Shifting Discourses of Vilification and the Taming of Unruly Mining Landscapes in Ghana

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Abstract

This paper explores the expulsion of >4,500 Chinese diggers and operators from Ghana's central gold mining areas during a series of raids and swoops enacted through military, immigration, and police and intelligence forces in 2013, arguably to conceal the state's own failure to sanitize and revitalize a stagnant and neglected artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASM) sector. I draw upon feminist social theory and political ecology to unravel processes of social exclusion that legitimated violent action against a social group rendered both invisible and wholly othered within a remarkably short period of time. The discursive production of less-than-human mining subjects – first the Ghanaian *galamsey* miners, then the Chinese operators – enables a highly politicized landscapes of power characterized by authoritative ordering of unruly mining spaces. The 'making' of demonized, unworthy Chinese miners epitomized the forceful disciplining of these spaces in the absence of more inclusive and genuine development policies. Observed processes of subject-making seem to propagate the sector's informality and perpetuate the distance from the state's idealized depiction of a responsible modern miner. The case study demonstrates that exclusion and exploitation of those targeted as not belonging nourishes elite capture and pervasive rent-seeking. Understanding the processes of subjection at work further suggests that better regulation of ASM in itself will be insufficient to move beyond the current impasse and support true partnerships and genuine politics of recognition and belonging.

1. INTRODUCTION

The artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sector in the global South is plagued by persistent informality. Governmental efforts to formalize and regulate millions of men and women miners without a license have by and large failed, even in countries like Ghana and Tanzania that have undergone waves of attempted regulations. Informality now seems to characterize the sector as a permanent rather than transitory feature (e.g. Banchirigah, 2008; Siegel & Veiga, 2009; Hilson, 2013; Verbrugge, 2015a). In Ghana, the tenacity of informal gold mining, involving an estimated one million artisanal and small-scale gold operators, driven by both poverty and opportunistic entrepreneurship, has been explained on the basis of ineffective policies and administrative inefficiencies (Banchirigah, 2008). In the case of Tanzania, the powerful and wealthier mining elite and those who embody the essence of an entrepreneurial miner have succeeded in the formalization process while the masses of ordinary diggers continue to operate in an ambiguous space between legitimacy and illegitimacy (Fisher, 2007). Hilson (2013, p.54) goes as far as explaining persistent inequality and the bureaucratic hurdles associated with obtaining a legal license throughout sub-Saharan Africa as purposefully ‘created’ by donors and host governments in order to prioritize foreign investment and large-scale mining projects at the expense of millions of unlicensed miners. Yet, persistent informality in ASM is not only the result of fiscal, legal, and administrative shortcomings, purposeful or not, but rather a structural impediment that results from a combination of exclusion and exploitation and serves the interests of the sector’s dominant strata, as exposed for instance in the case of the Philippines (Verbrugge, 2015a).

Social exclusion, marginalization, and uneven power relations are pervasive features of informal mining. Social exclusion, as defined by Beall and Piron (2005), refers to ‘a process and a state that prevents individuals or groups from full participation in social, economic and political life and from asserting their rights; it derives from exclusionary relationships’ (cited in Fisher, 2007, p. 738). In ASM, such exclusion is most visible through the undifferentiated stereotyping of artisanal miners as social and environmental criminals enmeshed in spheres of illegality (e.g. Hilson & Potter, 2003; Fisher, 2007; Tschakert & Singha, 2007; Hilson, 2013). In Ghana, informal and unregistered artisanal and small-scale miners, known and branded as *galamsey* operators (Armah *et al.*, 2013), have been repeatedly accused of pilfering gold, disturbing and degrading landscapes without environmental rehabilitation, disrupting social life due to drug and alcohol usage and prostitutes, and contributing to the militarization and influx of fire arms into the mining sector. In public and policy discourses and in the media, an anti-*galamsey* rhetoric portrays these unregistered local miners typically as ‘threat’, ‘menace’, ‘headache’, and ‘reckless environmental polluters’, requiring a ‘lasting solution’ (Tschakert, 2009; Hilson, 2013). In such socio-cultural narratives (Roe, 1991; Adger *et al.*, 2001), *galamsey* miners are assigned the role of ‘villains’ whereas the police and military forces are seen as heroes and defrauded farmers and concession holders as victims.

This aim of this article is to shed light on one aspect of the complex and entangled processes of social exclusion that, I argue, plays a fundamental role in perpetuating informality in the ASM sector—shifting discourses of vilification based on dynamic identity constructions. This particular aspect mirrors one of the three dimensions of social exclusion proposed by Gore (1994) for sub-Saharan Africa and employed by Fisher (2007) in the case of artisanal mining in

Tanzania, namely unequal power relations between miners and elites and processes of subordination along the lines of social identity (the other two being exclusion from access to and rights over mineral resources, and exclusion from decision making and governance structures). Fisher (ibid) focuses largely on the multiple and more or less subtle ways particular social groups are disadvantaged in or subordinated through labor relations in ASM, for instance in patron-client relations, specifically women and children. She argues that a too narrow focus on structural and legal exclusion risks obscuring pervasive and exploitative power differentials between mining elites, claim holders, pit owners, and the masses of mobile yet seemingly invisible diggers. Along similar lines, Verbrugge (2015a) highlights the need to recognize the heterogeneity of miners in informal sector activities, including external financiers, entrepreneurs, armed rent-seekers, as well as the role of the state, and to more explicitly reveal processes of differentiation, subordination, and exploitation.

This article contributes to a small body of literature on the role of identity construction and subject-making processes as part of subordination in the ASM sector as well as to the broader discussion of the political ecology and forms of contestation in natural resource exploitation. Using Ghana as a case study, this contribution examines how discourses of vilification shifted within just a couple of years from ostracized *galamsey* miners to Chinese operators, in a country that is otherwise known for its notable track record of good governance in comparison to other nations on the African continent. At the core of Ghana's long-standing anti-*galamsey* rhetoric was an institutionalized practice of misrecognition toward a form of livelihood that, albeit officially promoted in governmental poverty reduction plans, was repeatedly insulted, devaluated, and 'othered' as deficient, inferior, illegitimate, and dangerous (Tschakert, 2009).

Yet, since the early 2000s, large numbers of Chinese small- and medium-scale operators (~50,000) penetrating the country's ASM sector have replaced the local diggers as the vilified group at the bottom of the social pecking order that stereotyped the deviant Other. In 2013, swoops and raids against Chinese operators, enacted by military, immigration, police, and intelligence forces, ended with the expulsion of >4,500 miners, the largest repatriation effort of a single nationality in Ghana's history.

This particular demonstration of state power has been described as 'extremely pedestrian' and 'a façade aimed at pacifying an agitated public' (Hilson *et al.*, 2014, p. 203). Although the state and the media may well have fabricated and endorsed a shifting discourse of vilification in order to deflect attention from years of disappointing lip service to effectively regulate and support the artisanal and small-scale mining sector, such an interpretation overlooks the discursive mechanisms and subject-making processes that were at play, reflective of Gore's (1994) second dimension of social exclusion. I argue that such a superficial interpretation of the state's response to dealing with the mushrooming Chinese presence and growing influence in Ghana's ASM sector obscures the power dynamics that made this spectacle performance and enactment of social exclusion possible. It also obscures the role that the expulsion may have played in reproducing informality and fortifying the power hierarchies that favor the status quo.

Given the highly volatile environment in Ghana's ASM areas and the inherent difficulties and bodily risks of collecting primary data on a violent expulsion, this article approaches the complexity of social exclusion from a theoretical perspective, supported by observations and unstructured conversations with Ghanaian colleagues and collaborators as part of annual

fieldwork in the areas around Dunkwa-on-Offin, District capital of Upper Denkyira in Central Region. This fieldwork was part of a 2010-2015 research project entitled ‘reBUild’ on land fragmentation through ASM and the emergence of an environmentally-induced skin disease. During that time, the team had ample opportunity to observe and discuss the growing influx of Chinese miners with rural communities partnering on the reBUild project. By and large, communities affected by Buruli ulcer, the skin disease under investigation, depicted Chinese miners as environmental and social criminals who transformed community territory into moon-like landscapes prone to disease, even though Chinese mining operations had become an important employment opportunity for local miners lacking starting capital or equipment themselves. The research team happened to be in Dunkwa during the June 2013 raids and witnessed the round-up of intimidated Chinese men and women at one of the collection points. We also witnessed a Chinese male suspect being chased by Ghanaian military on the grounds of the Dunkwa High School, and Chinese hats ducking quickly around mining sites when the research pick-up trucks drove by. Our nightly debriefings added our own subject-making discourse to those propagated in the villages, by governmental officials, and the media.

The following account is an attempt to make sense of an unusually violent expression of social ordering in Ghana’s core ASM landscapes. Rather than conducting interviews with mining subjects during or even after a time of authoritative state ruling, I use employ feminist social theory and political ecology to unravel the subject-making processes that appear to have legitimated this violent action against a social group that was rendered both invisible and wholly othered within a remarkably short period of time. My aim is twofold. First, I explain how the government, the media, and the public discursively produced ‘less-than-human’ Chinese miners,

subjecting them to distinct processes of social exclusion. To complement existing scholarship on power relations and social identity as drivers of social exclusion (e.g. Fisher, 2007), I draw upon feminist social theorists to demonstrate how misrecognition, status injury, and the construction of less-than-humanness paved the ground for violent evictions. Second, I illustrate how such ‘subjection in action’ occurred in highly politicized landscapes of power, not just at the level of discourses. I rely on work by (feminist) political ecologists on subject formation and subjectivities and describe how the expulsion of the Chinese miners not only epitomized the forceful and urgent ‘taming’ of unruly mining spaces through authoritative ordering but also boosted the state’s vested interests in perpetuating informality in the ASM sector.

I construct the paper’s key arguments throughout six main sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 provides a snapshot of discursive media depiction of the 2013 raids and mounting criminalization in Ghana’s ASM sector as well as a brief overview of the origin of Chinese miners in Ghana. In Section 3, the paper discusses Ghana’s stagnant ASM sector and opportunistic ASM-China business partnerships, against the backdrop of larger, political economic Africa-China relations. In Section 4, I explore the dynamics of shifting discourses of vilification to explain the rather unexpected twist in the ostracizing of miners. In Section 5, I examine the processes of subject making and the taming of ‘unruly’ mining landscapes to expose the aggressive use of authoritative power in the context of the Chinese expulsion. I end with highlighting the value of a feminist political ecology lens for understanding violence and subject formation in Ghana’s mining sector, particularly with respect to avoiding naïve and unrealistic expectations for formalization of the ASM sector and more inclusive mining policies.

2. THE CONSTRUCTION OF CHINESE MINERS IN THE MEDIA

2.1. The 2013 Raids and Mounting Criminalization

In October 2012, Ghana's President John Dramani Mahama ordered a special task force to crack down on illegal gold miners, especially foreign illegal miners, and to pursue local citizens and governmental officials involved in illegal activities. On May 14, 2013, this task force was launched, resulting in a series of raids and swoops enacted through a combination of military, immigration, and police and intelligence forces (e.g. Dong, 2013; Hall, 2013; Nossiter and Feng, 2013). The crackdown targeted mainly Chinese citizens mining illicitly in Ghana, although the taskforce also hunted down Chinese nationals in restaurants, hotels, and private residences, confiscating gold, money, guns, and valuables.

Large international media coverage followed. The particular subject making in the media revealed overtly negative depictions towards the Chinese as an out-group or 'the other', perpetuating stereotypes of invaders, offenders, and perpetrators, also analyzed by Abid *et al.* (2013). The Guardian (Hirsch, 2013) showed in a documentary massive excavations, the use of toxic chemicals to extract the gold (typically mercury), the contamination of lakes and rivers, human rights violations, and widespread use of AK-47 rifles on mining sites. Al Jazeera reported on the Ghana Minerals Commission's intent to flush out all illegal miners in the country (Callahan, 2013). The Japan Times (AFP-JIJI, 2013) reported of 'heavy-handedness and indiscriminate arrests' by Ghana's security forces in landscapes 'pockmarked' from mining pits and 'rivers turning into brown sludge', similarly to the New York Times describing a

‘countryside dotted with holes’ (Nossiter & Feng, 2013). Some of the Ghanaian media, amplifying local resentment, depicted Chinese gold diggers as ex-cons responsible for armed gangs and lootings (e.g. VibeGhana, 2013). Such broad-sweeping stereotyping seemed to pursue one overarching goal—the devaluation of foreign miners that infringed on local livelihoods and resources, justifying the actions of an authoritative government under pressure.

2.2. Origin of the ‘Shanglin Gangs’

The Chinese media appeared more nuanced, avoiding a homogenizing construction of ‘Chinese miners’ and counteracting essentializing forms of criminalization. Several reports (Dong, 2013; Jiao, 2013; Hall, 2013; Kane, 2013; Huifeng, 2013; Song, 2013; Yin-chung, 2013) focused on miners from a particular province in China – Shanglin County in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, allegedly China’s ‘gold capital’, allegedly amounting to up to 50,000 in numbers and hence labelled the ‘Shanglin Gang’. These miners and prospectors are said to encapsulate the Chinese ‘gold rush’ that began in 2005 when gold prices started to climb, with Ghana as their preferred destination in Africa. Very few controversies in other countries on the continent had received prior attention, including a controversial shooting at a coal mine in Zambia (Sautman & Hairong, 2014).

In the emerging counter-discourse, Shanglin miners were praised for their gold panning techniques, high-powered sand-pumping machines to dredge alluvial gold, and other mining

equipment (e.g. excavators). Capital from family savings, bank loans, and *guanxi* (the social collateral binding personal and business ties in China) were cited to facilitate the formation of small companies with operating funds of ~US\$500,000 (Jiao, 2013; Levin, 2013). Although some close-knit community networks morphed into ‘semi-legal brokerage by intermediaries’ once operating on Africa ground (Maegher, 2012, cited in Lampert & Mohan 2014, p. 14), the Shanglin capital served as a crucial injection into the moribund ASM sector in Ghana, similar to external mining financiers observed elsewhere (Verbrugge, 2015a). Some Chinese mining entrepreneurs were portrayed as hard working and fortuitous, with >10 million yuan (US\$1.57 million) from operations in Ghana and individual daily returns as high as 100,000 yuan (US\$15,700) (Yin-chung, 2013) while others were pictured as marked by debt and violence.

Officially, Ghana’s Minerals and Mining Act from 2006 prohibits non-Ghanaians to engage in artisanal small-scale mining (ASM), defined as mining an area of <25 acres. Yet, as an unnamed owner of a gold mine in Ghana explained: ‘As long as you enter into an agreement with Ghanaian landowners, you can mine. It’s their land and their mining permit. I’m just helping him mine’ (Song, 2013). The Minerals and Mining Act does allow local people to hire foreign staff, a legal loophole that became extensively exploited. A significant number of Chinese miners, despite having obtained tourist visas upon arrival, were however reported to having remained in the country illegally, or bribing immigration officers for extending their visas (Jiao, 2013).

3. THE PERSISTENT INFORMALITY IN GHANA'S GOLD MINING SECTOR

The evolution of contentious, discriminating, and vilifying discourses and their often uncritical amplification that led to the 2013 raids and expulsion can be seen as one of the most recent articulations of political-economic processes that expose the lingering impacts of structural adjustment programs, neoliberal development reforms, and foreign investments in Ghana since the 1970s; they are well described elsewhere (e.g. Hilson & Potter, 2005; Hilson, 2013; Hilson & McQuilken, 2014). The confluence of two distinct yet parallel recent trajectories of development – Ghana's stagnant ASM sector plagued by persistent informality and Ghana-China opportunistic ASM business partnerships – enabled an unprecedented proliferation of foreigners in the country's moribund ASM operations, exploiting an ambiguous institutional and legal space that can be traced back to decentralization efforts since the 1990s.

The first trajectory of economic development identifies the explosion of foreigners, particularly those of Chinese origin, in Ghana's ASM sector as going hand in hand with the sector's continued stagnation. China's increasing donor presence, infrastructural programs, and dispatching of thousands of Chinese laborers under Beijing's national Going Out policy that propagates outward investment and resource extraction overseas (e.g. Friedberg, 2006; Cardenal & Araújo, 2014) has undoubtedly made entry into the country easier. Nonetheless, a lingering grievance transcends both the public and scholarly discourse suggesting that the Ghanaian government, through ineffective mining policies, has betrayed artisanal and informal mining citizens and robbed them of their right to pursue sustainable livelihoods and development. In the

age of ‘new extractivism’ through large-scale, corporal mining (Ayelazuno, 2014), the state allegedly failed to provide an appropriate regulatory apparatus to support artisanal gold diggers desperately needing assistance. Ghana’s government is accused of having repeatedly ignored the needs of its own small-scale mining operators (Hilson *et al.*, 2014). Inadequate policies and bureaucratic and economic hurdles are seen not only as preventing artisanal operators from entering processes of formalization but also as prolonging the attractiveness of informality and illegality (Banchirigah, 2008; Hilson, 2002; Tschakert & Singha, 2007; Hilson, 2013), driving miners underground and exacerbating social and environmental impacts. Ghana’s ASM sector in employs >1 million people with only 10% of all ASM operators carry a license (Hirons, 2014a).

It is no surprise that, against the backdrop of seemingly deliberate policy marginalization and the perpetual informality of the sector, despite pledges to the contrary in Ghana’s first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (Hilson & McQuilken, 2014, p. 105), *galamsey* operators would increasingly ‘reach out’ to other financiers, mostly foreigners (Hilson *et al.*, 2014, p. 293). Given their booming service companies, the Chinese positioned themselves as most suitable business partners, filling the void left behind by unfavorable mining policies and fiscal incentives biased toward large-scale operations. Compared to small-scale mining offices and other official state support, Chinese operators more readily provided Ghanaian artisanal diggers immediate access to equipment, start-up funds, and land to be mined. Such infusion of external capital and skills as well as new labor relations, as Verbrugge (2015a) argues, leads not only to a more pronounced differentiation in the sector but also to more space for exploitation and continued informality.

The second trajectory, paralleling the first, reveals hitherto non-existent business partnerships for individual Chinese entrepreneurs to engage in Ghana's *galamsey* sector. Ghana's Minerals Commission allegedly sent licensed local operators to China to acquire enhanced expertise in building mining equipment; this strategy, however, backfired as it provided those sent with ample opportunity to seek out potential Chinese business partners, many of whom then kick-started their own mining activities on Ghanaian ground via various forms of service support, a legal act, and expanded from there (Hilson *et al.*, 2014). Armah and colleagues (2013) draw attention to the peculiar 'metamorphosis' of medium- and large-scale Chinese and other foreign investors (e.g. Indians) into artisanal operators, enabled by complicit Ghanaian citizens who sold or transferred their mining license or partnered up with these foreigners, thereby circumventing the Minerals and Mining Act.

Such 'metamorphosis', following Fisher's (2007) logic, was made possible by an institutional ambiguity between legality and illegality that can be seen as the unintentional result of state efforts to decentralize and formalize Ghana's mining sector. Decentralization, understood here as "the transfer of power from the central government to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy" (Larson & Ribot, 2004, p. 3), has the potential to increase participation of a broader range of stakeholders and render decision-making processes over resource access and profit sharing more inclusive. Yet, as shown in a variety of resource contexts in general (e.g. Peluso, 2007) and in mineral resource governance in specific (e.g. Verbrugge, 2015b), decentralization has repeatedly produced unstable coalitions of actors — including governmental officials, small-scale operators, corporate mining enterprises, traditional leaders, and armed groups — and pervasive uncertainties pertaining to administrative laws and

rules and enforcement. In a climate of uncertainty and ambiguity with an abundance of competing claims to resource wealth, highly uneven processes of negotiation emerge from the combination of elite capture, volatile socio-legal constellations, coercive arrangements, and heightened resource conflict. In Ghana, high prices on the global gold market (>US\$1,800 an ounce in October 2012 compared to US\$300 ten years earlier), dysfunctional and under-resourced small-scale mining offices, inconsistent mining and land tenure laws between the state and customary institutions, lack of enforcement of rules, licenses, and visa status, combined with the active support and sponsoring from Ghana's chiefs or supreme traditional rulers (Hilson *et al.*, 2014) all encouraged illegitimate actions and allowed Chinese operators to permeate the ASM sector.

4. SHIFTING DISCOURSES OF VILIFICATION

Against the backdrop of these concurrent economic trajectories and ambiguous spaces, tensions and conflict inevitably emerge, foreshadowing new constellations for social exclusion. In the case of Ghana's raids and swoops, it could be argued that race as the prime social identity marker may have been the main driver of subordination. Predominantly negative racialized generalities and stereotypes about 'the Chinese' are not new in Africa, with numerous examples stemming from working relations in urban areas, especially trading, and resource extraction. These stereotypes range from hard-working, diligent, and high physical strength to cunning, cruel, deviant, corrupt, callous, and disregard for human life as key axioms of anti-Chinese racism (Harris, 2006; Sautman & Hairong, 2014; Wang & Elliot, 2014). Chinese projects in Africa have

been portrayed as ‘elitist and enclaved, with limited local consultation’ (Mohan, 2013a, p. v), even if some of these depictions resemble ‘flattened caricatures of rapacious Chinese, prone to “neo-colonialism”’ (Chari, 2015, p. 83). Rupp (2008) and Monson and Rupp (2013), however, remind us that such social expectations of the Chinese ‘other’ are rarely fixed but rather actively shaped and constantly in flux. The Chinese population in Ghana, in urban and rural areas, is also fragmented and in flux, with divisions along the lines of class and geographic origin (Ho, 2008). Nonetheless, racialized identities, even if understood as dynamic and overlaid with class and ethnicity, are insufficient to explain the mounting aggression toward Chinese miners.

In an effort to disentangle the multiple processes of social exclusion, following Fisher (2007) and Gore (1994), I however do not focus on social identity *per se* (in this case race) but on the construction of identities—or more precisely subjectivities—of Chinese miners through public, governmental, and media discourse. Employing feminist social theory and (feminist) political ecology, I demonstrate that distinct subject-making processes were at work that legitimized violent action against a social group rendered both invisible and wholly othered within less than five years. This ‘subjection in action’ through the portrayal of the Chinese as deviant Others occurred in highly politicized landscapes of power in which authoritative ordering of unruly mining spaces and their subjects led to a new discursive structuring of governable mining bodies. In other words, I argue that the state, its institutions and political representations in the ministries, mining elites, and armed-rent seekers, including the former as well as immigration officers, the military, and the police force, did not vilify and expel Chinese miners because of their racial otherness but because the act of ‘constructing’ these foreign miners as devious and criminal subjects to be governed (and punished) allowed the state to reveal and condemn the

informality and illegality of the ASM sector, without exposing its own complicity and vested interests in maintaining the status quo, the very informality it so visibly and forcefully denounced. Persistent informality is in fact dependent on the complicity of the state (Verbrugge, 2015a).

As reflected in media accounts, in the immediate aftermath of the 2013 crackdown on foreign mining operators, the new governmental discourse swiftly resurrected artisanal gold mining as the exclusive domain of small-scale Ghanaian miners, entitled to pursue a century-old and legitimate livelihood. President Mahama himself declared the need to bring ‘sanity’ to the mining sector (Hirsch, 2013), backed by other administrative voices to support sustainable small-scale mining and improve infrastructure (Hall, 2013), reminding the public of the numerous promises to the ASM sector. It appears that the ‘landed moral economy’ (Neumann, 1998, p. 11), the traditional and long-established right to mine the land, previously denied to artisanal and *galamsey* operators by way of their portrayal as socially deviant and environmental criminals, was all of a sudden resuscitated, albeit in rather unexpected ways. Even the hitherto ‘contaminated identities’ of local artisanal miners (Tschakert & Singha, 2007) seemed restored, at least temporarily, although at the expense of other diggers.

4.1. Faces of Oppression

In order to expose the *processes* of social exclusion and what I call ‘subjection in action’—the active *making* of subordinated mining subjects—I start with Iris Marion Young’s (2009)

conceptualization of social groups to explain how particular types of oppression came to work in the ostracizing of Chinese miners. Young defines a social group as ‘a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life’ (p.57). Such ‘groups are an expression of social relations; a group exists only in relation to at least one other group’ (p.57). In the case of Ghana’s mining sector, the Chinese miners were juxtaposed to local ASM operators who, previously, had fallen prey to the exact same ostracizing and criminalizing discourse. Young stresses how one is *made*, by others, part of a group, even if social groups are rarely homogenous but rather fluid, coming into being and fading away. Such heterogeneity is certainly the case in Ghana’s ASM sector that assembles a wide variety of actors (Hirons, 2014a). It includes school drop-outs, economically-deprived female workers on sluices, taxi drivers from the country’s capital, migrant miners from the north and neighboring states, as well as undeniable criminal elements. The same holds true for Chinese citizens in and around mining sites – miners, hotel managers, contractors, owners of Chinese fast food stalls, cell phone vendors, and dancers. Being made part of a social group, however, collapses such differentiation.

Young (2009) reminds us that prejudice against and stereotyping of members of a group in itself does not necessarily lead to animosity and exclusion. Instead, particular processes of oppression are at work that can lead to exclusion. She defines oppression as ‘structural phenomena that immobilize or diminish a group’ (57), built into the everyday practices of society. Oppression, to Young (ibid), reveals itself through five distinct yet related faces: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. To further advance Fisher’s (2007) and Verbrugge’s (2015) exclusion argument in the ASM sector, already encompassing Young’s first three faces, I focus here on her fourth and fifth type, respectively. Being subjected to cultural

imperialism, she states, ‘means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other’ (Young, 2009, p.66). This results in a paradoxical outcome – being marked out as the stereotyped, deviant Other and yet rendered invisible (p.67). Translated to the expulsion of Chinese, the hypervisibility of the demonized foreign operators on site, in the mining towns, and in the media went hand in hand with the erasure of their very mundane socio-economic and basic livelihood aspirations—make a living, save money, return home, and sustain a family, as a result of being othered defined by the dominant group as ‘not normal’.

Processes of devaluation, delegitimization, and criminalization not only highlight differences from the accepted or idealized norm – in the case of ASM in Ghana entrepreneurial small-scale mining that promotes local livelihoods and contributes to poverty reduction – but also establish a hierarchy of differences in a distinct social pecking order (Henderson and Waterstone, 2009). The discursive portrayal of the ‘environmentally and socially disruptive Chinese miners that don’t belong’ moved their entire social group to the very bottom of this pecking order, thereby replacing local *galamsey* miners as the most devalued group. Aspects associated with *galamsey* operators such as mercury pollution and encroachment on concession land that had previously been used to discredit and ostracize them were all of a sudden considered comparatively *better*, more desirable, than aspects associated with the social group of ‘the Chinese’ living in and around mining towns. As a consequence, Ghana’s policy makers, media outlets, and the society at large found it morally acceptable to re-establish their own fellow citizens, however poorly they had been considered before. This was possible because a new and easy-to-single-out culprit

for environmental destruction, economic losses, mismanagement, and persistent informality in the ASM sector was found.

Moreover, drawing upon Young's last type of oppression, violence, I argue that the aggressive crack-down on and expulsion of Chinese and other foreign illegal operators was legitimized as a matter of *justice*. Violence, in this sense, is designed to create fear, cultivated by an experience of 'random, unprovoked attacks on [...] persons or property, which have no motive but to damage, humiliate, or destroy the person' (p.68). The 'heavy-handedness and indiscriminate arrests' by Ghana's security forces (The Japan Times, July 21), the aggression and shaming displayed during the May/June swoops, and the violent raidings and killings by bandits roaming Chinese mining sites all vividly illustrate how violence against the Chinese social group was made 'possible and even acceptable' (Young, 2009, p. 68). Politicians, governmental officials, Ghanaian miners, rural communities, and the media endorsed this violence, given the urgency and pervasiveness of the sector's dilemma and the desire to locate a new, easy target.

4.2. Misrecognition and Status Subordination

Another way to illustrate 'subjection in action' is through the lens of subordination and misrecognition, as proposed by Nancy Fraser (2009), similar to Gore's (1994) argument that exclusionary practices operate through the subordination of certain people. The point here is that the Chinese miners did not warrant exclusion because of some pre-defined inferior social identity category; rather they suffered exclusion because they were made unworthy of recognition. Fraser

(2009) explains the process of ‘status subordination’, a particular type of subordination that leads to misrecognition. She defines the latter as the lack of recognition as a question of damaged or denied social status – as the production of a ‘category of despised people who incur economic disadvantages as a by-product’ (75). She claims:

Misrecognition, accordingly, does not mean the depreciation and deformation of group identity, but social subordination — in the sense of being prevented from participating as a peer in social life.... To be misrecognized, accordingly, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down upon or devalued in others’ attitudes, beliefs or representations. It is rather to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem (113-114).

Applying this notion of status subordination and misrecognition to the expulsion of >4,500 Chinese miners over just a couple of months, the Chinese were vilified not, or certainly not exclusively, due to racial stereotyping or simplified representations of an ambivalent or disliked ‘other’. They were vilified so convincingly because their growing influence coupled with destructive mining, allegedly exceeding those previously ascribed to *galamsey* miners, served as the perfect excuse to the state apparatus for declaring the whole social group as unworthy, inferior, and wholly ‘other’ while concealing its own failure to sanitize and revitalize the ASM sector. This vilification also served to demonstrate (or feign) decisive state action, even at the risk of exposing some of its high-ranked officials’ complicity. In other words, at the time of the raids, the discourse demanded that ‘the Chinese’ warranted this form of exclusion via this

particular fabrication of subordination, as unworthy partners in the social interactions defining mining business.

Social exclusion entails one last aspect that applies to the process of scapegoating, the shifting of blame onto the Chinese miners. It is the process of dehumanizing, the making of ‘less-than-human’ that, I argue, indiscriminately legitimized the extent of the 2013 anti-Chinese raids. Natasha Marhja’s (2013) understands ‘human’ as a fundamentally exclusionary category. She argues that morally-relevant difference not only determines every person’s place in a specific social hierarchy but inevitably dehumanizes others – certain individuals, often women, minority groups, and individuals of other dimensions of marginalization. Through exclusion, some humans are seen as more human than others while others still are considered not-fully-human or, in Fraser’s terms, less than a full partner in social interactions. Emerging axes of exclusion and the unequal power relations that generate or perpetuate them can be quite visible and at times well concealed. In the case of the Chinese expulsion, visibility of the raids coincided perfectly well with the manufactured invisibility of the livelihoods of the Chinese miners as an oppressed group. Judith Butler’s (2004: 2) description of ‘humanness,’ or lack thereof, reveals the dehumanizing element that purportedly justified violent action at the time of the raids:

Sometimes the very terms that confer ‘humanness’ on some individuals are those that deprive certain other individuals of the possibility of achieving that status, producing a differential between the human and the less-than-human.... Certain humans are recognised as less than human, and that form of qualified recognition does not lead to a viable life. Certain humans are not recognised as human at all, and that leads to yet another order of unliveable life.

To summarize, I argue that the processes of social exclusion in the case of the wretched Chinese miners in Ghana were devaluation, misrecognition, subordination, and dehumanization, as a whole social group, irrespective of their liability. These processes, fueled by the state and the media and propagated by ordinary people in mining communities, rather than their identity *per se*, positioned the Chinese at the bottom of the hierarchical pecking order. They actively subjected the Chinese to the image of a criminal element, wrecking the country's environment and upsetting the social order. They depicted them as unworthy of respect or esteem, dehumanized, and wholly 'other'. It is precisely this construction of Chinese miners as inferior and less-than-human, in contrast to the hitherto vilified *galamsey* miners, that made violence, the ultimate form of oppression, acceptable, as witnessed in the raids, brutal beatings, and human rights abuses.

5. FRAGMENTATION, SUBJECT FORMATION, AND THE TAMING OF UNRULY SPACES

5.1. *Fragmented Authoritative Ordering and Violence*

Processes of social exclusion, shifting discourses of vilification, and the above described 'subjection in action' in Ghana's artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASM) sector do not occur in a spatial vacuum. Rather, they occur in highly politicized landscapes of power and profits. Authoritative ordering of mining spaces that have become 'unruly' (poorly

disciplined in the Foucauldian sense of governmentality) not only creates mining bodies and subjects to be governed; it also creates an illusion of hegemony over otherwise messy, dysfunctional, corrupt, and conflict-ridden resource-rich contexts in which elite capture is pervasive (Fisher, 2007) and the state a complicit actor (Verbrugge, 2015a).

Attention to such politicized territorialities of resource access and exclusion is not new. Political ecologists have been examining spaces in which categories of subjects are configured as part of a productive process around a valuable resource. Michael Watts (2004), in the context Nigeria, describes how the complex politics of oil configures specific extractive enclaves in which communities are imagined, territorialized, identified, and ruled. Corporations, traditional chieftainships, militant youth organizations, security forces, ethnic groupings, local and regional state institutions, and the nation-state itself intersect, compete, and bond. Examining such intersections and complicities, Watts suggests that the emerging forms of rule and identity within constantly reconfiguring communities (of class as well as belonging and difference) are often ‘fragmented, unruly, and violent’ (2004, p. 195). In the Niger Delta, accumulation by dispossession has created increasingly unimaginable governable spaces in which violence produces and reproduces subjects and subjectivities. Along similar lines, Verbrugge (2015b) describes mineral resource conflicts in the Philippines where uncoordinated efforts to regulate resource governance has created volatile arrangements, shifting patronage networks, violent confrontations, and mutual entanglements. The latter bring together, often as unlikely bedfellows, ASM operators, local politicians, ethnic entrepreneurs, mining financiers, royalty-seeking land owners and armed rent-seekers, at the expense of a large labor force of excluded diggers.

In Ghana's ASM sector, decentralization in the 1990s also contributed to the fragmentation of rent-seeking authoritative power, including formal and informal engagements by district assemblies, ambiguous involvement of traditional chiefs, often poorly funded small-scale miners' associations, and guileful entrepreneurs, compounded by the continuous illegality of the sector (Hirons, 2014b). The 2013 raids, capitalizing on the unruliness and ambiguity of the informal mining landscape, can be interpreted as an authoritative attempt by the state to reassert itself by disciplining and taming the most 'othered' and demonized bodies of a dysfunctional mining sector. The violent actions during the raids can also be seen as an expression of the fragmented authority's reaction to perceived threats from the growing Chinese influence, upsetting the socio-political order enshrined in a simplistic *galamsey*-state binary where the former were regarded as criminals and the latter as agents of democratic state rule. The state, of course, needs to be understood as a punctuated, vertically diverse entity with "no institutional fixity" (Trouillot, 2001 cited in Verbrugge, 2015c), including complicit politicians and police on the ground. The persistence of the sector's informality, even if directly linked to failed and exclusionary mining policies, enables and justifies the use of violence, even if only to conceal more complex political entanglements with Chinese operators, abuse of authoritative power, and pervasive corruption.

5.2 Subject Formation

‘Subjection in action’—the active *making* of subordinated subjects—constitutes a crucial component in Ghana’s taming of unruly mining landscapes as it exploits the fluidity of relations of inequality, in the interest of the most powerful constituents. Feminist geographers and feminist political ecologists have highlighted the vital role of power, knowledge, difference, and subjectivities in the production of inequalities. Understanding how subject formation occurs requires the acknowledgment of several dimensions of power and difference (e.g. Elmhirst, 2011; Coddington, 2015); focusing on just one dimension — for instance racialized Chinese miners in Ghana’s gold mining — overlooks how and when these dimensions intersect to construct domination and subordination. As Donna Haraway (1994, p. 7) pointed out early on, people are not simply marked by race or gender or other elements of identity, but by processes and practices that produce ‘bodies in the making’. The value added from employing a feminist political ecology lens to the case of social exclusion and expulsion of Chinese miners by Ghana’s governmental forces lies in the explicit attention to processes of subject formation that allow us to comprehend how and why unruly mining landscapes are tamed, and to whose benefit. No scholarly work exists so far that examines such bodies in the making or the subjectivities of miners in territorialities of resource extraction, particularly the ‘making’ of ‘the *galamsey* miners’ and subsequently ‘the Chinese miners’ in authoritative efforts to control and allegedly bring order to these ambiguous spaces. Hilson *et al.* (2014, p. 292) view the growing presence of Chinese miners in Ghana’s ASM sector as ‘the latest “expression” of the sector’s informality.’ Yet, they fail to unravel how subject formation further strengthens authoritative ruling and perpetuate informality in a sector that is plagued with inefficiency, corruption, and conflict.

A glimpse into other resource sectors, historic and contemporary, allows us to better understand the significance of producing and subsequently excluding ‘the Chinese miners’ as a vilified group in Ghana’s resource contestation. Throughout these examples, it becomes evident how particular authorities ‘seek to regulate peoples’ access to resources, providing recognition and legitimacy to some, whilst excluding and criminalizing others’ (Elmhirst, 2011, p. 173). For instance, Peluso and Vandergeest (2001) described how state power and hegemonic practices in territories of rubber production in Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia determined which human and non-human species belonged or ought to be disciplined and which practices became criminalized. There, subject-making processes and the reconfiguration of ethnic and racialized identities coupled with violence established ‘rightful’ owners of land and trees while erasing other, identity-based claims (Peluso, 2009). Nightingale, assessing subject formation in Nepal’s forest sector (2006, 2011) and Scotland’s in-shore fisheries through a post-structural lens, uses the concept of subjectivities to denote a process that simultaneously disciplines certain groups of people through discourses and practices and creates social inequalities through differentiation and construction of hierarchies. Forms of authoritative power *make* a subject, and hence actively produce caste, ethnicity, village users, fishermen, forest officials (and by extensions artisanal miners) in multiple, dynamic, and at times paradoxical ways (Nightingale & Ojha, 2013).

Subject formation is always messy and contradictory. In the case of Ghana’s resource extraction, it would be both simplistic and misleading to assume a neat dualistic mining economy, separated into informal ASM and well-regulated medium- and large-scale operations, with distinct subjects operating in one or the other. In fact, as argued by Teschner (2012, p. 308), “the perceived dichotomy of formal and informal actors in the sector does not actually exist”. Rather, the sector

reflects highly intertwined and heterogeneous constellations of actors, with shifting roles and fragmented identities and subjectivities exposed by others. Entangled in these constellations are a massive and unrecognized workforce of men and women diggers, rent-seeking and corrupt local politicians, despised yet sought after racialized others, violent armed gangs, and well-intentioned but thinly stretched mining officials, and all kinds of possible and malleable power holders in between. As long as the least recognized and most vulnerable can be exploited (Verbrugge, 2015a), shifting subjectivities, perpetually negotiable claims over access and control, and elite capture in fragmented, unruly, and violent mining landscapes perpetuate if not strengthen the vested interests of powerful actors in the ASM sector. Their interest, I argue, is to nourish an environment in which informality can flourish, not subside, because such a landscape provides precisely the messy and ambiguous grounds upon which to reap maximal profits.

In Ghana's gold-bearing landscapes, territorialized power only appears to bring order into ambiguous, 'unruly' artisanal, small-scale, and informal mining spaces, populated with local and foreign diggers, sedentary and migratory, obedient and rebellious, sober and drugged, who all have long posed a social threat to the imaginary 'model' management of the country's most lucrative resource business. A profound ambivalence toward this multifaceted yet unremittingly devalued and ostracized group of miners not only sustains contested territories of exclusion and violence, singling out and criminalizing elements that are undeserving and don't belong. This ambivalence and sustained unruliness, I suggest, has also prompted a normative and highly idealized framing of a 'responsible, entrepreneurial, and governable miner' as portrayed on billboards advertising regulated mining jobs, while nourishing the perpetual distance from this ideal through haphazard ASM policies that perpetuate the sector's informality. Ghana's

indiscriminate governmental efforts to mold the ‘unruly’ local and foreign diggers into ‘modern’ mining citizens through registration and private ownership of gold-bearing land have been both insufficient and unsuccessful. Cultivating this ambivalence through processes of subject-making, exclusion, and violent erasure allows the punctuated and fragmented state with all its entangled legalities and illegalities to exercise control over mining bodies and spaces and to grant or deny access to resources without the need to justify or rectify its own forms of governmentality. This deliberate type of subject formation, I contend, has prevented full recognition and legalization of artisanal mining as a legitimate livelihood.

In retrospect, the 2013 raids in Ghana appear to have been nothing more than a brief yet highly visible demonstration of authoritative state power to ‘fix’ a deeply entrenched informality, deflecting at least temporarily from the deep structural deficiencies in the country’s mining sector. The naked reality of swelling mining pits months after the raids points toward business-as-usual, only worse, as the failure to restore recognition and strive toward medium-size regulated operations has pushed Chinese miners further into illegality, as encapsulated in a note from my Ghanaian research collaborators on the reBUild project in March 2014:

The number of Chinese has doubled. We chanced to visit some of their sites and even interview some last month. We counted 22 Chinese at a site. They directed us to a larger site but for security we couldn’t go. The site foreman disclosed that they are expecting more Chinese next week.....The Chinese have cut routes leading to their sites and are using very awkward techniques to cart supplies from the markets to their sites. For instance they no longer go to the site using the main routes rather they leave their cars somewhere near the Offin River and use a

fabricated canoe to transfer supplies like fuel over the river to their sites. The roads leading to the sites look so deserted no one would suspect there exists a mining site in the area. A visit to the site revealed that they have everything they would need for the next 6 months available on hand at the sites. And they are coming back really fast and in their numbers!!!

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Extractive industries, including informal gold mining, are not only replete with injustices but also generate highly politicized spaces in which discursive and material processes of subject making benefit the hegemonic powers while further disadvantaging those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Such processes of social exclusion operate through the construction of devalued, vilified, and demonized ‘others’ that don’t belong. I have explored the linkages between shifting discourses of criminalization within Ghana’s small-scale and artisanal gold mining sector and the expulsion of >4,500 illegal Chinese miners after a series of government-led swoops in the mining areas around Dunkwa-on-Offin in 2013. I have argued that the state and its various authoritative structures, ordinary citizens in mining communities, and the media have shifted blame for environmental destruction and social disruption from Ghanaian unregistered *galamsey* diggers to an increasingly influential, environmentally harmful, and despised group of Chinese miners and operators. Even researchers investigating ASM in Ghana are not without complicity in the othering of mining subjects.

The unprecedented and in parts extremely violent expulsion of illegal Chinese miners by Ghanaian authorities needs to be understood as a process imbricated in power hierarchies that produced distinct subjectivities – the demonized ‘Chinese miners’. This process as well as the very visible outcomes, I argue, obfuscate pervasive structural failures in the ASM sector while keeping informality alive and visible. Violence played a crucial part in producing these subjectivities, both in the form of armed violent acts committed by Chinese miners on sites and the violent crackdown, beatings, and human rights abuses during the 2013 raids. To satisfy their vested interests in and unfettered profit from mineral wealth, the sector’s powerful actors, rent-seeking governmental officials and business elites included, actively contributed to the discursive construction of these vilified subjectivities. These subjectivities, in turn, dictated certain action—physical and psychological abuse, and expulsion and erasure. The othering of Chinese unseated the hitherto scapegoated *galamsey* miners as main villains who, on previous occasions, had also suffered violent swoops. Given the state’s urgency to act and demonstrate authoritative power, in the face of real and rapidly growing environmental destruction and social upheaval, this ‘subjection in action’ and externalizing of liability became a means for reshuffling the unruly social hierarchies and extending muddled state control in the absence of inclusive and effective ASM policies. Hence, the attempted ‘taming’ of unruly mining landscapes in Ghana not only conceals the state’s own failure to sanitize and revitalize a stagnant and neglected ASM sector. It also, and arguably more importantly, further nourishes both the persistent informality of the sector and its perpetual distance from the state’s idealized framing of a ‘responsible modern miner’ and, thus, serves as an ideal excuse for foregoing reformative action.

Despite the wealth of literature on artisanal and small-scale gold mining in Ghana and other countries with significant ASM, there are only very few attempts to theorize unequal power relations and criminalization in this domain of resource extraction. Employing feminist social theory and political ecology as theoretical lenses is beneficial as these lenses allow us to move beyond simplistic stereotypes and unsatisfactory state-ASM binaries that only partially explain the increasingly contentious territories and entangled complicities that sustain the informality of the sector. These lenses make it possible to elicit the very processes of subject making and the production of subjectivities in ambiguous discursive and material spaces that shape social exclusion and subordination, the latter also examined for instance in the context of ASM in Tanzania and the Philippines (Fisher, 2007; Verbrugge, 2015a).

My main theoretical contribution lies in the emphasis on intersecting and shifting axes of vilification, exclusion, and violence that actively produce ‘unruly’ mining subjects and landscapes. These subjects and spaces function as a deflected mirror of the state’s failure to sustain small-scale mining as a poverty reduction strategy and its unachievable imaginaries of modern, governable mining bodies. An emphasis on processes of subordination and the making of what counts as a worthy mining body and what doesn’t provides an interpretation of the 2013 raids against demonized Chinese miners that brings to the fore highly exclusionary processes of subject formation. Such processes, embedded in broader discussions of contestation in resource exploitation, have so far received inadequate attention in both academia and the political arena.

This more nuanced interpretation reveals that the explanation provided by Hilson *et al.* (2014, p. 293) referring to the forceful intervention as ‘pedestrian’, ‘a façade aimed at pacifying an

agitated public’ is insufficient. By unravelling multiple, intersecting, and often concealed axes of power and oppression, feminist social theory and political ecology allow us to understand the raids and the use of violence not as an attempt by the state to display yet another condemnation of the informal ASM sector — the explanation provided by Hilson *et al.* (2014) — but rather as a demonstration of fragmented authoritative power that ultimately seeks to reproduce informality. This concealed attempt to sustain rather than eliminate informality, in turn, nourishes elite capture and dispersed and pervasive rent-seeking. This particular theoretical lens also reminds us that subject formation is always messy and contradictory, embedded in the production of power and the politics of imagining, disciplining, and ruling subjects and landscapes. Subject formation, then, is neither a trivial nor a pedestrian process but emblematic of deeply entrenched power differentials, persistent inequalities, and often violent exclusion. In the case of Ghana, it propagates the antithesis of the state’s idealized ‘responsible modern miner’ with a legal license, stable employment, and on-mine safety protection. The discursive and material (re-)construction of deviant miners, be they local or foreign, – alas – both perpetuates and justifies the state’s continuous inaction and the remarkable persistence of the sector’s informality.

Insights into processes of social exclusion, subject formation, and the taming of unruly mining subjects and territories bring to the fore the very entrenched power relations in the ASM sector. Hence, it would be naïve to assume that if the state just governed ASM more effectively, rectified inefficient decentralization, and facilitated formalization, the desired results would engender a reduction in informality, illegality, and even state violence and instead produce more empowered subjectivities. Not only is it unreasonable to assume that powerful actors would readily embrace a redistribution of power, based on a more inclusive governance structure that

also gives voice to miners' and citizens' rights (Fisher, 2007). It is also conceivable that processes of exclusion and exploitation, as suggested by Verbrugge (2015a) in the case of ASM in the Philippines, constitute the ultimate means to purposefully extend the sector's informalization and perpetuate ambiguous spaces that make accumulation possible, through the discursive, material, and bodily dispossession of those who can be most easily subjugated. In Ghana, those subjugated were first the local *galamsey* miners and then foreign Chinese miners. Apprehending persistent informality from this angle, with a more nuanced understanding of the processes of devaluation and subordination that sustain it, seems to leave little room for more inclusive policy approaches, unless they deliberately create space for positive recognition, partnerships, ecological citizenship, and a genuine politics of belonging.

This paper focused on the discursive and shifting constructions of 'unruliness' in informal gold mining that serve to legitimize the disciplining of both its subjects and its landscapes.

Appreciation of such constructions enables us to reframe the essence of the impasse in Ghana's ASM sector, from socio-economic and policy neglect, legal and administrative obstacles, and corruption to deeply entrenched neo-liberal forms of governmentality with distinct modes of imagining, territorializing, and ruling. This critical theoretical contribution cannot offer a tangible blueprint for more inclusive mining politics, other than advocating for allowing each party a recognized voice at the table, Chinese small- and medium size operators included.

However, it illustrates the deeply entrenched processes and practices of demonization that would need to be overcome, in addition to legal, fiscal, and bureaucratic hurdles, in order to imagine and nourish alternative and thriving environmental subjectivities in today's small-scale mining, in Ghana and beyond.

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