Saharan
Africa have come to epitomize major economic and social change” (Lyons & Brown, 2007), displaying some of the benefits and consequences of an increasingly connected global economy. However, the majority of the economic benefits remain inaccessible to informal vendors.

Throughout this investigation of trends of globalization and the conditions on the ground for informal food vendors, I have offered a picture that was not previously presented in scholarship on the topic. My hope is that this research will push our consideration of the ways in which globalization is reflected through social, spatial, and cultural ways in informal sector food vending and that this new found awareness will promote a cautious optimism that these pervasive global relationships, which Ghana is now engaged in, will provide more than only marginal economic benefit. I also hope that scholars and policy makers will use this research to build policy initiatives that are focused not only on overall economic growth and infrastructural development but also in improving the specific support systems available to informal food vendors as well as advocating for a more equal economic benefit in global capitalist systems.
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VITA

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