

# RESTOR(Y)ING HOPE: STORIES AS SOCIAL MOVEMENT LEARNING IN ADA SONGOR SALT MOVEMENT

**Jonathan Langdon**

St. Francis Xavier University, Canada  
jlangdon@stfx.ca

**Rachel Garbary**

St. Francis Xavier University, Canada  
rachelgarbanzo@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

Stories are a central component of how we understand ourselves and our societies in our world. This is especially true in the case of oral cultures. Stories, how they are used, how they are reframed, and how they change over time, are also an important record of learning. Randall (1996) and Kenyon and Randall (1997) have called this process restorying. This article explores how a social movement in Ada, Ghana, has been using stories to both learn and share that learning through several phases of struggle over the past six years. This movement aims to defend the 400-year-old communal artisanal salt production practice that is the livelihood of over 60,000 people. Women make up the majority of these practitioners. The aim of this paper is both to reveal the power of these stories for popular education and to explore how in restorying these stories over time the movement reveals the ongoing depth of learning. This paper also discusses how the alliance between the movement and the local community radio contributes to this restorying and learning.

**Keywords:** artisanal salt; Ghana; natural resources; restorying; social movement learning; Songor Lagoon; stories as research; women movement leaders

UNISA |   
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA  
PRESS



Education as Change  
www.educationaschange.co.za  
Volume 21 | Number 3 | 2017 | #2125 | 18 pages

<https://doi.org/10.17159/1947-9417/2017/2125>  
ISSN 1947-9417 (Online)  
© 2017 The Author(s)



## INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF STORIES

[O]ur 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. (Kofi Larweh, Radio Ada management team and ASAF movement member)

Stories are a central component of how we understand ourselves and our societies in our world (Chamberlin 2003). Whether oral or written, the stories people and societies tell themselves are important sources for qualitative research in order to understand how people understand themselves (Sinfield 1989). This is especially true in the case of oral cultures (Abdi 2007, 2010). Stories, how they are used, how they are reframed, and how they change over time, are also an important record of learning. Randall (1996) and Kenyon and Randall (1997) have called this process restorying. This article explores how a social movement in Ada, Ghana, has been using and returning to stories to both learn and share that learning through several phases of struggle over communal access to West Africa's second largest naturally producing salt resource (Manuh 1994)—the Songor. This paper shares the power of these stories for popular social movement education, but also how in restorying these stories the movement reveals its ongoing depth of learning. The power of popular education and social movement learning is reinforced through such restorying not only because Ada is an oral-based society, but also because the Ada movement is supported by and allied with the area's community radio station, Radio Ada.

The article begins by providing a brief historical context of people mobilising around the Songor Lagoon. Part of this story, since 2010, has been the emergence of the Ada Songor Advocacy Forum (ASAF), a coalition of groups and community organisations with a stake in the Songor Lagoon. ASAF (ASAF 2016, iv)

draws its membership from the Ada Songor Salt Women's Association (ASSWA), Ada Songor Co-operative Salt Mining Society Limited (ASCSMSL), and Radio Ada, as well as members from the 4 Songor Okor clans, District Assembly Persons, as well as Staff of District Offices (NADMO, NCCE, Community Development, etc.). ASAF is also a member of the National Coalition on Mining (NCOM) as well as international solidarity networks.

A participatory action research (PAR) study has been documenting the various stories that have emerged since ASAF was formed. The article will present how the narratives of the movement have shifted over time, how this collective reflection and analysis have revealed deeper learning, and how this learning has informed emergent strategies of meaning-making and action. Next, it will lay out the ways in which women's mobilisation and activism, in particular, have destabilised dominant discourses of state-driven development and patriarchy. Woven throughout are the women's voices, songs, and stories that are being restoried and that are moving with the movement (Langdon and Larweh 2015). Lastly, the article shares the ways in which the 2016 publication of the collectively authored *Songor Salt People's History* is being used as a tool for the advocacy as well as sustainability of the movement.

## SONGOR FOR ALL—A TASTE OF RESTORYING TO BEGIN

*Yi katse me? Wamasi!* / Brave women? We are here. (Ada Songor Salt Women's Association [ASSWA] call to action in the Songor Lagoon)

Brave women, we must rise up, we must come together. There is a fire at Songor, and we the women need to rise up and put it out! (Akpetiyo Lawer)

The warning and call to united action given here by Akpetiyo Lawer, the troubadour of the Ada salt movement, refers to an eroding livelihood and cultural way of life at the Songor Lagoon. Acting as the divine troubadour of the Songor women, Akpetiyo's songs have mobilised advocacy around a common cause—returning the lagoon to its communal, artisanal past by calling out “Songor for all!” Just as the foundation stories of the Dangme (Ada) people speak of an old woman, called the Yomo Spirit, who led the Dangme to settle at Songor and provided them with guiding rules to use the resource well, the Yihi Katseme (Brave Women) are leading the Dangme people to return to a shared vision of collective identity, culture, and shared resources. This re-invocation of the Yomo spirit, represented by the contemporary women of the lagoon, encapsulates how this group within the ASAF coalition has been using restorying to both learn and further its cause.

In many ways, “Songor for all,” the slogan of the Ada Songor Salt Women's Association, reflects the age-old practices and values shared by the Yomo spirit when the first Tekperbiaweh hunter, Korle, came to settle the Dangme people at Ada (ASAF 2016). However, collective access to the Songor Salt Lagoon has not been consistently practised in many years. Nearly four decades of privatisation, government-led interventions and corporate development, as well as the most recent private saltpan balkanisation practices called *atsiakpo* that now encircle the lagoon, have drastically changed the natural and cultural landscape of a once collective and open resource. Since the 1980s, there have been several iterations of struggle over the resource that is the backbone of contiguous community livelihoods. However, men have largely dominated leadership in these struggles, despite women being the most reliant on this communal access (Manuh 1994). In the most recent *atsiakpo* situation, women's role in the Songor has shifted from one of being in control of their labour and production to acting as wage labourers for owners of individual saltpans (Yihi Katseme 2016).

While recent activist efforts around the Songor Lagoon have focused on abolishing the divisive and individualistic practice of *atsiakpo*, Yihi Katseme are adamant that the source of fragmentation runs far deeper into the heart of Ada culture itself. Using indigenous cultural practices such as songs, storytelling, proverbs, and symbols as well as other forms of communication, including a powerful manifesto, their message, “Songor for all,” reminds the Ada people of their once shared values, culture and identity inherent in traditional salt-mining practices. Not only has women's involvement in the Songor movement been restoried as one of emerging leaders, but their involvement,

analysis, and practice of open dialogue have actually restored the ways in which the movement is understood among various local stakeholders. Through such approaches, women have restored the Songor movement as a unifying force to bring together all people of Ada as one, restorying and restoring the Songor's identity as a resource for all. These points are expanded upon in the sections that follow, but first a word on restorying.

The restorying of the Ada struggle has emerged through a collective process of reflection, analysis, and learning, through which deep learning has emerged. Randall (1996) and later Kenyon and Randall (1997) have shown how restorying, or the returning to and reworking of our stories, reveals learning and growth on an individual level. In this sense, Kenyon and Randall (1997) build on Clandinin and Connelly's work (2000) on narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have shown the power of narrative inquiry as a methodology for exploring learning. Langdon (2009a, 2009b) built on these approaches and connected them to social movement learning, especially in a participatory and reflective process, where part of member checking (Merriam and Simpson 1995) involves returning to, and adding to, stories of learning within and across movements over time. This preliminary work focused on broader narratives of learning across many movements in the Ghanaian post-1992 era of re-democratisation, including the women's movement, the democracy movement, the people with disability movement, and the anti-globalisation/resource extraction movements (Langdon 2009a). The Ada movement was also part of this initial study, and then became the main focus of a three-year participatory action research (PAR) social movement learning (SML) project from 2010–2013. This project is ongoing with a second iteration and expansion of this PAR SML work as part of a five-year study that not only looks at learning in Ada, but also in Gbane, a community in northern Ghana impacted by small-scale mining. Bringing together narrative inquiry and PAR through a process of restorying has enabled narratives of struggle to shift over time and revealed deeper learning and emergent strategies in meaning-making as well as actions.

Chamberlin (2003) argues that stories are the way in which we write ourselves into the world, justify the direction we have chosen or would choose to follow. At the same time, Abdi (2007) reminds us that oral cultures have a deeply refined literacy level revealed through stories. Stories are also part of the way that people identify themselves and part of the way that communities and cultures understand themselves. Finally, this research connects with Choudry's (2007) argument that social movements are knowledge producers. The stories produced and restored over time by the Ada movement are a perfect example of this knowledge production in action. Stories have been central to this research, not only for how they emerge, embedded in the context, the history, the epistemology of the Ada people, but also for the way they are restored over time—revealing a pattern of evolving analysis, a series of conclusions that come from learning from experience and engagement. All of these positions together provide the methodological backdrop for this paper. Inherent in this process is the production

and articulation of knowledges that undermine dominant discourses and ways of understanding (c.f. Choudry and Kapoor 2010). This phenomenon is what Larweh and Langdon (2014, 234) describe as the *literacy of struggle*, “[w]here broad based [oral] discussions and mutually constituted understandings of the struggle bump up against one another and enrich people’s literate connection with and ownership of the issues at stake.” This form of literacy privileges collectively produced local indigenous knowledge of the context and history of the movement over dominant forms of discourse and knowledge—i.e. written and oral literacy in English. This form of literacy begins even with the way Adas root understanding their language in salt.

## THE STORY BEHIND THE STORIES (CONTEXT):

Some people said the salt is our blood; it’s what we have in our Ada. Because if you don’t have money, you will get money through this salt selling, that is why they are saying it is our blood. Also they are saying it’s our backbone. Because in Ashanti region they have their gold there, but we have our salt. They said it was their pillow too, that it gives them wisdom and they can rest on it. It gives them money to educate their children. (Mary Akutey, ASSWA leader and salt winner, April 4, 2016)

In Ada, to speak Dangme is to eat salt. Literally, the direct translation of the Dangme phrase “*Ee yon ngo?*” is “does that person eat salt?” which is figuratively understood to mean, “does that person speak Dangme?” Thus to eat salt is to *be* Ada, and is to understand the cultural customs and norms of the Dangme people (Langdon, Larweh, and Cameron 2014). The Songor Lagoon, and the role of women as stewards of the land are intrinsic to Ada creation stories. However, the erosion of cultural values and practices with the onset of industrial salt production has also eroded the cultural value of women’s role in salt production, and has attempted to enforce a narrative of individual capitalist ownership, or a global design, onto the local history of Songor’s communal history (Mignolo 2000). Narratives of “big D” development, modernisation, and, later, neoliberal capitalist expansion have been widely forced upon African governments since their independence (Ferguson 2007).

Manuh (1997) sheds light on the devastation faced by rural women following Economic Recovery Programmes/Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1980s in Ghana, one of the many programmes undertaken by the PNDC military government of that time to align with the dominant neoliberal narrative of progress and development. This joint effort between the World Bank and the PNDC government of Ghana prioritised liberal trade and large infrastructure projects and reduced social services, like other neoliberal development programmes around the world at the time. Since the 1960s, the global system has been framed as presenting an era of development and modernisation (Sachs 1992). Within this scope, development has been envisaged as individual ownership and capital accumulation, a stark contrast to the collectivism, cooperation, and communal values that previously dominated life in Ada (Amate 1999).

A global agenda of progress based on the global design of Western capitalist empire has been projected as a linear process to achieving development (Escobar 1995). Ghana was no exception; the state agenda has mirrored the global trend, focusing on large-scale corporate and infrastructure development initiatives (Agyeman-Duah 2013). It is against this global narrative of development and progress that artisanal salt winners of Ada have been organising to protect their collective livelihood since the 1980s, carving a space for their own narratives of community, livelihood, and artisanal salt production in contrast to this global design.

The Secretaries Committee of the Ada Songor Cooperative (1989), and Manuh (1994) have documented the history of corporatisation of the Songor Lagoon and the formation of cooperatives in response to this enclosure of the commons. It begins with the altering of the age-old rhythm of the lagoon due to the effects of the Akosombo Hydro Dam, a mega-development project built 80kms upstream in the Volta River of Ada. Normally, the rising river levels from the annual rainy season would flood the Songor from the Volta estuary with a salt and fresh water mix, preparing the lagoon for crystallisation in the dry season (Manuh 1994; Secretaries Committee of the Ada Songor Cooperative 1989). Following the damming of the river, this natural cycle of rising water levels was disrupted, affecting the livelihoods of roughly 60,000 artisanal salt winners. Meanwhile, salt winners of Ada were organising themselves into cooperatives (Manuh 1994). In the 1970s, two private companies, Vacuum Salt Limited (VSL) and Star Chemicals Limited, took advantage of this disruption to gain leases from local chiefs with promises of returning the viability of the lagoon (Secretaries Committee of the Ada Songor Cooperative 1989). These leases were subsequently confirmed by the government and allowed them to win salt from the entirety of the vast lagoon (Manuh 1994). In the 1980s, tensions between the companies and communities were growing, as artisanal salt winners were marginalised from accessing their ancestral livelihoods. In response to this enclosure, communities organised themselves into a salt winners cooperative. By 1985, salt winners cooperatives in Ada had over 3200 members (Manuh 1994).

This tension between corporate control and communal access came to a head one sombre day in 1985 when Margaret Kowunor, a pregnant salt winner, was shot and killed by police during a raid at Bonikorpe, one of the contiguous Songor communities (Secretaries Committee of the Ada Songor Cooperative 1989). While her death devastated Songor communities, it brought into motion government action to put a plan in place to consult with communities on how the lagoon should be managed. The government launched the Amisah Commission (Government of Ghana 1986), a formal investigation into Maggie's death that paved the way for a consultation process with Songor communities. Months of consultation by Cuban consultants led to the emergence of the Songor Master Plan (Government of Ghana 1991). The plan noted that, while the lagoon represents "the biggest prospective salt producing body in Ghana ... with a salt production capacity of over 1,200,000 tons per year," access to its salt must



be shared between the private companies, and the contiguous salt winning communities, as organised into cooperatives (Government of Ghana 1991). Salt winners of Ada stood behind the plan, because they had been consulted regarding it and it recognised the vital role the Songor played in their lives and would guarantee they were not dispossessed of their right to win salt. Later, in 1992, PNDC Law 287 enshrined this plan in a law that held the Songor Lagoon in trust for these “contiguous” communities. PNDC Law 287 ensured that communities of Songor could not be excluded from taking part in discussions regarding the lagoon’s development, even as they are still waiting for the Master Plan’s implementation. Recently, the ASSWA have restored PNDC Law 287 to be a great Ghanaian example of what the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People calls “free, prior, informed consent” (United Nations 2007, 12).

While the Songor cooperatives were actively engaged with the district assembly, salt winning communities, and people’s defence committees during a period where people took over the company sites (Secretaries Committee of the Ada Songor Cooperative 1989), their leadership was predominantly male. Women’s labour has always been at the heart of salt winning and yet their opinions have never been sought when decisions are being made about the lagoon. During the 1990s and 2000s, a new phenomenon was sweeping the Songor that further denied women access to their inherent right of winning salt. *Atsiakpo*, the balkanisation of the Songor, emerged in the mid-1990s. With these individual pans, owners with access to capital (predominantly men) constructed walls creating their own mini-lagoons and pumped water from the main lagoon into their pans. While this method of production accelerated the salt crystallisation process for individual owners, it quickly disrupted the traditionally established practice of sustainable resource management and unquestionably fragmented the unspoken tradition of Songor as a resource for all. Previously, Songor was there to be relied on by any and all who would rush to its banks when the announcement was made by the fetish priest (the Libi Wornor) that the Songor was open (Amate 1999). *Atsiakpo* created winners and losers, whereby those with access to capital and connections to chiefs stood to benefit and in the process women were transformed from owners of their own labour to being forced to sell their labour to *atsiakpo* owners for a pittance.

The intrinsic logic of *atsiakpo* reflects the dominant narratives of development: capital accumulation by individual ownership and the disintegration of communal resources. One woman salt winner likened the value and fragmentation of Songor to the wealth of cocoa in Western Ghana:

Songor is supposed to be for all, it’s not supposed to be for one or two people. Because it’s a very big cocoa that we have, the amount of money you can get out of cocoa is the same you can get out of this Songor. So now that they’ve divided it it’s as if we don’t have any job in Ada. This Songor has been helping us to be healthy in the past but now we have turned in to labourers so we are trying to stand up to make Songor a resource for all again. (Unnamed woman, Pute community forum, March 12, 2016)

Furthermore, with the rise of *atsiakpo*, many salt winners have been forced to decide whether to leave a reliable source of income behind, or to go against their values and go into *atsiakpo* themselves. This continues to be a point of contention among the women leaders today.

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. (Akpetiyo Larweh, June 2012)

The rise of *atsiakpo* came with the return of activism around the Songor Lagoon, notably in 1998 with the launch of Radio Ada, Ghana's first community radio station (White 2007), and in 2010, with the launch of the Ada Songor Advocacy Forum (ASAF). Radio Ada, with the vision and mission of giving voice to the voiceless and aiming to broadcast the voices and struggles of the people of Ada, was deeply involved in sharing what was going on at Songor over the airwaves. Through news items, educational dramas, and salt winners programmes, Radio Ada has always been a part of community advocacy efforts by carrying the voices of salt winners for all of Ada to hear. In essence, Radio Ada was a democratising force for the voice and knowledge of the Ada people. Through open broadcast of the voices of local people, Radio Ada held an open space for communities near and far to voice their experiences. This approach, which influenced the process of Yihi Katseme, also stands in contrast to the hierarchical understanding of knowledges and development within dominant discourses of progress.

The advocacy efforts of ASAF to uphold the open nature of knowledge and the rights of contiguous Songor communities as stated in PNDC Law 287 were successful in 2011 when the government's plan to roll out a secret relocation and "alternative livelihood strategy" was thwarted when exposed publically on Radio Ada. The organised ASAF coalition of activists and salt winners, alongside the work of Radio Ada, reinforced the importance of exposing the chameleon nature of politicians when saying one thing and doing another. This experience of exposing what some know and others do not drew out the iconic song, *None No Ko Lio No Ko le* ("What One Doesn't Know, Another Knows") by troubadour Akpetiyo Lawer, that would later become the subtitle of ASAF's (2016) collectively written book.

It was through the open community spaces created by Radio Ada, and later by ASAF and then Yihi Katseme (ASSWA), that marginalised community voices were given space to be heard and valued as important contributors to dialogue on issues affecting their livelihoods. Akpetiyo for instance, stepped into her power as a divine troubadour of Songor through these spaces and over time was recognised for her divine wisdom and sharp analysis of the Songor situation through lyrical compositions. It was through these open spaces that multiple truths and experiences continued to be revealed, creating a more in depth collective reflection, learning and analysis of the Songor story, thus building narratives over time and restorying past, present, and future through the



uncovering of new knowledges and stories. With this general picture of the movement's story in place, let us now turn to a deeper, specific example of this restorying process that elaborates the emergence of women's leadership birthing a new narrative of the Songor story.

## RESTORIED NARRATIVES OF WOMEN AND SONGOR

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. (Kofi Larweh, July 2013)

Stories as ways of understanding stick to the minds of Ada people. As powerful accounts of reflection, analysis, and pre-emptive visioning of the world we'd like to see, stories connote a shared past, present, and future. Documented by Langdon, Larweh, and Cameron (2014) are the stories of the thumbless hand, the dog, and the chameleon. As collective analysis of the historical and contemporarily unfolding story of Songor, men, women, and youth, respectively, came up with these symbols in early June, 2011, as epistemically grounded narratives of struggle over Songor.

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 mould 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 a 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, quoted in Langdon, Larweh, and Cameron 2014, 27–8)

In many ways, these narratives have been a point of reference for evolving analysis, as they offer a vantage point for collectively thinking through their shared struggle. As the movement unfolded post-2011, these narratives also influenced the re-organisation of advocacy efforts and women’s emergence as leaders of the Songor movement. In 2013, returning to these narratives, women in the ASAF restoried their own situation as having been transformed from being dogs to being “like a wolf standing in front of the Songor and ... scaring away all destroyers of the Songor” (Becky, July 3, 2013). Therefore, the very act of collective reflection and analysis using indigenous ways of understanding and the literacy of struggle brought about deep reflective learning and a re-articulation of power dynamics within the movement.

It was through these open spaces that women were able to restory themselves in the Songor movement. One common practice at ASAF and then in Yihi Katseme meetings is to start things off by sharing any rumours or new knowledge from the community. In 2016 at a women’s meeting when discussing women’s exclusion from Songor due to *atsiakpo*, it was revealed that this exclusion or marginalisation had actually pushed women to develop a new method of winning salt, by harvesting the remnants from footprints in *atsiakpo* pans. Despite being in a dire social situation as women salt winners, the meeting was full of laughter at this insight, as if to celebrate women’s innovation and resiliency in the face of hardship.

Even as this shift in women’s sense of their role was taking place within the movement, a flourishing of creative popular expression of restoried accounts of Songor and the struggle was coming out of the movement. One such articulation was the creation of a tapestry, depicting the Songor story from its discovery by Korle, the Tekperbiaweh hunter, to the onset of corporatisation and the death of Magaret Kuwonor, to the current political situation over its communal access. The tapestry, 11 feet in length, was produced by a local artist in collaboration with the ASAF women narrating the images and story to be included. Women’s role is therefore central to the narrative within the tapestry and emerged from a workshop for Songor women to collectively design how they would use the tapestry to share the story of Songor. Since its creation in 2011, Songor women have used it as a medium to educate youth and community members on the important role of Songor in the livelihoods, culture, and identity of the Dangme

people. The methodology developed by the women repositions women as the keepers of knowledge, as the knowers of history, as experts of their own cultural narrative. This process stands in stark contrast to dominant historical narratives of culture in Ghana, whereby men are positioned as experts with central identities in histories and are largely those in a position to speak on behalf of women and the communities (c.f. Manuh 1994). In this sense, the tapestry, and the process through which it was developed and shared, is another way by which women of Ada restored privileged forms of knowledge and discourses of power and patriarchy. Through sharing and restorying their own collective story and the important role of women within Songor they are creating a space for subjugated voices and ways of knowing to come to the fore. Here, Reverend Sophia Kitcher, chairperson of the Ada Songor Salt Women's Association (ASSWA) provides a walkthrough of the tapestry from a live Radio Ada broadcast in 2012.

The whole legend is that you know Adas originally came from Nigeria, Ile Ife, and we walked all the way to Osudoku area in those days, history that is what we got to know, and midway there was some friction, some conflicts, that is why we have the name Ada, Ada means separated or dispersed, and our ancestors' intention was to relocate, come down and look for a suitable place to resettle, so they walked along the coast, right down from Ningo area and as they were coming, one of our ancestors was coming, was thirsty, that is Tekperbiawe, the name of the man was Korley, he was thirsty, he was looking for water to drink. Fortunately there was an eagle, over the Okor forest, so he saw the eagle, the eagle flew and directed him to water, and then fortunately he saw the sea, and the Yomo, you know where the source of our salt is a small catchment area. And it's been named Yomo. *So it was this Yomo, the old woman, who led, she was a spirit, who led Korley to this. That was how he discovered the Lagoon.* And so what happened after that, after that there have been developments. And in those days what normally happens is when the salt is the salt forms, our chief, that's Nene Ada, goes there. To open the lagoon for everyone to come and mine. This is him, he comes all the way from Luhesi and then he comes with a boat, and he walks to the Lagoon so that people will start mining. ... We have gold, the white gold, but unfortunately people are dying because of the white gold. *Maggie was of value, womanhood is of value, of value.* She died as a pregnant woman. Presently the state of Ada is we are mourning, we are so sad, we are in poverty. The question is should this continue, because in those days people were arrested, people were arrested, this is the police. They arrested people, they chased people, some were asked to eat salt. Some were driven away, and this has continued and continued up to date. We are saying the wealth that we have is encased and locked up in this box, what do we do? Now it's selfishness, because the place is not developed, selfishness has set in, individuals have been able to allocate small portions of the plots to themselves and they are doing their own salt production, and .... Should this continue? We are saying the government should implement the Master Plan, so that we can get a lot. ... We can use it for numerous things, we have over one hundred forty uses, thousand uses of salt and Ada is one of them. Why do we continue importing from Brazil? So many potentials, the youth will be employed and we will go a long way. Coming and contributing our quota to the nation and the district, and whatever, so that's what we are expecting. (Rev. Sophia Kitcher, August 4, 2012; emphasis added)

“The Songor is for all of us” principle or collective ownership of natural resources as a way of life has been subjugated through what Mignolo (2000) has called the “global

design” of capitalist expansion and the aforementioned national development project. The collective ownership and importance of shared access to the abundance of salt from the Songor Lagoon reflects the same logic of Radio Ada pertaining to knowledge and voice. While Yihi Katseme are adamant that Songor be for all, Radio Ada has always insisted that information, story, and voice be for all as well. This is the very logic that resists the divisive and hierarchical logic of global capitalism and development, through a mutual ownership of and access to resources, language, culture, and story. Women’s articulation of the struggle over Songor as a struggle for collective identity, culture, and a way of life therefore presents an alternative narrative to “big D development” logic, while expressing a local history and way of being that aligns with their identity as Dangme people. Through women’s formal organisation of the Ada Songor Salt Women’s Association (ASSWA) and a process of ongoing reflection, analysis, and learning, ASSWA has actually restoried the underlying narrative of the struggle over Songor. While previously an attempt to end *atsiakpo* and maintain communal access to a shared livelihood resource, ASSWA has looked deeper and are adamant that at the heart of the struggle is “Songor for all.” Articulated clearly through their “Songor for All” manifesto, ASSWA is challenging the underlying logic of the global design of individualism and capitalist expansion, premised on the idea of ownership and individual gain. Their manifesto, reflecting a shared vision for Songor, expresses the collective ownership of Songor for the Ada people, but also for Ghanaians as a whole.

## DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP NARRATIVES CHALLENGED THROUGH RESTORYING

Women’s involvement with and restorying of the Songor movement also challenge dominant development and state-driven discourse. From a social and cultural level, women of Ada are loudly and proudly stating their inseparable understanding of livelihood and cultural identity. From a “development” level, women are saying that any state or corporate development that does not involve and meaningfully consult with their families and communities is inherently flawed and unwelcome in Ada. On an economic level, women leaders in the Songor movement understand that economic benefits for some cannot be at the expense of the many and they have acted with critical self-reflection, lamenting the broader circumstances that have forced them to enter into the devastating, individualistic, and isolating practice of *atsiakpo*.

Thus, the “thumbless” inability to use the resource well that Abayateh noted was connected in ASAF’s open discussions to Manuh’s (1994) critique that the previous movement’s leadership provided very little room for women’s leadership. This culminated in debates regarding who removed the metaphoric thumb: was it removed by internal strife, or by external threats? The companies were still operating behind the scene to regain their stranglehold on the resource—even as the Amisah Commission (Government of Ghana 1986) sat to review the situation that led to Maggie’s death. At

the same time, Manuh (1994) documented the internal tensions within the cooperative over the mishandling of money, which led to criminal proceedings against cooperative leaders on the one side and the proliferation of cooperatives on the other. Upon reflection, these and many other answers were found for both what the thumb was and how it came to be removed. Importantly, though, many of these answers provoked lines of action that were ground directly in learning from the past. This is what restorying can do in an action-reflection cycle. For instance, the discussion of missing women's leadership within the previous movement led to a conscious effort within ASAF to ensure women are not only playing a leading role in the movement, but also in articulating the struggle. In fact, it was this conscious realisation that gave birth to ASSWA, the Yihi Katseme that emerged to stand on its own beside ASAF and Radio Ada. Meanwhile, the restored narrative of the chameleon has taught the movement members to keep both eyes on the chiefs lest they change colour again. The lessons in the literacy of struggle (Larweh and Langdon 2014) that emerged that day in 2011 have been returned to and restored again and again.

At the same time, the Ada Songor movement story, as a local subjugated history, does what Mignolo (2000) argues local subjugated histories and knowledge should do and destabilises discursive truth regimes. First, it provides an account of the negative impact of large-scale development, thereby challenging the national discourses of central government and Ghana's president, which claim that holding resources "in trust" is the best way to ensure Ghanaians benefit from natural resource management (Langdon 2016). Also, the most recent rise in women's leadership in the movement challenges local patriarchal narratives and provides an important Ada-based women's form of empowerment that defies Women in Development and Gender and Development dichotomies (Gunn 2014).

In the Songor movement's contestation of the president holding their natural resource "in trust" there are two crucial components to highlight. The first is that the traditional collective management of the Songor Lagoon salt flats gave equitable access to these flats and did not privilege the local Ada people over other Ghanaians (Langdon 2015). This is in sharp contrast to the example of capitalistic exploitation that greatly reduced its equitable access, first through a huge dam project that undermined the resource's viability and second through company and government activities that attempted to privatise the resource. These state-sanctioned development activities have dramatically affected the livelihoods of people not just from that locality, but from across the nation.

The argument to be drawn from these points is that there are two contrasting systems in place for resource use in Ghana (Langdon 2015). The first of these, based on the Ada story of traditional management systems with access for migrants and locals to natural resources, favours Ghanaians from across the country. The second of these systems grants monopolistic access to resources to a company, usually a transnational company, and restricts resource wealth to only those exploiting it and the few elite government

officials benefiting from state complicity in the company's activities—with a pittance in royalties going to public coffers.

It is based on the Ada example of restorying what national development could mean that so many activists in Ghana have been drawn to the Ada story (Pessey 2016). Locally based resource movements, such as the Songor movement and the anti-mining movement, are seen as the best source of mobilised contestation against neoliberal globalisation in Ghana (Langdon 2015). This rootedness in people's lives leads to movements with a strong sense that what they are fighting is local, national and global in character. In this sense, they are contesting and restorying the reality, the story, the discourse that neoliberalism constructs. These restorying efforts, as well as those of the emergence of the movement's women leadership, are exemplified in ASSWA's "Songor for All!" manifesto, and have been documented in the Ada struggle's new book.

## THE SONGOR STRUGGLE, RESTORIED

The most recent manifestation of Ada salt winners' and activists' efforts to democratise knowledge of the movement and challenge dominant discourses of local history through narrative restorying emerged through the collective theorising, writing, and editing of *The Struggle of the Songor Salt People: None No Ko Lio No Ko le* ("What One Doesn't Know, Another Knows") (ASAF 2016). Initially imagined as a sequel to *Who Killed Maggie* (Secretaries Committee of the Ada Songor Cooperative 1989), the book project quickly became a space for multiple accounts of history to emerge and come together as a people's history. Notably, embedding prominent narratives of women's place in the struggle in the book further solidifies women's leadership as a necessary counter narrative to previous discourses of the Songor struggle.

In the very early stages, it was proposed that the book be a standalone account of the history of the Songor, taken from the perspective of the people of Ada, as opposed to an account trying to establish some objective truth. This book was seen as an advocacy tool. This approach to the book project was endorsed by ASAF and a collective timeline of events and community actions was developed by the collective, before a book project steering committee took over guiding the process, afterwards bringing the draft of the text back for collective ASAF editing and then validation in a Songor community. Throughout the year and a half process of developing the text oral testimonies were taken from 28 people and inserted into the voice sections of the book. The book was divided into four eras, the pre-1980s period, the 1980s, the 1990s, and the 2000s. In each of these sections an accessible introduction to the chapter was written that aimed to make a complex presentation of the Songor story, with several sides of the story being shared, while at the same time making this story easy to follow for readers from many backgrounds. The last section of each chapter had endnotes of voices that expanded upon and reinforced what was shared in the beginning of the chapter. This made sure people's voices were present throughout the text and could be read in line with the



storyline that was told. Through this process of combining voices and storyline a rich but accessible restorying of the Songor history emerged. Even the title of the book was restoried, going from *Maggie's Legacy: A People's History of Struggle in the Songor*, to its final title, *The Struggles of the Songor Salt People: None No Ko Lio No Ko le* (“What One Doesn’t Know, Another Knows”) (ASAF 2016). This final title was arrived at through collective deliberation by the book’s steering committee, after a decision to distance the project from *Who Killed Maggie* to further allow it to stand on its own. Looking ahead, sales of the book are now also providing the financial ability for the story to continue and open further and is partially supporting the ongoing struggle of ASSWA of a return to Songor for all.

As a process of opening a space for multiple narratives to emerge, the book project provided an entry point for previously subjugated voices to be included and held as valuable accounts of history—in essence holding open a space for people to story their own lives. Inherent in this process is the production and articulation of knowledges that undermine dominant discourses and ways of understanding. The method of gathering and recording oral testimonies and allowing people to speak for themselves and be included in the book regardless of literacy in English, as well as collectively editing—or restorying—the narratives privileges Dangme-speakers as literate in their own histories, experiences, and struggles. Through creating a space for these knowledges to be documented and shared, subjugated ways of knowing and understanding the world rooted in these local literacies begin to disrupt dominant forms of knowledge. 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 movement’s consistent message that it is working to improve not just the lives of Songor residents but revitalising the culture of the Ada nation—a difficult thing to openly criticise.

## CONCLUSION

This article has shared three examples of restorying in the struggle to restore communal access to Ada’s Songor Lagoon. Through restorying their sense of self and relationship to the lagoon, women from Songor communities have emerged as leaders in the struggle for communal access. Their restorying reveals deep self-reflection and learning, as well as a profound analysis of gender dynamics and how to shift them through their own actions. This research has been able to move with them as they unlearned patriarchal subjugation and collectively learned their path to the front of the struggle and transformed themselves into *Yihi Katseme* (“Brave Women”).

Parallel to this, the *Yihi Katseme*’s “Songor for All” manifesto is rooted in a restorying of what development discourse means in Ada. Turning away from neoliberal and statist discourses of development, they build upon Songor’s past to articulate a different vision of development that is rooted in communal access and livelihoods, not just locally, but nationally. They reconnect with legislation from the past, namely PNDC

Law 287, to codify this alternative vision, as well as international compacts like the UNDRIP that reinforce their vision. The emergence of this vision is the product of many years of activist restorying, in the open dialogue and learning spaces of ASAF, Radio Ada, and now the Yihi Katseme. We have spread the folding-together of this storyline over the course of the entire article to reflect the way in which this restorying process happens a bit at a time and also to reflect the way in which literacy in struggle is built gradually through several different iterations of the struggle.

This dovetails nicely with the final example of restorying we have shared here, where the cumulative learning and multiple iterations of struggle have been woven together into a number of creative outpourings. The first of these was the tapestry and the most recent of these is *The Struggle of the Songor Salt People* with its subtitle *None No Ko Lio No Ko le* (“What One Doesn’t Know, Another Knows”) (ASAF 2016). Both of these outpourings represent the collective efforts of the movement’s activists to share their understanding of the Songor struggle, but to do so in a way that invites readers and viewers to explore their own interpretation of what the struggle represents—implicitly drawing them into the dialogue process and inviting them to develop their literacy in this struggle. The ongoing insistence that this be done in a way that is open and asks those engaging with the work to think about what it means has been possible only because of the conscious way in which the movement’s actors have restoried these struggles over time by engaging with each other. Both of these outpourings are the best examples of what documenting a restorying process of social movement learning can produce, both as a reflection of learning within the movement, and as knowledge produced for others to be invited into the struggle.

## REFERENCES

- Abdi, A. A. 2007. “Oral Societies and Colonial Experiences: Sub-Saharan Africa and the De-Facto Power of the Written Word.” *International Education* 37 (1): 42–59.
- Abdi, A. A. 2010. “Clash of Oralities and Textualities: The Colonization of the Communicative Space in Sub-Saharan Africa.” In *Indigenous Knowledge and Learning in Asia/Pacific and Africa: Perspectives on Development, Education, and Culture*, edited by D. Kapoor and E. Shizha, 147–64. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230111813\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230111813_10)
- Agyeman-Duah, I. 2013. *An Economic History of Ghana: Reflections on a Half-Century of Challenge and Progress*. Banbury: Ayebia Clark.
- Amate, C. O. C. 1999. *The Making of Ada*. Accra: Woeli Publishing Services.
- ASAF (Ada Songor Advocacy Forum). 2016. *The Struggle of the Songor Salt People: None No Ko Lio No Ko le*. Sogakope: Comboni Press.

- Chamberlin, T. 2003. *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground*. Toronto: Vintage.
- Choudry, A. 2007. "Transnational Activist Coalition Politics and the De/Colonization of Pedagogies of Mobilization: Learning from the Anti-Neoliberal Indigenous Movement Articulations." *International Education* 37 (1): 97–112.
- Choudry, A., and D. Kapoor. 2010. "Learning from the Ground Up: Global Perspectives on Social Movements and Knowledge Production." In *Learning from the Ground Up*, edited by A. Choudry and D. Kapoor, 1–13. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230112650\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230112650_1)
- Clandinin, D. J., and F. M. Connelly. 2000. *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Escobar, A. 1995. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ferguson, J. 2007. *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Government of Ghana. 1986. *The Amisah Commission Report*. Accra: Assembly Press.
- Government of Ghana. 1991. *Master Plan*. Accra: Assembly Press.
- Gunn, L. 2014. "From Dogs to Wolves: A Look at the Role of Learning and Organizing Processes in Women's Empowerment in Ada, Ghana." Honours dissertation, St. Francis Xavier University.
- Kenyon, G. M., and W. L. Randall. 1997. *Restorying Our Lives: Personal Growth through Autobiographical Reflection*. Westport: Praeger.
- Langdon, J. 2009a. "Democracy and Social Movement Learning in Ghana: Reflections on 15 Years of Learning in the Democratic Terrain by Ghanaian Activist-Educators." PhD dissertation, McGill University.
- Langdon, J. 2009b. "Learning to Sleep Without Perching: Reflections of Activist-Educators on Learning in Ghanaian Social Movements." *McGill Journal of Education* 44 (1): 79–105. <https://doi.org/10.7202/037773ar>
- Langdon, J. 2016. "Democratic Hopes, Transnational Government(re)ality: Grounded Social Movements and the Defense of Communal Natural Resources in Ghana." In *Beyond Colonialism, Development and Globalization*, edited by D. Kapoor and D. Caouette, 49–66. London: Zed Books.
- Langdon, J., and K. Larweh. 2015. "Moving with the Movement: Collaboratively Building a Participatory Action Research (PAR) Study of Social Movement Learning in Ada, Ghana." *Action Research* 13 (3): 281–97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750315572447>
- Langdon, J., K. Larweh, and S. Cameron. 2014. "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." *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* 6 (1): 27–44.

- Larweh, K., and J. Langdon. 2014. "Seeing the Synergy in the Signals: Reflections on Weaving Projects into Social Movement Mobilizing through Community Radio." In *Community-Based Multiliteracies and Digital Media Projects: Questioning Assumptions and Exploring Realities*, edited by H. Pleasants and D. Salter, 217–36. New York: Peter Lang.
- Manuh, T. 1994. "Survival in Rural Africa: The Salt Co-Operatives in Ada District, Ghana." In *Development from Within: Survival in Rural Africa*, edited by D. R. F. Taylor and F. Mackenzie, 102–24. New York: Routledge.
- Manuh, T. 1997. "Ghana: Women in the Public and Informal Sectors under the Economic Recovery Programme." In *The Women, Gender and Development Reader*, edited by N. Visvanathan, L. Duggan, L. Nisonoff and N. Wiegersma, 277–83. London: Zed Books.
- Merriam, S., and E. A. Simpson. 1995. *A Guide to Research for Educators and Trainers of Adults*. 2nd ed. Malabar: Krieger Publishing.
- Mignolo, W. 2000. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Pessey, D. 2016. Foreword to *The Struggle of the Songor Salt People: None No Ko Lio No Ko le*, by ASAF. Sogakope: Comboni Press.
- Randall, W. 1996. "Restorying a Life: Adult Education and Transformative Learning." In *Aging and Biography: Explorations in Adult Development*, edited by J. E. Birren, G. M. Kenyon, J. E. Ruth, J. J. F. Schroots and T. Svensson, 224–247. New York: Springer.
- Sachs, W., ed. 1992. *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*. London: Zed Books.
- Secretaries Committee of the Ada Songor Cooperation. 1989. *Who Killed Maggie? The Story of the Songor Lagoon*. Cadier en Keer: Ada Songor Co-operation/The Africa Centre. Accessed October 10, 2017. <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/123456789/1200>
- Sinfield, A. 1989. *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Post-War Britain*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- UN (The United Nations). 2007. *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People*. New York: United Nations. Accessed October 10, 2017. [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)
- White, G. 2007. "Community Radio in Ghana: The Power of Engagement." Center for Communications and Community. Accessed April 8, 2013. <http://www.c3.ucla.edu/research-reports/reports-archive/editors- perspective/community-radio-in-ghana>
- Yihi Katseme. 2016. "Okor Songor Yihi Akpe: Songor for All, Sustainability Forever." Facebook video, 8:12. Edited by R. Garbary. Posted July 25, 2016. Accessed October 18, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/YihiKatseme/videos/983089715122003/>