



# Electoral Democracy and the Attenuation of Subaltern Resistance in Ghana

## Why Democracy is increasingly becoming a Poisoned Chalice in Africa

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Abstract: The paper highlights one of the central arguments of my book, *Neoliberal Globalisation and Resistance from Below: Why the Subalterns Resist in Bolivia and not in Ghana*. Electoral democracy is one of the distinctive properties of the present socio-historical context of Ghana, a factor that has strongly shaped the political agency of the subaltern classes. Since holding its “founding” elections in 1992, Ghana’s (re)democratisation has become a model of electoral democracy in Africa. Yet the democratic experience of the subaltern classes is that of misery and a neo-patrimonial democratic state, buried neck-deep in corruption, unable to deliver basic necessities of life to the poor. Paradoxically, the Ghanaian subaltern classes have not mobilised in an Arab Spring-style to resist the failed democratic developmental state. They are rather divided by and loyal to their political tribes, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic (NDC) party. They sometimes even engage in internecine intra-subaltern struggles over the patronage dispensed by the neo-patrimonial political oligarchy. Thus, one of the paradoxes of electoral democracy in Ghana is that, rather than opening political space for subaltern groups to mobilise from “below” to hold the state accountable, it has led to, on one hand, the attenuation of subaltern resistance; and on the other, the emergence of a politically gullible and pliant subaltern class that is deeply divided along party-tribal lines.

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In his influential book, *Africa Since Independence*, Paul Nugent asked whether independence was a “poisoned chalice or a cup of plenty?” (Nugent, 2004, p. 7). Another watershed event in the political history of Sub-Saharan Africa (henceforth, Africa) that happened in the postcolonial era was the wave of democratisation which swept the region in the early 1990s. Indeed, some observers even described the latter as the ‘second independence’ or ‘second liberation’ of Africa (Legum, 1990; Muna, 1991; Ake, 1993). After two decades experience with electoral democracy, the time is ripe to pose Nugent’s question again: is democracy a poisoned chalice or cup of plenty? From a radical perspective of political accountability, my contribution addresses this question by scrutinising Ghana’s 25 years of democratic governance, “held up as one of Africa’s star democratizers” (Gyimah-Boadi, 2015, p.101). Since holding its “founding” election in 1992, Ghana has since organised six successive, four-yearly periodic, and peaceful elections. The most recent, 2016 elections, lent credibility to the narrative of Ghana being a star democratizer, with the organizational capacity and requisite political culture of holding relatively peaceful, free and fair elections. They were the third elections whose results have led to the rotation of power between the incumbent party and its political opponent, the opposition party. The Ghanaian subaltern classes often turn out in massive numbers to vote, and in some cases, wait several hours in the queue to do so. There is a sense in which one may argue that the subalterns have embraced electoral democracy, if even their wellbeing has not improved in any significant ways (Ayelazuno, 2015).

Ghana’s (re)democratisation has been a magnet for the work of scholars, democracy-promotion civil society groups, and development aid agencies. With electoral democracy promoted as the “only game in town”, a voluminous body of literature, both scholarly and grey, has been produced. A great deal of this work has fixated on promoting and analysing Ghana’s progress on the minimum conditions for the consolidation of electoral democracy, the predominant

model of democracy shaped by the neoliberal world order. In contrast to this oeuvre, this paper interrogates Ghana's 25 years-old electoral democracy from a more radical perspective of democracy and political accountability and legitimacy. I argue that Ghana's electoral democracy has led to the installation an elected neo-patrimonial oligarchy that uses the political legitimacy bestowed on it by elections to command the resources of the state. It then distributes them to themselves, their cronies, and clients.

What electoral democracy has done in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa is to give political legitimacy to the hitherto authoritarian neo-patrimonial state. The corollary of all this is the emergence and consolidation of the elitist, Schumpeterian model of electoral democracy where elections are not mechanisms for holding the political elites accountable. They are rather institutional arrangements through which the political elites are vested with "the power to decide on all matters as a consequence of their successful pursuit of people's votes" (Held, 2006, p. 142). Far from being rule by the demos, electoral democracy in Ghana is increasingly becoming a poisoned chalice because of the attenuation of resistance from "below" against the elected oligarchy. Unchecked from "below" by the subaltern classes—save the four-yearly ritual of elections—the elected oligarchy of Ghana acts like the ancien regime of France prior to the 1789 Revolution in eighteenth century. They overindulge themselves openly in opulent lifestyles which—in a country where every corner is marked by one subaltern or the other eking out a miserable life—represents islands of wealth in an ocean of poverty. The prediction of Ghanaian Political Scientist, F.K. Drah, on the eve of the (re)democratisation of Ghana has become true: he anticipated that the participation of the masses in the democracy they struggled for would be manipulated by the political class for their selfish ends if the masses did not keep control of the political class (Drah, 1987, p. 31).

This perverted democracy is shaping the wind of disillusionment with democracy blowing across Africa and the world in general because of its failure to deliver substantive material equality. Liberal democracy all over the world is being called to question because of its inherent contradictions, major among them is the gap between the enjoyment of procedural equality and immiseration from structural socioeconomic inequality; a condition engendered by neoliberal globalisation. This situation is giving rise to creeping political tribalism even in the heartlands of democracy like USA and UK, where the disappointments with democratic governance is creating an increasingly intolerant and tribalistic democratic citizenry, fuelled by extreme right-wing populism (Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Zakaria, 2016; Chua, 2018; Fukuyama, 2018). The (re)democratisation of Africa happened in the specific socio-political context of polities characterised by widespread practices of neopatrimonialism (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Allen, 1995; Sandbrook, 2000). Not to be outdone, these neopatrimonialism practices have, unsurprisingly, come back with vengeance—if they ever went anywhere at all—to debase democracy to the ritual of rotating one elected neopatrimonial oligarchy with another by means of so-called free and fair elections.

In this political context, periodic elections will not suffice to make democracy truly participatory and social-democratic (Drah, 1987, p. 30–1; Ake, 1996, p. 132, 137). Even in the celebrated democracy of Ghana, elections have merely led to the rotation of one elected neopatrimonial oligarchy to another. Radical modes of holding the elected neopatrimonial oligarchy accountable to the subalterns for their decisions, actions, and inactions are required. I am, here, canvassing for resistance from the “bottom” by the subaltern classes; I am urging the participation of the Ghanaian subalterns in ‘contentious politics’ (Tarrow, 1998) or ‘collective action’ (Piven, 2006). In addition to queuing long hours to vote every four years, the subalterns need to mobilise as a class—not supporters of diffe-

rent political parties—to mount “contentious challenges through disruptive direct action” (Tarrow, 1998, p. 5) against the political elites for their harsh neoliberal policies, their obscene display of profligate lifestyles, and the massive corruption they are engaged in. The active participation of the subaltern classes in contentious politics is critical to rescuing democracy from the capture of neo-patrimonialism. However, these non-traditional modes of political participation have been marginalised in the era of the hegemony of liberal democracy where periodic elections are viewed as the only mechanism by which the citizenry can hold the state accountable in a democratic system of government. The refrain is that citizens should go out and vote; it is better to use the ballot, as “paper stones”, than to use barricades and bullets (Przeworski and Sprague, 1986).

Yet the erosion of contentious politics is rather ironic as the universal suffrage, by which electoral democracy is practised, was made possible through contentious politics. The (re)democratisation of Africa happened on the back of contentious politics. Courageous ordinary people defied the brutality of authoritarian regimes and organised protests against their tyrannical rule. Contentious politics opened the political space for variegated transitional trajectories to electoral democracy in Africa and other parts of the world such as Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia. It was, more recently, tried in North Africa and the Middle East, though with few successes

Paradoxically, the prospects of radical modes of holding the state accountable from “below” are not bright in Ghana—despite the hospitable political context liberal democracy has provided through constitutional guarantees of freedoms of association and expression, as well as the rule of law and due process. There a sense in which liberal democracy, with all its contradictions and democratic deficits, opens the political space or provides what social movement theorists conceptualised as the ‘political opportunity’ (Tarrow, 1998; Meyer, 2004) for the subalterns to mobilise from “below” against elected

neo-patrimonial oligarchy for their corrupt practices and harsh neo-liberal policies. Paradoxically, the Ghanaian subalterns have not mobilised in an Arab Spring-style to resist the failed democratic developmental state. Why? This is the question I posed and addressed in detail in my recent book published with Routledge, *Neoliberal Globalization and Resistance from Below: Why the Subalterns Resist in Bolivia and not in Ghana* (Ayelazuno, 2019). While the Ghanaian subalterns have historically been “virile and irrepressible by nature” (Padmore, 1953), electoral democracy has led to the diminution of resistance on one hand; and on the other, the emergence of a politically gullible and sycophantic subaltern class that is deeply divided along, and loyal to, the two major political tribes in Ghana: The National Democratic Congress (NDC) party and New Patriotic Party (NPP). Because of their party-tribalism, the subalterns do not mobilise as a unified class to resist the elected neo-patrimonial political elites. They rather engage in internecine struggles over the patronage dispensed by their political patrons. Clearly, elections and the elected neopatrimonial political elites in Ghana have not only divided the ranks of the subaltern classes, the latter have continued to exploit this division to their political advantage (Ayelazuno, 2019, p. 193, 216-217).

### **Democratising the Ghanaian Neo-patrimonial State**

Electoral liberal democracy presumes a form of state that has well-developed institutions; functional and effective in meeting the minimal procedural standards of democracy. Institutions are the building blocks of democracy (Luckham, et al., 2003). They determine whether democratic standards and procedures are followed or not, whether democratic goods (even in their nominal and procedural form) are delivered to the citizens or not, and for that matter, whether or not citizens enjoy the democratic goods they are entitled;

and whether the roles that democracy plays for the general good of society are played effectively or not.

Functional and efficient institutions are key to whether elections can be a conflict resolution tool; whether elections can be a procedure of political accountability; whether a democratic citizen of Ghana gets treated equally before the law; whether he/she gets treated fairly by, say, the judge, police officer, prison officer, and the bureaucrat; and whether horizontal accountability of government to citizens through checks and balances works or not (see O'Donnell, 1996). As advocates of liberal democracy assert, when functional institutions do not exist or are in short supply, the most critical pillar of liberal democracy crumbles, leaving it on shaky grounds (Fukuyama, 2015). Not that strong institutions can do anything to address the inherent contradictions of liberal democracy: to address, for example, the contradiction between procedural political equality of citizens on one hand and substantive economic inequalities on the other. They cannot, but good institutions are the prerequisite for any modicum of credibility in the defence of liberal democracy by its advocates.

In the 1990s, neo-patrimonial practices of autocratic African leaders led to crises in political legitimacy, culminating in the agitations of the masses for democracy, and subsequently the transition from authoritarian to variegated democratic regimes (Bratton and van de Walle 1997, p. 98-99). As will be revealed below, these neo-patrimonial practices have intensified after the transition to democracy in Ghana. Indeed, they are practised brazenly and with audacity because of the tendency of electoral democracy to degenerate to "delegative democracy" where elections lead to the installation of "a caesaristic, plebiscitarian executive that once elected sees itself as empowered to govern the country as it deems fit" (O'Donnell, 2010, p. 33). In a neo-patrimonial form of state like Ghana, elections do not produce representative and accountable governments. They rather produced an elected oligarchy, whose members, depending on

their position in the government, behave like lords, nobles, princes, and princesses. This poses a poignant question whether democratising a neo-patrimonial state changes its perverted characteristics to anything close to a semblance of an effective state with the capacity and political commitment to serve the good of all citizens irrespective of their political connections and socio-economic class.

The answer to this question must be no. What has happened in Ghana is the replacement of the authoritarian neo-patrimonial state with a democratic patrimonial state, a worse form of this perverted form of state. Perverted because it deviates from the ideal state, which is supposed to be founded on strong institutions, and supposed to operate strictly according to formal rules guiding the discharge of the duties and behaviour of state officials. Why these officials need to be guided by formal rules is because their actions and inactions make the state functional or dysfunctional; make it effective or ineffective; make it deliver services efficiently or inefficiently to citizens. It is the actions and inactions of these officials that make the state accountable to the citizens or to the special interests of a few elite groups of people. Their behaviour can make the state propitious of a form of development that serves the general good of all the citizens or make it a non-developmental state that fails to provide conditions for citizens to meet their basic needs. Worse than that, their actions and inactions can waste the resources of the people on useless things, but which are otherwise useful to the political class because they serve their personal and political interests, as well as those of their relatives, cronies, and clients.

The Ghanaian state under electoral democracy is afflicted by many incurable maladies of the neopatrimonial state. In most cases, state officials operate more on informal rules than the formal ones they pledged to be guided by. For example, the elected oligarchy and top public servants are mostly corrupt, adept in manipulating and subverting the formal rules they are supposed to operate by, to enrich themselves and to live lavishly. Writing in the 1970s, Nigerian



political scientist, Peter Eke, correctly described the character and behaviour of the Ghanaian political and bureaucratic elites of today: their behaviour reflect the “amorality of an artful dodger” (Ekeh, 1975, p. 107), who sees the state and politics as not the realm for morally-upright behaviour of serving the citizens diligently and honestly. They rather see the state as a pot of gold, and politics as the pathway to grabbing it to serve their personal interests. This characterization generally remains true in 2018.

Though celebrated as a model of electoral democracy, the Ghanaian democratic state meets most of the characteristics of the neo-patrimonial state, captured in the oft-cited conceptualisation of this perverted form of state;

As with classic patrimonialism, the right to rule in neo-patrimonial regimes is ascribed to a person rather than to an office, despite the official existence of a written constitution. One individual (the strongman, “big man”, or “supremo”), often a president for life, dominates the state apparatus and stands above its laws. Relationships of loyalty and dependence pervade a formal political and administrative system, and officials occupy bureaucratic positions less to perform public service, their ostensible purpose, than to acquire personal wealth and status (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997, p. 62).

The two authors document in detail the dynamics and characteristics of this perverted form of state in Africa. Some of these characteristics that stand out as the defining features of the Ghanaian liberal democratic state are:

1. Officially, state officials receive salary but they also “enjoy access to various forms of illicit rents, prebends, and petty corruption, which constitute a sometimes important entitlement of office” (p. 62);
2. Formal rules exist on paper, but “parallel and unofficial structures may well hold more power and authority than the formal administration” (p. 62);
3. Formal institutions or rules hardly constrain state official from using their offices to serve their narrow selfish interests. On the contrary, the

personal interests of political leaders and top public servants take precedence over formal institutions and the public good (p. 63)

4. Government, especially the executive arm, is transformed from an institution exercising authority within the bounds of checks and balances to what is conceptualised as “presidentialism”; where the executive head, the president or head of state, exercises wide-ranging power directly himself, rarely delegating to any other persons to act on his/her behalf (p. 63)
5. Some citizens, some more than others, are transformed to “clients”. Rather than the lofty civic virtues highlighted above, they become gullible and sycophantic supporters of the political elites, and expect to receive, and receive favours in exchange for their support and loyalty (p. 65). In Ghana these favours include political appointments such chief executives of local government organs, state organisations, board members and chairpersons of public organisations, special assistants and spokespersons; scholarship to study abroad; award of contracts; material and monetary gifts such as cars and lump sums of money.
6. The corollary of all the above perversions is a state whose officials have no sense of the distinction between public and personal resources. Political elites and top public servants dip their hands into the public purse to dispense favours and enrich themselves and commandeer other resources of the state such as vehicles, land, minerals, oil and fuel to serve their private interests (p. 66).

The postcolonial Ghanaian state exhibits most of these characteristics of the neo-patrimonial state, whether governed by democratic or authoritarian regimes.

### **Implications of the Democratisation of the Neo-patrimonial Ghanaian State**

The nature of electoral democracy, in the way that it involves competing for votes, deepens and extends some of the practices of neo-patrimonialism outlined above. The stakes of winning or losing elections are often high, as this determines whether political elites get control of the state and its resources or not. Being a zero-sum game in which the winner takes all, and loser loses all, elections must be won at all cost, regardless of the means used to do this. The end justifies the means, including the means by which votes are bar-

gained for and bought. These dynamics of elections not only reinforce the patron-client transactional relations but broaden them across a broader constituency of clients and across all corners of the country. Small wonder that some electorates in Ghana see elections as a 'harvesting season' and a time to "chop, a season during which voters demand favours from politicians and for politicians to distribute patronage to voters for their votes" (Lindberg, 2003, p. 124). This way of viewing elections turns them to something totally different from an institution for voters to participate in politics as political equals and as an organised way of choosing representatives to govern on behalf of the citizens. Nor can they be mechanisms for vertical political accountability where the citizens punish or reward their representatives for exercising their mandate well or badly.

As correctly noted by Lindberg;

The function of such giving and taking is to establish and reproduce pacts of mutual loyalty... In this instance, there is little left of the idea of democratic accountability in a liberal democracy. Elected officials are not held accountable for their action, or inaction, with regard to public matters and their political agendas rely on the provision of socioeconomic benefits in personalized networks (2003, p. 124).

The wide powers given to the president of Ghana by the Fourth Republic Constitution of Ghana have opened the floodgates for the neo-patrimonial practices sketched above, making political accountability of Ghanaian presidents to the citizens a caricature of itself.

One of the unremitting promoters of liberal democracy in Africa made a notable and accurate observation of the risks posed to democratic governance by the overly powerful Ghanaian president;

...so far, elections have proven an uncertain mechanism for guaranteeing the political accountability of political leaders [in Africa]... Thus, despite two decades of democratization across the sub-Saharan subcontinent, political executives in Africa continue to enjoy considerable room for decision-making maneuver with all the opportunities for corruption and maladministration that such discretion allows (Bratton and Logan, 2014, p. 1).

Precisely what has happened in Ghana? A case in point is the extensive powers of appointment Article 71 of the constitution gives to the president. He has the power to appoint heads of key public institutions such as the Commissioner for Human Rights and Administrative Justice and his/her Deputies; the Auditor-General; the District Assemblies Common Fund Administrator; the Chairmen and other members of the Public Services Commission; the Lands Commission; the governing bodies of public corporations; and Chairman, Deputy Chairmen, and other members of the Electoral Commission. In addition to article 71, other articles of the constitution give the president the power to appoint the Chief Justice and other Justices of the Superior Courts (article 144); the Chief of Defense Staff of the Armed Forces (article 212); and The Inspector-General of Police (article 202). A president with megalomaniac tendencies may abuse these powers to serve his or her narrow political interests. Concerned to protect their selfish interests and to create a personality cult of themselves, Ghanaian presidents have the tendency to use these appointments to reward relatives, friends, and party loyalist; they use them to punish those who are disloyal or suspected to belong to the opposition party; and in some cases, to show those who disagree with or criticise them where power lies.

One of the dangerous developments in Ghanaian democracy is the increasing politicisation of most public agencies supposed to be serving citizens rather than the president, including the politicisation (and doubly dangerous at that) of the military, police and other security organs. With the awesome powers of the president to appoint and sack—known in recent political discourses in Ghana as the power to appoint and disappoint—most public servants who serve at his pleasure are mostly afraid to serve the public if doing that will displease the president, his appointees and party top executives such as the national and regional chairmen/persons. Cowardly, these politicised, rather than neutral public servants run around with their tails in-between their legs carrying out the orders of the president,

his ministers, appointees, and top/influential executives of his party—even if they border on his personal interests and the interests of his political party. Or, they do not perform their functions if doing so will hurt the personal or political interests of the president, his appointees, friends and relatives. Even military and police commanders have become eye-pleasers of the president rather than the professionals they are supposed to be, and in whose safe hands the security of the homeland and the protection of national resources from the loot of the political classes may be left in. The commanders of these agencies, particularly the police, have become toothless in the face criminal abuse of political office; unable to deal with acts of lawlessness or crimes involving the political class, their loyal supporters, and those who are well-connected politically.

Spawning from the politicisation of the security agencies by the political elites are two threats to the democratic political stability of Ghana: political party vigilantism and discontent simmering below the surface of the existing order in these agencies. Political party vigilantism has emerged in Ghana, with the foot soldiers of the NDC and NPP constituting themselves to security agencies responsible for the protection of the interests of their parties, including the use of violent means (Bob-Milliar, 2014). The very core quality of the Ghanaian state, the monopoly of the use of force and right to raise military/paramilitary forces, is challenged by the existence of party vigilante/paramilitary organs such as Azorka Boys, Bolga Bull Dogs, Invincible Forces, Bamba Boys and the Kandahar Boys. For fear of losing their positions, the chiefs of state security organs have failed to take firm action to dismantle these vigilante groups. Yet there are career military or police personnel who want to discharge their functions as professionals, not party men or women. Herein lies the second threat to the democratic stability of Ghana. This professional segment of the security agencies, concerned to protect the integrity of their profession, may rise up against the increasing politicisation of the army or the police. This is no doomsaying, based on un-

founded fears. If the history of military coups in Ghana and Africa is any guide, the politicisation of the security agencies of Ghana risk reversing the country's enduring democracy and may plunge it back into the dark era of coups and counter coups of the 1970s.

Corruption is one of the practices of the neo-patrimonial that has been made worse by electoral democracy. One keen observer once noted that corruption is so endemic in Ghana it is openly accepted as part of the economic system of the country (Brittain, 1983, p. 51). Older Ghanaians would blame the military government of Colonel Acheampong for painting such an ignoble image of the country. His government and the 1970s—the period that he ruled—are known for the widespread practices of corruption, patron-client transactions, and nepotism. So widespread were these practices that a local word, *kalabule*, was coined to capture them and the kleptocratic tendencies of Acheampong. It took a revolution by Flight Lieutenant J.J. Rawlings—under the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)—to cleanse the Ghanaian society of this moral decadence that had eaten so deep into its fibre. Indeed, the AFRC adopted violent, highhanded and extrajudicial measures to do so.

With the benefit of hindsight, the revolution failed to change the inherent neo-patrimonial practices of the Ghanaian state, particularly, with the redemocratisation of Ghana in 1992. Thus, Acheampong's government may mark the worst autocratic neo-patrimonial state, but the democratic neo-patrimonial state that emerged in 1993 has surpassed Acheampong's regime with neo-patrimonial practices, particularly corruption. This is not surprising because military governments often do not need elections in order to continue to stay in power, nor do they need the support and loyalty of a big and wide range of clients to stay in power. In contrast, because of the high transactional cost of elections and electioneering, the inherent practices of corruption of the neopatrimonial state may worsen. Corrupt practices in Ghana have gotten worse because the political class and their accomplices in the public service

and private sector have become bigger than existed in authoritarian regimes of government. Unlike electoral democracies, the authoritarian regimes of Ghana did not need parliamentarians and party executives; as well, they didn't need so many ministers and political appointees as it pertains to the democratic regimes that have existed since 1993.

To be added to these are the huge opportunities for corruption that opened up in the era of liberal democracy. Money and other resources flowed in from development aid and commercial loans in the name of implementing so-called development projects to improve the wellbeing of Ghanaians. The reality, however, is different. In Ghana, most development projects open up avenues for the political and bureaucratic elite to make a lot of "dirty" money. If the project involves the award of contract, the procurement of goods, and the recruitment of staff, it is a juicy opportunity for a syndicate of the political, bureaucratic, and business elites to get rich and dispense largesse of state and favours to various constituencies of supporters, friends, and relatives. It is not surprising that, between 2012 and 2014, Ghana lost more than \$3 billion every year through corruption; an amount that is about 300 percent of the aid it received during this period (IMANI Ghana, cited in Citifmonline.com, 15 May 2016; see also Graphic.com.gh, 4 July 2018).

Corruption pervades the fibre of the Ghanaian polity in such crass and reckless abandon, it is described aptly in the words of Justice Jones Dotse as a situation where the political, bureaucratic, and business elites conspire "to create, loot and share the resources of [Ghana] as if a brigade had been set up for such an enterprise" (Ghanaweb.com, 21 June 2013). Justice Dotse said these words when he read his opinion on a corruption case involving the payment of €40million and GH¢51.2 million as judgment debt to Watterville Holdings Ltd and businessman, Alfred Agbesi Woyome—what has become known in Ghana as the Woyome Gate Scandal. This scandal is one of the major cases of corruption that occurred

under the government of one of Ghana's two major political parties, the NDC party. However, it is a microcosm of the broader and gargantuan spate of corruption that has characterised the Fourth Republic of Ghana under the government of the two major parties, the NDC and NPP: the two parties that have rotated power between themselves through the four-yearly periodic elections held in Ghana since 1992. The pulse.com.gh, one of Ghana's online news media portals, did a good job of publishing on its website '15 memorable quotes on corruption by famous Ghanaians' (Buabeng, 10 September 2015). The famous Ghanaians quoted included all the six presidents of Ghana, both former and incumbent, with all, except professor Atta Mills, still alive. All the statements point to the enormity of the problem and looming threat it poses to the very existence of the Ghanaian polity. The former Chief Justice, Mrs Georgina Theodora Wood's words capture this picture vividly;

Our country is caught in an unending spiral of decadence. Every day we read and hear of unspeakable corruption and abuse of the public purse by individuals and institutions entrusted with public funds. The situation has reached tipping point and our citizens genuinely wonder if any public official or institution can stand up to scrutiny (Buabeng, 10 September 2015)

Irked by the massive corruption in Ghana—and rightly so—one Ghanaian argued with concrete examples similar to the Woyome gate scandal that 'create, loot, share (CLS) is the 'new norm' in Ghana (Kaminta, myjoyonline.com, 29 May 2017).

Any casual scan of the reportage of the Ghanaian news media—who do a good job of raking up dirt from the hidden closets of public institutions—affirms the claim of Kaminta that 'create, loot, share (CLS) is the 'new norm' in Ghana. The works of Ghanaian investigative journalists such as Anas Aremeyaw Anas and Manasseh Azure Awuni have uncovered corruption scandals in the public sector of Ghana, illustrating the huge cost to the country and the modus operandi of the perpetrators. Apart from his recent (2018) earth-shattering documentary—Number 12: When misconduct and greed



become the norm—in which he reports the shocking corruption that has bedeviled the Ghana Football Association (GFA), Anas has also reported on other corruptions scandals in Ghana: in 2011, he exposed the bribery and corruption of customs officials at Tema harbor; in 2012, he exposed officials of the Electricity Company (ECG) who engaged in illegal supply, distribution and debt collection; and in 2015, he exposed corruption in the judiciary involving over 30 judges of both lower and higher courts, of which several of them were dismissed and others disciplined in other ways. Manasseh Azure Awuni's investigative work into the Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency (GYEEDA) and the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) similarly uncovered various acts of corruption in these public institutions. His documentary, the Sad SADA Story, reported vividly how a project involving the planting of trees in the northern part of the country was buried in corruption and mismanagement—a typical characteristic of the implementation of development projects in Ghana.

This author wonders the weight of guilt J.J. Rawlings carries on his shoulders, still living and seeing what has become of the Ghanaian state. His two military governments killed people for relatively minor acts of corruption and waste of state resources. Yet, literally unfolding before his very eyes, are massive, widespread corruption and crass abuse of public offices marking every corner of the country. It is not uncommon to hear from one of the presidents of Ghana or their loyal supporters asking for evidence to support allegations of corruption, arguing that the allegations are most often based on perception. This attitude betrays their motivation to engage in and machinations of corruption. They are motivated because the legal bar set for prosecuting and convicting criminal offences and criminals is so high, they know they can get away with corrupt practices without prosecution and conviction. By their positions and authority in various public institutions, they have the luxury of time and institutional space to scheme, create, loot, and share while covering their

tracks—sometimes, by manipulating administrative procedures, or exploiting loopholes in them, or both.

The legal bar for prosecuting and convicting offences/offenders of corruption needs to be lowered below other criminal cases because it is a white-collar crime that is very difficult to prosecute. Unlike other crimes like fraud, stealing, forgery, and dishonestly receiving where the evidence is difficult to cover up, corruption can be covered up with administrative procedures and the exercise of discretion. In any case, one doesn't have to look beyond the political elites, the perpetrators of corruption, for the evidence. It is all documented in the content of the news media in Ghana where the political class engage with each other publicly. In trying to gain political advantage by criticising and discrediting each other for political advantage, they provide the smoking gun of the widespread nature of corruption in Ghana. The endemic nature of corruption exposes the hypocrisy and empty rhetoric embedded in such high-sounding anti-corruption aphorisms designed and parroted by Ghanaian leaders like "probity and accountability" (à la President Rawlings), "zero tolerance for corruption" (à la President Kufour), "I am incorruptible" (à la Mahama), and "I am not into politics to take bribes or be corrupt. I did not come into politics to line my pockets with the money of poor Ghanaians" (à la Akufo Addo). Indeed, the Rawlings-led AFRC and PNDC (as aforementioned) used extrajudicial measures to cleanse Ghana of corruption. But one of Rawlings' political legacies, the formation of the NDC party, is deeply involved in the widespread corruption of democratic governance in Ghana sketched above. Similarly, even though President Kufuor won the 2000 elections partly because of his promise of zero tolerance for corruption, he left office with his infamous saying that corruption is as old as Adam.

The veritable display of the neo-patrimonial state in Ghana is the obscene overindulgence of public servants, both elected and appointed, in lavish lifestyles in the midst of suffering and indigent

masses. Rather than servants of the masses—which is what they are supposed to be in a democratic system of government—they have become lords, nobles, princesses and princes. They see themselves as a privileged caste, superior in social status to the citizens whom they treat with scorn and contempt—as if to say the citizens belong to the lower caste and they the superior caste. Suddenly, they become “Honourables” and “Excellences”, entitled to live a luxurious lifestyle befitting their status. To do this, they give themselves extravagant perks of office, which they unconscionably and crassly flaunt in front of the bulging and miserable poor.

Thus, the quintessential paradox of Ghanaian democracy is that it has led to the installation of the *ancien régime* of Medieval France, with all the flamboyance and overindulgence reminiscent of the trappings of the status of the nobility. One example of this flamboyant lifestyle will suffice: their taste for super-luxurious cars. They must ride in Toyota Landcruiser V8 vehicles, customised with specs to suit their taste and status. At the moment, this is the vehicle of their taste; but they used to ride in Nissan Patrols before they discovered the more luxurious Landcruiser. In the near future they may upgrade to any other car the automobile companies may invent which is more luxurious than the Landcruiser. The cost of the car doesn't matter, let alone the servicing and fuel consumption; and despite the high fuel consumption, the engines of these cars must be left running for hours, waiting for one noble or the other to return from a meeting to ride without feeling any sign of heat. Never mind that this may be someone who might not have bought and ridden in an air-conditioned car before entering into politics. Also bear in mind that the combined cost of all the above expenses on the car can pay for the cost of building a clinic in one of the remote villages or slums they would be going back to canvass for votes during the next round of elections. Never mind that by the time they go back, some of the inhabitants might have lost their lives through cholera or malaria, especially children. When they are riding in these cars,

they are entitled to break all the traffic regulations; they must put on hazard lights and even trigger off the sirens for everyone to give way to this privileged class to pass.

Liberal/electoral democracy is elitist indeed! It inverts the principal-agent and master-servant relationship between the citizens and their elected or appointed public servants to a totally different relationship: superior-lower caste relationship. Surprisingly, the citizens seem to have accepted this new relationship wholeheartedly and unquestioningly.

### **Surprise! Democracy in Poverty and Inequality**

Promoters of liberal/electoral democracy are surprised that it has endured in some parts of the world where the socioeconomic and political conditions are inhospitable for its survival. Countering the current thinking that democracy is on the decline, Levitsky and Way (2015, p. 73) cited countries like Ghana, Benin, and others where democracy is surprisingly thriving despite unfavourable conditions like 'little or no democratic tradition, weak states, high levels of poverty and inequality, and in some cases deeply divided societies.' Larry Diamond is also surprised that democracy has survived in countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone where the objective conditions for sustaining it are unfavorable due to poverty (Diamond, 2015, p. 99).

True, the consolidation of liberal democracy in Ghana is surprising; more so from a radical perspective of democracy and political accountability. This is a democracy in which the luxurious lifestyles of the elected oligarchy and the top public servants belie the levels of poverty and underdevelopment that exist in the country. They belie the fact that the Ghanaian economy is on the life support of loans and development aid (Whitfield 2010, 2011), including those from China, a non-democratic state which has become one of the leading actors of "development" in democratic Ghana. They belie the fact

that the Ghanaian state cannot provide essential services to its citizens; and in some cases, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have to fill in for the state by providing some of these services or helping the citizens to provide them themselves (Bawa, 2013). Despite all the glorification of Ghana as a model democracy, the country is essentially so poor and underdeveloped that it even had to go through the humiliation of joining the highly indebted poor countries (HIPC) in 2001.

Anyone visiting Ghana for the first time will be highly impressed with the modern infrastructure she will see; ranging from the relatively modernised airport that she arrives at, to the paved roads she would drive on from the airport to the hotel she may be lodging at the plush airport or East Legon Residential areas. She may also be impressed with the huge shopping malls where she can buy everything found in any mall in a Western country like USA, Britain, and Canada. However, this is a highly deceptive picture of development in Ghana. In fact, a paper-thin façade that masks a country that is essentially a Fourth World country in Castell's (2010) formulation of the concept: a country characterised by extreme poverty, misery, and deprivation of the majority subaltern classes. The visitor begins to get this real picture of the level of development of Ghana when she drives a few kilometres outside Accra to the nearest village; more so, when she travels towards and to the northern part of the country. She will discover that Ghana is a Fourth World country in which most Ghanaians lack adequate healthcare; in which children still attend schools under trees; in which open defecation is rampant; in which people still drink unpotable water from streams, dams, and rivers; and in which children suffer from malnutrition. It is a country in which some parts are usually cut off from the rest during raining season because there are no bridges to cross the river to join the mainland. Ghana is a country that the state cannot even manage waste. Its capital city, Accra, is buried up to the neck in filth. Ghana is a country in which the state cannot provide reliable electricity.

Local level governmental bodies like district assemblies which are supposed to provide basic services such as water, sanitation, education, and health cannot do so because they lack funds. They are neither able to generate enough revenue nor get funds from central government. In most cases, funds from central government are often in three quarters arrears of what is budgeted for the year (Barnett et al., 2018).

Characteristic of a Fourth World country, a great number of Ghanaians still suffer appalling levels of poverty and deprivation in this twenty-first century of abundance of wealth and advanced science, technology, and medicine. The national poverty line of Ghana is based on the monetary measurement of the consumption basket. That is the amount of money needed to command the food and non-food basics of life such as the nutritional requirements of each member of the household (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2017, p. 8). There are two levels of poverty lines: lower and upper poverty line. The lower or extreme or food poverty line, pegged at GH¢792.05 per adult per year—that is about US\$164 per year—is the amount of money needed just to meet the nutritional requirements of household members. The upper poverty line, pegged at GH¢1,314 (about US\$273) per adult per year, is the amount of money needed for both essential food and non-food consumption goods. Nominally, poverty is said to be reducing in Ghana in the last three decades, between 1992 and 2013, when it has reduced from 56.5% to 24.2%; thereby achieving the MDG1 (Cooke et al., 2016, p. 1). However, the latest Ghana Living Standards Survey 7 (GLSS 7) reports that more Ghanaians are living in extreme poverty in 2017 than they did in 2013: “the number of people living in extreme poverty increased from 2.2 million in 2013 to 2.4 million in 2017” (GSS 2017, p.). The report gives a sobering interpretation of what this means: an estimated 2.4 million Ghanaians “cannot consume the minimum daily requirement of 2,900 calories per adult equivalent of food per day, even if they were to spend all their expenditures

on food. This figure is up from the 2013 levels, by almost 200,000" (GSS 2017, p. 14).

Note that GH¢792.05 (US\$164) may not be enough for the monthly servicing of one Toyota Land Cruiser V8 used by state officials, both elected and appointed. It may not be up to the sitting allowance paid to members of a committee or board of a public organisation per sitting. It is certainly not enough to pay one-night hotel accommodation for one top state official, political appointee or public servant. Bear in mind, also, that the amount the poor Ghanaian needs just to feed himself/herself the whole year may not even be enough to pay the per diem of one of the above-mentioned officials when they travel within the country or abroad. For example, the Chief Executive Officer of the Microfinance and Small Loans Centre (MASLOC), Mr Amoah, has said that his predecessor, Mrs Sedina Tamakloe Attionu, used to draw GH¢5000 as per diem when she travels outside Accra; but he has slashed it down to GH¢1500 for himself (Starrfmonline.com, 29 October 2018). If related to the national poverty line, it means that his successors used to take more than six times what an extremely poor Ghanaian needs to be well-fed the whole year. Even in its drastically reduced amount of GH¢1500, it represents two times the amount the extremely poor need the whole year to be well-fed. Even though this author hardly makes official travels, he takes per diem of about GH¢250 when he travels within the country, a third of what an extremely poor Ghanaian needs to be well-fed the whole year.

In Ghana, and in most of Africa, it is the rural areas that are hardest hit by poverty. About "15.6 percent of the projected 14.2 million persons in the rural localities are extremely poor, and they contribute 93.8 percent to this national extreme poverty" (GSS, 2017, p. 14). Yet poverty does not inflict rural people evenly across Ghana. It is worse in some regions and districts than in others. The Northern, Upper East, and Upper West Regions are poorer than the rest of the ten regions. Even in these regions, some districts are worse

off than others. For example, between 80% and 90% of the population in the West Mamprusi and Mamprugu Moagduri districts in the Northern Region and the Builsa South districts in the Upper East Region live below the national poverty line (Barnett et al., 2018). What is even across Ghana are elections. Barring communication hitches, the remotest parts of Ghana—even those places in “over-seas”, often cut off from the rest of the country in the raining season by flooded rivers—exercise their rights to vote. Not only does the Electoral Commission set up polling stations, voting booths, and send personnel there to organize elections. The politicians invade there, unashamedly, with their Toyota Land Cruiser V8s to canvass for votes.

Inequality is the bedfellow of poverty in Ghana. While all Ghanaians irrespective of class, gender, sex, and ethnicity are equal in the political realm, there is widening inequality between the haves and have-nots. Obscene inequality is the hallmark of our present neoliberal order that promotes liberal democracy as the best model of democracy. Liberal democracy does not see any contradictions between being free and equal in the political realm and unequal and trapped in poverty in the economic realm. Little wonder that we live in a world that is dominated by democratic governments; yet equality of wealth between regions, countries, and people is widening. For example, in 2016, the 10% top income earners possessed 37% of the wealth of Europe, 41% of the wealth of China, 46% of the wealth of Russia, 47% of the wealth of US and Canada, and around 57% of the wealth sub-Saharan Africa, Brazil, and India (World Inequality Lab, 2017, p. 9). Having implemented neoliberal economic policies for more than three decades and practised liberal democracy for 25 years, Ghana is a microcosm of the atrocious inequality of our present world order. The gap between the poorest 10% and the wealthiest 10% of Ghanaians has been widening between 2006 and 2013. Whereas the “wealthiest 10% consume around one third of all national consumption...the poorest 10% consume just 1.72%”



(Cooke et al., 2016, p. 2). In the cities of Ghana like Accra and Kumasi, the yawning chasm that separates the Ghanaian ruling class, a fraction of the population, from the majority living in grinding poverty is so evident to the casual observer. One is confronted in these cities by a distasteful scene of islands of wealth in a sea of despair and poverty, with wealthy people (including the political class) conspicuously displaying their wealth in the midst of beggarly young people eking a living by selling knickknacks.

The figures cited above give us a good picture of poverty and inequality in Ghana. However, it is only when one sees the real life-world of the poverty in which the subalterns live, observe their miserable living conditions, and how they strive to survive in these extremely difficult circumstances that the enormity of the problem is brought into sharper focus than figures can do. Some of the news media, both local and foreign, have been doing a good job of bringing the appalling living conditions of the poor from the dark remote parts of the country to the spotlight and the awareness of people across the world. For example, TV 3's Mission Ghana and Joy News Seyiram Abla Desouza's documentaries on development problems in the rural areas give panoramic and vivid picture of the miserable living conditions of the rural poor and dismal failure of the state to promote development in Ghana.

The dark side of Ghana's electoral democracy is that the democratic state fails to provide even the most basic things like furniture to schools. We are told in one recent news report that:

Pupils of Kalbeo-Tindongsobligo primary school in the Bolgatanga municipality in the Upper East Region sit on the bare floor for studies...Pupils of the school which has an enrolment of over 400 pupils from kindergarten to primary four sit on the bare floor for their lessons (ghanaweb.com, 27 October 2018).

Ian Birrell of the UK newspaper, The Daily Mail, has filed a report on the failure of The Millennium Villages Project (MVP), a five-year development project implemented in northern Ghana with £11

million of the British taxpayer (see also Barnett et al., 2018). His report (and Barnett et al.'s) illustrate not just how extremely incapacitated the democratic neo-patrimonial state of Ghana is to promote development; it is spiced with embarrassing photos of the development-backwardness of the country. One photo shows miserable school children sitting on a dirty floor of a class room in the village of Duu in the West Mamprusi District in Northern Region, listening attentively to their headteacher, Mr. Abdulai Shefu (Birrell, 14 October 2018).

If one is elected into a political office in a Fourth World country like Ghana—where some of your school children don't have classrooms, chairs, and desks—that elected public servant doesn't deserve to ride even on a good motorcycle, let alone a Toyota Land-cruiser V8. As a president of a country like this, you don't even deserve to fly business class in a commercial airline let alone flying in a presidential jet. Top public officials, both elected and appointed, see all these as normal perks of their office befitting their status as the nobility. Therein lies the paradox of development aid, targeting democratic African countries. Ghanaian political leaders go with cup-in-hand to the Western industrialised countries, genuflecting to collect aid to improve the wellbeing of their people. Yet they are not restrained by their begging to live luxurious lifestyles that their Western counterparts, the givers of the aid, would envy.

### **Conclusion: Why no Resistance from below in Ghana?**

If material hardships and socioeconomic inequality of class were enough to get the subaltern classes up in arms against the ruling classes, Ghana should have experienced, at least, one Arab Spring-style rebellion—especially, with its bulging unemployed youth. Enter my book! It took issues with the industry of Marxist literature claiming a groundswell of resistance from “below” against neoliberal globalisation. The central claim of this oeuvre is that neo-

liberal globalisation is unjust and has inflicted untold hardships on the lives of the subaltern classes. In response, they have mobilised around the idiom of "Another World is Possible" to resist this economic and political order. While this may be true in some countries such as Bolivia, it is false in Ghana. Far from rising up against the state and the elected oligarchy, the subalterns have become loyal supporters of the two dominant parties, the NDC and NPP; the governments of which have implemented and continue to implement harsh neoliberal policies with deleterious effects on their lives. Despite the failures of these governments to improve their wellbeing, there is no evidence that the Ghanaian subalterns are mobilising across party and ethnic lines as a class to mount an Arab Spring-style revolt against the corrupt and non-performing leaders of these two parties. Rather than raising the flag of class, the subaltern classes have raised (and continue to raise) the flag of party and ethnicity.

The fundamental question the book then addresses is why the subalterns in Bolivia resist and their counterparts in Ghana do not. It is argued that the political agency of the subaltern class is shaped by the socio-historical context in which they live and reproduce themselves, materially and socially. It is this that shapes what they define as intolerable injustices, whether they can do something about it, the resources they have to do something about it, and the counteracting imaginings of what is defined as a just world and why the status quo should not be disrupted. One of the distinct properties of the socio-historical context of Ghana between 1992 and present (2018) is electoral democracy. Situating the political agency of the Ghanaian subalterns in this specific context, the book illustrates that the traditionally radical civic culture of Ghanaians in holding their traditional authorities (like chiefs) accountable is eviscerated by electoral democracy and its concomitant partisan party politics. Even the traditionally militant and well-organized civic organizations like university students' associations and workers unions have all become dormant as their leaders and the rank and file are all di-

vided by partisan politics. To be added to this is the increasing politicisation of the academia. Intellectuals who used to speak truth to power are increasingly becoming loyal supporters of NDC and NPP, throwing into the dustbin any sense of critical and objectives analysis of issues—let alone the boldness to speak out based on findings of such critical scrutiny. Essentially, electoral democracy has killed the republican virtues of the Ghanaian subaltern and spawned a political culture that betrays a clientelist, gullible and sycophantic Ghanaian citizenry who uncritically imbibe the political rhetoric of the political class; and are prepared to defend them against their own interests as a class.

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