Wango! Women's Struggles Amidst Privatised and Extractive Models of Salt Mining in Ghana

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Abstract

In this article, we examine the contestations and struggles of women salt miners in Ghana within the context of the increasing privatisation of commons and enclosures. Using a qualitative approach based on both desk reviews and primary data sources, we situate the study within the changing models and scales of salt production along Ghana's eastern coast as driven by development rhetoric. While the State continues to use a development discourse framed around modernisation and productivity to provide an impetus for such enclosures, the mechanism through which benefits should materialise remains highly contested among different classes and groups of women and between women, the State, traditional authorities and the private sector. We argue that the women's demand for access to the lagoons and salt fields and sustainable mining practices typifies feminist struggles worldwide against capital and patriarchy. The study also shows that the evolution and class character of the struggles are connected to the divisive roles that the State and traditional authorities have played in the communities. We conclude that the fragmentation of the grassroots women's organisations results from the strategies deployed by the agents of capital and their neoliberal institutions.

Keywords: Rural livelihoods, commons, women, salt mining, privatisation

Introduction

Ghana's annual salt production potential, estimated at 2.2 million metric tonnes (Ghana Export Promotion Council 2009), is about eight times more than current production. The production potential is at the centre of the national discourse on salt production, which revolves around its under-exploitation and the need for modern, capital-intensive extractive production models. Although often purported to incorporate different producers in the spectrum, including artisanal small-scale miners (ASM), the vision to modernise the sector is framed in the logic of large-scale industrial production (Third World Network, 2017). In the past two decades, the State began to take a more uncompromising stance against ASM, primarily women, in the Keta and Songor Lagoon areas, the largest salt-producing areas along Ghana's eastern coast. While the State has neglected the infrastructure and policies necessary to support community-driven and sustainable salt-winning and mining, it has taken pragmatic steps that have undermined the existing practices in the salt-mining communities.

In 2011, the government of Ghana granted a total lease of 49,421.1 acres to three large-scale companies to undertake salt mining in the Keta Lagoon area. In this paper, we focus on women's struggles against the 7,299.41acre concession originally granted to West African Goldfields Limited, which transferred its rights to Kensington Salt Industries, now Seven Seas Salt Limited (Atta-Quayson and Baidoo 2020). We also analyse the 15-year concession lease of 39,126.66 acres, the largest of its kind in West Africa, to Electrochem Ghana Limited (EGL) in the Ada-Songor Lagoon area, granted in October 2020. The lease grants and their fallouts have culminated in the current conjuncture where dispossession, disruption of economic activities, and repression of democratic processes amidst the crisis of social reproduction have ushered women to the forefront of the struggles in the salt-mining areas. As Ossome (2021) argues, women's quest to control their means of production and for greater autonomy has placed them at the centre of these struggles and in the domains of social, political, and economic oppression. Organised mobilisation by women salt winners in the two major salt-producing areas is new (Keta-Adina, post-2010) and old (Ada-Songor, since the 1970s). It is, therefore, imperative to understand the nature of the current struggles and the collective framing of the demands about capitalism,

feminism, and development. This paper reflects on how feminist concerns drive the struggles, shape their form, and determine their character and demands.

The history of struggles around access to land, salt, and water along Ghana's coast dates back to pre-colonial times. However, men dominated the leadership of the mobilisation (Manuh, 1994). The crises spanning the later stage of the 20th Century to the new millennium presented challenges in neoliberal democracy, which centres development on market-driven narratives while repressing community voices. Thus, violence and repression of people have become a part of the neoliberal democracy. Another significant characteristic of the time was the legitimation of extractivism through state machinery and policies. Salt, hitherto the most feminised mineral in Ghana, has come under cycles of crises emanating from State policies and development failures. While the nature of the extractive sector is usually context-specific, some commonalities are inherent in all forms. As noted by Pereira and Tsikata, these include "the appropriation of land to extract natural resources, the dislocation of communities, widening social and economic inequalities, increasing use of violence to repress resistance, and the destruction of ecosystems and biodiversity" (2021, 16). The factors that trigger violent clashes, such as dispossession, livelihood disruption, and human rights abuses linked to environmental degradation and social dislocation, intersect with patriarchy to affect women in particular ways. Hence, women's struggles against extractivism in their communities are linked to current multifaceted feminist struggles of socio-economic rights, social reproduction, and environmental justice.

To articulate the intersections of power, class, and resources in extractivist-related struggles, we used feminist political economy perspectives as an analytical lens to explain the women's and communities' struggles in the salt mining areas of Ada Songor and Adina in Ghana. In our analysis, the State occupies a critical space due to its complex role as an enabler and mediator in the salt sector. Atta-Quayson (2023) has laid out the relationship between the State, customary authority and corporate interests in salt mining. The author details how a segment of the customary authority that had earlier opposed industrial takeovers in the salt sector has gradually accepted that production model and its citizens' dispossession. The implications of the shifts in customary authorities' endorsement of industrial mining and dispossession are in opposition

to citizens' struggles for community ownership of the resource. As Chomsky (1999) argues, in the neoliberal development paradigm, States enact laws and regulations that promote profit over people and quicken profit maximisation and accumulation, no matter the cost. Ghana's salt sector policy directions and change have echoed this perspective. We analyse the women's struggles against dispossession, livelihood disruption and human rights abuses vis-a-vis the shifting positions of the State and its intricate relations with chiefs and corporate interests. We discuss the feminist mobilisations in the Ada-Songor and Keta-Adina lagoon areas and the emerging class contradictions they evoke.

In the remainder of this paper, we first reflect on our methodological approach, after which we contextualise women's current struggle in the context of changing State policies and associated shifts in production models. Next, we present the intricacies of women's everyday struggles, highlighting their demands and strategies. We then present the outcomes of these struggles on the women's front and conclude with a reflection on how they speak to women's struggles in the 21st Century.

Researching Feminist Struggles: Methodology and Positionality

Researching feminist struggles and collective actions requires multiple methodological approaches embedded in reflexivity and participation. Hence, a dual conscientisation where the researchers and the target groups share ideas, strategies, and tools is critical (Mies and Shiva 1993). In the spirit of scholar-activism, we engage this research from a critical standpoint following the experiences of women who experience oppression (Mama 2011). Women have been mobilising and continue to take collective and individual actions to confront extractive capitalism. Their struggles are manifold and located across multiple sites of power. Therefore, we adopted research approaches that enabled us to get to women, whether in or outside movements. We interacted with women and the leadership of women in a female-only group in the Ada Songor area, namely Ada Songor Salt Women's Association (ASSWA), commonly known as *Yihi* Katseme [brave women]. Furthermore, we interacted with women in other community-based groups, such as the Ada Songor Advocacy Forum (ASAF),

Ada Songor Lagoon Association (ASLA), and women who participated in sporadic protests in the Adina area without such organised mobilisations.

We used a mix of qualitative research methods in this study. In Songor, the over 20 communities along the lagoon are all sites of resistance, of which we selected five for our data collection. In Keta, we selected Adina, the community that remains the critical site of resistance, for our data collection. We, therefore, conducted more interviews in Songor than in Keta. We carried out six key informant interviews in Songor and two in Adina. We also conducted 20 in-depth interviews in Songor and six in Adina. We had five Focus Group Discussion (FGD) sessions in Songor and two in Adina. At Ada Songor, we participated in a meeting of a newly formed community group, Ada Songor Lagoon Association (ASLA), and had one-on-one conversations with a few members. In January 2023, at Kasseh, a town in the Ada East District, NETRIGHT, a women's organisation championing economic justice in Ghana, organised a town hall meeting and a research dissemination activity with cross-generational participation. We used the opportunity to interact with the participants to get their perspectives on the emerging issues about the concession grant to EGL. At Adina, we also visited abandoned community salt fields. The study also relied on secondary documents with important information on the cases we studied. Examples include national legislation and policies, company business plans, government speeches, news items, and documentary films on salt production and struggles.

A Historical Overview of Salt Sector Policy and Production Shifts in Ghana

Women's current struggles in the Ada-Songor and Keta-Adina lagoon areas are rooted in policy shifts in the salt sector. We link these policy shifts to the changing production models to emphasise the State's instrumental role in transforming the sector and the scapegoating of ASM. Traditionally, salt in Ghana is produced as a shared resource governed by customary practices and driven mainly by indigenous knowledge, skills and technologies. Women were central to salt mining and trade, producing autonomously and controlling their income (ASAF 2016). The turning point for community lagoon and salt governance systems came when Ghana, drawing from provisions of the United Nations, nationalised

mineral resources and vested them in the hands of the State. The State's vesting of natural resources is closely linked to people's right to self-determination and economic development. At the same time, States must have powers derived from their constitutions to regulate investment standards to protect people, the environment, human rights, and other public interests (Dagbanja 2022). Ghana's Minerals Act, Act 126 (1962) was passed almost immediately, which, in principle, changed the community resource access and ownership in favour of the State. However, some mineral resources continued to be managed by local people. For instance, the State focused on precious minerals such as gold, manganese, bauxite, and diamond. Thus, despite the law establishing a mineral licensing regime, salt-producing communities continued to win salt based on customary practices and norms. Subsequently, mineral laws have seen several revisions and changes. The state's power remains, while industrial minerals such as salt have gained renewed interest (see Ghana's Minerals and Mining laws 1986; 2006; 2019).

It is essential to take a step back to understand the circumstances undergirding the shifts in developments around salt and the critical role of the State. In 1965, the construction of the Akosombo hydroelectric dam, an ambitious State project, restricted the cyclical water flow into the Songor Lagoon, which affected salt mining and started a long spell of livelihood crises and ecological impacts (Tsikata 2006; Amate 1999; Miescher 2021). These crises compelled the chiefs from land-owning clans to welcome Vacuum Salt Limited (VSL) in 1971 to establish and use its "superior" technology to restore the lagoon to enable small-scale mining. However, the company reneged on its promise and began gradually dispossessing small-scale miners, resulting in violent community clashes. Within ten years, the State cancelled the VSL concession and all other leases to industrial companies. The State, however, excluded the sacred Yomo Lagoon from its control and nationalised the entire Ada Songor Lagoon. Following the killing of Margaret Kuwornu, a pregnant woman, by stray State bullets on May 17th, 1985 (see Ada Salt Cooperative, 1989), the State set up the Justice Amissah Commission of Enquiry in the same year to investigate the tensions in the area concerning the salt and the lagoon. In 1989, the State consulted a Cuban Technical Team, ECIMACT, to study the salt sector. ECIMACT produced a very elaborate *Master Plan for Salt Production in Ghana in* 1991, which the State

approved for implementation. The Master Plan recommended, among other things, technological solutions to restore the flow of water into the lagoon and common brine and space sharing to accommodate various types of production. The State had the sole responsibility for implementing the recommendations. In furtherance of the Plan, the State enacted the Ada-Songor Lagoon (Site for Salt Industry) (Vesting) Law, 1992 (PNDC Law 287). The State, however, reneged on its responsibilities to implement the Master Plan, and this would have long-term implications for the livelihoods and development of salt mining communities along the coast. In the Adina area in the Keta Lagoon catchment, the total erasure of women and communities in salt mining commenced around 2011.

Since the early 2000s, in line with Ghana's neoliberal development shift, the State's vision for the salt sector has been industrialised and modernised large-scale production. This is characteristic of the several policies formulated at the time, such as the Land Use Plan (LUP) for the Ada Songor Lagoon Area (2007), the Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703), the Strategy for Ghana's Salt Sector (2009), the Minerals and Mining Policy of Ghana (November 2014) and the Mineral and Mining (Amendment) Act, 2019 (Act 995) which provided an enabling environment for the private sector. By enforcing policies that entrust natural resources to it, the State gave out thousands of hectares in concession to private companies in the Keta and Songor lagoon areas. Consequently, violent clashes continued to erupt in these areas following the State's entrenched role in problematic concession grants that violated the socio-economic and cultural rights of the communities (Atta-Quayson and Baidoo 2020).

We characterise the primary shifts in the salt sector in three main conjunctures. The first is the community-driven lagoon and salt governance and mining practices anchored in access to the commons. Women's role in the salt sector and their place in their communities and families was highly recognised. The second conjuncture is the "nationalisation" push, which entrenched the invisible hands of the State in the salt sector. This period has varied forms of contradictions with ramifications for livelihoods. This phase also began the erosion of community management practices while entrenching the power of a segment of the traditional authority over the resource. Thus, over time, the supportive mineral legislation criminalised traditional salt mining. The third conjuncture is the privatisation

phase, which took root during the nationalisation period. In the Ada Songor area, the failure of the State to implement the Master Plan and the suspicion that the State could covet the resource fuelled a new locally driven privatised model of mining: *atsiakpo* (private saltpan balkanisation practices). The *atsiakpo* owners, mainly local elites, some members of the traditional authority and wealthy urban dwellers occupied the lagoon and lands by creating embankments in which they pumped water to produce salt. This model concentrated salt mining in the hands of a few men and relied on access to capital for heavy machinery and technology, such as excavators, water pumps, generators, and trampolines, which many ordinary women could not afford. All these culminated in women mobilising to demand the restoration of salt- and lagoon-driven livelihoods from the State and other institutions.

The Current Struggles of the Women Salt Miners

The Ada and Adina areas have been built on ancient practices of artisanal salt mining, reflecting communal values and identity. For many women, salt is all they know, as participants in the focus group discussion sessions emphasised. In Ada, collective salt mining has defined this socio-economic activity for many decades. "Songor for all", the Ada Songor Salt Women's Association (ASSWA) slogan, encapsulates their desire to return to the past practice of collective community ownership, which recognised and protected women's community membership. The framing of the salt and lagoon as common resources meant less pressure for the contradictions and differences of gender to emerge as a distinctive question. (Ní Chléirigh 2019). Nonetheless, following years of privatisation, state interventions, corporate development, and *atsiakpo*, the natural and cultural landscape of a once collective and open resource has been drastically modified (Langdon 2020; Langdon and Garbary 2017).

Until the EGL takeover of the Ada Songor Lagoon, the *atsiakpo* system dominated. Its owners are a mix of men, women, financiers, licensed firms, private individuals, local groups, and people who have strong alliances with influential traditional authorities, the capital to acquire modern equipment, and the ability to hire labour for salt production. With the EGL takeover, the labour of the majority of women whose salt livelihoods depended on a common lagoon

and brine have become alienated from the resources. Many women have lost their productive autonomy. Those incorporated as labourers - fetching water, gathering harvested salt from pans to stockpile areas, and packing salt in refineries - work under exploitative conditions. FGD participants at Matsekope described the period as difficult for women who earned just about GHS1 per basin of salt gathered, which, until 2012, was 30 pesewas. Respondents indicated that, on average, women labourers earned about GHS20 (USD 1.7) daily, which can barely sustain them and their households. One woman reiterated:

> We need help to win salt on our own. The younger ones cannot go to school. We educated our children well when we won our own salt. However, with *atsiakpo*, we worked and earned GHS10 a day. How much will be left for the child to send to school? .

Further, the rigid nature of the *atsiakpo* model neither coheres with their reproductive responsibilities nor makes room for family support, as was the case in the past. The women complained that even women *atsiakpo* owners preferred male labourers. There were accounts of verbal abuse of female labourers linked to the difficulties in meeting their daily targets. To many, the *atsiakpo* undermines intergenerational structures by favouring the strong, vibrant, and capacitated. Widely held cultural and family values are not reflected in the work environment. For instance, many community members condemned the practice of older adults working for younger *atsiakpo* owners, as bitterly expressed by a woman in Ada during an FGD, "how can a young girl or boy ask her or his mother's age mate to become a labourer for him or her?" The situation has thus created intra-family and community conflicts.

The *atsiakpo*, akin to the petty bourgeoisie as Karl Marx conceptualized, represents a system of production that has both capitalist and working-class inclinations but also blurred interests regarding their social situation. The *atsiakpo* complicates the ongoing discourses and struggles concerning the takeover by EGL. Prior to the takeover by EGL, chiefs were noted to have granted *atsiakpo* leases to non-indigenes on a relatively more extensive scale than was done for community members. The granting of leases to non-indigenes resulted in agitations and clashes between traditional authorities and the local people. In Lolonya, for instance, some members of the customary authority, with the backing of non-indigenous *atsiakpo* owners, funded police-protected counterclashes

against the people to quash any resistance. This has created a dent in the relations between the different groups of women and segments of the traditional authority. Over time, resistance to *atsiakpo* withered, and many opponents later joined in to create their salt pans to sustain their livelihoods.

In Adina, salt mining was based on inherited salt-wining spaces— more of a family commons. Before the new ownership structure, the salt-gathering technology, which was based on a natural crystallisation process, enabled salt winning without limitations to space. Repeated use of the same space came with new mining technologies, which required investment in salt pans by individuals and families amidst the lack of State infrastructure. Akin to family commons for farming based on usufruct rights (See Gyapong 2021), developed salt pans are passed on to generations and are conventionally not marketised or leased to others. Children could win salt on the fields of their mothers and grandmothers. However, the parts of the fields that were not constructed with cement remained community commons. We did not receive any reports of internal dispossession prior to the concession grant, in contrast to Songor, where *atsiakpo* embankments preceded the most significant industrial concession grant. The current struggles in Adina are directly linked to the rupture caused by industrial mining and the extractive model of operation, which primarily affected the community lands. A woman expressed in an FGD session the community's relationship with the resource before the takeover:

> That concession is a community land for us. God has made the lagoon and salt available to us as our gold. The Akan people have gold and cocoa. We, too, have the lagoon, land, and salt as our cocoa. However, the government has taken it away from us. We are suffering as a result.

The primary struggle for women is against the enclosure of the commons and its impact on their livelihoods. However, the struggles are also anchored in the ecological effects of large-scale industrial salt mining. Successive governments have premised their modernisation discourse on a counter-narrative that artisanal salt mining, and by extension, women's mining methods, destroys the environment. Women, however, contest this narrative; one of them quizzed, "*A grader machine and a hoe, which will destroy the environment faster?"* Women's struggles are, therefore, intended to counter this narrative and instead highlight the ecological effects of industrial mining on the lagoon and its interlinked

natural resources and livelihoods. In both study areas, women contend that their traditional methods of salt production are guided by the generational benefits of the commons, which is environmentally sustainable. They contend that using small tools causes minimal disturbance to the lagoon landscape (Coumo 2005). The women also highlighted changes to the lagoons' ecology and the persistent flooding from industrial salt mining. Flooding affects downstream communities and the lagoon's salinity, thus harming aquatic life. In Adina, the company was mandated to leave a buffer for community salt production. The land was strategic only for mining, but women used the drier space to dry anchovies. Anchovy processing and marketing are major economic activities for women in the area. Despite the importance of salt-winning and anchovy processing to women, the company's activities disrupted both livelihoods. In Ada, extractive mining has increased the lagoon's salinity, thereby reducing stocks of fish species such as *hawii* (water crabs), *peniku* (small tilapia), *abor*/*abordu* (shrimps), and *kpotoe* (mudfish). The women's struggles are rooted in the inseparability of land, lagoon, fish, and salt, anchored in the rippling effects of the changing lagoon ecology and landscape on other natural resources and associated livelihoods.

In both cases, the women and affected communities were not adequately involved in the decision-making regarding the takeovers. The community engagements were not transparent. Chomsky (1999) argues that consent in the global neoliberal regime is manufactured, and where it fails, States resort to violence and lethal force to enforce it. In Ada, there is disregard for socio-cultural beliefs and reverence for the lagoon as a deity. Women's struggles and demands manifest in economic, ecological, and cultural dimensions and represent a longing to return to the Master Plan and its vesting law. The Master Plan gives credence to the centrality of micro and small-scale artisanal salt mining and outlines strategies for protecting the ecology of the lagoons and other associated resources. The Plan epitomises the women's demand and envisions salt and other related activities as crucial to a more integrated and sustainable sector.

Mobilising to Reclaim the Commons: Women's Strategies in the Struggles

Women groups in Adina and the Songor area used various means to invite the State to negotiate. When that failed, they deployed confrontational strategies to push back against their dispossession. It is important to emphasise that while there is a commonality in women's experiences of dispossession, those in the Ada Songor area have had a more extended history of struggles in the salt sector. This has shaped their resistance strategies and made them more grounded in the long term. While we did not find women's struggles in the Adina area before the 2000s, we found that women mobilised and engaged in actions deemed "unruly" for women and organically linked to their roles in their communities.

In Ada, Naa Yomo, a female deity, is credited as the spiritual foundation for the Ada traditional area, Songor lagoon and the salt (see Amate 2017). Naa Yomo guided customary practices linked to the lagoon and the salt. This history evokes the cultural importance of women's position in salt winning in the communities. Also, the memory of the killing of Margaret Kuwornu on May 17th, 1985, is often evoked to mobilise women to be part of struggles around sustainable salt mining. In 2016, ASSWA adopted the *"Songor for All"* manifesto, which reiterated Songor's history as a shared resource. ASSWA used the manifesto to advocate for the communities. The women used Radio Ada, a community radio station, as a hub for their dissemination and strategies. They also protested and held press conferences to continue their advocacy. For example, in 2016, ASSWA wrote letters to the police service informing the security outfit about their impending demonstration to amplify their discontent with the State's neglect of the development of the salt sector. This plan to protest followed various advocacy activities in communities to support the restoration of the Songor Lagoon as a common resource for women and the local people. The police, however, denied ASSWA the right to protest, citing the imminent national elections and associated security risks. The mobilisation reached a crescendo on October 12th 2016, when the women held events simultaneously at Sege, the Ada East District capital and in the national capital, Accra. Those at Sege marched through the streets, accompanied by a band, and holding placards to convey varied messages. The following were some of the messages displayed on the placards,

"Salt is our life."

"Songor Salt is wealth of the Adas."

"Women salt winners are sinking."

"Our livelihoods as salt winners are at stake. Women and children!!!"

"Master Plan, White Elephant. Dollars Wasted 26 years now!!!"

"Traditional Council, Wake Up, Songor is being Destroyed."

"Songor, Wor kulaa wano: Yihi Katseme!!"

"Songor Salt Development: Local Content."

"Poverty at Songor Area due to salt importation."

The ASSWA members who travelled to Accra held a press conference and petitioned the President and prospective government officials to attend to the salt sector by implementing the Master Plan. A key leader of the ASSWA recounted the moment and its success:

> We used one stone to get two things. We were smart. When the Police Commander saw us, he realised they could not dissuade us. The police escorted us, protected us, danced with us and then we presented our petition containing our alternative ideas to the District Chief Executive and the presidency. The demonstration happened in Ada and Sege. However, we sent copies of our petition to the DCE, Member of Parliament, Minister of Trade, Minister of Lands and Natural Resources and the presidency.

The women localised international bills of rights to make demands on the State. They petitioned the State to adhere to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), which urges States to respect the rights of indigenous people to self-determination and to prevent forceful dispossession of their lands and natural resources, among others (see UNDRIP declaration 2007).

Adina and its surrounding communities have no history of salt-related confrontations; thus, they have no known grassroots movements. However, they rose to the occasion when they saw their livelihoods threatened by the concession grant to industrial miners. As part of their mobilisation strategies, women defied threats from the State, the traditional leadership, and the company against people who mine in the concession. They were emboldened to mobilise and demand

the return of the salt mining concessions to the community. A pivotal moment in their struggles was their occupation of the salt mining field at Adina as an act of defiance and to draw attention to the structural injustice that confronted them. One of the leaders of this singular event narrated what happened at the time,

> We, the women, mobilised ourselves; we were more than fifty, women only. We were in clothes, and we wrapped *danger* (red pieces of cloth) on our heads to signify the seriousness of the problem. We were shouting as we marched ourselves to the concession. We started winning salt when we got there. We had our baskets and pans. We went there, and the company called the police, saying we were destroying their property.
>
> We women had only our mining tools- pans and baskets. We were only singing and shouting to attract attention. We called on the government to reverse the concession grant and see that the lease to the company was a mistake. We invited the whole country to see what was happening in the community. We were hungry and angry!

The women stood their ground and refused to move when confronted by about 20 police officers. One of the leaders, a relative of the community chief, received a call from him, pleading with her to ask the group to leave the concession. When she remained adamant, he told her, *"If you continue to occupy the concession and the police shoot you, you would have died a foolish death because you would have brought it on yourself".*

Another member of the group, frustrated, told the research team,

> A gun is a gun. I will not fear it. I then went to stand in front of the police with my hands in the air. I asked them to shoot me. They were silent. I said if killing me will bring an end to the occupation of our salt field by these foreigners, then shoot me. Perhaps my death would give freedom and justice to other women, the community, and future generations. So, I said, shoot me! However, they did not shoot. I saw that one by one, they laid down their guns.

The police withdrew and started negotiating with the women. The women rejected their offers, labelling them as short-sighted, tokenistic, and not liberating enough. When the police commander offered to give them money for food so that they could vacate the concession, the women replied,

> We do not want your money. Our source of livelihood for food and care for our children is lost. That is all we want back. We want the salt field back! The sea has flooded our community and destroyed our livelihoods. The sea displaced us, and these foreigners are also destroying the lagoon. Where do you want us to go?

While attacks on women in communities experiencing extractive activities are also linked to women's deviation from gender norms, in the case of the Adina women, aware of how power works, they overturned the structure and decided that men should not follow them, thus demonstrating that they could construct their resistance path. They were fully aware that if men followed them, the police would attack them, so their strategy was a calculated act to forestall the police brutality but also to centre women's economic autonomy independently of men. The women also argued that they have better negotiating skills to engage with police, hence there was less likelihood of their being shot.

When the women realised that none of the forms of protest yielded any result, they threatened to go on a naked protest - the highest form of female anger and bodily insurgency. They did not carry out this threat, but it would have been severe, as reported by a local government official. By threatening naked protest - resistance through the evocation of disrobing - the women knew that culturally, such acts exert pressure on patriarchy to act. Diabate (2020) has shown that the threat of naked protest and the act of executing it have increased in Africa and are linked to women's discontent with many things. Women have used naked protests as a feminist tool to defy norms governing society and decency and to expose in public spaces parts of the body deemed private (Young 2020). In many societies, it is a cultural taboo for women, particularly mothers, to show nakedness in public. Such naked protests defying taboos resonate with women all over the continent at the frontlines of mobilisations against all forms of violence, including environmental, social, socio-economic, political and gender-based. It shows the commonalities in the experiences and struggles of past and present generations of women, particularly in Africa, and their resistance to socio-economic oppression. As Mathebula (2022,1) notes, "…naked protest is a powerful form of protest that transforms a woman's body from social constructions of vulnerability and consumption to a site of militancy, defiance and one that speaks back from a position of solidarity and strength." One of the

leading figures in ASSWA who supports Adina women with information and strategy recalled the events:

> In the Adina area, the women marched into the concession together, and the company invited the police to be deployed from Ho, Tema and Aflao. The women wanted to strip naked, and because of that, the police did not shoot them. Were they men, the police would have shot at them, and blood would have [been] spilt.

Tamale (2017) has reiterated the underlying power of women's naked protest in African societies, which is deemed a "curse" on whoever has incurred their wrath. The threat of a naked protest, thus, is intended to cause discomfort to patriarchy and not soothe it. While the women did not strip naked, one of the leaders demonstrated to the research team how she held her breasts and jiggled them in front of the police commander and his team and told them that *"these [breasts] fed you!"* This is another form of humiliation to the police, which disarmed them subsequently. As Lewis (2009) has argued, public spectacles, which include enlistment of the body, evoke struggles beyond formal politics. Naked protests are subversive acts that show resistance to oppressive regimes.

The Changing Models of Production and the Tensions within the Women's Front

The shifts in production models in the salt sector in Ada Songor and Adina have significant trajectories linked to the way feminist struggles have to be conceptualised. Women everywhere are not a homogenous group; gender intersects with status and class differentiation. In the salt-producing areas, the dispossession deepened social differentiation when the commons became threatened, leading to disparities in relation to how women are incorporated in the changing salt economy. This is particularly evident in Ada, where the changing models of production have had different livelihood effects for different categories of women.

When salt was produced as a common good, it was based on exchange and collective labour. The women talked about how they held hands walking in the muddy salt fields to protect themselves from slipping. They also helped each other carry the salt and worked close to each other on the fields. Salt winning was less individualistic. The community observed cultural practices that prohibited

people from winning salt during certain months until rituals were performed to announce the beginning of the season. Those practices were linked to a moral economy of sustainable salt winning. For instance, access to the Ada Songor Lagoon was sometimes closed for three years.

The corporate takeover has brought women together to resist the State's effort to deprive them of autonomous production. However, the years following the failed promise of the Master Plan ushered in the development of the *atsiakpo* system. The privatisation of the commons through the creation of embankments and dykes and the deployment of heavy machines created local opportunities for accumulation, which excluded some women and benefitted those with the requisite resources. The incorporation of resource-endowed women into the new stage of mining is a fallout from the long spell of livelihood crises and the State's resolve in the 2000s to displace locals by the introduction of industrial mining. From this period, the class differentiation among women became sharper. A few women acquired concessions of their own, while many others became labourers in the salt fields.

The completion of the Master Plan was followed by a significant delay in its implementation, prompting ASAF to campaign for the lagoon to be used communally for the benefit of all. To give voice to women and garner attention for their peculiar challenges, ASAF sub-convened ASSWA. These were mainly labouring women salt winners who had lost their autonomous production through the VSL concession and *atsiakpo*. They saw *atsiakpo* as an illegal mining system that allowed a few people, including affluent women, to accumulate wealth while dispossessing many poor women. The advocacy to stop the new mining model resulted in visible tensions among these classes of women - those who mobilised to overthrow the *atsiakpo* system and those who supported it. Many women supported ASSWA's advocacy for a return to the commons salt-winning logic. However, the group and others, such as ASAF, faced hostilities from the beneficiaries of the *atsiakpo* mining system. This tension was lurking in the background to unfold on a bigger scale.

In 2020, when EGL took over the concession, tensions were ignited. EGL's concession grant subsumed the *atsiakpo* salt pans and dispossessed these categories of women as well. This clearly complicated women's struggles and could be seen in the divisions among them and the contradictory attitudes to

different kinds of dispossession. For example, within ASSWA, some members see EGL's concession grant as an infringement on women's rights. However, others hold the view that the community saltpans that EGL started constructing were an answer to the long-held advocacy for a return to the commons, which would bring women back to salt winning. For the latter, their position on this type of commons is a visible resistance to *atsiakpo* that had long displaced many women. Confronted with the prospect of prolonged dispossession of many women and the associated livelihood crises, they see the community pans from EGL as the closest semblance of a commons which can benefit many ordinary women. However, it is essential to emphasise that the creation of eleven community saltpans was outside EGL's business plan and part of the agreement signed with chiefs and the State. The construction of these saltpans resulted from people's resistance to the takeover and was not bound by law. Since the business plan has a strategy of finding alternative livelihoods for the people, it shows that the real intention behind community saltpans is to nip resistance in the bud and generate good publicity. Besides, since EGL controls water flow in the lagoon, there is no assurance that brine will be available for salt mining in the pans when needed. In Adina, there is flooding at a legally required community buffer. The women said that the company's activities caused the flooding. The site is now a waste dumping site.

We argue that if *atsiakpo* with its brand of dispossession of many women had not happened, EGL, which caused dispossession of a greater magnitude, would not have divided the women's front. If the concept of the commons represents a shared interest of the women, then the dispossession caused by the *atsiakpo* and later EGL, and the subsequent fragmentation of the women's movement in the area, reveal the underlying class contradictions in the struggle. This indicates that the struggle is not monolithic in its character and form. The women's advocacy for a return to sustainable salt wining in the commons simultaneously addresses the questions of resource management, social reproduction, economic justice and environmental sustainability. Yet we found that the framing of the issue around salt has shifted much more with the formation of ASLA, which started in 2020 to confront EGL. We found many defected ASSWA members in ASLA, which is a mixed group of men and women, *atsiakpo* owners and *atsiakpo* dispossessed women who became labourers. The complex

composition of ASLA, which unifies different groups of people to fight an industrial miner, is reminiscent of past struggles when salt was at the centre of Ada's nationhood. Currently, it is ASLA, with membership drawn from different communities of the Ada traditional area, which is at the forefront of the mass resistance mobilisation and struggles against EGL. For this group, the central issue is sovereignty and community ownership of the lagoon and its resources.

In Ada Songor, all women mobilised in the struggle in the salt mining areas chanted "Songor Livelihood for All" and thus aligned with a vision that the lagoon resources should benefit all women. Yet, there is no consensus on the model of production that will benefit all women. The divergent views among women on what production models are favourable for women's livelihood are long-standing. Even within ASSWA, individual members have divergent views about the commons through community pans and whether it presents a better livelihood option for women than working as labourers in the *atsiakpo* system. These reflect how the different categories of women encounter the livelihood effects of the progressive privatisation and enclosures of the commons.

Conclusion

Women in Ghana have adopted various strategies to challenge the State, corporations, and patriarchal power in general (see Torvikey 2021). In this paper, we highlight how women use confrontation to tackle threats from private companies, the State and traditional authorities from which companies derive their legitimacy. We contextualised the history of women's struggles in the salt mining frontlines within the growing State repression in the extractive sector, the strengthening of State power in natural resource ownership and the marginalisation of community mining to benefit corporate entities. We reflected on the multifaced nature of the feminist struggles, the class tensions in the front and neoliberal disruptions in salt mining.

Women's struggles and confrontations are in defence of the old commons and shared identity through which many categories of women secured their livelihoods. By defying the State, their traditional authorities and the companies amidst the violence which confronts them, women demonstrate their demand for constitutional and socio-economic rights. The evolution of the production

models has shaped the mobilisation strategies of women. We have shown that class differences became more evident as the privatisation of the commons unfolded and profit motives of production superseded the moral economy that had driven the collective production logic in the past. The protracted livelihood crises have also systematically fragmented the women's front, culminating in a hiatus where industrial mining in Ada, for example, inserted a false version of commons in women's mobilisation demands.

Various groups, such as ASAF, ASSWA, and the women salt winners in the Keta Lagoon area, are working together to protect their salt resources. They are running campaigns through different media channels, but face threats from powerful institutions. At the same time, they are learning how to build their movement and strengthen their cause. Dispossession drives resistance against capital, but the struggles also show women's objection to oppression in their households and by the State and traditional institutions. The collective efforts by women, such as pooling resources, using cultural capital and working of their own volition without external control, challenge traditional relations of submission, exploitation, and oppression. The women's struggles are feminist in nature as they demand sustainable mining, socio-economic rights, production autonomy and respect for community salt production practices rooted in common resource access.

Notes

1. Salt winning is a method of salt extraction through the solar process of evaporation of sea salt where there is an absence of construction of dykes and embankments. Salt mining is a general term for salt production, but mining is mainly used to describe controlled production.
2. UN Resolution 1803(XVII) of December 14th 1962 called for nation-states to have "Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources".
3. https://www.mincom.gov.gh/acts/
4. USD1 = GHS11.8 in April 2022.
5. Women, Bonikope, April 22nd 2022.
6. Women's Focus Group Discussion, Matsekope, April 27th, 2022
7. Women, Adina.
8. In-depth interview, leader, ASSWA, May 6th 2022.
9. Woman, Adina.
10. In-depth interview, leader no. 1 of Adina female protests, Adina, April 30th 2022.
11. In-depth interview, leader no. 2 of Adina female protests, Adina, April 30th 2022.
12. Key informant interview, male respondent, Adina, April 30th 2022.
13. In-depth interview, ASSWA leader, May 6th 2022.

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