# Reclaiming our Land and Labour: Women's Resistance to Extractivist Agriculture in South-eastern Ghana

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**Abstract**

Neoliberal development projects have invaded multiple spaces. In rural areas, women's livelihood activities are targets for interventions in the name of poverty reduction and this is often conveyed through commercial agricultural production schemes. These initiatives have become the source of tension between household-based production and capitalist production systems. This qualitative research uses the establishment of an industrial cassava company in south-eastern Ghana to reflect on some of the lingering questions of commercial agricultural production. This was done by examining its features, its implications for livelihoods, and women's resistance strategies to the extractivist production system. Women combined evasive and confrontational resistance strategies based on class—including demands for new land, land occupation, labour withdrawal from household farms and the company, and absenteeism from work—to reclaim their land and labour. The women's politics had wider ramifications for the new production systems, causing the company to change its production model as a response to the many concerns of the women and other social groups. The strategies largely contributed to rescuing the local economy from extractive agricultural production. The women were united in their individual and collective struggles against a system which they soon realised threatened their livelihoods. In this study, I argue that women's responses to the changes in their agrarian landscape, although differentiated on the basis of class, should ultimately be seen as questioning the neoliberal development vehicle that encroaches on autonomous production and gives less than it takes.

**Keywords:** Women, Ghana, commercial agriculture production, cassava, resistance, livelihood

## Introduction

At the centre of Ghana's development trajectory is a long history of extractive production anchored in mineral mining and agricultural export commodity production. Colonial and post-colonial governments have implemented development policies that promoted the exploitation of gold, diamond, manganese and iron ore (Ayelazuno, 2014; Childs and Hearn, 2016) as well as agricultural export commodity production. The discovery of oil and gas in 2007, and its subsequent production from 2014 onwards, became the latest addition to the country's extraction-dominated development model (Aryeetey and Ackah, 2018). In the agricultural sector, cocoa is the best example of a crop developed through an extractivist model. Ghana was the world's leading producer of cocoa until it lost this position to Côte d'Ivoire in 1978. Currently, more than 700,000 households produce cocoa, which earns the nation over two billion dollars annually, an amount crucial for the economy (Kolavalli and Vigneri, 2011). Several studies have documented how cocoa production has profoundly changed land, labour, gender and class relations in producing areas (Hill, 1963; Mikell, 1989; Amanor, 2010).

The cocoa dependency model proved costly to the Ghanaian economy due to world price instabilities which affect cocoa pricing. To protect the economy from cocoa revenue shortfalls, the state embarked on export crop diversification programmes from the 1980s, which saw the promotion of horticultural crops such as coconut, mango, pineapple and papaya. In 2001, cassava (*Manihot esculenta*), an essential food security crop, became part of a Presidential Special Initiative programme which promoted cassava for industrial starch production (Tonah, 2006). Although the project failed, private companies started enrolling farmers into cassava contract farming schemes (Poku *et al*., 2018). Trade and financial deficits resulted in hyperinflation from 2009. Consequently, the state announced an industrial policy of import substitution by encouraging local raw material use in industrial manufacturing in exchange for import duty waivers. As a result of this incentive, by 2012, Guinness Ghana Limited and Accra Brewery Limited, the local subsidiaries of the world's leading multinational breweries— Diageo and SABMiller—began processing cassava into beer (Torvikey, 2019). This intensified cassava production in leading producing areas and subsequently changed production dynamics.

The story of cassava's rise to industrial prominence is a new addition to an ever-expanding feature of extractivist agriculture, which is catching up with crops

that are traditionally produced, processed and marketed at the household unit. This said, in Ghana, regardless of the sector in which extractivism is taking place, its wider ramifications are seen in increasing land dispossession—which affects the livelihoods of smallholder producers—and environmental destruction. Although the working conditions of peasants are worsening, extractive agriculture continues to be the main focus of Ghana's agricultural policies, which are centred on increasing production but pay little attention to how smallholders reproduce themselves.

In 2005, a wholly Ghanaian enterprise, Agro Industrial Cassava Company Limited[1], acquired 3,000 hectares of land to produce cassava for industrial processing in parts of South-eastern Ghana, where women have traditionally cultivated cassava mainly for food and trade. The acquisition dispossessed many migrant women and appropriated their labour. This kind of agricultural production could only be extractivist. Extractivist agricultural production has come under immense scrutiny for its destructive nature. Ye *et al.* (2020) argue that a major feature of extractivism is using resources without reproducing them. Resources crucially include land and labour. Direct and indirect land dispossession and ecological destruction are some of the core outcomes of extractivist agricultural production. Land dispossession seriously affects labour relations, with negative consequences for reproduction and livelihood outcomes such as food security. The structural logic of extractivist production entails dispossession, accumulation, exploitation and uneven distribution of gains and losses, often circumscribed by power relations (McKay, 2019).

The gender and class inequalities and inequities related to control of resources in households are further complicated in the complex processes of extractivism. Land and labour are central to agrarian livelihoods (Apusigah, 2009; Tsikata, 2009; Li, 2011) and for women's empowerment (Meinzen-Dick *et al.*, 2019). In recent times, large-scale land acquisition and land appropriation have been critiqued for creating poverty rather than providing jobs and improving livelihoods. Even when jobs are created, the labour conditions and extent of incorporation depend on the structure of production, including its institutional model, the type of crop, the level of mechanisation, and labour regime (Hall *et al.*, 2017). In addition, since the losses and gains are unequally distributed, it is women who usually occupy the lower rungs of the new and modern employment structure. It is also women who are locked up in manual, casual and precarious work. As social reproducers,

changes concerning land and labour affect women in complex ways.

Neoliberal development projects rarely take into account the socio-cultural context of their local constituents, thereby creating constant friction in communities and households. New agricultural projects may create some euphoria due to the framing of their intentions and envisaged outcomes; they will attract farmers who are understandably receptive to new technologies, methods and inputs that promise to improve agricultural production, income and wellbeing. Farmers often participate in producing new crops or old crops that have received a boom in production (Li, 2014). However, due to the power hierarchy in traditional societies and the structure of production, the immediate and long-term ramifications of such projects exacerbate gender and class differentiation.

Maria Mies (1991) has consistently pointed to the contentious features of capitalist development. She highlights its polarised process which creates wealth and poverty as well as losers and gainers. This logic defines extractivist agricultural development, which is fashioned on production that subjugates traditional systems and prioritises problematic modern ones. Extractivist agricultural production framed in efficiency and growth logic contradicts sustainability, which has profound implications for social groups, especially women and migrants. Extractivism is therefore a polarised process and phenomenon.

Using the establishment of an industrial cassava company in rural South-eastern Ghana as a case, I address the following questions in this article: How did women mobilise to resist the company? What were their strategies and what were the outcomes? Feminist analysis of these questions highlights the significance of listening to women's voices and what they tell us about women's capacity to change relations of production.

## Theoretical Framing

This article adopts resistance and feminist theories of the household to illuminate the features of neoliberal extractivist agriculture production and the different ways in which rural agricultural producers resist exploitative production systems, while acknowledging the context specificity of their struggles. Class and gender relations in the communities and households under examination are key dimensions of these struggles. James Scott's (2005) concept of infrapolitics highlights everyday forms of resistance and their diverse and complex forms that are situated in ways reflecting

the material conditions of the exploited. Scott (1985; 1990; 2013) shows that class relations produce different types of resistance, which come about as a result of political, social and economic power differences. Power asymmetries produce overt and covert forms of resistance, and thus resistance struggles become situated. Social groups and sites are important in shaping resistance forms and strategies.

Infrapolitical strategies are used in contexts that demand great caution and where there is an absence of mass mobilisation. Open confrontation can be fatal for social groups such as migrants and women who derive their resources from others whose economic, social and political rights are constantly debated. In such contexts, everyday forms of resistance are not without merit and consequence. The wide varieties of strategies used by the exploited and dispossessed show their recognition of the processes of domination rooted in material practices in a neoliberal economic paradigm. As Scott (1985) rightly notes, every instance of domination is connected with processes of appropriation. Therefore, infrapolitics and everyday forms of defiance are strategies to minimise appropriation and its effects. One end goal of such forms of resistance is to alter power relations and impel renegotiation.

The household as a site of resistance to capitalist production provides an important lens through which to view gender and class relations. The forms of resistance that manifest within it respond to particular concerns of households and these may differ for men and women. In rural households where economic interdependence and separation exist, conflicts often arise in production relations, especially ones that threaten women's socioeconomic autonomy. Women play triple roles in agricultural production. They operate their own farms, sometimes drawing labour from the household, and also work on their husbands' farms as a matter of duty and responsibility. Additionally, they provide reproductive services such as cooking for labourers in household farms that their husbands control. The multiplicity of women's roles shows integration, independence and separation of production. At the same time, due to the intricate relationship between capitalism and patriarchy, women are very often oppressed in each of these three spheres. New agricultural schemes often gloss over these aspects and the internally-differentiated character within the household, even though they often generate resistance (Kandiyoti, 1985; Razavi, 2009).

## Methodology and Study Area

The data for this work are culled from the qualitative component of a larger project. The main data collection approaches used were in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and non-participant observation. The names used for the quotations are pseudonyms.[2]

The study was conducted in five communities in South-eastern Ghana which are well known for cassava production for domestic consumption and market trade. For the purposes of this analysis, three categories of community are differentiated: indigenous, secondary-indigenous and migrant. Two of the communities identify themselves as indigenous or indigenes. Indigeneity in this sense means a history of first settlement, with associated control of land resources and political power. These communities own vast tracts of lands which were allocated to the other communities. Two of these other communities are labelled as secondary-indigenous and the last community, a migrant one. Communities that are classified as secondary-indigenous arrived second in the area centuries ago and had lands allocated to them by those communities that arrived first. The order of arrival and resource control dimensions have become an exclusionary factor in major decisions concerning land lease to the Agro Industrial Cassava Company Limited. The migrant community rightly acknowledges its migration status from the 1930s and still owes allegiance to its community of origin in the Volta Region. Its members have established a farming community which continues to expand. The cassava company acquired lands that used to be cultivated by farmers in the migrant and secondary-indigenous communities, which are directly affected by the acquisition.

Women's land access has been shaped by the local norms in different communities. Indigenous women access lands through their families and the market. Women in the secondary-indigenous community obtain land through the market, especially by allocation from the indigenous community, and through allocation by husbands. Migrant women who married migrant men access land mainly through their husbands. Unmarried migrant women access land through the market, often by yearly rental or sharecropping.

The study found that differences in how women from different communities gain access to land were important for understanding how the women were affected by the land acquisition for industrial cassava production, their incorporation into

the production system, and how they responded to the agrarian change that the cassava production represented.

## Description of the Case

Agro Industrial Cassava Company Limited (AICC Ltd.), wholly Ghanaian owned, was the first private company to venture into large-scale industrial cassava processing in Ghana. Since the fall of the state's industrial cassava company, AICC Ltd. has become the biggest industrial cassava company in the country. The company acquired 3,000 hectares of land in some communities in South-eastern Ghana to cultivate cassava for the production of ethanol, High Quality Cassava Flour and Industrial Flour. The company claimed that 100 farming households were dispossessed while community members disputed the figure, saying it could be more than 300. Prior to the acquisition, the dispossessed mainly used lands on a token payment basis. They received no compensation, since the landowners argued that they were tenants and not allodial title holders. In customary law, allodial title is the ultimate interest in land. Allodial title can be held by a stool, family, and community, and confers ownership and control on holders. Other types of land interests such as customary freehold, tenancies, sharecropping and annual rental, among others, are derivatives of the allodial title (Woodman, 1996).

AICC Ltd.'s agricultural production model comprises a nucleus estate along with contract and outgrower schemes. Both contract farmers and outgrowers had a contractual relationship with the company where the latter committed to buying industrial cassava produced by the farmers. Contract farmers were allocated a hectare each of company land to produce cassava, while outgrowers used their own land. A land limit of at least two hectares was required for participation in the outgrower scheme. Due to this restriction and other factors to be discussed in the ensuing sections, only 28 out of 107 registered outgrowers in the communities were women.

The company organised cassava production on a strictly monocropping basis and therefore outgrowers were prohibited from intercropping. The company did make some concessions that farmers could cultivate cowpea, soya and groundnuts in the cassava farms as a soil fertility measure. The company determined both the price and measuring standards for the crop, often using a truckload (about two and a half tonnes) as the unit of measurement.

## A New Agricultural Production System: Land, Labour and Food Security Concerns

Women often bear the grave consequences of agricultural commercialisation in ways that complicate their lives. Such complications could be social, economic, cultural, and political. For projects that have a combination of labour regimes, the health of the workers and that of the environment are often compromised (Tsikata, 2016; O'Laughlin, 2017). The structure of industrial cassava production creates both tension and excitement as it changes social relations of production. The ramifications of the commercial production of cassava are three-fold—land dispossession, labour exploitation, and food security. Within these are also ecological factors that threaten sustainable agricultural production in the communities.

The company's land acquisition disproportionately affected women who were dispossessed and who cultivated parcels of land that were relatively small in size. As a result, they had to cultivate multiple crops on one small plot to manage the fertility of the soil. They were now forced to use the same piece of land repeatedly, while some others stopped farming completely. The land acquisition also increased rent seeking among landowners, who started demanding annual rents or payments in-kind for land use. Since women's land access and use rights are derived from male relations mainly, the harsh changes in the land tenure practices affected their livelihoods. The affected women also complained about the distance of the new lands they acquired and expressed safety concerns about farming in those areas. Here are a few of the impacts mentioned by the women:

> I was cultivating groundnut, maize and cassava before I lost the land to the company. In the past, we used not to give anything for the land use but now, we give the landowners crops after every season since land is scarce now. Also, the company's land is on a higher ground. But the place we have now is a marshy area and so our cassava and yam do not do well there.[3]

> Initially, when the land was acquired, we asked the landowners to give us other lands. They gave us the hill lands that are far away from the community. Those lands are very fertile, but the area is not safe. The problem is that the lands are near the Togo border and murders happen there frequently. As a woman, what can I do when men surround me at a place like that? We have all our crops there. But we stopped going there due to the security problems.[4]

The household was incorporated into the production scheme through contract farming which relied on unpaid family labour, especially that of women and children. The land size criteria to become an outgrower—at least two hectares—were not sensitive to women's relatively smaller allocations, which averaged a hectare. Women who could not meet the land size criteria but who nevertheless desired to participate in the outgrower scheme combined their lands with those of their husbands in order to qualify. In households where men registered, women, especially wives, contributed both reproductive and productive labour to the contract farming schemes. Depending on the resource endowment of the household, the women would cook for labourers, mainly using food crops such as cassava, beans, groundnuts and vegetables from their farms. Husbands also relied on the income from women's daily trading activities to pay labourers. In addition, some women worked alongside their husbands on the contract farms. Some women with older husbands mostly worked on the farm all alone and also supervised labourers. However, since the men were the registered outgrowers, they controlled the income from the outgrower scheme.

As it turned out, the company could not fulfil its obligation to buy all the cassava that outgrowers produced, despite setting a land size limit that gave rise to overproduction of the crop. Due to the high starch content of the company's preferred cassava variety, which the communities said was not suitable for local food consumption, the company was the only potential buyer. Thus, its inability to purchase the produce caused a glut and led to massive post-harvest losses. Apart from this, women were incensed that the cultivation of the industrial cassava prevented them from getting access to cassava for local trade which hitherto was an essential livelihood activity for them. Cassava trading was one of the main economic activities for many women as its harvesting was spread over the year as a socioeconomic strategy. The women soon realised that the industrial cassava production system threatened the traditional cassava production and marketing system, as it became incongruous with the way they organised production and marketing. They complained about the fact that households and the community at large were producing cassava varieties they did not eat. They also found the use of agrochemicals in the production of cassava to be problematic and strange since their usual varieties were not chemical-dependent. A female traditional leader explained the women's concerns as follows:

> The company had more male outgrowers than females because we women were not interested. They introduced chemicals in the production of cassava, weighing of produce and rules on harvesting which were different from what we practice. That was not how we organised our cassava production before the company came.[5]

In addition, the women found the use of the truckload as a measuring standard of the contract cassava to be exploitative. The women said that they could make four times as much as the company paid for such a quantity if they sold that amount on the local market, and even more if they processed the same quantity into *garri* or *agbelima* (cassava dough). They found the harvesting structure tedious and costly: a contract farmer was expected to harvest in one fell swoop, which is at odds with the traditional harvesting structure. Prior to the arrival of the company, cassava farmers did harvesting sequentially, only a day before market day and by acreage when there was a bulk buyer who harvested by herself or himself. The women maintained that the way they traditionally harvested cassava suited their labour needs and capabilities. Usually, they would harvest only the quantity of cassava they needed for home consumption and for sale in the local market, which was held every five days. The portion harvested would be replanted before the next market day. That way, they were able to manage production and harvesting simultaneously. Sequential harvesting is also a strategy to manage pricing and oversupply. The women enumerated numerous problems with the organisation of industrial cassava:

> The outgrower scheme did not help us. We can get about 30 sacks of cassava dough from the full bucket of the truck which would fetch GHS1,600. But the company buys that same quantity at GHS500. So, we felt cheated.[6]

> The company preferred starch, so it advised farmers to harvest cassava in six months. With this type of production, we farmers can cultivate cassava twice a year. But we have observed that this type of production was not helpful to us. The farmer will suffer and produce, and the company will harvest it in six months. Yet the farmer will not make much money since s/he has to harvest more to get one truck. But if you allow your cassava to grow well over a one-year period, you will realise that you get better harvest. So, you see, because the company is just interested in the starch, they don't allow the cassava to mature before harvesting.[7]

In terms of labour in the company, many women were employed mainly as casual workers, often working long hours (7 a.m. to 5 p.m.). The work in the company was segmented into two types. The first was on the farm. Farm workers did planting, harvesting, carting, loading, weeding and spraying. Women were assigned all these except spraying. Farm workers started work at 6 a.m. and clocked off around 11 a.m. The farm work was organised as an individual task although workers often helped one another so that they could accomplish the work on time. Many farm workers were men.

The second type of work was factory work, which comprised peeling, washing, milling, bagging and packing. Most factory workers were women. The women would also load the cassava peels onto a truck after work. Then they swept, scrubbed and mopped the floor before going home. The work was organised as a group task with five women assigned to process two and a half tonnes of cassava daily. Many of the workers at the first stage of processing were women. Only one man worked under a shed where 20 women were working when I visited the factory in 2016. His portion of the work was mechanised; he milled the cassava into dough. However, it was the women who filled the milling machine with the cassava they had finished peeling. The women also cleaned the man's section of the factory after work. The second stage, which was flour production, involved three men. Two men worked with the machines while one cleaned the factory during and after production.

Casual workers did not enjoy any social security or annual, sick or maternity leave. They wore no protective gear. The women used only rudimentary tools that made work difficult. Even the seats they used at the processing site were their own kitchen stools which they brought from home and carried back at the end of the day. Most of the work was manual. When women fell ill and were absent from work, they received no pay. Although all the female workers in the company were casual workers, some had worked for as long as eight years by 2017 and these were mainly migrant women from land-dispossessed communities with no alternative livelihoods. Above all, the company defaulted in paying wages and often either delayed payment or paid less than the amount that was due. Some former workers recalled their experiences as follows:

> The supervisor would often give large areas for us to weed or harvest. The tasks were always very tedious. They gave us huge plots to weed in a day. We often spent so much time weeding. They kept their eyes on us and monitored us. We could not eat once we got in the yard. They called us at a specific time to eat and after that we could not eat again. Those were some of the things that exhausted some of us. It also angered us. They were treating us like slaves.[8]

> When the company first arrived, we were happy that work had finally come to our communities. Though they were not paying us any good wages, we were managing. But the work conditions were terrible. If you go to work today and as you know, we human beings are just like machines and can break down too. When you ask permission that you have a headache, they would give you a chit to go to the hospital at your own cost. They deducted the sick days from our pay. But it was the work that made us sick most of the time.[9]

The women's continuous casualisation meant that they could not benefit from any social security schemes. I agree with Ouma (2018) who argues that the employment and labour structures of capitalist enterprises are intentionally designed to create division among the workforce and to quash solidarity among workers since a unified workforce would pose a high risk to companies. In this instance, the few men recruited were permanent workers, often supervisors and administrative workers. Cassava peelers and harvesters had different working conditions. The peelers, mostly women, worked longer hours and received less pay than their male counterparts on farms. The differences in working conditions for men and women meant that organising for structural reforms in the company was quite unlikely.

The casualisation of the female workforce contravened section 75(1) of the country's Labour Act 2003 (Act 651) (Government of Ghana, 2003), which enjoins employers to take workers on a permanent basis once they have worked continuously for six months. However, the law has gaps which compromise the security of agricultural wage work. Section 73(1) of the same legislation states that "an employer may hire a worker on terms that suit the operations of the enterprise" (Government of Ghana, 2003: 27). This is an example of what Peck (2002) highlights as the state's role in providing legislative cover that promotes neoliberal capitalism and extractivism, which consume bodies in the name of job

creation, competitiveness and growth. Many agro-processing companies of this nature use the seasonality of crops to justify the pervasive casualisation of its workers. In Ghana, Torvikey (2018) shows that long term labour casualisation of female workers in the agro-processing formal sector has become a permanent feature of the employment structure in the country.

The company's operations also affected food security in the household and in communities. Men and women committed most of their land and labour to producing different crops. While women cultivated cassava, maize, okra, tomatoes, pepper, groundnuts, cowpeas and green leafy vegetables such as *gbomaa*[10], *ademee*[11] and *atoma*[12], men cultivated maize, rice, cocoa, yam and oil palm. Since a high number of the dispossessed were women, the household lost diverse food crops which it had produced on the land that the company acquired, thereby compromising the household's dietary diversity. Similarly, the fact that the company promoted monocropping meant that the women could not plant essential food crops on the household's outgrower farm. Even when the company asked farmers to intercrop cassava with soya to manage fertility of the soil, the women pointed out that besides taking too long to cook, soya foods were alien to the community. Soya food preparation therefore created new burdens on women's reproductive roles as it required more energy and labour.

Meanwhile, the industrial cassava variety itself was unsuitable for local food consumption. Women lost access to cassava for food which they usually traded in local markets. Income from cassava trading was partly used to purchase food that the household did not produce for itself (such as sugar, salt, spices, fish, meat and eggs) and energy for food preparation (charcoal, fuel wood, kerosene and matches). Land concentration and expansion by male outgrowers to meet outgrower production criteria and the company's acquisition also affected women's access to the commons, a source of essential food products and fuel wood. In general, the company's operations constituted an attack on all four pillars of food security—availability, accessibility, sustainability, and utilisation. Many of these ramifications of the company's production system informed the reasons for women's resistance to the project.

## Women's Resistance to the Extractivist Agricultural System

Two broad forms of resistance were discernible in the communities that hosted the industrial cassava company: evasive and confrontational forms. Both strategies were used simultaneously, depending on the actor and her particular concern. Land dispossession was the first issue around which women rallied, especially those from the secondary-indigenous community. They had to confront an internal power (landowners) and an external power (the company) and therefore used different strategies in each case. Due to the social and economic costs of openly confronting the traditional authority and landowners, the women engaged in dialogue, resorting to cultural and moral arguments to make demands. Framing their activist demands from the perspective of motherhood, women argued that their roles as mothers and social reproducers should be maintained through restoration of their access to land, which the dispossession had restricted. They needed the land to produce food for their children and to sustain themselves and the rest of the family.

Women from the secondary-indigenous community protested against the land acquisition and asked for new parcels of land to be allocated to them. They questioned the moral basis for the land sale and acquisition which threatened their livelihoods and community social cohesion. Rather surprisingly, even the dispossessed men whom I interviewed felt that they only had user rights to the land and not the allodial title; they therefore felt unable to question the land acquisition. The women in the secondary-indigenous community justified their right to use the land on the basis of their roles as social reproducers and mothers who needed to feed their families. The landowners listened and allocated new plots of land to them. However, the women realised that the allocated plots were waterlogged and unsuitable for producing root tuber crops. Other areas allocated to them, though fertile, were far from the community and also unsafe. Thus, the women could not use the land they obtained.

Since the women did not get adequate and suitable land from the landowners, they turned their anger towards the company which had dispossessed them. Here, they were more forthright and confrontational in their demands. In their own words, they made "noise" to drum home their demands. They mobilised and hounded company officials whenever the latter visited the communities. They openly demanded the return of their lands and verbally abused the company and

its officials. In addition, they occupied part of the company's 1,200ha vacant land and continued to cultivate it. The women also put pressure on the company to leave some of the land near the community as a buffer for food production. They were successful in pushing back the company and continued to cultivate the land that they reclaimed. The women detailed some of these confrontational resistance strategies and outcomes as follows:

> In the past, before the cassava company was established, we cultivated land freely and even chose where to cultivate which crop. Some crops are good for higher ground and others for marshy areas. We women in this community made noise and reminded the company that we needed to feed our families and therefore we needed land. If we had not done this, they would have cultivated even our residence.[13]

Some women who owned land participated in the contract farming scheme in their own right. However, they withdrew from it very early on due to restrictions on intercropping, the company's unfulfilled promises to supply labour for harvesting, questionable measuring standards, and low producer price. The women's withdrawal exemplifies an evasive form of resistance.

The few women who participated in the contract farming scheme in the initial stages believed that it would give them better incomes and also solve the tedious nature of local cassava marketing. As an act of defiance, during cultivation, some women mixed the company's preferred varieties with local ones which they could sell in the local market as a stopgap measure for poor pricing. A female outgrower summarised the general concerns about the industrial cassava production system:

> The company paid low prices for the cassava. I cultivated cassava on contract for the company in the past and it yielded well. When I harvested it, it was almost a bucket of a truck full and the company paid me GHS40 since they said it was not a full truck. Since then, I stopped cultivating for them. That was in 2007. I suffered. I suffered a lot. If I were to sell that cassava in individual homes in this community, I would have made so much money. Luckily for me, I mixed their variety with the local [*ankra* and *tuaka*] ones I used to cultivate. That was what saved me from debt.[14]

The outgrower above is referring to having planted local varieties of cassava at the time of cultivation, in addition to planting the company's preferred varieties.

Women who contributed their labour on household outgrower farms as a matter of conjugal duty withdrew their labour and concentrated instead on their own production. They realised the exploitative nature of the scheme, which did not guarantee an income commensurate with what they would earn if they produced and marketed the food-oriented variety. The women's boycott of the outgrower scheme and their subsequent return to autonomous agricultural production shows their consciousness of the food security and agroecological dimensions of the industrial cassava production system. A woman who participated in the outgrower scheme with her husband reiterated this concern:

> In this community, we eat what we produce. We only buy fish, salt and some ingredients. We used to cultivate cassava before the Agro Cassava Company Limited introduced us to the new variety. We were told not to intercrop with any other crop except cowpea, soya and groundnut. Meanwhile, those crops have their own problems. The new cassava variety is not suitable for the food we eat here. They told us that we could not eat the cassava we produced for them. At the time households were producing for the company, there was hunger in our communities. Households that had both husband and wife in the outgrower scheme were worse off. You could go to your own farm and yet you are hungry. Now, my household's food situation has improved because we stopped producing for the company. The company created initial poverty and if we were not to stop producing for it, we would have died from hunger.[15]

Some women used non-participation, desertion and absenteeism as strategies to confront the company's operations and labour exploitation. Other women, especially those from households with resources such as land to engage in autonomous production, did not take up work in the company. Some of them later recognised the exploitation that their colleagues were enduring but thought that women who took jobs in the company were doing so as a coping strategy to solve temporary financial problems. The following voices reiterate this position:

> I have never worked in that company. I can trade. I can also farm. Why should I go and work there? The women who worked there had specific problems. That is why they took those short-term jobs. They wanted to solve some financial problems with income they would earn from the company.[16]

> I worked there because my son was in the Teacher Training College then. At the end of the month, whatever I received, I sent some to him or used it to buy provisions for him so that he would not be hungry. I managed the little that remained for me. I was managing it until he completed school and I quit the work.[17]

Many women deserted the company due to the terrible working conditions. In the early years of the establishment of the company, many indigenous women took jobs in the company. However, many left and returned to their farming and trading activities as they considered the factory and company farm work to be exploitative and a waste of time. They found the structure of production problematic. The women who continued to work there used different strategies to show dissent. I visited the company one Saturday in March 2016. There was no-one at the shed where the women did the processing. The cassava that had been harvested that morning was heaped there. A company official complained, saying:

> This is how these women behave. Sometimes, especially on Saturday, they would fail to come to work, thereby shutting down production completely. When they come on Monday and we query them, they would come with all sorts of excuses. They would say they went for funerals, marriage and naming ceremonies. These women are undisciplined.[18]

The women used absenteeism to resist the exploitative capitalistic production system that did not pay adequate wages, paid irregularly, and had no social security and protection schemes for them. In the absence of these, they used their Saturdays to rest and to cater for traditional forms of social security which found expression in their attendance of social events.

The company felt the effect of the women's actions and responded accordingly. It expanded its own farms, abandoned the land size criteria and resorted to radio announcements to attract cassava producers in the region on the back of massive withdrawals from the outgrower scheme. It also started buying cassava of any quantity and variety from independent farmers. Here, one can say that the women's actions changed the company's stringent production strategies of insisting on monocropping, sourcing only particular varieties that were unsuitable for local food consumption, and only buying from outgrowers. Unlike Gyapong (2019) who argues that everyday forms of politics may not have big effects and therefore may not change the structure of production relations, I argue that the

aggregate effects of the women's actions resulted in a major restructuring of the company's production model.

The rationale for the women's actions—some collective, others individual—shows the resilience of traditional production systems which are anchored in sustaining livelihoods and the ecosystem. In general, the women found their production system more efficient and therefore doubted the new methods and technologies that the industrial cassava had introduced to farmers. One respondent summarised her feelings about the structure of industrial cassava production by saying dismissively, "Is it that Agro Industrial Cassava Company that will teach us how to cultivate cassava? What do they know about cassava production?"

## Conclusion

The social relations of production and the agrarian structure differentiated women's access to resources such as land. Therefore, the company's land acquisition affected them differently. Yet, opposition to the type of production which prioritised profit over sustaining livelihoods united the women's struggles. In the absence of strong social movements in Ghana's rural areas, strategies and responses to the extractive agricultural production system can be seen in different forms. The success of an agricultural project should depend on the level of involvement of farmers and their assessment of the ensuing benefits. In this work, I have shown that women's responses to industrial cassava production must be contextualised as a trajectory of both evasive and confrontational forms of resistance. This was a journey of fifteen years of unravelling and the people's discovery of the deceit in the type of production which they were coerced into accepting. I argue in this article that it was women who rescued the local economy from continuous subjugation to industrial agricultural production. Such production does not prioritise the environment and tried to create a pseudo-crop production specialisation in an area that has been known to produce multiple crops which secure livelihoods and food. The women fought against land dispossession and labour exploitation, both in the company and in the household, and against their general constraints in accessing reproductive and productive resources.

The women resisted the production of the industrial-type cassava through multiple actions. Dispossessed women questioned the moral basis of the land sale to the company. The women directed their anger at the traditional authorities

who sold the land, and asked for new plots of land to be allocated to them. The women also confronted the company by demanding that it leave a buffer for local food production. They succeeded in pushing the company back and subsequently occupied parts of the company's lands to produce cassava and other food crops. The women also resisted the exploitation of their labour as wage workers in the company. Many indigenous women were the first to quit work in the company due to the low pay, delayed payments and tedious work structure which prevented them from combining factory work with crop farming and trading. Migrant women, who formed the core of the workforce due to their lack of alternatives in the absence of land, used absenteeism to resist the factory-type production structure. It was common practice that on Saturdays all women would fail to go to work, as though it were choreographed, thereby halting production for the day. At the household level, the women boycotted the cassava contract farming and outgrower schemes by first refusing to participate and secondly, by withdrawing their labour from their husbands' contract farms.

The women were successful in getting land for permanent and temporary production. However, land occupation means their access to land is still insecure. Their strategies also caused a change in the way the company organised its production. The women's struggles to free their traditional production systems are linked to the embeddedness of reproduction, production and ecological concerns. The household is a site for constant struggles about conditions arising out of a household's relationship with capital. I posit that women's responses to changes in their agrarian landscape, although differentiated on the basis of their class and access to productive resources such as land and labour, should ultimately be seen as questioning the neoliberal development vehicle which encroached on their autonomous production and gave less than it took from them.

## Endnotes

1. A pseudonym.
2. The larger study, from which this article is drawn, went through the University of Ghana's ethical clearance procedures, which included seeking consent from participants to use their quotes. The interviews were conducted in the Ewe language, transcribed and translated into English.
3. In-depth interview, Dada Aliforsi, farmer/trader, secondary-indigenous community, 28 May 2017.
4. Female FGD, secondary-indigenous community, 2 June 2017.

5. Key Informant Interview, female traditional leader, secondary-indigenous community, 24 May 2017.
6. In-depth interview, Elinam, female, 30 years, married, farmer/trader, indigenous community, 1 May 2017.
7. Community Open Discussion, female participant, 26 years, company casual wage worker/farmer, 26 May 2017.
8. In-depth interview, Davi Elolo, 42 years old, migrant, married, former company wage worker, secondary-indigenous community, 20 March 2017.
9. Female FGD, secondary-indigenous community, 2 June 2017.
10. Jute mallow.
11. African eggplant.
12. Surinam spinach.
13. Female FGD, secondary-indigenous community, 2 June 2017.
14. In-depth interview, Dada Mercy, 65 years, widow, farmer/trader, indigene, indigenous community, 1 March 2017.
15. In-depth interview, female, Dada Fidelia, farmer-trader, migrant community, 28 May 2017.
16. In-depth interview, Dada Christina, migrant, farmer/trader, wife of an indigenous wealthy farmer, indigenous community, 22 May 2017.
17. In-depth interview, Dada Enyonam, widow, farmer/trader, indigene, indigenous community, 29 March 2017.
18. Onsite observation. Production Manager complaining about the women, March 2016.

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