

The Thumbless hand, the dog and the chameleon: enriching social movement learning theory through epistemically grounded narratives emerging from a participatory action research case study in Ghana

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Abstract

Over the past 3 decades, a local Ghanaian movement has been defending communal access to West Africa's largest salt flat – access that is the backbone of an artisanal salt production process that is over 400 years old and supports the livelihoods of roughly 60 thousand people. While this movement has been largely successful in these efforts at defense, it currently faces new challenges from Ghana's petro-chemical industry, spurred on by Ghana's recent oil discovery, and from small-scale enclosures by local elite. This current context has challenged the movement to reconfigure its approaches, even as it builds new partnerships with the area's local community radio station. It is into, and more than partially because of this shifting terrain that a group of researchers and movement members began a participatory action research study of this social movement's learning. Along with sharing the methodological contributions of this study, the participatory case study shared here also adds a rich exemplar of locally-framed learning narratives to discussions about the way learning is disseminated. Not only are imagery and proverbs central to narratives of learning within this movement, they are also central to its popular education approach. The critical importance of local history and spirituality are also revealed to be key sites of epistemically grounded learning – learning that reinforces local ownership of this conversation in opposition to narratives of globalization and state-led visions of large-scale development. The sheer rootness of these local narratives is proving to be a strong source of resistance and alterity.

For me, this whole thing is like somebody without thumbs, who is cutting morsels of food, he is hungry, but he wants to cut, you know, banku, you have to cut a morsel, and you need to roll it into a certain shape, before you can [eat it]... You need, you need a thumb... so for me it is a thumbless hand trying to mold a morsel of banku... So, we had, we had everything, but we lacked something, we lacked something to make our intentions and our aspirations complete. And for me, the thumb is important.

- Nomo Abayateye, Traditional Priest, member of the older generation of male activists

The symbol that we selected was a chameleon, and, it was in reference specifically to the chiefs, who were participating in Atsiakpo, and to how the chiefs would be doing, some - , would be involved in Atsiakpo, but at the same

time, like I mentioned, they would be saying “oh yes, Atsiakpo is very bad, I’m gonna stop it.” And so, like a chameleon, they would be in one environment looking one way, but then they would change when they went to another environment, they would change their appearance.

- Tom, representing youth activist group

“What symbolizes the group’s view?” We said dog. Our reason for choosing dog is that the dog works for us, when we [are] going for hunting, take the dog along. When we need an animal to take care of our house, we take the dog. But what do we do to the dog? What, when we, even when we go to hunt with it, do we even give it the meat? After cooking, do you remove some meat for the dog? No! It’s what we’ve chewed, the bones that you feed it with, that’s what we do to the dog. So, that’s it, that is what the Songor is.

- Jemima, representing older generation of female activists

Introduction

The above quotations emerge from reflections on over 3 decades of struggle to reclaim and defend communal access to West Africa’s largest salt flat – access that is the backbone of an artisanal salt production process that is over 400 years old and supports the livelihoods of roughly 60,000 people. At the heart of this struggle is a Ghanaian social movement, called the Ada Songor Advocacy Forum in its latest iteration,¹ that has been largely successful in these efforts at defense. Yet, it currently faces new challenges from Ghana’s petro-chemical industry, spurred on by Ghana’s recent oil discovery, and small-scale enclosures by local elite, called “atsiakpo” locally. This current context has challenged the movement to reconfigure its approaches, even as it builds new partnerships with the area’s local community radio station. It is into, and more than partially because of this shifting terrain that a group of researchers and movement members undertook a participatory action research study of this social movement’s learning. This study makes important contributions to the field of social movement learning, as well as participatory research methodologies. This paper will provide an overview of these emergent contributions, including an in depth discussion of each of the symbolic and epistemically rooted pedagogic reflections, or narratives, introduced above.

Social movement learning, a sub-field to critical adult education, has “enormous...breadth” (English & Mayo, 2012, p. 110), and yet, according to Hall & Turray (2005) research that studies African contexts is underrepresented. In this sense, the study reported on here adds an important sub-Saharan African case study to discussions about the ways in which movements learn. However, as advocated by Kapoor (2009) and emphasized by English & Mayo (2012), it is

¹ The previous iteration of the movement, in the 1980s, was much more closely associated with the cooperative than is ASAF – though the salt cooperative continues to be a member of ASAF.

crucial that such studies of movements in contexts outside of Euro-America be understood through their own epistemic lens. It is for this reason, and also as part of efforts to make this research movement-owned, that a participatory action research approach was mutually agreed upon. This approach to the study of social movement learning is not unique (Hall & Turray, 2005), but using a mutual design process has helped ensure this research is grounded in movement articulations, and not academic ambitions (c.f. Choudry & Kapoor, 2009). From a methodological perspective, the extensive participatory research framing process that took place from 2008 to 2010 has meant that this study has also been an important part of movement learning processes, even as it helps document and disseminate the learning that has emerged. Furthermore, it has ensured a widespread sense of ownership of the research process (Langdon, 2012; Langdon & Larweh, 2013).

Going back to the quotes above, they have emerged as integral parts of locally-framed learning narratives that reveal as well as enact Foley's (1999) notion of learning in struggle – the informal, non-formal and incidental ways in which movements learn through engaging in particular struggles. Not only are imagery and proverbs central to narratives of learning within this movement, they are also central to its popular education approach. The critical importance of local history and spirituality are also revealed to be key sites of epistemically grounded learning – learning that reinforces local ownership of this conversation in opposition to narratives of globalization and state-led visions of large-scale development. The sheer rootedness of these local narratives is proving to be a strong source of resistance and alterity – one that is gaining momentum in many different local forums (e.g. mobilization surrounding climate change in Ada is taking a similar shape). At the same time, while rooted, these narratives have not remained static over the course of the research. As the movement evolves and changes, the reflection and learning that emerges informs and shapes the narratives. Finally, the importance in this case of community radio's role in enhancing local ownership of and investment in the movement through radio dramas and community-owned broadcasts that disseminate narratives such as those shared here cannot be ignored. The power of these synergies is something that has been emphasized in collective reflections by ASAF members on what has been learned about learning.

An overview of the struggle over salt in Ada

There are two recent efforts within the movement to detail the long history of the relationship between the Adas and the Songor Lagoon that inform this section. The first of these is a recent report by one of the core ASAF members on revitalizing the salt cooperative (Ada Songor Salt Cooperative, 2013) (see also Amate, 1999). A second effort by ASAF documenting this history is also in the finishing stages: a collectively written Peoples History of the Songor Struggle

book project (ASAF 2013).² Both of these descriptions are important examples of movement-produced research. These two efforts add to a collectively written history from the last iteration of the movement, called *Who Killed Maggie?* (Songor Salt Cooperative Committee, 1989), as well as research by Manuh (1994) on the previous iteration of the movement and a book about Ada's overall history by Amate (1999).

Turning to the historical relationship between Adas and the Songor, according to records of British colonial correspondence, this history predates the establishment of the Gold Coast colony by over a hundred years (Amate, 1999). Oral history of the Adas establishes the relationship between the Ada-Okor people and the lagoon as foundational to their current existence (ASAF, 2013). It is this foundational narrative that lends weight to the saying amongst the Adas that "salt is life." This is also reflected in the phrase "Ee yon ngo," which is literally translated as "does that person eat salt", but is used to ask if someone is fluent in the local language, Dangme. Moreover, implicit in its meaning is that the person understands the cultural customs and norms of the Dangme people. It is important to foreground this strong cultural identity linkage between the Ada-Okor people and the Songor Lagoon, as it helps underscore from the outset that understanding the social mobilization of Adas around the Songor as simply defending a livelihood, or a way of life misses a large portion of the symbolic meaning this lagoon holds for those who call themselves Ada-Okor. In fact, as the report, and many other publications (c.f. Amate, 1999; Ada Traditional Council, 2011; 2012; 2013; ASAF, 2013), rightly points out, the cultural celebration in Ada, the Asafotufiame Festival is a symbolic reenactment of the process of defending the salt lagoon from external aggressors. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the resource directly supports the livelihoods of over 60,000 people around the lagoon, and has indirect economic connections to double that figure (Barbersgaard, 2013; Ada Songor Salt Coop, 2013). Women figure prominently in those who most directly draw their livelihood from the resource (Manuh, 1994).

However, understanding how this history is enacted in current and recently past struggles concerning the lagoon means examining colonial and post-colonial government policies. In other words, we need to trace how the struggle to defend the resource has continued within the confines of a decolonizing West African nationstate. Amate (1999) shares how colonial policies in relation to the Songor backed competing sides concerning who had rights to proceeds from the lagoon – a classic divide and rule strategy. Many of the tensions established in this period can be traced to current issues surrounding atsiakpo. At the same time, after Ghana became an independent nation in 1957, the central government at the time decided to move ahead with a big electrical dam project on the Volta river. This decision dramatically effected the natural flooding cycle of the Songor lagoon, and led to a major reduction in salt yields (Manuh, 1994).

² Importantly, this latest effort has also been translated into Dangme, and recorded for broadcast – thereby returning their stories to movement members and the broader Songor communities.

This led a small group of elites to grant small concessions to two companies provided they help revitalize the resource. One of these companies, Vacuum Salt Limited (VSL) used duplicitous tactics to doctor their concession, and lay claim to a huge portion of the lagoon – including the majority of the area used by artisanal salt winners, as they are called in Ada (Songor Salt Cooperative Committee, 1989). Despite changes in military and civilian governments through the rest of the 70s and into the early 1980s, VSL was able to maintain a stranglehold over not only the resource, but the area. VSL treated the entire lagoon as its property, and attacked local artisanal salt winners simply engaging in salt collection practices they had been doing in the lagoon for 400 years (Songor Salt Cooperative Committee, 1989; Amisah Commission, 1986).

Oral testimony gathered and broadcast in 2002 by Radio Ada, the local community radio station and member of ASAF, as well as oral testimonies gathered by the research documented here, reveals deeply violent accounts of company behavior during this period – including the force feeding of raw salt on those captured practicing artisanal salt winning (Radio Ada, 2002; ASAF, 2013; Songor Salt Cooperative Committee, 1989; Amisah Commission, 1986). These were not people who were stealing from the saltpans the companies had established (not that this would excuse this human rights violation). This treatment, as well as the refusal to permit local artisanal salt-winning led to growing unrest amongst the Adas. When the December 31st, 1981, revolution occurred, and a rhetorically socialist military government came into power many people in Ada thought the situation would change – and it did for a short while with the establishment of a People’s Defense of the Revolution committee to take over and run the saltpans of the companies. Unfortunately, the companies were able to regain their hold over the area, and used police and military forces to enact even more abuse (Songor Salt Cooperative Committee, 1989). At the same time, a local salt cooperative had been established that countered the two companies’ claim over the resource – a partial explanation for the growing tension in the area.

This tension and conflict resulted in the death of the pregnant Maggie Kowunor, in 1985, who was killed by police fire. Her death led to the national Amisah Commission of investigation (1986), and the establishment in 1992 (just prior to the return to democracy) of PNDC law 287 – a law that annulled the two company concessions and held the resource in trust for the people of Ada, and of Ghana. A key element to underscore here is the fact that the mobilization by the Adas to defend their resource, even after it had been given out by members of the Dangme elite, was crucial in returning communal access to the resource to Adas. However, as will be discussed further below, Manuh (1994) notes that despite the importance of the resource to women, and the fact that it was a woman’s death who led to the commission of inquiry, women were not well represented in the cooperative leadership that had emerged to counter company rule.

Since 1992 a number of notable things have happened in Ghana, such as the return to democratic rule in 1993, the peaceful electoral transition of

government in 2000, and a second peaceful transition in 2008. Also notable are the two government sponsored plans for the Songor salt resource that emerged throughout this period. The first of these, embedded in law 287, is what is simply known as the Master Plan (Ghana Government, 1991), produced by a Cuban consulting team in 1991, with broad community and cooperative participation, and which imagines the resource accommodating local artisanal salt production through cooperatives co-using the lagoon alongside industrial salt producers intent on serving West Africa's petro-chemical needs. The second plan, called the Land Use Plan (Ghana Government, 2003), produced by the largely pro-capitalist winners of the 2000 election, used the same base research of the Cuban team in-terms of production potential, but re-oriented the direction of policy to instead focus on privatizing the whole resource as a concession to an outside company. Needless to say, this second plan met with much local resistance, and when this government lost power in 2008, this plan was (temporarily) shelved.

Another critical shift happened in 2008 when oil was discovered in commercial quantities off of Ghana's coast. Suddenly the interest of many elites in salt, both within the Ada area and at the national level, was peaked. As Affam and Asamoah (2011) note, the economic potential of using Ghana's salt in petrochemical processes is large. With this dawning awareness, many new forces are looking at the Songor with interest. Already, in 2011, ASAF managed to publically expose a government delegation, that was talking to the area's traditional leadership, of relocating the one-hundred thousand plus Ada residents who live around the lagoon – the core idea of the Land Use Plan. Largely as a result of the public education efforts of the movement, as well as the creative contributions of Radio Ada, the central government and the local chiefs who support the move have been forced to abandon language of relocation and are (for now) taking a more slow and consultative approach to planning around the lagoon. This is the current context of the struggle. Yet an important dimension of this background has not yet been described.

Since 2003, the communal artisanal approach to salt winning in the lagoon has been facing another threat besides government and external expropriation. An internal process of carving out salt pans along the edge of the lagoon, called "atsiakpos" in the opening quotes, has been gaining ground. This balkanization of the resource emerged in response to private concessions disrupting the traditional communal process and has continued with the explicit or implicit involvement of local elite and custodians of the land. Though there was much initial resistance to this emerging trend by local youth (Langdon, 2011), the failure by local decision-makers, police and national government to put an end to the practice has led many of those who resisted initially to create their own astiakpos within the lagoon – making it more and more difficult for women especially to access the communal salt fields. Needless to say, this has led to severe internal divisions and tensions, with families divided over the practice. Before the emergence of relocation plans connected to oil, the majority of the focus of ASAF members was to combat atsiakpo. In fact, in 2008 Radio Ada and the Ada Traditional Council managed to establish a ban on the practice – but

the failure of traditional leadership involved in this ban to account for seized goods delegitimated this route in future efforts to end the practice. In this sense, there are two fronts upon which the current movement has been working: the specter of supplying salt to the oil industry leading to expropriation and exploitation of the resource, and the current realities of divided communities dealing with unregulated seizure of the lands around the edge of the lagoon. It is into this complex context, with both internal and external challenges facing the movement, that the current research entered. Before turning to delve deeper into what has emerged from this research, it is important to share here how this study evolved.

Studying social movement learning through participatory action research

Participatory and collaborative research approaches have been identified as being an important and synergistic method for studying social movement learning (SML) (Hall & Turray, 2006). Hall & Turray (2006) reveal how integral participatory action research processes have been, and continue to be for movement research in adult education circles. This stream of research, known as social movement learning, has a strong tradition of participatory collaborative research, and yet, as Walter (2007) has pointed out, the majority of these studies are dominated by Euro-American dichotomies drawn between Old Social Movement (Marxist and labour movements) and New Social Movement (identity based movements, such as the LGBTQ movement) theories of organizing (c.f. Holst, 2002). Kapoor (2008) has underscored the dangers of assuming the portability of this dichotomy in Southern contexts. He, like others (c.f. Foley, 1999; Walters, 2005), advocates a strong connection to context when analyzing social movement learning.

This echoes warnings of Eurocentric dominance in critical theories that write from an African context, such as Mamdani (1996) who argues for using context rich approaches to analyzing African phenomena. Hall (2005) and Fals-Borda (2006) have written reflective pieces on the history of participatory research and its connection with adult education, in the case of the former, and, in the case of the latter, its connection with an anti-Eurocentric desire to stop the studying of exotized 'others', and rather generate spaces of mutual meaning-making. Along these same lines, Choudry & Kapoor (2010) have argued that participatory research, and PAR in particular, must be owned by the movements at the centre of social movement learning studies, rather than being used by academics – especially in the North – carrying out studies ultimately more concerned with extracting information than in responding to movement needs and priorities. They note that the relationships that frame such research, along with the way in which the research is conceived (i.e. is it owned by the movement from the outset) is critical to avoid this type of extractive relationship.

First in 2008 and further in 2010, members of ASAF, including representatives of Radio Ada, as well as two of the three authors began to design a long-term study of learning in the salt movement. While an ongoing research project emerged from this process, what was ultimately more important to the movement membership was the quick reconfiguration of the design process by members to be a reflexive learning process in and of itself. Foundational to this emerging vision was a mutual education process that not only formed the basis of the research study to follow, but a conceptual collectively-constituted understanding of the struggle at hand and the important lessons from the past to move forward. So, while the design process asked, “what themes and processes should frame a potential longer-term study of movement learning in the Ada movement?”, this question was reconfigured to focus on “how do we achieve a similar and collectively determined understanding of what our struggle is today and the best way to tackle it?” In this sense, what was originally envisioned as a movement research design conversation, became in and of itself a part of movement education, planning and reflection processes. As such, this synergistic parallel structure, where movement research design and movement processes feed the one into the other, exemplifies the call by Choudry and Kapoor (2010) for research embedded in movements from its very outset.

Subsequently, the three past years of the actual research project have seen the research continue to “move with the movement” (Langdon, 2012). As the new challenge of government relocation plans emerged, the focus and energy of the movement shifted. The action-research was part of the reflection process that led to this shift and has been embedded in the ongoing community dialogue processes that informed communities of the new challenge, and worked with them to plan their responses. All of these processes were planned by movement members in an organic way, based on the evolving situation, and all research activity went into documenting the processes, and also contributing to reflective discussions on the situation by sharing the documentation – culminating in many ways in the People’s History of the Songor Struggle book project mentioned above (ASAF, 2013). One interesting phenomenon that has emerged is that many overlapping activities undertaken by different groups within ASAF have become part of movement activity, or support movement goals (such as Okor Nge Kor, a radio soap opera series on Songor issues started by Radio Ada, or research on revitalizing the salt cooperatives by the Ada Songor salt cooperative mentioned above). In this sense, the research has been able to incorporate into the case study a wide array of related activities that also move with the movement, describing a kind of ‘ecology of activism’ (Langdon & Larweh, 2013).

It was in the first workshop after the design period, held in May 2011, where the priorities and strategies of the movement were being articulated that the three narratives that began this paper emerged. Continuing on the tradition that emerged during the design process, this first workshop was imagined by all involved as a mutual education process, to find out what we all knew, what we all thought of the Songor situation, and what our perspectives could teach

others even as we learned from them. Before turning to these three narratives, it is important to situate them in a context of challenging epistemic norms.

Challenging how the root causes of struggle are framed

As noted above, embedded research allows for the kind of epistemic challenge of ongoing legacies of colonial relations as it foregrounds the ways in which subjugated ways of knowing and being are actually defining struggle – rather than locating this struggle within Euro-American theoretical containers. For instance, the Ada case challenges the false dichotomy between livelihood and identity concepts as a root source of struggle. In ASAF's current work the two are absolutely intertwined, as the history of struggle about the Songor, along with its linkage with foundational narratives of the Okor people is as much a part of the strength of the movement as is 60,000 people fighting to protect their livelihood. Before turning to the three narratives that provide different lenses through which we can understand this current movement and struggle, we would share an example of epistemic shifting to help illustrate this point.

This example concerns the link between livelihoods and resource use. From the outset, ASAF has focused not just on the defense of communal access, and inclusive planning processes in connection with government decision-making about the resource. The movement has also consistently emphasized the importance of the Okor forest in these discussions. In many ways, this forest – located on the southern edge of the lagoon – symbolizes the current situation in the Songor, and also the larger Ada nation. It is heralded as the forest through which the founders of the Ada nation were guided by the Yomo spirit – a wise old woman who alone knew the way to the Songor. This forest serves practical spiritual purposes, as it is a major shrine to the Ada people, and is the first place a newly enstooled Ada king, or Paramount Chief in the current lexicon, is to go to be spiritually fortified and educated in the roles and responsibilities of his new position. Although it is still unclear as to when this encroachment started, but the forest has dwindled in contemporary times to a fraction of its original size, and has also been shunned by the current Paramount Chief of Ada. The only parts of the forest that remain are the four shrine areas of the founding Ada clans.

Radio Ada, along with other members of the movement, have consistently linked the dilapidated nature of the forest to the atsiakpo encroachment on communal access to the Songor, as well as the dwindling of the lagoon's salt production levels. In making this link the movement has both connected with the foundational narratives of the Ada nation and Ada identity, as well as established a strategic support to the consistent message of the movement that this is about improving not just the lives of Songor residents but revitalizing the culture of the Ada nation – a difficult thing to openly criticize. From a social movement learning perspective, this strategy emerges from long-term learning in struggle, which could be thought of as learning from struggle (Langdon, 2011), connected to previous iterations of the movement. This is expanded upon

in one of the narratives below. During the conflict with the two companies described above, defenders of communal access at the time were able to have the Yomo shrine site (not the Okor forest) declared outside the purview of the company concessions (Ada Songor Salt Cooperative, 2013). In several ASAF discussions, this victory was described as an important beachhead for the later annulment of the concessions. From this perspective, linking spiritual and cultural identity markers to the Songor struggle was an important lesson to apply to the current struggle. Along slightly different lines, Radio Ada also saw this link with the forest as an important demonstration of the station's commitment to address multiple community issues – a point often used to undermine attempts to paint the station as becoming too deeply involved in Songor issues alone. This sense of the need to show balance emerges from the learning of the station staff in how to deal with contentious issues, enacting the station's mission to be the voice of the marginalized and ruffling the feathers of the local and national elite, while at the same time performing neutrality, or a form of balance in the station's relationship with traditional authority. As is discussed elsewhere, this is not an easy balance to achieve, and is a constant source of learning and adjustment (Langdon, Quarmyne, Larweh & Cameron, 2013). But the pragmatic approach this account of learning suggests should not overshadow the very palpable importance this forest has for many Adas, and the very real need to do something to protect and regenerate it – something a wide number of people, including many traditional authority figures, support.

The importance of this many-leveled interconnection was demonstrated at a movement forum in the Songor community of Goi in August, 2012. Without delving into too much detail, ASAF and the station effectively undermined attempts to paint the movement as anti-Ada and anti-development by broadcasting live from the community and focusing not only on Songor issues, but also the regeneration of the Okor forest. This strategy, described elsewhere (Langdon, Quarmyne, Larweh & Cameron, 2013), allowed the movement to effectively position itself as both defender of livelihoods and Ada identity. This approach forced the Ada Traditional Council to meet with ASAF members, where some openly discussed their mistake in working with the government relocation effort. This kind of grounding within what Mignolo (2000) calls 'local histories' has been the two legs upon which the movement has had success. It is precisely from these local histories that the three symbols and surrounding narratives described below emerge. Kofi Larweh, one of the authors of this paper and member of the movement, described the importance of this narrative approach in connection with the epistemically rooted symbols at the heart of this paper:

When we were growing up, knowledge and wisdom was presented in the form of Ananse Stories and you have animals and trees talking and it helps to build the imagination so that one is led in the spirit to experience what is good. Now, our people are storytellers. All the history of the community is, is written in songs, in stories that are handed over from one generation to the other and so, people would even say what is going on in the community in the form of animals or

trees, birds or whatever, in a certain way. Our people are great storytellers. That is the reason why I started by saying that what has been expressed has two forms, the spirit and the letter. And so, if you take the thumbless hand, the dog and the chameleon, this is the letter, that is what is physical. The spirit behind it is the feelings that the people are able to express, looking at the whole thing, at these things as they said or as they live with the humans. The understanding is that, normally you will hardly, for example, if you have a bad leader, our people would not say that, “you have a bad leader”, you would say that “our leader has bad advisors”. The same way you don’t want to talk to the people in the face. And so, the simple thing is to use the logic of the thumbless hand, the dog and the chameleon in the form of objects that can give meaning to what they feel, deep down their hearts. And our work, in the field, is to help people tell their stories. Is to help people come out with these images so that it will stick, the images stick better, because that is what people will remember. Even up to this day, those who said these things and those who heard will know that, when you’re talking of the thumbless hand, the dog and the chameleon, they know what they are talking about.

This analysis is a fitting introduction to the three narratives that form much of the ongoing strategic analysis of the ASAF movement.

The Thumbless Hand, the Dog, and the Chameleon

With so much history of struggle in this movement, one of the major issues identified by movement members early on in collective conversations was a need to share inter-generational knowledge, while also learning from the past in today’s struggles. As has been documented elsewhere, and as is discussed in the youth section below, there has been a disconnect between the generation of older male activists and many of the young protestors (Langdon, 2011). It is in part because of some of these tensions, and a desire to regenerate organizing around the Songor that the initial conversations around this research began in 2008. At the same time, cross-cutting this issue, and very much linked to continued mobilization and concern by women in the Songor communities regarding atsiakpo also re-emphasized a point Manuh (1994) had made previously, that it is especially women who are affected when communal access to the Songor is restricted. It was based on these three key elements of the current iteration of the Songor movement, now called Ada Songor Advocacy Forum (ASAF), that the organic perspective groups emerged during this first workshop, held on June 6th and 7th, 2011. Each perspective group had taken on the task of detailing their understanding of the issues confronting the lagoon, concluding with a symbol that captured the core issue for them. It is from this process that three images – now deeply entrenched in the movement’s popular education processes and public analyses – emerged.

The Thumbless Hand

In their group discussions, the older generation of male activists shared much history of struggle, detailing the layers upon layers of intrigue and undercover moves associated with the 20 years plus of company presence in the lagoon (1970 to 1992). While being a combination of older men from both within the Songor community, including some elders, chiefs and traditional priests, and from the educated Ada civil servant community, the entire group were mutually involved in the last wave of struggle over the resource. A key dimension of this group's reflection on the past was the difficulties they had in meeting under successive military regimes, the challenges they had in finding out what was planned at the national level, even while others detailed the intrigue of discerning who within the broader Ada community, and within the Songor communities themselves were aiding the companies in their operations.

With the revolution in 1982, this all became more fraught, with a sense that the resource would be returned, but also witnessing the ambiguous moment where the revolutionary government issued a proclamation encouraging the formation of cooperatives in the Songor, while at the same time re-granting the concessions for the companies (Songor Salt Cooperative Committee, 1989). In pursuing the formation of the cooperatives, the people of Ada now had a tool through which they could reassert their right to win salt. And yet, this tool was necessarily blunt, as it had to face repeated police raids, intimidation, etc. It was one of these raids that led to Maggie's death. It was in the midst of these reflections, over what was regained, but also the terrible price paid, that the notion of the thumbless hand emerged. As Nomo Abayateye said, quoted at the outset of the article, "we had, we had everything, but we lacked something, we lacked something to make our intentions and our aspirations complete." This idea of the hand with the missing thumb became important, as it captured the way in which the mobilization in Ada was successful at regaining access to the lagoon, but there was a lack of something to concretize the aspirations of the people to guarantee this access. Broad agreement emerged that this was the perfect image to describe both the success and the shortcomings of the last struggle over the lagoon. However, of perhaps greater pedagogic interest, the issue of the missing thumb provoked a debate that instigated critical analysis. First, discussion centered around whether the missing thumb was mismanagement of the resource by those who managed to seize control at particular moments during the 1980s. Then a discussion emerged, provoked by Radio Ada and movement member Kofi Larweh who said:

When we had the opportunity to manage the resource, was management composed of women? And, for, for that special ability of women to be added, or, management of the time was so made up of men, that the missing thumb could be alluded to the missing role of women in managing at the time that we took over?

Thus, the inability to use the resource well was connected to Manuh's (1994) critique that the previous organization around the movement provided very little room for women's leadership. Debates also surfaced regarding who removed the thumb: was it removed by internal strife, or by external threats? Upon reflection, many answers were found for these different questions. Importantly, many of the answers provoked lines of action that were ground directly in learning from the past. The most relevant of these was to ensure women are not only playing a lead role in the movement, but also in articulating the struggle.

The Dog

“Look behind us, there comes Government after us Okor People. I repeat, turn and look behind Dangme People, Government is catching up with us [...] They told our Elders, they are going to take over Songor, to quell conflicts so that we live in peace. Radio Ada heard of this development, took on their broadcast armour, mobilized us; we entered the communities and started informing the people; we are spreading it.” – Translated excerpt from a song by Akpetiyo, the ‘Divine Singer’ of the movement.

Akpetiyo is a leading voice within ASAF. Her social commentary songs, like the one drawn from above, capture the essence of the current struggle in Ada. She was not present the first day of the imagery workshop. Yet, when she joined the following day, she immediately connected with the symbol of the dog. She describes the lagoon in a similar fashion, calling the salt from the lagoon, “abomination salt”:

My family and I no longer win salt because we consider the current salt from our lagoon to be abomination. We were not using this Atsiakpo method of salt winning in the past. I grew up to meet the Songor lagoon free to all. It was the main source of livelihood for our mothers and also served as their source of income. Today, people are balkanizing Songor lagoon and selling them.

This analysis by Akpetiyo is crucial at grounding the current struggle in the livelihood contexts being felt by communities around the Songor, and by women in particular. Partially as a result of the missing thumb conversation described above, the notion of the taken for granted, and ultimately mistreated dog was applied by Songor women on themselves, and not just the lagoon. This was an important link, as it foregrounded in the midst of discussions about the history of struggle around the resource, how women's labour has always been at the heart of salt winning, and yet their opinion is never sought when decisions are being made about the lagoon. A key learning that has emerged in this iteration of struggle is that women must play a leadership role in the Songor movement.

The combination of this image, as well as the idea of the missing thumb articulated by the older male activists, as well as women's grounded analysis has made this conclusion clear. Akpetiyo is a key example of this leadership, as her voice, and her songs have emerged as the crucial popular education tools of this movement. For her, it is the atsiakpo balkanization of the resource that is the key example of the disregard for the lagoon and the livelihoods that depend on it. Her thoughts on this provide a bridge to the final symbol, that of the chameleon:

Some Atsiakpo practitioners are seated among us. We are the same people making noise against such Atsiakpo. If we really want to change, it must start with us... because we need to unite and fight for Songor.

This statement reflects the dialogue and learning space at the center of ASAF, where dialogue often involves both calling people out on their contradictions, while at the same time offering a path to collective action. Unafraid to call it like she sees it, she illustrates how having a "thumb" like her may have changed the last iteration of struggle, even as she composes songs in the current one pointing out people's duplicitous colour changing.

The Chameleon

The final symbol came from the mostly young men's group, though it was self-described as a youth (both male and female) group. Being much less versed in the history of struggle than both the older men and women, the focus of the youth was on the current situation – atsiakpo. It was the internal betrayal by those in leadership positions, saying one thing and doing another, that rose most firmly to the surface of their analysis. As can be gleaned from the opening quote at the outset of this article, there is a common understanding that many traditional authorities – those who have the power to grant land usage – are directly involved in the atsiakpo process. Nomo Abayataye confirmed this, saying "what the youth said is so effective, it affects [and touches] the chiefs." He went further to link the importance of publically declaring this chameleon behavior as being crucial to end atsiakpo, as well as to build a strong united front to undermine any attempts by central government to expropriate the resource:

The [radio] drama, as is going on, showing that a chief is giving money to somebody to do Atsiakpo for him. And, the same chief, in the drama, was asked to arbitrate over a case where the person he was sponsoring is caught constructing Atsiakpo, and the chief fined the, the culprit, and the chief gave money to the culprit to come and pay at his own court, that was in the drama. That it is true, that is exactly what is happening.

This avowal by a key traditional priest is crucial at legitimating the critical analysis of the movement, especially its younger generation. As important as it is to be rooted in women's articulations of this struggle, the voice and energy of youth is critical to the success of this movement. What was so important, if also disheartening, was that the community discussion forums that followed this workshop around the *atsiakpo* issue and the threat of government relocation confirmed both the applicability of the chameleon image, and the stories of elite involvement in the *atsiakpo* phenomenon.

Movement learning through struggle

Based on a reworking of Foley's (1999) idea of learning in struggle by Langdon (2009), to include how learning emerges over a long period of social action, the three narratives reflect different forms of reflective learning embedded in local stories, images and knowledges/epistemes. In August 2013, two years after these images were first articulated, a session on movement learning over the past three years was held. While many aspects of learning were noted, including the fact that women now described themselves as "wolves, protecting the resource" rather than dogs – an indication of how their activism had become central to the effort – the most telling description of learning came from Isaac, a leading member of Radio Ada. "We have learned to change," he noted. Others joined in to say the movement had learned on the move, trying different strategies, and moving on if they didn't work. For instance, the hope that the Salt Cooperative revitalization effort would help spread the movement was stalled by some of the ambiguous history of the previous leadership of the cooperative, as articulated in the *thumbless hand*. As such, ASAF shifted focus, even as the women's core emerged to leave this issue behind – organizing successful demonstrations, as well as popular education tools that continue to teach a radical questioning of large scale development of the resource for either oil industry needs, or those of local elites.

The voice of Akpetiyo, and women's analysis of the problems in the Songor have been the consistent guide through the different strategies – a clear reason why not only movement members, but even community youth implicated in *atsiakpo* processes are now coming around to seeing the women's vision of change as the one that must be followed, despite it being hard on them personally. This last point came to light when the Dangme broadcast version of the "People's History of Struggle in the Songor" was outdoored in the community of Toflokpo – one of the most conflicted communities about *atsiakpo* when the research began. Rather than defending the practice, as they had in the past, a number of young men in the town publicly spoke of needing to end *atsiakpo*, and implicated themselves in the practice. They pointed to the women assembled and explained that they had come to understand the devastation this balkanization was having on the family structure. Perhaps this shift captures best what it means that women in the movement have gone from seeing themselves as dogs to the wolves, protecting the Songor.

Frequencies and learning in struggle – an open conclusion

There is much more to write about this struggle, and yet there are clear indications of the ways in which the learning in struggle process at the center of this movement is creating an impact. As Foley (1999) notes, this impact can often surface in complex and ambiguous ways. This context is no different, as the emergence of women's leadership has made a tremendous impact, where women salt winners led demonstrations, created a popular education tapestry of the Ada relationship with and struggle over the Songor over time, and also built bridges with sympathetic elements in the traditional leadership of the community to restore the Songor to the moral center of the Adas – seeing the many sides of its importance (spiritual, historical, community building, etc.) rather than just its rent seeking potential. In doing so, they are consciously challenging notions of trusteeship that don't include consultation and transparency. These are also the very themes of the *Okor Nge Kor* Radio Ada drama series that Nomo Abayateye mentions above – a series that has used the drama form to openly discuss corruption, chameleon-like behavior by authority figures, and the potential of women's leadership in destabilizing some of these practices. With the success of this show, as well as Radio Ada's general ability to become a conduit for the issues of communities like those in the Songor who are most affected by decisions, and least consulted, it is perhaps not surprising that community radio in Ghana is under a lot of pressure from powerful forces in both the government and commercial radio sector. This is the ambiguous side to learning in struggle. As Kofi puts in, "our success is our greatest challenge." And yet, as Foley (1999, p. 134) notes:

We need to recognise the complex, ambiguous and contradictory character of particular movements and struggles. Analyses of these complexities provide a necessary basis for future strategies.

It is the ongoing mutual reflective analyses of these complexities, and collective and epistemically rooted perspectives of the analyses that are contributing to this movement's ability to strongly push for the continued communal access to this resource. It is hoped that as a result, this time around, ASAF has learned the truth of the proverb that "Unless the thumb helps the other four fingers, they cannot hold anything well."

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