The Politics of Land Ownership and Livelihoods: An Exploration of Land Dispossession in Ghana’s Mining Communities

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Abstract
Land is an essential commodity everywhere in the world. But for people who use it mainly as a source of livelihood, either for farming or other subsistence purposes, it becomes a quintessential means of survival and even a natural entitlement for them and their families. Mineral mining in Ghana is gradually disrupting these natural connections people have to their land as companies in search of gold and other minerals are obtaining licenses to exploit them. This paper examines the dynamics of land dispossession in Ghana’s mining sector, with a focus on the Ahafo and Sefwi areas where foreign companies such as Newmont Ghana Gold Ltd. and Chirano Gold Mines Ltd. operate. While land dispossession in general is the topic for discussion, an emphasis is placed on the peculiar challenges women face as a result of losing their lands to mining companies. This is mainly because women appear to be the most disadvantaged group in the discussion around land dispossession because the lack of access to their land means lack of food, livelihood and their inability to make adequate sustenance provisions for their households.

Keywords: Land, accumulation by dispossession, resources, women, host communities, livelihoods, Ghana

1 This is a first draft so your questions and feedback are welcome. To cite an extensive portion of the content, please contact author at andrews5@ualberta.ca
Introduction

Conventional knowledge suggests that the richer a country is in terms of natural resources, the better off it should be economically. However, evidence from mineral-rich countries, especially in the global South, does not support this perception. On the contrary, more of the most endowed countries are in some kind of a ‘curse’ (Auty 1993; Humphreys et al. 2007) also known as ‘paradox of the plenty’ (see Stevens 2003). Be it a result of conflict, misappropriation, rent seeking, or the lack of social responsibility on the part of companies, these countries are among the poorest in the world. And the kind of poverty they experience is reflected in various forms of social exclusion, inequality, and marginalization. The essence of the tale is that the vast majority of people expected to benefit from mineral investments often experience dispossession from their lands, depriving them of basic needs and decent livelihoods. This has been a major bone of contention in many resources-rich countries in Africa and elsewhere.²

Imagine having a piece of land where your ancestors and current generation farmed in order to sustain the family. Now, a large-scale mining company comes into town with legal documentation to claim ownership of this land, and gives you a little compensation for the crops on the land. Meanwhile, there are no proper arrangements to address the livelihood concerns that results from the loss of land. Once the compensation has been spent, and in most cases where the mining company is unable to absorb the employable population, how else would you survive in this environment? This short scenario plays out many times for people living in resource-rich parts of Ghana, and Africa as a whole. Struggles over land in Africa have been ongoing for decades, if not centuries (see for instance, Mather 1995). But it has recently become an issue of contention as more and more marginalised populations become aware of their rights and ability to claim ownership over their indigenous lands and resources. Mostly “driven by dispossession, rural protest and urban food riots, the centrality of land and struggles over access to it and how it is to be worked and owned are once again at the fore of political debate and policy-making interventions” (Bush et al. 2011, 187). These interventions are useful due to the rising spate of land grabbing and big (corporate) land deals worldwide (see White et al. 2012).

There is a general impression created by international financial institutions that Africa has a lot of idle land. This has drawn tremendous attention to the continent, and has now led to a new scramble for the continent’s resources (Bush et al. 2011). To be sure, the main difference between contemporary struggles over land in Africa with previous land sales is that they now appear to be the foundation of a capitalist crisis of fuel, food and finance. From the World Bank’s standpoint, “market transfers in land are simply a feature of modernization. The enclosure of land, dispossessing farmers and limiting people’s access to it are necessary consequences of business raising productivity, and with it the opportunity for African governments to increase revenue generation” (Bush et al. 2011, 189). This is a rather simplistic assessment of land as an economic commodity, but the commodification of Africa’s land is not a panacea to dispossession or socio-economic

² For the case rural landlessness in Asia, see Li (2009).
inequality. The sad aspect is that the state is often involved in these processes of dispossession. The reminder here is that “the primitive accumulation of capital is not only a prelude to capitalism; it is a process fed by the continuing accumulation of dispossession of marginalized rural areas” (Bush et al. 2011, 191).

In Africa, relationships around land are both socially embedded and “are embedded in unequal social relationships” (Peters 2004, 304). And the prevailing dualism between ‘statutory’ and ‘customary’ complicates the issue further (see Chimhowu and Woodhouse 2006). The fact that most lands are still under customary or communal ownership suggests that people can have access to them for cultivation and other subsistence-living uses. Nonetheless, it is this flexibility that allows tenure and ownership of land to become negotiable and ambiguous – hence the growing social competition and conflict over land and the deepening exclusion of people who may be deemed to have ‘customary’ rights over the land (Peters 2004). It is worth recognizing that land conflicts are ubiquitous in the same way that the African political economy terrain itself is complex: “competition over land has followed myriad social fault lines, pitting national and local elites against ordinary citizens, neighbor against neighbor, kinsman against kinsman, and husbands against wives” (Berry 2002, 639). But at the centre of this dilemma is the global competition for land and its natural resources by a plethora of transnational mining corporations (TMCs) facilitated by neoliberal globalization.

A key feature of the neoliberal agenda is its obsession with economic growth, even though there is evidence to suggest growth alone does not lead to sustainable livelihoods (Durand and Légé 2012; Martínez-Alie et al. 2010). What is most troubling is the expectation that neoliberalism can help advance the goal of poverty alleviation (Harvey 2005) or perhaps even environmental sustainability (see Bakker 2010). Despite the globalization hullabaloo (see World Bank 2002; Dollar 2005; Bhagwati 2005), it is established that Africa’s deepening integration into the world economy, instead of generating wealth, has rather resulted in the outflow of wealth (Bond 2008). According to Bond (2008), this is the outcome of the looting of Africa’s resources that has been ongoing for centuries. In the name of ‘development’, several government and international development organizations support the acquisition of large-scale concessions of land for commercial purposes. In essence, “advocacy of a large farm model for agricultural growth, linked to assumed comparative advantages in a globalized economy, is often at the centre of justifications for large-scale corporate land deals” (White et al. 2012, 625). Unfortunately, most of these transactions occur without a proper assessment of how they impact the livelihoods of local people. And this is where the problem really lies.

The argument here is that accumulation by dispossession generally undermines the potential of mineral mining contributing to sustainable livelihood outcomes for people in host communities. Rather, it marginalizes these people and reduces their access to a decent life partly due to the absence of land for subsistence purposes. Based on primary fieldwork data, I can unequivocally argue that the promise of mining investment contributing to socio-economic growth is not one that accounts for the wellbeing of the ordinary citizen who may be living a few meters away from a large-scale mining
operation. This paper is divided into six sections. The first and current section gives an introduction to the topic and points to where the rest of the paper is headed. The second section reflects on the analytical framework that cements the discussion, that is, accumulation by dispossession. Section three examines the dynamics in Ghana’s mining sector with emphasis on the land dilemma. The fourth section uses fieldwork data to show how host communities see land as a source of livelihood. The discussion in this section is underpinned by the three characteristics of dispossession identified by Peluso and Lund (2011). The fifth section narrows the discussion further to understand the gender-specific concerns around land and dispossession. The final section, which is primarily a conclusion, attempts to explore some ways of improving the existing condition.

Accumulation by Dispossession: An Analytical Framework

The concept of accumulation by dispossession is somewhat an expansion of Marx’s original theory of capital accumulation, which is typically based on these assumptions: “freely functioning competitive markets with institutional arrangements of private property, juridical individualism, freedom of contract and appropriate structures of law and governance guaranteed by a ‘facilitative’ state which also secures the integrity of money as a store of value and as a medium of circulation” (Harvey 2004, 73). It is still considered to be synonymous with ‘primitive accumulation’ (see Bond 2008; Arrighi et al. 2010). In specific terms, Marx’s dialectical method sought to show how market liberalization or neoliberalism cannot promise us an equitable world that makes everyone better off. All the things Marx envisaged as the repercussions of capitalism are present with us in some form or shape, but new mechanisms of accumulation by dispossession have also emerged involving the depletion of the global environmental commons (land, air, water), wholesale commodification of nature, depletion of habitat, and the commodification of cultural forms, histories and intellectual creativity, among others (Harvey 2004). And the state is often seen to be involved in these processes of dispossession. According to Harvey (2004), accumulation by dispossesses arises out of the inability of global capitalism to steadily accumulate through the sustained expansion of production. This trend becomes a quintessential part of what he calls ‘the new imperialism’ (Harvey 2003).

A discussion of capitalism is essential here because it is this market ideology that underpins the promotion of TMCs in Ghana, and it is the broader concept that underpins notion of ‘accumulation by dispossession’. Sanyal (2007) simply defines capitalism as “a global system based on global free trade” (2). It is basically a system organized around the free market principle and the institution of private property, which contrasts the state ownership of productive resources. Capitalist production as conceptualized by Marx generally requires three elements; namely, money possessed by the capitalist; means of production used as constant and variable capital; and free wage-labour (Sanyal 2007, 47). The quest to make profit or accumulate more capital leads to the alienation of workers from the produce, and thus creates a wasteland of excluded and marginalized spaces. In a critique of capitalism, Sanyal (2007) shows how underdevelopment is “endogenous to capitalist development in the post-colonial context” (ix). According to him, the
economies which are supposed to benefit from this process of development become disposed and therefore ‘castaways’ of the development process itself. Another study by Harriss-White (2005: 2) shows that “poverty is continually being created and re-created under the institutions of capitalism” and thus, the quest to eradicate poverty remains far-fetched if these institutions are not understood and their negative consequences mitigated.

Close to the end of the 1908s, which was considered the ‘lost decades’, the neoliberal spread of capitalism became known as the ‘Washington Consensus’, a term coined by Williamson (1990). This consensus entails ten policy instruments including fiscal deficits or discipline; reduced public expenditure; increasing tax revenue through tax reforms; market-determined interest rates; ‘competitive’ exchange rate; trade liberalization; enabling environment for foreign direct investment (FDI); privatization; deregulation; and property rights. Out of these instruments came the Structural Adjustment Programs that were implemented in, or perhaps, imposed on many countries in the global South as the only way of overcoming their accumulated debts. Yet these ‘austerity’ policies, which are still apparent today, albeit in ‘different bottles’, target macroeconomic indicators of growth with no sense of the connection between these indicators and the lives of individual agents. For instance, a mining company can be said to contribute a great deal to a country’s gross domestic product but this means nothing to community members who are faced with the day-to-day side-effects of lost livelihoods and depleted environments. To be sure, we need to understand that Washington itself “does not always practice what it preaches” (Williamson 1990, 17) so it is not reasonable for anyone to uncritically follow its doctrines.

A study by Cornwall and Cornwall (2001) of some Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) economies (for instance, United States, United Kingdom and Canada) in the post-World War II period indicates that the condition of high unemployment that prevailed at that time required the joint action of government, capital, and labour in order to create a sustainable institutional framework that engenders social bargains, and guarantees social safety nets. In this particular case, the authors argue that “[n]o invisible hand could be counted on to perform this task” (Cornwall & Cornwall 2001, 262), and the approach taken actually distanced the economies from the neoliberal laissez-faire model. This example is to show the lack of commitment of even developed economies to the so-called ‘invisible hand’ rhetoric. On the contrary, it appears the rhetoric is used when it serves a particular purpose, and abandoned when it is not. The 2007/08 financial crisis, the repercussions of which are present up to date, revealed how “[f]ree market policies and doctrines were abandoned” in the quest to salvage the economy from ruins (O’Flynn 2009, 161). However, the neoliberal-based Washington Consensus or globalization has become a hegemonic ‘golden straightjacket’ that has become synonymous with ‘common sense’ (Soederberg 2004a, 2006), forgetting that the crisis or “contradictions inherent in global capital accumulation inevitably create human insecurity” (Soederberg 2004b, 35). There is simply no need for the “market fundamentalism” (Soros 2003, 3) that surrounds the neoliberal project at the expense of people’s livelihoods and wellbeing.
As argued by Harvey (2004), “the balance between accumulation by dispossession and expanded reproduction has already shifted towards the former and it is hard to see this trend doing anything other than deepening, making this the hallmark of what the new imperialism is all about…” (82). In very clear terms, he also argues elsewhere that neoliberalism is a ‘creative destruction’ in the sense that it seeks to restore class domination by siphoning resources and wealth from the poor to the rich, and by undermining institutions and arrangements that facilitated more egalitarian and distributive processes (Harvey 2007). This makes it useful to interrogate the different shapes and form dispossession is being perpetuated by the growing global capitalism. Within the African context, Bond (2008) argues that although accumulation by dispossession in Africa dates back many centuries of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism, “neoliberal policies are today the most direct causes of inequality and poverty” (20). It is worth pointing out that in the context of this paper, capitalism, neoliberalism, primitive accumulation, globalization, and accumulation by dispossession are used interchangeably. This is to show that although the narrative, language or terminology might have changed, the core elements as explored above remain present. These entail a varied ontological configuration of capitalism as embeddedness, dispossession and subsumption with its various theoretical sources (Rossi 2013; see also Glassman 2006). But more specific emphasis is placed on accumulation by dispossession as a frame for this discussion because in the first place, it is the growth of large-scale mining facilitated by the global laissez-faire economy that perpetuates the dispossession of people from their lands. Once people become dispossessed, they lose the voice to speak or contribute to discussions that affect their lives.

**Data Collection Methods**

Primary data for this paper was collected using two main methods of data collection: semi-structure interviews and focus group discussions. The in-depth research was preceded by a pilot study in January 2013 where 22 people from Kenyasi no. 1, Kenyasi no. 2, Sefwi-Akoti, and Sewfi-Etwebo were randomly handpicked on site and asked simple questions around the companies and their general impressions of their social performance. For the four-month fieldwork itself, 44 interviews were conducted involving a variety of mining stakeholders. The interviews generally lasted between 10 and 60 minutes each. Those that were ended at 15 minutes or less exhibited an immediate potential to be repetitive. After about 20 interviews with locals, I almost reached the point of saturation as the views and concerns began sounding similar. Out of the total number of interviews, five (5) of them were with government officials (i.e. Minerals Commission, Environmental Protection Agency – Ghana, Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology & Innovation, and the Ghana Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative, which is under the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning); four (4) were with identified NGOs in Accra (i.e. Third World Network-Africa, Wass Association of Communities Affected by Mining, ISODEC/PWYP-Ghana, and Associates for Development Partnerships); and six (6) were with company officials – three from each company. The remaining 29 interviews were split between the two companies covering the six towns/villages listed above, and including ordinary community members, community consultative committee members, opinion/youth
leaders, and leaders of community-based organizations. Two focus group discussions were conducted involving six (6) females in the CGML three focus areas and five (5) in NGGL’s areas. This included a wide range of age groups, from 18 to over 50 years. The data gathered were manually coded and subject to a qualitative analysis to identify and interpret common themes.

The Dynamics of Ghana’s Mineral Economy and Land

Gold mining has been going on in Ghana for many centuries, becoming a prominent activity in the late 15th century (Aryee 2003). It is believed that local inhabitants of the coast had a good knowledge of gold processing before the arrival of the Portuguese in the early 1400s. Pre-colonial mining operations were in three main categories: alluvial, shallow pit and deep shaft. As the gold trade between Ghana and other European traders surged in the mid-1800s, so was the number of official concessions. For instance, the 25 gold concessions granted to European companies in 1884 had increased to 400 by 1888 (Aryee 2003, 383). This rampant granting of concessions, however, reduced the availability of prospective land for indigenous miners (mainly small-scale), thereby engendering conflicts. In particular, the shift from deep shaft (or underground) mining to surface mining resulted in social conflicts as fewer people were employed and many of the existing employees were laid-off. The shift also led to the displacement of many farmers from the lands since mining came into conflict with agricultural activities (Dashwood and Puplampu 2010). This shift, in addition to the plethora of mining concessions granted, has been the reason land remains a continuous bone of contention. The mining industry faced ups and downs during the country’s military rule of the mid-1960s and early 1980s. After the promulgation of the 1992 constitution, and also facilitated by the structural adjustments of the time, gold production in Ghana skyrocketed to over 700% (Addy 1998). In the early 2000s Ghana was a significant gold-producing country in West Africa, accounting for about 70 per cent of the regional output (Hilson 2002), and gold production in general remains an integral part of Ghana’s socio-economic dynamics (Akabzaa and Darimani 2001).

Although mining normally displaces communities and depletes reserved lands, mining companies are often unwilling to allow community members who are still interested in farming to use their idle lands: in some cases, there is total disenfranchisement since individuals who own farms close to mining concessions are refused access to their farms (Akabzaa et al 2007). The absence of such sustainable practices has led to galamsey operations. Historically, the relationship between large-scale mining (LSM) and artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM), especially those involved in galamsey is often antagonistic, violent, or even deadly as the latter perceive they have the traditional rights to work on the land, be it for mining or farming purposes though the former has legally acquired concessions (Aubynn 2009).

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3 The term is a corruption of the phrase “gather them and sell” (Aryee 2003, 384) but it generally refers to ‘illegal’ artisanal mining
Being members of the community, the *galamsey* operators think they should have as
much access to the same land as the mining companies, especially since ‘land ownership’
and ‘community membership’ share a close link in Ghana. This is underscored by the fact
that before big mining companies came to the area small-scale mining was going on in
pre-colonial times. Although considered illegal, it is a means of survival for the youth
who have not been absorbed by the mining economy and for whom farming activities are
no longer attractive; and also for the older population who were once employed by the
mining companies for underground mining as the shift to surface mining has reduced the
level of manpower needed. Yet, this activity remains environmentally unsustainable just
like LSM, if not more, as ‘crude’ means are used to extract minerals after which
chemicals used (for instance, mercury) are washed in nearby water bodies. Mercury is
considered an “agent of poverty” in the context of Ghana’s ASM industry due to the
absence of robust social services, mercury-free technologies, and lack of education on the
environmental impacts of mercury (Hilson and Pardie 2006). What is more, the
contamination of water resources has serious gender implications. Women, who are
primary domestic water managers, are forced to get water from longer distances
culminating in other health issues for them and their families (Balfors et al. 2007).

Generally, the mining sector is the centre of major land disputes in Ghana. There remain
questions around who owns the land and who has the right to issue license to mining
companies, be it the central government, chiefs and local authorities, or perhaps the
people who traditionally use the land for farming and other activities. Such questions are
a major source of conflict in many mining communities in Ghana (Hilson and Yakovleva
2007). Part of the problem is the fluidity, negotiability and insecurity surrounding
property rights to land and the blurred lines between formal and informal sectors of the
economy (see Firmin-Sellers 1996; Amanor and Ubink 2008; Schoneveld and German
2014).

The main mining legislation, Act 703, gives the central government the power to
authorize the occupation and use of land, especially land for mineral resource
development. And the 1992 Constitution grants the President of the country power to
oversee all pieces of lands with mineral deposits on behalf of the people of Ghana. Yet
existing literature indicates that the state owns only about 20 percent of Ghana’s total
land surface with the remaining 80 percent customarily controlled by traditional leaders
of the area who are entrusted with such lands for their respective communities (Aubynn
2009). It is not clear how the mandate established by the constitution is communicated to
traditional authorities in a way that reduces the clashes over land rights. Even with the
introduction of the National Land Policy in 1999, land reform in Ghana has been “an on-
going process rather than a one-time comprehensive effort to restructure the country’s
system of land holding and tenure arrangements” (Berry 2009, 1-2). Moreover, the land
policy is only recognized as policy but not a law with binding legal effect (Kasanga and
Kotey 2001). Despite what exists, there is little to show that tradition and modernity are
being equitably combined and the prevailing dilemma remains (Ubink and Quan 2008).
Land as a Means of Survival/Livelihood

In recent times the surface mining technique used by many companies has resulted in an annual deforestation rate of 2 million acres, with over 60% of rainforest in the Wassa West District being lost to mining activities (Akpalu and Parks 2007). With surface gold mining being the main cause of deforestation, it is estimated that only 12% of Ghana’s rainforest remains. The population of rare species and forest habitat is quickly declining as people’s livelihoods are destroyed. The fact that land is a means of survival and livelihood for mining community dwellers cannot be overemphasized. In her study of rural land claims in West Africa, Berry (2006) opines that “land, formerly seen primarily as a source of livelihood, is increasingly viewed as territory – space to be governed as well as cultivated …” (241). However, due to the inexistence of proper legislation to protect customary land rights, the onus lies with traditional land users/owners to contest infringement on their rights. The ‘capacity to claim’, as Schoneveld and German (2014) call it, has been the main way communities are able to protect their lands. But the challenge is that once a large-scale mining company receives the official nod to operate, they can use all sort of means to secure its rights as well resulting in a cycle of clashes with community members who often receive inadequate compensation for their lands. While this is happening, it is the survival of many lives that once depended on these lands that is left on the margins. One research respondent’s description sums up the extent to which people depended on their farmlands prior to large-scale mining:

Before Newmont came here, I had my farm from which when I harvest I could get three to four bags of cocoa. By the end of the year, I could have had about six bags of cocoa from which I could deposit some money in the bank so that in hard times I could withdraw … I had money to buy items from other towns to sell. I had a plantation farm, I used the proceeds from the farm to take care of my child to college. But since the possession of farm, I could not sponsor the other two children (a boy and girl) to further their education. And now we could hardly put food on the table (Kenyasi no. 1, 23 May 2013).

Being a major source of livelihood, one’s dispossession of one’s land reveals a number of devastating impacts that reduces the potential of making a good living. And it does have a negative influence on food security, with gender-specific repercussions as well (see Tsikata and Yaro 2014; Doss et al. 2014). As noted by one female respondent, “I’m in real hardship. They’ve destroyed my farmlands and I cannot get food to eat. They also won’t employ me so I just have to sit here and do nothing” (Sefwi-Akoti, 7 January 2013). Even in cases where people are able to engage in farming, the portions of land available to them are so minimal that the produce becomes too costly for the average person. There is a huge demand but the supply is scanty, hence a hike in food prices: “as a result of the lands that have been claimed, the farmers no longer produce more. This has affected the prices of farm produce” (Kenyasi no. 2, 7 January 2013). A recent study that used Landsat satellite images between 1986 and 2002 to map land cover changes due to surface mining in Western Ghana shows that surface mining has resulted in 58% deforestation and 45% loss of farmland (Schueler et al. 2011). From the qualitative data gathered in other parts of the country, it appears these percentages would have risen.
between 2002 and now. The finding suggests that surface mining profoundly affects the livelihood and survival of farmers and local dwellers in mining communities. The irony is that compensation that is expected to make the lives of previous landowners better rather impoverishes them further, often leading to a great of social conflicts between communities and mining companies (Lawson and Bentil 2014; Derkyi et al. 2014). Besides the fact that proper compensation was not paid, most people interviewed have spent the entire amount given to them, as reflected in the statement below:

I have finished spending the compensation I received for my land a long time ago. It has been ten years now since they gave me the money. They cheated us because they did not pay us the money they were supposed to give us. So we spent the money within a few days. We are living here with our children without jobs; we no more have lands on which we could have planted rice or cocoa or cassava (12 June 2013, Sefwi-Etwebo).

Since land remains a source of livelihood and survival for many in these communities, the impact of a mining company’s exit would no doubt be devastating. One of the questions I asked my respondents was how they see their lives a few years after the closure of the mine. Even though their lives are not better off today, almost every respondent saw the exit of the company (whenever it happens) to be something that would be overwhelming. A group of women who were part of a focus group discussion exclaimed almost in unison “we will just die!” Another responded, “we will kill ourselves. They have already destroyed the land so if they leave there would be nowhere to farm, not to think of planting cassava. It is just further hardship that we would go into.” The reference to ‘killing’ and ‘dying’ might not be in the literal sense, but based on the frustration of the people I interviewed it does paint a fair picture of the harsh realities of their existence. One community leader put his thoughts into rhetorical questions: “because they have possessed all our lands, how can we then live? The water that we drink from is being polluted by the mining activities. So if they leave the land as it is now, what would come of it? … The future generation would suffer a lot” (Ntotroso, 23 May 2013). An officer of the Ahafo Movement for Development, Kwasi Gyamfi, also spoke to the long-term impact of land dispossession in the following manner:

One cocoa tree costs less than the actual amount of money that is due for compensation in the sense that one acre of land … can generate revenue for more than 50 years and if you take this land and then pay a small amount of compensation compared to stretch[ing] it out for 50 years, you see that you have paid nothing. Now that the land has been taken, none of the people that come after them would have any access to the land again because the lands have been taken forever (Kumasi, 24 May 2013).

Mr. Gyamfi confirmed that his organization is thinking of taking legal action against Newmont Ghana Gold Ltd. to properly address the compensation issue and the deprivation that results from the uptake of farmlands for surface mining. The existing mining legislation (Act 703) requires companies to negotiate with farmers and people affected by land dispossession the appropriate compensation needed on a case-by-case
basis. It also requires that they factor in the life expectancy of the crops and their expected income. However, the companies tend to lump all cases together without examining the specificities. This has been the main dichotomy in many mining communities, and certainly a major factor in the poverty and marginalization being felt by people in these locations. The statement below by the Deputy Executive Director of the Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining, Hannah Owusu-Koranteng, best underscores this sentiment:

They are saying that communities are receiving 17 Ghana cedis for cocoa tree when one cocoa tree in a year would yield a quarter of a bag of cocoa beans – and that translates into 40-50 Ghana cedis. So if you are paying even 20 cedis, you are short-changing farmers. That is what is perpetuating poverty in the communities and they are using these green-washing mechanisms to portray themselves as a company that is helping communities. No, they are exploiting communities! (Tema, 23 July 2013).

According to Peluso and Lund (2011), primitive accumulation, enclosure and privatization are certainly important ways of maintaining control over land and other resources. They identify three characteristics of accumulation of by dispossession, namely territorialization, legalization and violence, which remain a part of the new frontiers of land control. Carried out by states and other entities, they argue that “territorialization is and produces a bundle of powers and mechanisms for restricting access” (Peluso and Lund 2011, 673). It also represents a collaborative claim to rights over land through such mechanisms such as titles and concessions. In the context of Ghana, territorialization occurs through the granting of official mining permits. An aspect of territorialization is also foreignization,⁴ which occurs as a result of the lack of voice in a matter that concerns oneself. A farmer who sells off or loses his/her land to a mining company soon becomes a foreigner to this same piece of land even in cases where farm produce are due to be harvested. This massive dispossession of farmers will be part of what Araghi (2009) calls ‘accumulation by displacement’. One male respondent noted that “when they claim the lands, you cannot even go near to harvest the farm produce on them” (Kenyasi no. 1, 7 January 2013). It is surprising that in most cases, the company has no use for the produce but in order to claim ownership over the territory for which they have legal concession from the state, they fail to allow the original owners access even for the duration of the harvest. Strict territorialization has made some companies lose social conscience needed to gain ample social license to operate. Even though they claim to be engaging in acts generally referred to as ‘corporate social responsibility’, their specific deeds speak louder than mere words on paper. One female responded announced that

Even if someone is dying in your house they will just ignore you – they won’t mind you even when you are lying on the ground. This thing also worries us. The fact that you walk in the sun sweating and they decide to ignore you [is worrying]. Even if someone is chasing you to kill you they will just bypass you, allowing the

⁴ For how globalization in general contributes to the ‘foreignization of space’, see Zoomers (2010).
Another aspect of accumulation by dispossession is legalization. In essence, legalization and institutionalization mainly “dispossesses commoners or individual claimants without ‘legal titles’, and powerful, legitimized, or draconian enforcement turns ordinary people into ‘poachers and squatters’” (Peluso and Lund, 2011, 674). In Ghana, this trend towards legalization has marginalized a number of previous customary landowners who had no titles and recognized documentation over their land. It has also pushed a number of people who believe they have natural rights to the land into galamsey operations. This activity is seen by the state to be ‘illegal’ but it is a thriving business for people whose livelihood depends on it: “galamsey is illegal; it does not help the government of Ghana but then to us the villagers we can say it’s helped us a lot…” (Male, Kenyasi no. 1, 18 June 2013). By legalizing certain artisanal mining activity, a huge portion of that industry is sidelined. Local authorities are not helping resolve this issue since they benefit from contracts from large-scale mining companies. The outcome is well explained by an officer of a community-based organization: “the disadvantage is that the people become poorer. The masses become poorer and the chief becomes richer. And you can see it everywhere in Ghana where the chiefs become richer and richer and the masses are crying” (Kenyasi no. 2, 21 May 2013). As the criminalization of galamsey operators reveals trends of abjection and social exclusion, Bush (2009) argues that the activity offers “a strategy of resistance to state mining policy and foreign company” (57).

In addition to territorialisation and legalization, violence is also an important way of establishing control over land. One thing to note is that “violence is as important in establishing and upholding territorialization or enclosure processes and institutions as it is in challenging them” (Peluso and Lund, 2011, 676). In the mining communities under focus, violence is expressed through militarization by both state and mining companies and it is often used as a mechanism of territorialisation. A striking finding is that even access to forests is highly restricted. A twenty-six year old driver from Akoti confirmed the ‘trouble’ an individual could be in if found looking for food in the forest: “the impact is that they have destroyed our lands and farm produce. What to eat is hard to come by and when you go to farm in the forest they come to arrest you. So this is a problem, which results in hunger” (7 January 2013). Another respondent added that “in these times that food is scarce we do not get food to eat. We steal food from the forest [reserve] and if you are caught it means trouble” (Male, 12 June 2013, Sefwi-Etwebo). Due to the nonexistence of farmlands, a number of the people survive on the forest because as one woman noted “if you do not farm in the forest, you will not eat.” Judging from how the forest is crucial to the survival of individuals in the absence of previous farmlands, it is quite worrying that people who resort to that as a main source of food will be met with violence and abuse by state security forces. In addition to the militarization enforced through state apparatuses, mining companies are also known to use violence to claim what they feel belongs to them, often with the help of state security (see Hilson 2007).

This statement sums up the discussion around different characteristics of dispossession: “in many instances, government agencies and their corporate associates operate with
virtual impunity, while weaker actors may see rights whittled away in the name of form\textit{alization, standardization, the global common good, or state territorialization” (Peluso and Lund 2011, 675). To a community leader, the adverse effects of mining far outweigh any benefits to the people, and thus he believes they might be better off if the mineral is left untouched: “Let’s just stop the mining and allow the minerals to be in the ground so that when Jesus comes he would carry them away. Because if mining would kill, why should we not just leave it in the ground in order to have peace?” (Ntotroso, 23 May 2013). This might sound like a rather extreme approach, but for individuals whose livelihoods and survival have been left at the mercy of mineral extraction, specific action needs to be taken to improve their current life circumstances.

**Engendering Land Dispossession: Women’s Specific Challenges**

It is already established that generally “women are the main victims of systemic poverty and inequality, whether in productive circuits of capital (increasingly subject to sweatshop conditions) or in the ‘sphere of reproduction’ of households and labour markets, where much primitive accumulation occurs through unequal gender power relations” (Bond 2007, 4). In the extractive sector, there is tremendous evidence to support this assertion in a global sense (see Lahiri-Dutt 2006; Perks 2011; Purevjaj 2011; Mercier 2011). But the fact that the mining sector has been characteristically male-dominated suggests that gender concerns are often sidelined (see Mishra and Reddy 2012). It has therefore been suggested that in order to get the full picture on the impacts of the large-scale land transactions and their ramification in terms of inequalities, livelihoods, and food security, “it is important to examine the gendered effects of and responses to these deals” (Doss et al. 2014, 2). From the focus groups I organized with women in mining communities, it became clear that although the general concerns are similar, there are some peculiarities that make their plight more burdensome. One woman noted that

Before Newmont came, I have a cocoa farm that I got money from after sales and used it to cater for my children and also took care of their education. When Newmont came, they took my land and gave me 14 million [GHC 1,400]. They did not pay for the cost of land and gave me little… Ever since, I have been in hardship for a long time and I even got ill and paralyzed for the past three years (Kenyasi no. 1, 23 May 2013).

It is known that the conditions of women in relation to mining activities in the global South are generally under-recognized and under-theorised. After centuries of mining, this topic remains “an emerging research agenda,” as Jenkins (2014) calls it. This suggests that the specific inequalities they experience, as a result of dwelling in a mining area, is more likely to be relegated to the backburner. But the reality is that “women’s traditional roles tend to place them as primarily responsible for collecting water and preparing food for the family, as well as in many cases making up the majority of small-scale farmers…” (Jenkins 2014, 333). Thus, any woman who loses land to mining activity loses a great part of their livelihood and there is hardly any payment that could make up for that. Yet, companies are not paying the compensation required – as one woman noted: “after all,
the payment they gave me was for the cocoa trees on my land only. They did not pay for the cost land. I know they currently do pay for the cost of land, so why is it that those of us they first bought lands from have still not been settled?” As a result, she says “I should be receiving some regular compensation from the profits they get because that was all the property I had” (Kenyasi no. 1, 23 May 2013). Accumulation by dispossession simply occurs by virtue of these women feeling hopeless and powerless in the presence of a large-scale mining company.

The fact that recent discussions around global ‘land grabs’ and large-scale land transactions have failed to incorporate gender concerns (see Chu 2011) does suggest that poor people in local communities in Ghana would remain at a disadvantage. Thus, their livelihood remain altered, as one of the interview respondents note: “at first with my farm having harvested about three bags, I could readily go to Yendi to purchase some meat/fish, beans, groundnuts, all the things I need and I trade. However, since my land was taken away from me I haven’t been able to board any vehicle, coupled with my ailment” (Kenyasi no. 1, 23 May 2013). Another woman from a different mining community corroborated the hardship being felt as a result of land dispossession: “Previously when you pass through your backyard, you would find kontomire [equivalent of spinach] and other things. Now there is no more kontomire because they have cleared the whole area. We do not get [food] to eat. So for now it is poverty, hunger and hardship that are killing us here” (12 June 2013, Sefwi-Etwebo).

Sweetman (2002) confirms that “poverty is qualitatively different for women than men. Poor men face social and economic exclusion from government bodies and other institutions which shape their lives, on the grounds of their poverty. Women are excluded twice over from public institutions, on the grounds of sexual discrimination as well as poverty” (4). For the woman who has lost her land and remains unemployed, her life becomes vulnerable to the extent of giving sexual favours to mine workers in order to survive. Even to get a job, one noted that “sometimes they even ask to have sex with you before being given placement. If he can’t have sex with you, then don’t think of being employed” (12 June 2013, Sefwi-Etwebo). Existing studies show that the lack of control over land for women implies their inability to control their sexuality since they become more vulnerable to sexual harassment and domestic violence (Federici 2011). The record of women’s sex work being an outcome of large-scale is well recorded (Lahiri-Dutt 2011). And it often bears negative and devaluing connotation, but women indulge in such acts to make a living in a town where their previous occupation (i.e. farming and selling of farm produce) is no longer lucrative.

A twenty-year old woman explained how the impact of land dispossession has been on her life: “they took my parents’ land when I was in JSS 3 [Grade 9]. After my exams results came out they said that they will pay my school fees but when I went there I was told I’m not in the category of the poor so I didn’t get any good thing from the company’s presence here” (Kenyasi no. 2, 7 January 2013). For this woman, the lack of access to the farmland meant no money with which to continue formal education. Even if she managed to get educated, her return to the town bore no guarantee of employment with the mining company. Neither is there a surety of a profitable trade due to the flight of many mine
workers to neighbouring big cities. The impact of the loss of lands is devastating for many people in mining communities, but as already shown above, the impact on women is much more disturbing both because of their gender and their lack of access to other sources of livelihood that men may have (e.g. galamsey work or day-by-day manual work). In essence, “mining can only be an effective vehicle of economic development if gender concerns are built into every aspect of project development” (Mishra and Reddy 2012, 14). Nonetheless, the experience of women I engaged with does not show proactive efforts to build these concerns even into an existing project.

Conclusion

Those who protest against the WTO and G8 summits are mainly protesting “against the loss of livelihood, loss of environment and disempowerment of millions of people in the third world resulting from predatory practices of multinationals” (Sanyal 2007, 262). This is because the perceived beneficiaries of neoliberal development are often at the sidelines of development itself. It is this politics of exclusion and resistance that resource-rich postcolonial Africa is faced with today. Although mining in general has a great potential of contributing positively to the economy, it has “a dismal empirical track record to date in poverty reduction,” (Pegg 2006, 376). Of course, as argued by Dashwood and Puplampu (2010), the institutional context in a developing country like Ghana can play a role in making people’s lives better. While this is true, we cannot place a greater part of the onus on the domestic context because the presence of such institutions alone does not propel satisfactory outcomes. And as has already been alluded to above, the state is often culpable in the grand design to marginalize its own people mainly by not making them aware of their land rights or helping them legalize such customary rights. The situation is therefore gloomy but there are some possible ways forward.

Globalization, and the neoliberal agenda that facilitates the spread of global mining corporations, has gained enough momentum to the extent of becoming common sense (Soederberg 2006). This trend reflects “a tendency to regard dispossession from the land as a ‘natural’ precursor of industrial development, urbanization, and capital accumulation” (Hart 2006, 989). This allows the aftermath of mineral exploration (i.e. dispossession of people from their lands and basic sources of livelihoods) to become almost a natural phenomenon that is expected to go without question. The first way forward possible involves the denaturalization of dispossession as a mechanism through which the natural status of dispossession can be duly questioned by movements of local mining dwellers. In the context of Ghana, there is a growing mass of community-based organisations and other non-governmental groups that are continually questioning the practices of corporations in local communities. However, not all mining communities I visited have these groups in place. But in order to properly denaturalize dispossession, these local forces will need to emerge and thrive in all locations as formidable alternative voices.

Another point related to denaturalization of dispossession is education. Education of the locals is needed in order for them to properly claim their spaces. Here too, civil society can play this role better than government, as the latter is often an instrumental part of the
problem. According to Berry (2002), “struggles over land in postcolonial Africa have been as much about power and the legitimacy of competing claims to authority, as about control of property per se” (639-40). This suggests that the diverse forces involved would need to come to a common ground in order to realize the potential of reducing these struggles and conflicts. A key player is the local population, who will need ample education in order to properly assert their role and also to understand other key stakeholders. Education here is not the usual formal classroom type; it rather entails a basic understanding of their power as people and how they can maintain a voice in the midst of a powerful corporation and government. Some of my research participants either did not know their rights as citizens or felt they could not assert such rights even if it was clear they had them.

Lastly, I am tempted to cautiously suggest the ‘formalization’ of land rights as one of the ways out of land dispossession. But there is simply no empirical evidence of a robust correlation between formalization of tenure and enhanced agricultural productivity or improved livelihoods (Bromley 2008; Benjaminsen et al. 2008). In fact, the neoliberal logic that says “rich countries have formalised tenure, therefore formalisation of tenure will help make you rich” fails to work in this case (ibid., 20). As evidence exists that such universalist ideas do not work everywhere, there is the need for context-specific approaches (see Sjaastad and Cousins 2008). And it is expected that local institutions may be better equipped to provide formal land title registration in a fair manner (Toulmin 2008). But there is proof the state and local authorities have been seen to be part of the grand design to dispossess host communities, particularly the most vulnerable such as women. Most of the respondents for my study did not trust their local authorities to be working for the common good.

By ‘formalization’, I am therefore not referring to a mainstream government-centred approach which often leads to further reduction in access to land for its expected beneficiaries (see Gray and Kevane 1999). For instance, in the discussion around land tenure in sub-Saharan Africa and its implications on women’s access to and interest in land, some activists are calling for a return to customary systems of land tenure even though it has been shown to be one of the main reasons why women landowners remain marginalized on their own lands. Particularly, the power relations in local communities do not position women well enough to claim their rights (Whitehead and Tsikata 2003; see also Tripp 2004). My suggestion is a proper marriage of customary and formal rules. Particularly, there should be a more appropriate way of accepting people’s customary land rights as legitimate. In the case of Ghana, this is crucial since the existing dichotomy between ‘customary’ and ‘formal’ remains the bane of a progressive land tenure system. If women and men could organize to make this possible, the better they could advance their cause from the bottom up. But in the absence of such organizing efforts, all stakeholders need to be involved in ascertaining how not to further perpetuate accumulation by dispossession.

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5 For the case of post-Apartheid South Africa, see Meer (1997).
References


Bush, Ray. 2009. “‘Soon there will be no-one left to take the corpses to the morgue’: Accumulation and Abjection in Ghana’s Mining Communities.” Resource Policy 34: 57-63.


