PART 6

SOUND, VISION AND STORYTELLING

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14. PEDAGOGY OF SONG AND RESTORYING HOPE

*Stories and Songs as Social Movement Learning in Ada Songor
Salt Movement*

[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, former Radio Ada station coordinator, and Ada activist)

INTRODUCTION

Creative dissent is not only a crucial part of social movement activism, but is also a key area of social movement learning, and therefore social movement learning (SML) research. Over the past 8 years, an ongoing participatory study of social movement learning in Ada, Ghana, has documented the ways in which narrative ‘restorying’, as well as the creation and reviving of songs in Dangme, the Ada language, have been at the heart of this learning. Restorying is a narrative inquiry technique where stories are returned to and retold over time, with the retelling revealing learning in motion (Kenyon & Randall, 1997). In the case of this research, the restorying has been collective, and has emerged through songs and other creative forms, such as tapestry making, that have enabled a rich, complex form of documentation of learning.

The movement in Ada is defending an artisanal salt production practice that is 400 years old, and provides the livelihood for roughly 60,000 people. Their livelihood is being threatened by a local rent-seeking elite, and national and international capital interested in using Ada salt in Ghana’s newly established oil industry. A crucial dimension of our chapter will share how the emergence of women’s leadership in this movement parallels the emergence of the narrative and song forms of creative dissent. This chapter also shares how such creative dissent builds on and reimagines Griff Foley’s (1999) notion of ‘learning in struggle’. Finally, and most centrally to this collection, the chapter lays out how a participatory research approach, coupled with a methodology sensitive to learning through collective stories, such as restorying, can produce rich meaningful research on adult learning through social movement activism.

This chapter shares the empirical results of the research documented so far (Langdon, 2015; Langdon, Larweh, & Cameron, 2014; Langdon & Larweh, 2015;

Larweh & Langdon, 2014), but takes this work further to look at recent developments in the social movement in Ada, where women's leadership has emerged at the forefront of the struggle, and is using creative means to disrupt both external power structures, as well as power dynamics within the movement itself. Songs are a central part of this creative dissent. Restorying has also been a key component to this women's leadership assertion of their analysis of the situation in the lagoon over that of older male activists who are no longer on the front line of this struggle. Given that women make up the majority of salt winners in the Songor movement, this shift in dynamics represents a democratic response. At the same time, this emergent women's leadership has insisted on the resource being for all, and knowledge about the resource being for all. This pivot towards knowledge-democracy through creative dissent connects well with the overarching theme of this text, criticality and creativity. This chapter will, ultimately, focus on these three aspects of social movement learning in the Ada Songor salt movement that have emerged through the participatory, story-sensitive methodology: (1) The pedagogy of songs; (2) restorying the movement; and (3) building the movement through knowledge-democracy.

A PARTICIPATORY, STORY-SENSITIVE AND MOVEMENT-RELEVANT METHODOLOGY

An important facet of our methodology that deserves special consideration is the dialogue-based process of theorizing change. Rather than beginning work and entering into relationships with preconceived ideas of how change will happen, our theorizing is a process that emerges from dialogue within the movement. In this way, this study is participatory action research that is compelled to "move with the movement" (Langdon & Larweh, 2015) and engages with the people who are closest to the issue, thus creating space for local organizers to guide work that is mutually constituted by everyone involved. While Bevington and Dixon (2005) have called for this movement-centric approach in studies of movement theorizing in general, Choudry and Kapoor (2010) underscore the importance of movement-articulated theorizing especially in connection with adult learning, as well as in contexts outside of the Global North – especially given how much social movement learning thinking has been framed by Euro-American theorizing (English & Mayo, 2012). In particular, Choudry and Kapoor (2010) argue that it becomes imperative to document the knowledge production and learnings that emerge from these social movement contexts, as they are important sites of resistance, developing insightful critiques of dominant and oppressive power structures, and imagining visions for social change.

As important as documenting "the what" of this knowledge production is "the how" of this production. There are two facets to the "how" of this production. The first of these involves the relationships and processes of ongoing movement-researcher accountability that allowed for the documentation of this knowledge

production. While Langdon, the lead author has been working with Radio Ada since 2004, the relationship with activists on the Songor did not start to form until 2008, when he was invited by these activists to build a research project on their learning. At that time, Kitcher, the third author, and a leading voice in the emergence of women's leadership in the movement, was only peripherally involved in the activism, but was deeply concerned by the issue. She became deeply involved in the movement from 2012 onwards. Jackson, the second author, became involved as a graduate research assistant from 2015 to 2017. She was directly involved in documenting the many movement meetings that were recorded openly for potential broadcast on Radio Ada, and for keeping track of movement knowledge production – an important way to document in an oral-focused movement context. The research team has therefore been composed of movement members and also a Canadian researcher with long-standing ties to the community, and research assistants from his university in Canada. At the end of each intensive research period (generally from May to August ending due to the rains which suspends work in the salt flats), a research specific movement meeting is held – one of the only ones during each intensive period. It is during this meeting that collective decisions about the ways in which knowledge should be shared are discussed. In other words, what parts of the movement story will be told where.

Alongside this aspect of “how” knowledge production is documented, of equal importance are the ways in which the movement frames what its struggle is over time – the “how” of the production itself. In Ada case, as Kofi Larweh notes above, it is through stories that this thinking has been framed over time, as well as through songs. In this sense, creating ongoing spaces for collective dialogue developed complex tellings of the struggle that were returned to and restoried in various ways (through tapestries, imagery, proverbs and songs) over time – and this restorying, or the evolving ways of understanding the struggle helped to reveal the movement's learning both to itself and in the research (Langdon & Garbary, 2017).

The use of stories, songs and arts-based interventions have long been the tools with which social movements across the globe have affected meaningful social change (Lynskey, 2011). From the anti-Apartheid protest music of South Africa, to civil rights anthems in the contemporary United States – all have used creative dissent in the form of music to spread messages and further a political end. Lynskey (2011) shares how the use of song has been intimately tied to social movements creating community awareness about burning issues. On the notion of art as activism, Barndt (2006, p. 18) maintains that:

whether verbal, or non-verbal, art making that ignites people's creativity, recovers repressed histories, builds community, and strengthens social movements is in itself a holistic form of action. The modes of expression are endless. Most important is that they are appropriate to a particular group, time, or place.

Artistic expression is a natural and essential part of life for the people of Ada; through music, dance, song, visual arts and a multitude of other art forms these communities convey their experiences of everyday life. The emergence of song as an effective and powerful tool for social movement learning stems from its place as a traditional practice that is rooted in the culture of these communities. Perini (2008) asserts that when groups gather to share imaginative and creative artistic processes, people can become connected in a way that “fosters collective, generative action” (p. 183). With this in mind, what is shared below are a set of snapshots that reveal how a story-sensitive, participatory approach to research in a social movement contexts provides rich illustrations of the learning ongoing within the movement. But first, a note about the context.

CONTEXTS OF ADA

The rural communities that surround the Songor Lagoon in Ada have been impacted over time by the harsh nature of ‘accumulation through dispossession’ – a Marxist concept further refined by David Harvey (2005) that focuses on how local and international elite accumulate wealth by dispossessing broader groups of communal resources (Langdon & Larweh, 2017). In the 1970s and 80s, the communities surrounding the Songor were dispossessed by a pair of companies, one of which used duplicitous tactics to claim almost the entire lagoon as a concession (Ada Songor Salt Cooperative, 1989; Manuh, 1994; Amate, 1999). Through years of resistance, which has included the loss of life, the community managed to reclaim the resource from these companies in the early 1990s, on the eve of Ghana’s return to democracy (Langdon & Larweh, 2017). Despite this success at reclaiming the resource, a plan to develop the Songor for the benefit of both local communities and potential business interest, called the Songor Master Plan, has yet to be implemented – leading older activists involved in this era to describe the victory as a “thumbless hand” – one where the resource was reclaimed but was not subsequently handled well (Langdon, Larweh, & Cameron, 2014). This has led, in contemporary times, to entire communities being dispossessed from their livelihoods, as the communal salt resource is being turned into individuals’ private property – whereby the 400 year old tradition of open salt flats of the lagoon in the dry season have been turned into individualized saltpans, known locally as ‘atsiakpo’ (ASAF, 2016; Langdon & Larweh 2017). A closer examination reveals the intricacies and intersections of these social processes of accumulation – the resulting household insecurity leaves women exposed and vulnerable, standing at the forefront of those being dispossessed. Women once were able to access the Songor lagoon in Ada and win salt to supplement household finances, drawing on it when necessary to add to or replace lost earnings from other endeavours (Garbary, 2016). Women living close to the lagoon have often used it as one of the main sources of household income. It is through salt that many non-subsistence costs such as school fees and healthcare are paid for. Now women work as labourers for an ‘atsiakpo’ owner, making a small wage, a mere fraction of

what they had previously earned (Garbary, 2016). With limited options available to them, some women in these communities are submitting to sexual advances in order to acquire access (ASAF, 2016). Given this reality, it becomes incredibly relevant that women's voices from these communities are rising up and claiming leadership positions that were not possible a decade ago. This research has documented how songs are at the heart of this transformation.

Beginning in 2010, with the emergence of the Ada Songor Advocacy Forum (ASAF) social movement, women from the Songor salt communities began voicing their concerns about *atsiakpo*. One woman in particular, Akpetiyo Lawer, used her talent with song composition to encapsulate this concern and the analysis of women began to shape the broader movement's thinking (Langdon & Larweh, 2015). This emergence led some to see women's voice and leadership – and its absence in the 1980s round of struggle to reclaim the resource – to act as the 'missing thumb' required to handle the resource well (Langdon, Larweh, & Cameron, 2014). Since 2015, the women have consolidated this leadership with their own group within the broader ASAF movement, called the Ada Songor Salt Women's Association (ASSWA), known more broadly by their catch phrase, "Yihi Katseme" meaning 'Brave Women!' in Dangme. These Brave Women have taken inspiration from Akpetiyo and have deepened the use of song to mobilize their fellow community members to not only resist *atsiakpo*, but to more broadly call for a return to times past when the Songor was a communal resource for all – even those from outside Ada (Langdon, 2016).

PEDAGOGIC ELEMENTS OF SONG

While songs entertain, they also currently serve deep pedagogic functions in the social movement context of Ada. This pedagogic turn in the movement was begun by Akpetiyo Lawer who has been writing songs her whole life. In recent years, as a leading member of ASAF and ASSWA, her songs have given the Ada movement an analytic foundation that has both grounded its work and helped propel it forward. An expert in Ada history and language, an activist, and a community elder, Akpetiyo Lawer is deeply engaged in sketching out a clear depiction of the Ada struggle. Larweh and Langdon (2011, 2015) have explored a selection of Akpetiyo's songs in previous publications associated with this study and propose that she has helped engender a *literacy of struggle*, one that is oral and rooted in the history and epistemology of Ada and that pulls listeners deeper into this history.

Akpetiyo Lawer's song, *Nɔnɛ Nɔko Liɔ, Nɔko Le* is composed in Dangme, and gives an important analysis of the struggle for resources – namely salt – and communal access to the Songor salt lagoon. Translated to English the song means, "What someone doesn't know, someone knows", an idea she raises as both an indictment of those who have chosen to conceal details of their knowledge, as well as an invitation to others in the community to search out this hidden knowledge (ASAF, 2016). The song then encourages community members to "spread it" (ASAF, 2016).

Her song reflects exactly what the Yihi Katseme have since done; equipped with their own knowledge and analysis they have claimed space, marking a solid starting point for pushback against this accumulation through dispossession.

To illustrate how this has happened, in one of the Yihi Katseme collective dialogue spaces, our research documented a crucial moment of knowledge production and learning in the Yihi Katseme movement, where the song strategy was formalized. Occurring in 2016, the movement held a workshop to think more deeply about how they wanted to use songs in their activism. To this point these songs had been mostly used in protest moments – like those that Akpetiyo Lawer developed, discussed below. However, at this point, they now wanted to use songs to reach out to the communities surrounding the resource they were trying to defend. They developed a five finger approach that enabled them to easily memorize their strategy, and also gave them confidence to shift from reactive activism to movement building and organization. The use of song was the opening finger of this approach: “The small finger represents the music, the music we will be using” (Mary Akutey, Song Workshop, August 11, 2016). For example, the women decided in one instance to use a traditional working song in this community mobilization:

You have entered the room
You are keeping long to come out,
The community will be expecting you to give
birth to twins!

Translated from Dangme, this Ada song is used by the Yihi Katseme to reference older times, when resources were accessed communally, work was collective, and the Songor lagoon was open to all. Edith Okabutey, a member of the ASSWA executive, shares her own reflections on the song, which points to how times have changed:

The music ... tries to refresh our minds in the olden days where the women can work on their own, and housekeeping was not a problem for the men and women. At evening the women gather and sing this song: You have entered the room and are keeping long to come out. The community will be expecting you to give birth to twins. This is a song the women used to tease each other because of the excitement they have. (Garbary, 2016)

Looking at the lyrics, there is a playfulness to the words, the song is a reminder of the importance of communal work and collective responsibility, but also teases people for putting their own personal needs above the best interests of the community. The song also points to women’s dual responsibilities for productive and reproductive labour (Garbary, 2016). Revitalizing traditional songs that speak to communal spirit is the cornerstone of the women’s mobilization strategy. They use songs such as this one to draw people into a discussion over the differences between contemporary times and the past. In this way, they provoke a restorying learning context, where community gatherings can use stories of the past to rewrite what is possible in the present. Kofi Larweh summarized this thinking:

So, we say before we work, the first thing we do is that we will bring songs out to gather the people. The first thing we do is use folk songs, we bring songs to gather people. Songs we use to gather the people. After singing those songs, we have words that will back it, things that are getting missing in our culture, our tradition and cultures are getting missing. Time back, we gathered and sing those songs. But now, it's no more like that. We the Songor women won't allow that thing to beat us. That's why we are bringing out these songs. (Song Workshop, August 11, 2016)

Using songs and restorying in this way enables the women to effectively engage with their communities by creating a safe space for community members to have difficult conversations, as West (2017) describes. Yihi Katseme are essentially meeting people where they are – a central tenet of adult education. By sharing imagery of communal life, they return to the familiarity of what people know, and then use that as the starting point to delve deeper into challenging discussions of community issues. This strategy is yielding deep community buy-in to the manifesto for change Yihi Katseme have developed – expanded on in the next section.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT

Women's organizing in the contexts of Ada is strongly connected to discourses of women's leadership and empowerment, looking at the many ways that gendered power relationships take shape in communities and change over time. The Yihi Katseme of Ada have spent years working to mobilize community members and raise awareness about the Songor lagoon, the issues surrounding it, and the grave costs associated with *atsiakpo* – its current balkanized state. The women have been travelling a winding road of self-driven empowerment, made all the more possible because of a commitment to self-teach through song and other creative art forms. Women have long been a part of the Ada Songor Advocacy Forum, where older men had more prominent voices and held key positions of power within the movement. The women's process of empowerment was gradual yet impactful, as the Yihi Katseme are recognized as leaders of the Songor movement, with their analysis adopted by community members who previously refused to support the women's perspective. The self-driven process of empowerment that the Yihi Katseme experienced is a break from the literature and practice of many within the mainstream development paradigm (cf. Anyidoho & Manuh, 2010). All too often the meaning of empowerment is technical in nature, as it is put forth as step-by-step procedural endeavour where at the end, an individual will be empowered. Within the discourse of empowerment in the aid sector, there has been a preoccupation with the idea of women's economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, and specific externally-derived programming that will yield particular results of capitalist success. A tension exists within the literature – between self-driven processes of empowerment and mainstream conceptions of 'being empowered by x, y, z' (Batliwala, 2009;

Anyidoho & Manuh, 2010). The women of Ada have shown us the former, where they have demanded and taken space, it has not been handed to them.

In Ada, where Manuh (1994) notes historically, women have been excluded from the leadership of the salt struggle, over the past seven years women have insisted on their space and role as a leading force in struggle for a *Songor for all* – the title of their manifesto. This has all taken place within the limits of a deeply patriarchal society. In the past, women involved in the Songor movement have drawn stark parallels – likening women to the lagoon, maintaining that they, like the Songor, have been treated like dogs, taken for granted and abused (Langdon, Larweh, & Cameron, 2014). The women have undergone a transformative process of self-empowerment, and now describe themselves as wolves, protecting the lagoon. The women's perspective on the central issues of the Songor has emerged as the most rooted analysis and is the focus of defending communal access to the lagoon in the face of the 'atsiakpo' small scale mining, and the threat of government expropriation of the lagoon. The Yihi Katseme have emerged as capable leaders, organizing demonstrations at key moments to raise awareness of issues in the lagoon.

Community radio has been an instrumental partner to the ASAF and ASSWA social movements, not only in its pursuit to democratize the airwaves, and disseminate the voice of indigenous communities and the knowledge systems they uphold, but for its active work to create space for women to build their own analysis, share their perspective, and take steps towards self-empowerment. In the Ada context, Radio Ada, the community radio station, has created space and opportunity for women's voice to be heard, and in broadcasting Yihi Kateme's songs, has helped to reinforce the women's analysis, and has developed enabling mechanisms for women to dialogue together in a broader way.

Kofi Larweh, a key figure at Radio Ada and whose quote began this chapter, links the importance of song to understanding the Ada world and the Ada people, explaining how the oral tradition of song is bound to the identity and expression of Ada, and serves a multitude of important social functions – most notably maintaining a historical record. Larweh further points to the essential role that community voice and social movement songs have been given in the community radio context, stating that “songs and their meaning are the center of our radio programming strategy” (ASAF, 2016).

Radio Ada aims to be the voice of the Ada people and is committed to engaging in culturally relevant and appropriate ways of communication, which includes indigenizing broadcasts to support communities of listeners and the knowledge systems they uphold. In broadcasting the Yihi Katseme songs, Radio Ada provides a larger platform for the women's analysis to be shared with all of Ada, democratizing this knowledge and creating and supporting more accessible avenues that amplify marginalized voices.

ARTICULATIONS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT LEARNING

Studying articulations of social movement learning is inherently about connection and depth; looking at ways that people and their ideas can connect and ultimately deepen understanding and learn from that exchange. As noted above, this current study has grown out of, and builds on many years of collective research and movement work; the theorizing around social movement learning and the articulation of ‘learning *through* struggle’ as well as “learning *to* struggle” have surfaced through a Ghana-based dialogue reconfiguring Foley’s (1999) notion of, ‘learning *in* struggle’ (Langdon, 2011). The former refers to the discrete learning that comes from conflict – demonstrations, campaigns, and rallies can all be spaces of deep learning. The Yihi Katseme organized a demonstration, marching to spread their message of a Songor for all, while sharing details and updates on various social media platforms and on the radio. Importantly, this march included the presence of a brass marching band that added to the songs they sang as they marched. Initially, when the demonstration began the police presence attempted to stop the women marching. Then as time went on, and the women continued to march and the band continued to play, some police officers began walking with them. By the end of the demonstration the women had so transformed their relationship with the police that officers were showing off their own marching techniques and the tension between the groups had eased. This type of situational learning is what can emerge from situations of conflict, learning *through* struggle.

Learning *to* struggle, on the other hand, is the processes and theorizing movements themselves are producing to educate themselves and the broader world. As the five finger approach share above shows, this is happening and being theorized in Ada through song. For instance, songs have provoked a call to widely broaden the circle of knowledge about plans for the Songor – building processes of knowledge-democracy into the movement. Songs have been used as a way to connect to a communal past, and to provoke discussion about how things have changed. They can also help restory this past to highlight the role women have played in establishing and maintaining Ada culture. Finally, the women have learned through struggle that songs can be used to create openings for relationship building and to undermine assumptions even in the minds of adversaries. It is by using a movement-articulated, participatory and story-sensitive approach to this research that we have been able to document this learning in rich, restoried ways for the movement to better understand its own learning over time, and to share this learning with the world.

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