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# GHANA ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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## **DEFICIT OF CRITICAL CITIZENSHIP IN GHANA:**

A CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL  
(IL)LITERACY, CIVIC (IR)  
RESPONSIBILITY AND (UN)  
CRITICAL FOLLOWERSHIP

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**WISDOM J. TETTEY, *FGA***  
*Political Scientist*

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# Introduction

Both the theoretical literature and policy discourses on good governance tend to, almost exclusively, focus on the state with scant, if any, attention to responsible citizenship as a *sine qua non* for effective governance. Inflections to citizenship gravitate towards concepts such as participation and engagement, with extensive privileging of the rights of citizens (Marshall, 1965). While the state, particularly in the African context, is critiqued and the political class is excoriated, there is only minimal critique of citizens, as the sovereign, and of the role and significance of accountable and responsible citizenship to the success of good governance. The latter analysis, however, deserves paramount attention in the scholarly literature, popular discourse, and civic action related to African politics, if the transformational promise of democracy is to become a reality.

I acknowledge the important role of the state and political leadership in socio-economic and political transformation, and the impact of a leadership deficit on Africa's development, issues that others and I have addressed elsewhere (Hodzi, 2018; Mayanja, 2015; Tettey, 2012). In this lecture, though, I want to shift the focus and to turn the gaze on citizens as a major variable in the equation, with as significant, if not more critical, a role in the extant paralysis of development that the country is contending with. After all, as Ayece (2017, p. 311), points out:

Some of the grounds for justifying the holding of elections include the capacity of citizens to influence the conduct of politicians, the compensation for private inequalities by public or state resources, the distribution of power in society, the consolidation of new democracies and the promotion of their legitimacy. In short, frequent and competitive elections are designed to supply legitimacy

and to solve principal–agent problems (ie, the voters as principals holding their representatives as agents in check), as well as to ensure governmental responsiveness.

The purpose of the lecture is, therefore, not to exonerate the political class and state institutions from responsibility, or to diminish the significance of structural impediments to civic responsibility, but to bring visibility to a crucial but often ignored dimension of the Ghanaian polity. Furthermore, the focus on the citizen should not be construed as effacing the valuable work that various mandatory and permissive stakeholders, civil society organizations, and others have done, and continue to do, to support the development and advancement of democratic practice and its consolidation (Antwi-Boasiako, 2019; Arthur, 2010; Botchway, 2018; Karreth, 2018). While recognizing the importance of these actors, it is evident from the literature that the Ghanaian citizen has not been a focused subject of much scholarly inquiry regarding the country’s democratic politics. The need for such a focus, and related awakening of civic consciousness, is made very imperative by recent findings that suggest that the youth, as exemplified by university students, demonstrate “low civic engagement” (Sam et al., 2019, p. 42). The goal here, therefore, is to insert active citizenship as a critical, complementary substructure of the architecture of democratic consolidation that would sustain democratic principles and values, regenerate responsiveness to democratic aspirations and accountability, and enrich the work of other meso- and meta-level bodies that are pushing for good and inclusive governance. In the spirit of President Obama’s (1990) inaugural address, which was reminiscent of an earlier one by President Kennedy in 1960,

What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility - a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying

to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task. This is the price and the promise of citizenship.

I contend, in the light of this call to democratic duty, that accountable and responsible citizenship and, by extension, critical followership are fundamental anchors that cannot be compromised or circumvented if Ghana is to become a mature, inclusive and transformative democracy. This ‘soft systems infrastructure’ is, indeed, foundational at all levels of social organization if the Ghanaian polity is to register substantive, substantial, and positive socio-economic and political development. Regrettably, however, the literature has been very anemic as far as scholarship on followership is concerned. It is on the basis of this gap that Malakyan (2014, p. 6) notes as follows:

To address the need for a new paradigm for leadership, the leader–follower trade (LFT) approach is introduced, which may result in the nonstatic and organic approach to leadership–followership as two valuable human behavioral functions. In this case, leadership and followership functions and roles may be traded or exchanged by the positional leaders and followers in different situations or organizational settings toward mutual respect, empowerment, and effectiveness.

This lecture is intended to contribute to that effort through an examination of the dialectical tension between critical and uncritical followership, vis-a-vis the concept of political/constitutional (il)lteracy and responsible citizenship, as they play out in the Ghanaian context. It seeks to address concerns that “political science has – along with a range of other largely invisible political actors – in recent decades offered little in terms of the promotion of the public understanding, the cultivation of political literacy or the encouragement of active citizenship” (Flinders, 2012, p. 356).

The literature on responsible citizenship can be captured under four main approaches, namely, liberalism, republicanism, communitarianism, and deliberative democratic, all of which foreground the exhibition of the elements of civic virtue, duty to the polity, and moral obligation by citizens as core to the integrity and sustainability of the democratic system of governance (Olfield, 1990; Heater, 1999; Dohoney, 2007). Each approach has its own nuanced explanation of why and how those elements are important, but the first three do not provide a robust explication of how citizens contend with the responsibilities required of them. Habermas' deliberative democratic approach addresses this limitation by demanding of the citizen a responsibility to the primacy of the collective interest and a critical outlook. In expounding his version of the deliberative citizen, Habermas (1990, 1995) identifies four categories of individuals – the egotistical, the conforming, the reformist, and the reflexive. Each category is distant from or proximate to the archetypical deliberative citizen by the extent to which that individual's actions and perspectives are, respectively, shaped by i) self-serving motivations; ii) penchant for sub-group conformity; iii) an inclination towards auto-beneficial reforms, or iv) a drive for the good of all.

The deliberative democratic approach informs this lecture's analysis of responsible citizenship, critical followership, political and constitutional literacy, and their opposites. It proceeds from an understanding of the deliberative citizen as

one who engages in a public discussion on an issue of public concern, takes the points of view of all relevant parties seriously as well as any other relevant norms and aspects of the situation, makes a decision in light of these reflections, and then has the moral strength to accept the decisions. This framework is based around the value of communication and discourse and its usefulness in deliberating social issues—a use that provides both



individual and society with the opportunity for learning and transformation (Doheny, 2007, p. 409).

A requirement of civic and responsible citizenship is, thus, enlightened (self-)education that supports critical thinking and engagement. According to Yacoubian (2018, p. 311),

critical thinking is a ‘fundamental educational ideal’... as is significant for the preparation of democratic citizens... Critical thinking is a process the goal of which is to produce reasonable and reflective decisions on what to believe or do and which encompass certain dispositions and abilities. Whether an individual is to critically evaluate a knowledge claim or adopt a position he/she has to attempt to produce a certain outcome as a result of his/her thinking. The outcome could have a reasoning component, an action component, or both ... because they would eventually need to make judgments regarding what to believe or do.”

Let me note at the outset that I am going to largely use recent examples to analyze critical citizenship in Ghana and to illustrate my arguments. The illustrations are meant to register the continuing currency of the issues that are addressed, and should not be misconstrued as indicating that they are exclusive to this moment or to a particular group. As will become obvious in the ensuing analysis, examples abound across political dispensations, actors, and historical moments over the course of the Fourth Republic.

# Reclaiming our Sovereignty and Demanding Servant-Leadership

Hannah Arendt (1994, p. 291) argues that

[s]ince the Rights of Man were proclaimed to be “inalienable,” irreducible to and undeducible from other right or laws, ... man appeared as the only sovereign in matters of law as the people was proclaimed the only sovereign in matters of government.... The people’s sovereignty (different from that of the prince) was not proclaimed by the grace of God but in the name of Man, so that it seemed only natural that the “inalienable” rights of man would find their guarantee and become an inalienable part of the right of the people to sovereign self-government.

As citizens, as the collective of the people (the *demos*), we need to understand our place as the sovereign within the political system. Many in Ghana do not seem to have made the transition from seeing themselves and/or others as subjects, beholden to paternalistic systems of governance (Mamdani, 2018), to being citizens with rights and power to demand that their leaders be answerable and accountable to them. The sovereign in our democratic dispensation is not the head of government or a traditional leader; it is the people. We cede our place as such at our own peril.

Public servants and the security services work for the people, the sovereign, not for an individual politician. We should understand the difference between serving the state, via the government of the day, and being beholden to the government. This distinction is critical to properly situating our loyalties as citizens and in support of our constitution. We should, therefore, eschew attempts to confuse this distinction by politicians who seek to direct the loyalty of public

servants towards a President as an individual, instead of to the presidency as a state institution, as represented in the following statement to police officers by the Minister of Interior, Ambrose Dery:

an improvement in maintaining public safety and security by enforcing the law will not only restore the faith of the President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo in police personnel but also make him proud (Ghanaweb, 2019a).

The police service should be entreated to seek a restoration of the public's faith and to earn citizens' pride, not the President's. If they focus on the former, the latter will inevitably follow if, indeed, service to the sovereign and to the constitution are the common goal. This is the attitude that should have guided the Board of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) and the National Media Commission (NMC) when they were pressured to meet the political demands of the government in the midst of the TV licence protests in 2018. Rather, it seems that they chose to subordinate principle to personal loyalty or subservience to a government. Parliament had passed a law, the Chief Justice had established a legal process and structures to implement the law, and the plans were openly articulated and covered by the media. However, when the government interfered with the implementation in order to avoid the political fall-out from a public that had no appetite for the fees, members of the statutory bodies charged with upholding the independence of state media, and the media in general, succumbed to political pressure. They failed to do their job in a fair and transparent manner, and orchestrated the termination of the appointment of the Director General of GBC who was implementing the provisions of a legally enacted law.

With the termination and attendant failure to implement the law, everyone went back to life as usual, with no peep from workers of GBC or from parliament, which should have been the target of any public revulsion since it passed the law. In June 2019, about a

year-and-a-half following the ouster of his predecessor, the Acting Director-General of the GBC said his organization was going to go ahead with the fees collection (Asempanews, 2019). Obviously, political expediency on the part of various actors had not solved the problems that occasioned the enactment of the law in the first place. A substantive Director-General has continued to lament the debilitating impact of the "cancellation" on the corporation's solvency and to advocate a redux. Will the incumbent be sacrificed as well, once the public reacts negatively? Would we, as citizens, intelligently confront the reality of what is required to give us a public broadcaster worth its mandate or decide that we do not need one? It behooves us to interrogate whether the (temporary) relief that the "cancellation" brought us is the instantiation of short-sighted political expediency reflective of what Laclau (2005) calls the floating signifier. This concept is "used to describe a precise historical conjuncture in which a particular signifier (logdged in between several opposing, antagonistic, hegemonic projects) is used as part of the battle to impose the 'right' viewpoint onto the world" (Farkas and Schou, 2018, p. 302).

As the sovereign, we should require our government officials to be servant-leaders, a values-based approach to leadership that combines a "motivation to lead with a need to serve" (van Dierendock, 2011, p. 1228). The concept can be traced to Greenleaf (1977) and has gained significant scholarly attention in the last decade (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Eva et al., 2019). Its key distinguishing feature, relative to other approaches to leadership is that it

places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader, emphasizing leader behaviours that focus on follower development, and de-emphasizing glorification of the leader... When compared with authentic, transformational, and ethical leadership, servant leadership appears to better explain various outcomes (e.g. trust climate, work engagement, organisational

commitment, organisational citizenship behaviours)” (Karatape et al., 2019, p. 87; Hoch et al., 2018, p. 507).

We should not be obsessed with or cowed by leaders and their titles, but rather insist on their accountability to us, which requires that we focus on their service responsibilities, the substance of their performance, and the merit of their contributions. Unfortunately, we valorize and aggrandize positions to the point where titles and positions obfuscate our capacity for confident, critical dialogue, and informed critique. Hale and Fields (2007, p. 140) found that “Ghanaians reported experiencing servant leadership behaviours significantly less than did respondents from the USA.” In rhetorical exchanges, those with titles are accorded privileged access or hearing, just because they have those titles. Somehow, the merit or validity of the argument is not as important as the title of the person holding it, because it is assumed that the title confers incontrovertible authority or that those with those titles deserve veneration. It is commonplace to see Ghanaian publications confer accolades such as “luminary”, “renowned”, and, of course, “honorable”. While those with legitimately acquired titles deserve to be recognized and applauded, we tend to apply accolades loosely, liberally, and uncritically. In any case, it is important that the titles do not bamboozle us into giving those who hold or demand them a pass on critique.

In fact, the aggrandizing potentials of titles are what has resulted in a number of undeserving Ghanaians clamoring to put prefixes of dubious provenance before their names, with some of these conferrals becoming an invitation to ignominy. Recent incidents of prominent public figures accepting honorary degrees from unaccredited institutions, including an IGP who we expect to exercise the highest level of due diligence, is reflective of this phenomenon (Ghanaweb, 2016; Peacefmonline, 2016a; Myjoyonline, 2016). Our MPs enjoy and sometimes insist that they be referred to as “Honourable” outside the House, when they should know that the proper place and context for the use of that prefix is the floor of Parliament. It

was refreshing to see the Chief Justice school a couple of them on the proper use of the prefix (Ghanaweb, 2017).

The conferral of symbolic authority, either through accolades or other trappings of a position, makes those in positions of authority think that they are overlords, as opposed to servant-leaders, who cannot be challenged or questioned. Instead of police and military uniforms being symbols of discipline in the service of the sovereign, we have allowed them to become the incubators for intimidation and brutality. There have been many cases in which solidarity of the brutes holds sway because some law enforcement officials erroneously think that the uniform grants them unbridled power to bend the law, with a significant degree of certainty that they can escape any negative repercussions (Ghanaweb, 2019b). Somehow, by succumbing to their intimidation and by failing to hold many of them accountable, the rest of us reinforce their perception of being in charge. When those who wear the uniform do not accord it the dignity and respect that it deserves, they elicit disdain and resentment for their institutions, which undermines their credibility and role within our system of governance and, by extension, the system itself. We have seen a similar fate befall our traditional institutions where some chiefs' abuse of their role as the custodians of the people's land (through wanton, self-serving sales) has inflicted reputational damage on the fabric of the institution as a whole.

It is important to understand that we live in a democratic country as citizens, not subjects, even as we accord our traditional leaders and institutions the respect and recognition that they deserve. Our traditional leaders should represent our collective interests, not take away our voice to speak for ourselves. They need to transcend the ingratiation of the "subject" of yesteryear and embrace the changing expectations of autonomous, discerning and critical citizens in a democratic republic. It is, for example, presumptuous of chiefs to commit their whole communities to thanking the President or a party with their votes. They do not represent the democratic will

of their people, neither do they have authority to exercise citizens' democratic rights and choices on their behalf. It is appropriate for the Chief of Dambai to be elated during a meeting with the Vice-President, and his expression of gratitude, on behalf of his citizens who overwhelmingly supported the creation of a separate Oti region that was facilitated by the government, may be justified. But he does not speak for his people regarding whom they should or will vote for, and he should not be committing to a particular outcome by stating:

We were in slavery until President Akufo-Addo came. We will thank the NPP and President Akufo-Addo with our thumb in 2020. If we don't do that it will mean we are ungrateful (Dailyguidenetwork, 2019).

Citizens must challenge the recurring practice where chiefs make sycophantic commitments on behalf of their people when they meet with politicians (Ghanaweb, 2020a; Starrfmonline, 2020; Pulse Ghana, 2016).

Furthermore, as citizens, we should not see any leader as beyond critique and we should resist the tendency towards deification of leaders, which numbs critical citizenship and subordinates reason to obsequiousness. Legitimate and respectful critique, no matter how uncomfortable, should be part of our democratic culture. It was, thus, an exhibition of an anachronistic mentality for a spokesperson of the Asante Youth Association, during the 2006 cocaine scandal, to threaten journalists and to assert:

When it comes to the Otumfuo, there is nothing like freedom of speech. You can insult me, you can call me any name, I am an ordinary person like anybody but don't touch Asantehene. .... His name should not be mentioned at all because he is a sacred institution to Asantes. Let me tell you he is our god" (Ghanaweb, 2006a).

The beliefs of one group should not be arbitrarily imposed on others – in this case to see a traditional leader as divine, infallible, and/or beyond reproach. Assertions of this kind are a throw-back to pre-enlightenment dispositions and dispensations, and it would be an unfortunate surprise and the height of hubris and narcissism if the Otumfuo himself subscribed to them. We see similar attitudes from supporters of President Rawlings who allow him room to criticize as he pleases, but vehemently deny others the right to criticize him without retribution, as though his actions and words were sacrosanct. It would be utterly egotistical if he confers such inviolability on himself. It is worth heeding Flinders' (2012, pp. 357-58) admonishment that

democratic politics frequently produces periods of *moral euphoria*, creates *folk heroes* and can even be seen as cultivating a naïve *glorification* of *politicians*. It is this emphasis on euphoria, heroes and glorification that provides the mirror image counter framework to the existing focus on panics, devils and demonization. 'One of the saddest laws of politics'... 'is that the euphoria never lasts' and one of the rawest insights into the transition from campaigning to power and the inevitable weight of public expectations is provided by Blair in his memoirs ... [where he contends that] the danger is disillusionment, more painful because of what preceded it.

It is worrying when those who should protect free speech and free intellectual inquiry arrogate to themselves this “beyond reproach” privilege, as exemplified by what happened in 2018 during a presentation of research findings at a law conference. Some prominent jurists portrayed as essentially unwelcome in Ghanaian scholarship an analysis of the correlation between the decisions/votes of Supreme Court appointees and the political leanings of the government that appointed them. It would have been appropriate and within the rights of the Justices to critique the robustness of the



methodology and the rigour of the analysis as part of the intellectual discourse that the conference was meant to engender. Instead,

Chief Justice, Sophia Akuffo, described the research as **alien to Ghana**.... Justice Jones Dotse was even more critical. He is certain the entire research is an affront to the judges. “You are entitled to your views,” he tells Prof Atugaba [sic], adding, “I think it is an insult of the highest order.” An Appeals Court judge, ... also said Raymond Atuguba’s research is a direct attack on the integrity of justices of the Supreme Court (Myjoyonline, 2018a; Youtube, 2018) [Emphasis mine].

This mindset, and the connotation that “alien” evokes, conveys a double entendre that reveals the hypocrisy of leaders who at once profess to castigate the encroachment of “alien” academic practices while religiously holding on to the trappings of sartorial forms (Ghanaweb, 2019i; Ghanaweb, 2020b), the most visible manifestation of colonial culture, and remaining reverent to Western jurisprudence. Their criticism of the critique is essentially an attempt to defend privilege and to stifle academic freedom. It is an affront to democratic values and redolent of the anachronistic practice of anathema where the Pope or Council visited a curse on and/or excommunicated those who critiqued church doctrine. Considering the source and implications of the Justices’ reactions, it is worrisome for some in the legal fraternity to assess the responses as charitable. Furthermore, there seems to be either a lack of understanding of scholarly norms or a proclivity towards censorship among these supporters for them to suggest that,

because Prof Atuguba’s research was more of an audit of past cases, he should have adhered to the convention of any audit process: present the findings before going public with them.... the least Prof Atuguba could have

done was to present the full research to the Judiciary (Myjoyonline, 2018b).

Except in a few cases, we don't call our leaders to account for their jobs as parliamentarians, as long as they share our political stripes. Apart from a few lonely voices, many citizens don't seem to care that their elected representatives do not really represent them in the legislature, because they don't even show up for work or on time, notwithstanding appeals from Speaker after Speaker. When the legislators are critiqued and graded on their performance, they take offence. They obviously do not see themselves as servant-leaders who should be answerable to their constituents and the public. Hence, they dragged the editor of *Africawatch* magazine to the Privileges Committee in 2010, because the publication exercised a democratic right to assess and grade their performance. In June 2019, the Speaker criticized scholars from the Political Science Department of the University of Ghana for exercising their academic freedom to gauge citizens' perceptions of the performance of their representatives. The MPs and the Speaker took issue with the results of the survey because they were likely to jeopardize the re-election chances of many incumbents. The Speaker also misrepresented the nature of the research and the obligations of researchers when he said:

... all those who want to carry out such exercises, please it is not a matter that should be done in secrecy – it must be done openly and in fact, research demands that before results are published, you seek explanation, especially, where adverse reports are published. The person must have the opportunity. ... The Speaker speaking further on the issue, said the findings of the research is tantamount to inciting the public against the MPs and cautioned researchers to be mindful of such (Kasapafmonline, 2019).

While MPs are welcome to critique the methodology of the survey, they have to contend with the fact that these were the perceptions of citizens, not the concoctions of the researchers, unless they can provide evidence to the contrary. They may have a legitimate argument that the public's perception of their role is misinformed, in which case their focus should be on addressing that misunderstanding, not criticizing the researchers who are assessing citizen's perceptions, whether misguided or not.

Part of the reason for the uncritical surrender to the avowed or ascribed irreproachability of those in authority is a propensity towards gerontocracy in our body politic (Afrobarometer, 2020;). We assume that old-age or time in a role necessarily equals superior experience, expertise, or knowledge (Tettey and Puplampu, 2000, p. 91; Universenewsroom, 2020). We silence younger voices. For example, instead of addressing the anachronism of existing laws on homosexuality vis-à-vis human rights, and the fact that those who introduced those laws to our jurisprudence have deemed it necessary to expunge them in their own countries, a "senior lawyer" attacked his colleague for projecting that "same-sex marriage may be legalised by 2039." According to the senior colleague,

[he] should be careful, he is a **young lawyer** and if he doesn't know what the law says, he should stop making pronouncements on it. "This is not a curse I am reigning on him, but what he is doing is a fight against God, he is a **small boy**" (Classfmonline, 2019) [Emphasis mine].

Similarly, the Special Prosecutor, acting in his personal capacity in a case before the Supreme Court, castigated a Deputy Attorney-General for challenging his version of the facts, demanding respect from the latter because "you are younger than my son, and a junior at the Bar" (Ghanaian Times, 2019). In both instances of gerontocratic entitlement described above, the "senior lawyers" seem more focused on an appeal to age and time at the bar to get the "younger lawyer"

to cede to their arguments, instead of putting forward a substantive rationale to undercut the opposing argument or point of view. In the minds of these “senior lawyers”, age and time at the bar seem to confer, *ipso facto*, incontrovertible authority – a claim that is as spurious as it is vacuous. In the political arena, during the primaries leading up to the 2016 elections, the MP for Ningo Prampram, Mr. E.T. Mensah was incensed that a “nobody”, his “boy”, had the guts to contest him for the seat, implying that he saw the seat as an entitlement (Youtube, 2015). By and large, older Ghanaians demand responsibility from the youth, without a willingness to grant them their rights to citizenship as autonomous and capable individuals, with the capacity to demonstrate intelligent action and thought. The following observation by France (1998, p. 110) is germane to the Ghanaian context:

If ... we want to increase the social responsibility of the young it is important that we recognize the relationship between rights and responsibilities. It is not enough to expect or to enforce the young, through compulsion, to be active participants. As a society we have to recognize that young people need a stake in the society or community in which they live. During the last 15 years this has been reduced by the erosion of social rights and the expression of social power by certain adults. This has led to fewer opportunities in both the community and employment for young people to move into the adult world. It is important therefore to recognize that without these opportunities many young people will not feel any desire to undertake social responsibilities either to their local or national community.

# Hyper-Partisan Political Illiteracy and Uncritical Followership

We need a politically literate citizenry which understands that politics is a public sphere where contestation and collaboration take place regarding pathways to the common good. Hyper-partisan politics and visceral derision for our political opponents cloud our judgement about legitimate questions, and subordinate common pursuit of our collective interests to the dictates of parochial political expediency. It is for this reason that we are quick to point to the shortcomings and poor record of one political party to justify poor governance and incompetent government by incumbents from our own party. We vilify those who ask legitimate questions that expose incompetence or failed promises. This attitude corroborates Vraga and Tully's (2018b, p. 422) observation that "partisans are poor judges of news content, raising neutral content as biased against their views (the hostile media perception) and forgiving biased content when it favors their side." In order to develop as a country, we need to instill answerability to citizens in our leaders, not rush to impugn those who ask the questions.

While political parties always seek to score political points from every incident, we must not be dismissive of every concern raised by the opposition. The partisan response to the legal shipment of arms in 2019 by a legitimate dealer is a case in point. A political commentator argued that "the alarm raised by the NDC is needless and baseless considering the fact that the party issued permit for arms importation 2 days before leaving office. ... even if it was needed, they did it in a diabolical way driven by mischief" (Ghanaweb, 2019c). Irrespective of the motive of the NDC, the authorities owed it to citizens to explain the situation. The right of the opposition or of citizens to raise questions bordering on legitimate security concerns is appropriate. It behooves the government to address the matter as the custodians of national security, especially in a context of increasing

concerns about armed conflict, armed robbery, kidnappings, and terrorism. Instead of the government trying to associate the arm import with the previous government, it just had to discharge its duty of answerability as the police did in a statement saying that

their investigations had revealed that the weapons were authorized for private use by licenced persons, adding that rightful port procedures were also followed to clear the weapons (Ghanaweb, 2019d).

Efforts by government and party officials to link the case to the previous government or to bring up the family relationship between the importer and a former PNDC Secretary of the Interior, who served about three-and-half decades ago, may be seen by some as mischievous. Insinuating or evoking “diabolical” intent, which has evil connotations, does not bode well for reasoned debate, based on the merits of an argument. It oversimplifies a more nuanced and sophisticated process, with each side trying to make political capital because they are seized with the immediate instinct to do damage control or milk the situation by associating the potential fall-out with the other party.

In this hyper-partisan environment, it is important that we cultivate citizens who are media and politically literate and understand that responsive and responsible governments thrive when they embrace answerability to their citizens as part of their sacred social compact with the sovereign. We need to invest in the development of discerning citizens who do not outsource thinking on national issues to party propagandists or sympathizers - whether in inter-personal or mediated spaces - and, thus, swallow - hook, line and sinker - the versions of reality that are spewed by these actors.

In our attempt to defend the government that we support, we compromise accepted norms and principles. This was evidenced by the April 2019 controversy surrounding a speech in Washington

DC by the Senior Minister at the Presidency regarding the decision by the government not to prosecute a Chinese national accused of extensive illegal mining. In that encounter with Ghanaians, he said: “Putting [Aisha Huang] in jail in Ghana is not going to solve your money problem. It is not going to make you happy or me happy” (Ghanaweb, 2019e).

Among those who came to the defence of the Senior Minister was a former presidential candidate, who contended that we should

weigh the benefit of extraditing her and that of ... [2 former inmates of the Guantanamo Bay detention centre that the] NDC government brought into the country [in a controversial deal with the US government]. ... “What did we get for bringing Gitmo 2 into the country?” (Ghanaweb, 2019f).

The Member of Parliament for Effutu also lent his support, saying we “should focus on matters that will put food on our table than to get into petty issues” (Ghanaweb, 2019g). Not only is it disconcerting for a legislator to justify undermining our laws and legal institutions for economic gain; it is worrisome that he sees the devastating impact of environmental degradation and related health hazards as “petty issues,” thereby implying that they can be carried out with impunity as long as those acts help us grow the economy. It is obvious that the rule of law has become a convenient concept for many Ghanaians and politicians, to be deployed when it serves their purposes and to be discarded when it does not. However, as Irvine (2020, p. 179-180) reminds us:

Under the rule of law, even those who have the ability to make and change the law remain subject to it. Even those who have the power to interpret and enforce the law remain governed by it. It is this feature of law, as much as the ballot box or the free press, that protects the ordinary

citizen from arbitrary state power. Understood in this way, the rule of law is more than just the requirement that governments must act according to the law. ... To be genuine, rule of law must place substantial, non-trivial constraints on the use of state power, just as it does with ordinary citizens. It requires not only that government authority be exercised in accordance with publicly disclosed and appropriately adopted procedures. It also requires that genuine prohibitions exist against at least some types of state action. It is in this sense that rule of law differs from rule by law or rule through law.

The preceding statements by supporters of the Senior Minister show a willingness to sacrifice principle and the long-term, for short-sighted, parochial advantage, be it political or economic, personal or partisan. In the absence of principle, we give foreigners good reason not only to think that we can be bought, but that we are willing to mortgage our future for a pittance and to undermine our system of justice to do so. We justify their questioning our integrity, our performance, our competence, our compassion and care for our own people, and our loyalty to our country. Consequently, it is not surprising that many of them treat us with disrespect, disdain, and disparagement. The Chinese Ambassador is correct in asserting that “I believe some local people provided some protection and support to the Chinese people. ... Ting Wang argues that the Chinese will not be successful in galamsey without the support of Ghanaians” (Myjoyonline, 2019a). We need to demonstrate, not just by words but by deeds, that we believe in certain core values and will not sacrifice them for pecuniary gain. It is such steadfastness to principle that helps to consolidate democratic traditions and good governance, and – by the way, commands the respect of other peoples and countries.

The tendency towards uncritical followership, reflected in the above defence of the Senior Minister, also appeals to the lowest common denominator of performance to justify indefensible actions that



undermine the integrity of our institutions. As critically-minded citizens, requiring better, we should not give an implicit licence to our leaders to repeat the failings of previous leaders only to excuse them with comments such as “they also did it” or “they were worse.”

If citizens were content with the status quo ante, they would/should have stuck with the previous administration. They chose a new dispensation because of the promise of a different kind of governance, a better government, not same old ways of doing things.

At best, those who succumbed to the views supporting the Senior Minister in the above case or the President’s “proceed on leave” order to the Auditor-General (AG) in June 2019, in the middle of an unrelated allegation of financial impropriety involving the same Minister, and subsequent efforts by the Audit Service Board to constrain the AG’s access to his own office while on leave, expose the shallowness of constitutional literacy in the country and the vulnerability of our system of constitutional government. By treating the Auditor-General like a petulant subordinate in a patron-client relationship (Ghanaweb, 2020c; Ghanaweb, 2020d; Ghanaweb, 2020e) for asserting his independence; by portraying constitutionally mandated independent office holders as though they are subservient to the presidency (Myjoyonline, 2020a); by dismissing and vilifying thousands of individuals and hundreds of civil society organizations which sought to defend the relative autonomy of the Auditor-General and to protest presidential overreach (Ghanaian Times, 2020; Citinnewsroom, 2020; Myjoyonline, 2020b; OccupyGhana, 2020), supporters of the government’s actions seem beholden to a patrimonial political system defined by “big man politics” and “politics of the belly” (Bayart, 1993) that have been the bane of African politics, notwithstanding its ostensible rejection by many citizens (Dulani and Tengtenga, 2020). Whether these inimical inclinations are wilful or borne out of ignorance, they demonstrate why

constitutional literacy is a twenty-first imperative.... Constitutional illiteracy is one of the major threats to Africa's fledgling democracy, because limited knowledge of the understanding of democratic processes has progressively facilitated the elite capture and manipulation of electoral processes ... deeper and more pronounced among Africa's poorest and marginalized communities (Fombad, 2018, p. 495).

Unfortunately, we have witnessed extreme manifestations of uncritical followership that results in physical violence and death. The phenomenon of marauding "foot soldiers" and political vigilantes willing to intimidate, harm, and destroy property (Gyampo et al., 2017) is an indictment on the quality of political literacy in the country. It shows a failure to recognize that the best way to counter an argument is to provide a more convincing counter-argument and the best ways to address an injustice is to seek recourse to the proper venue, not to resort to brute force as the mechanism of choice. The practice of unenlightened vigilantism sows the seeds for a cycle of political violence that erodes confidence in our democracy, and maim or deprive families of loved ones. These victims generally do not come from the homes of the political masters on whose behalf or at whose behest these acts are, presumably, committed. Ghanaians should take the following candid advice from the former Minister for Zongo and Inner City Development, Abubakar Saddique Boniface, who said:

[it] was clear that when the foot soldiers of opposing political parties clash, the figureheads of these opposing parties make merry in the background. ... When you see us arguing, we are not fighting. When we finish, we go to drink tea and eat meat."

"Osafo-Maafa is in NPP, but his brother, Kumah Adjei Maafa is in NDC. Sherry Ayitey is NDC but her elder

brother, Professor Ayitey is NPP. NDC lawyer, Larry Adjetei is the son of NPP's Peter Ala Adjetei. Samuel Jinapor is NPP his elder brother John Jinapor is NDC, and then myself I am NPP but my elder brother, Baba Kamara is NDC so how can we fight?"

"We will never starve in my house. My party, the NPP, may have been in opposition but I was not. When the NDC was in power, I always got what I wanted from my brother Kamara and today when he needs anything, I will give to him. So think about this" (Citifmonline, 2017a).

These words reflect the truth. You can be a zombie of a follower or a critical, reflective, questioning, and discerning one, who is driven by an objective assessment of actions and performances of politicians, based on the facts and by a reasoned response, in terms of your own conduct.

When some supporters of Nana Akufo-Addo's candidacy as NPP flagbearer engaged in violent acts at the party headquarters in 2014, President Kufuor correctly described their behavior as "thuggery". He was right. The failure of Nana Akufo-Addo to condemn those acts, ostensibly perpetrated in his name, does not reflect transformative servant- leadership. Instead of unequivocal condemnation, based on the principle of non-violence, his immediate instinct was to pursue a politically self-interested calculus. Notwithstanding his tepid appeal to party unity, the following statement from him bears out this calculus, because it is transparent in its singularly focused goal of advancing a self-enhancing "higher purpose":

"I want to appeal to all NPP supporters and officials to remain calm and focused, and desist from actions that might undermine the unity of the party and compromise our chances for success in 2016."... "I had noticed with

deep regret the events that took place at the Headquarters. It ended in unhappy and regretful incidents of violence” (Starrfmonline, 2014).

His supporters failed to impress upon him the importance of a firm rebuke and condemnation of the perpetrators and their actions. Rather, they defended his deafening choice not to condemn. This is a collective indictment on them as willing accomplices, not a demonstration of responsible and critical citizenship. What may serve our interest today may enable recurrences of mayhem in the future, and we may find ourselves on the other side of that affliction.

Sadly, individuals who engage in violent political acts are emboldened by inconsequential action. Silence and inaction normalize their behavior. Instead of being treated as political pariahs, they are rewarded and celebrated for their actions. We submit to their base instincts, which diminishes all of us who directly or indirectly support their actions. Members of the government-affiliated Delta Force were given a slap on the wrist for physically and symbolically besieging, and undermining the authority of a bedrock institution of our democracy – our judiciary (Graphic, 2017; ; Citifmonline, 2017b; OccupyGhana, 2017). We are, by our actions and inactions, creating fertile grounds for political turmoil and a vicious cycle of pernicious recrimination and discriminatory deprivation. We have seen this happen from vicious take-overs of the management of public toilets, with alternate changes in government (Aye and Crook, 2003), to violent, and sometimes fatal, attacks related to elections (Bob-Milliar, 2014), the latest of which include the Ayawaso West Wuogon by-election in 2019 (Commission of Inquiry Report, 2019; Government of Ghana, 2019) and the 2020 voter registration exercise (Xinhuanet, 2020; Vaticannews, 2020).

The concerns of parliamentarians about the survey results of the Department of Political Science, University of Ghana of 2019 raises a legitimate question about political literacy regarding the work of

Parliament and the implications for citizens' expectations of their representatives. MPs have lamented the fact that they deplete their personal finances, resort to borrowing, and are indebted because they take care of the personal needs of constituents. A CDD-Ghana survey in 2016

revealed that 84% of Ghanaians are to a large extent influenced by the extent to which a candidate can directly provide personal resources, provision of developmental projects in the constituencies and the ability of the candidate to help many people. (Starrfmonline, 2016).

This transactional relationship may leave MPs with the perception that they have paid for their positions and so do not owe constituents the delivery of their legislative responsibilities, as long as they can continue to provide personal perquisites. They then end up focusing on little personal favors as opposed to the delivery of public goods, the public good. It also means that we lose having competent and capable people in Parliament, because they cannot meet the expectations set by the citizenry. Effectively, we encourage and reward malfeasance to enable MPs to sustain their ability to meet narrow, self-serving expectations.

MPs have a responsibility to educate their constituents about their roles, and should be willing to lose on principle when there is a gap between what their roles entail and the unrelated, unreasonable demands of those they represent. Citizens, on their part, must learn what it means to be a legislator and must decide whether to support the best candidate based, on a calculus of collective benefit, or forego such a person for personal material gain. It is unacceptable, as Mrs. Ursula Owusu-Ekuful, MP for Ablekuma West lamented, that “a lot of MPs live in debts... many many MPs borrow to be able to finance their campaign and are saddled with their debts into the future” (Starrfmonline, 2016; Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2018). By choosing this path to power, MPs are

demonstrating that they value the trappings of the office more than the services that they can provide as legislators, as servant-leaders, in which case they should stop complaining about the pressure of personal demands. Citizens should also be prepared to live with a sub-par quality of service that they get from their representatives, if they choose to elevate access to candidates' personal largesse over their proper qualifications for legislative office. Both politicians and ordinary citizens need to honestly accept "the simple fact that governing is difficult, complex, messy, and that politicians cannot please everyone all the time: '[Politics] is about imperfection and less than ideal solution'" (Flinders, 2012, p. 262). This candour in understanding is necessary if we are to stem a downward spiral towards pathological popular cynicism and despondency about our democratic experiment, because of the mirage of election promises that fuel unattainable expectations and incentivize undue demands that cannot be met.

## Religion, Superstition, and Outsourcing of Critical Thought

Marx described religion as the "opium of the people" because it can be an impediment to critical thought and related action. Many Ghanaians are willing to subordinate critical thought to the supposedly all-knowing pronouncements of "men of God" whose words and actions are considered sacrosanct and beyond reproach. By granting these religious leaders unchallenged authority over reason or the metaphysical, we grant them the power to cap our own ability to reason.

In the midst of the Bank of Ghana's decision to shut down some banks, there were questions about whether boards of these banks should be held accountable. One of those subjected to significant critique was Pastor Mensa Otabil, who was the Chair of the Board

of Capital Bank. In reaction to these critiques, Archbishop Duncan-William is reported to have said:

I caution every Christian to shut your mouths... I am saying that to Christians; as for unbelievers and heathen, they have the right to talk. But for us Christians, we are under God's constitution (Graphic, 2018).

While it is appropriate for the Archbishop not to wade into the debate because he did not “know the details,” it is presumptuous of him to entreat all Christians to shut up because of an undefined “God’s constitution” that should constrain citizens from expressing their views on a matter of national concern, when some of those views are informed and well-argued, even if one disagrees with them. In fact, the person at the center of the controversy, Pastor Otabil, admits that “some decisions that were made turned out well while some did not turn out as well as had been anticipated,” thereby acknowledging defects in his stewardship. Nevertheless, he “admonish[ed] his congregation to say “God is good” three times to anyone who would ask them about the role he (Mensa Otabil) played in the collapse of the bank” (Graphic, 2018). That is not modeling critical citizenship or accountable servant-leadership. As Chair of the Board, he has to understand his fiduciary responsibility to shareholders and accept that he is accountable for his stewardship. His motivation for accepting the role may be noble (Myjoyonline, 2018c), but accountability is critical to responsible stewardship. Chair and membership positions on boards should not be construed as sinecures or just expressions of magnanimity. They are awesome responsibilities to serve and to do so diligently.

Another of the ways in which we have mortgaged our critical approach to citizenship is the inordinate penchant for subordinating reason to superstition. We seem content to accept the illogical primacy of the metaphysical, instead of delving into the real causes of problems and, hence, to competently and efficiently address

them. Such intellectual myopia allows us to excuse one another's incompetence or inability to deliver on our responsibilities and obligations. Without knowing whether or not Kwame Nkrumah brought "Kankan Nyame" to Ghana, it is disconcerting to see people subscribe to assertions such as the one by the General Overseer of the House of Power Ministries that

the woes of the country can be attributed to the bringing in of a god called "Kankan nyame" by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah so many years ago. ... because of this, though Ghana can boast of lots of minerals like gold, timber, diamond, etc, the country will still struggle in terms of finances if leaders of the country do not do the needful in terms of Biblical directives" (Ghanaweb, 2019h).

What are these biblical directives? Where and how have they been tested, and what evidence has been provided to support delivery of factual and verifiable desired outcomes? The fact that someone who propagates this bizarre claim has an audience of loyal followers, but also that his views are shared by many other compatriots, is a huge indictment on us as citizens more than it is a reflection of an ignoramus or charlatan.

Indeed, citizens have given pastors, prophets, and others with cognate titles, the licence to operate with no accountability for their claims, assertions, or deeds. We do not challenge faith leaders who claim, post-facto, to have foreseen certain occurrences to explain why they did not see those that directly affected them. Their failure to provide robust answers should take away any credibility they may have. Why, for example, did T.B. Joshua, acclaimed by his followers as a powerful man of God and who after many major disasters claimed to have had foreknowledge, not foresee the collapse of his own *Synagogue Church of All Nations* building in 2014 (BBC, 2014) and prevent its destruction and the countless deaths that resulted from it?. Why did his prescient powers not avert the loss of lives



among those who had thronged a church in Accra, a year earlier, to experience the healing power of his holy water? (BBC, 2013). Our gullibility emboldens many so-called “men of God” (yes, they tend to be preponderantly men) to venture into the more bizarre or the outrageous, in order to feed our craving for ethereal explanations. Our vulnerability to their guiles is mainly because we seem averse to, or are too lazy, confronting evidence-based explanations for things that impact our lives, thereby allowing us to absolve ourselves from responsibility or to excuse our not taking appropriate action.

Uncritical consumption of tales of the supernatural as the cause of various occurrences, is a bane of our society (Pobee, 1987, p. 45). Even those who should know the scientific explanations for those occurrences succumb to the spurious and unsubstantiated explanatory power of forces beyond the physical. These beliefs stifle honest critique and accountability by inducing fear and giving a pass to those who should be held answerable for their stewardship. This was the case with the 2019 disaster at Kintampo Waterfalls that took the lives of 20 people, including many students. The tragedy was, to a large extent, due to an almost non-existent culture of maintenance and due diligence. In the same vein, we attribute recurring accidents in notorious locations, such as the Techiman-Kintampo highway, to witches, instead of looking at road design, driver culpability, and vehicles that are not roadworthy but ply our roads because some compatriots privilege personal pecuniary gain over public safety and the value of life. Apparently,

with the increasing commercialization of motorcycles as a means of transport – okadas – the number of deaths from motor-cycles are also on the increase. The first two months of 2019 has already seen 411 fatalities from motorcycles” (OccupyGhana, 2019).

It is worth remembering that it is concerns about these outcomes that drove Parliament to pass legislation in 2012 banning the use

of “okada” for commercial purposes. However, as is usually the case, political expediency and immediate gratification trumped reason. A sitting Regional Minister and MP, Nii Ofofey Agbo, effectively undermined his own government and Parliament when he denounced his peers and the police, and asked the operators to defy the ban. He assured the operators, many of whom were presumably supporters of his party, that

“I am telling you this as the regional minister that we won’t abolish the use of okada in Accra”.... The minister remarked that there were many laws in the country which were not implemented, adding that this was therefore not the time to insist on the arrest of okada riders.

Of course, Ghanaians who choose to follow his unsustainable logic and use this means of transportation have agency. Unfortunately, their exercise of that agency, in a manner that is bereft of critical reflection, has contributed to the carnage reflected in the statistics above. It is instructive that, in the election season of 2020, as political parties sought to court or manipulate voters, the National Democratic Congress presidential candidate, John Mahama, was again dangling the promise of allowing “regulated” okada operations in front of youth who have been compelled by socio-economic marginalization and distress to enter this dangerous line of work (MSN, 2020; Newswire GH, 2020; Peacefmonline, 2020).

When the Black Stars surprisingly lost to Zimbabwe in the 2006 African Cup of Nations tournament, Ghanaians blamed the fact that the team wore black jerseys, which is superstitiously associated with gloom or doom, instead of addressing the real reasons. Consequently, officials decided never to use black jerseys again. A GNA report from the time stated:

The Ghana Football Association (GFA) has registered new colours for the Black Stars after public disapproval

of the black apparel they used in their final group match, in last January's African Cup of Nations tournament in Egypt.... "There will be no more black kits for the Black Stars," Mr O.B. Amoah, Deputy Minister of Education and Sports said at the 'Meet-the Press' series in Accra on Tuesday (Ghanaweb, 2006b).

What a thoughtful analysis of, and solution to, the problem! What a transformational leader he must be! The black jersey is gone and Black Stars' problems are all solved! Or are they?! It is equally embarrassing to recall that, in 2004,

the management and staff [of Ghana Airways] held a three-hour prayer session where they sought celestial intervention in the desperate affairs of one of Africa's first national carriers. They sang, prayed and cited the scriptures under the direction of a Ghanaian evangelist who flew in from London. Ghana Airways owes more than \$160m to a variety of creditors (BBC, 2003; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2004).

One would have thought that the efficacy of such actions would have been brought into verifiable doubt by similar interventions in the 1970s, when the National Redemption Council (NRC) government declared a National Day of Repentance and the black color was vilified and excised from the branding of various national assets, including the Black Star Line and the Black Star Square (Pobee, 1987, pp. 47-48). Obviously, we are still looking for divine intervention to bail us out of the deep, extensive, and debilitating challenges of inefficiency and mismanagement.

Rigid religiosity and intolerance are very much on display when it comes to questions of gender and sexual identity (Dovlo, 2005; Tettey, 2016). Rarely do we accommodate alternative viewpoints that critique heteronormativity, homophobia and the kinds of

‘restorative’ interventions that they portend. Moreover, we are still very far behind, as a society, in addressing the misogyny and gender-based discrimination.

Among the arguments put forward in support of homophobia are the following: it is unbiblical; it is un-Ghanaian; it is foreign; it undermines a fundamental human requirement to procreate; even animals do not do it, so it is unnatural. We should recognize that our sodomy laws are not originally ours; they were imposed by colonial Britain, which has since deemed it fit to expunge them from its own criminal code. There is no uncontested evidence that, prior to colonization, we considered homosexuality as abominable and criminal. If procreation is what defines our attitudes to same-sex relations and hence the right to substantive citizenship, then should we endorse the maltreatment or stigmatization of people who are unable or choose not to conceive, and take away their right to the benefits of citizenship, because they are defying the imperative obligation to procreate? Is it fair to deprive citizens of their full rights solely because they are genetically different? Let’s reflect on the dangers of such parochial and sanctimonious frameworks of citizenship that create notions of citizenship purity that deny equal substantive rights to people who don’t fit the frame. At some point in our history our traditional names were considered heathen, to be replaced by “Christian names,” presumably in consonance with biblical teaching. People with albinism are treated by some as aberrations, pariahs, misfortunes -- at best, undeserving of full rights and inclusion and, at worst, as non-human and unfit to live (Benyah, 2017). Should we continue to subscribe to these proscriptions and prescriptions in the light of overwhelming evidence debunking the misconceptions and misperceptions that undergird them?

In drawing moral authority from the Bible to justify and to fortify discriminatory practices and denigration of the “other,” we forget that it has been (ab)used to support the subjugation of people in colonial and contemporary contexts. Instead of letting the history of

that role alert us to its (mis)use as an instrument of persecution and marginalization, we acquiesce to its continued deployment for that purpose. Copious evidence of sexual intimacy among non-human animals of the same sex debunks the often-made argument among Ghanaian moral entrepreneurs that such relationships are non-existent in nature and so are unnatural (BBC, 2015). In any case, why do we reduce the essence of love, and hence homosexual love, to coitus? Instead of embracing inclusion, we seem predisposed “to a civic culture of reactionary exclusion” (Heathcott 2011, p. 3), thereby undermining the fundamental values of liberal democracy and the substantive rights that our constitution confers.

The foregoing analysis highlights the dangers of reactionary exclusion that permits maltreatment or stigmatization of people who are considered “other” according to some arbitrary markers of purity. Should we allow moral entrepreneurs to determine our worth as citizens because of how we choose, as consenting adults, to be intimate or according to whether we are unable or choose not to conceive, presumably because we are defying the imperative obligation to procreate? Maybe we should critically review the reasons why other African countries, such as Angola, Mozambique, Seychelles, and Botswana, have decided to decriminalize same-sex relationships. We should also find out why the calamities that have been predicted by moral entrepreneurs, including the virulently and unabashedly homophobic Speaker of Parliament, Mike Oquaye (Abcnewsgh, 2019a), have not befallen countries that have done away with laws that prohibit same-sex relations. It is ironic that we, who have become vehement protectors of a vestige of colonial rule, are not oozing with milk and honey. It may be more productive for us to focus our energies on addressing heterosexual pedophilia, which is, sadly, quite rampant against vulnerable minors. News reports abound with such incidents, and yet there appears to be no moral panic or overwhelming revulsion, which exposes the moral hypocrisy within our society and misplaced priorities as far as the

protection of the most vulnerable members of our communities is concerned. As Tettey (2016, p. 101) exhorts,

we should cultivate a public sphere that is conducive to sober, fair, and dialogic engagement with the issues that homosexuality raises, including critical interrogation and assessment of claims by various moral entrepreneurs vis-à-vis homosexuality. This approach, based on a critical ontological framework, will facilitate an informed understanding of why intimacy between consenting adults does not deserve to be reviled, demonized, criminalized, and subjected to violent repression just because their choices do not fit the dominant heteronormative frame.

In Ghana, there is misogynistic association of witchcraft almost exclusively with females and religion has been a key propagandist for this culture, as misfortunes are linked to witches within or outside one's family. Many elderly women have suffered abuse – both physical and mental (Graphic, 2020) – because manifestations of dementia and Alzheimer's disease are misconstrued as evidence of witchcraft. We sometimes attribute success to witchcraft or the occult, thereby stigmatizing accomplishments, particularly when the subjects are female. It is, thus, necessary to guard against well-intentioned critiques of Western perspectives on witchcraft, and approaches to address related violence, such as Roxburgh's (2018). These critiques, maybe inadvertently, come across as condescending towards Ghanaians who are making concerted efforts to curb witchcraft-related violence, which overwhelmingly target females as the focus of aspersions and physical harm. Indigenous efforts to root out the beliefs that give vent to the violence cannot be simplistically characterized as manifestations of Western "cultural, civilizational or epistemological superiority" (Roxburgh, 2018, p. 131). They are a reflection of the fact that cultures are not ossified in some essentialized tradition. Rather, they are dynamic, evolving social systems where internally contesting actors exercise agency through recursive and

discursive processes that are responsive to developments, challenge existing belief systems and power structures, and engender change away from anachronistic practices and their insidious explanatory premises.

Masculinization of ability and success, and its reproduction of gendered power imbalances, is endemic in our body politic. It is largely propagated by a twisted logic within our cultural and religious belief systems and practices that grants pride of place to males and prescribes submissiveness by female spouses and the minorization of females. In this context, many capable, assertive and successful women have had to live with being pathologized, denigrated, and demonized, because they directly or indirectly challenge the logic. Many live with the insinuation that their success does not emanate from ability and hard work, but as rewards from commodification of their bodies or witchcraft. Under these circumstances, some women have imbibed their inferiorization while those who choose to defy the odds face the Sisyphean task of constantly fighting for acceptance, respect, and recognition as capable and deserving of their positions and success. It is noteworthy that a Deputy Speaker of Parliament was proud enough to claim vindication, when a former Chairperson of the Electoral Commission was impeached and removed from office in 2018, disclosing that he had advised her not to take the job because he did not think a woman could do it (Ghanaweb, 2018). What message does this send to our women and our young girls? That they should not unleash their potentials and/or that they can only be excellent in the domestic sphere? Unfortunately, many Ghanaians respond in the affirmative, a sad reflective of a deficit in critical followership.

Misguided allegiance to faith and religious overlords feeds erroneous notions that church attendance, for example, should take precedence over our responsibilities at work and to family, because our supplications will yield results that matter more. We, therefore, fail to critically interrogate conspicuous cathartic displays of religiosity

that are usually bereft of substance. People shirk work and family to serve their faith masters, to the detriment of their loved ones and the public purse (Manglos and Weinreb, 2013, p. 195; McCauley, 2012). Many religious leaders exploit the gullibility of these individuals to get them to accede to the most humiliating acts or to claim the most ridiculous of experiences. The reality is that faith may only take us so far in terms of personal success and national development. Many less-religious societies and individuals are better off materially and in other ways than we are (The Telegraph, 2016; UNDP, 2019). As the General Overseer of the Global Church of Grace Ministries recently advised,

“Ghanaians, especially Christians, [should] work hard to justify the salaries they receive from government to prove their steadfastness in God. 70 per cent of the population were Christians and that must translate into positive development for society, ... “however we are not feeling the impact of Christianity in Ghana” (Ghana News Agency, 2019).

This view is shared by Manglos and Weinreb (2013, p. 214) who noted that Sub-Saharan Africa “is arguably the most religious region in the world, as well as the region facing the most profound difficulties in enacting an effective program of state building and instituting stable democratic systems.”

Even though we are not a theocracy, we have allowed religion to so infuse our institutions and practices, including state functions, that many ordinary citizens and public officials are reluctant to take bold action to challenge infractions by those acting within mainstream faith traditions. The uncritical adherence to the supersession of religion over civic duties, responsibilities and rights has, for example, created the nuisance of endemic noise making by churches across the country. Respect for the rights and sensitivity to the circumstances of our compatriots seems to be fast eroding, notwithstanding



expansion of conspicuous religiosity, because religious fealty and commitment are allowed to find expression in their most atrocious forms that undermine the virtues of responsible citizenship within a constitutional democracy. We are comfortable with the suffering of others as long as we get our spiritual succour. It is ironic that churches and Christian proselytizers are the most notorious for flouting social norms of decency and regulatory provisions when it comes to noise-making (Aljazeera, 2019; Graphic, 2019a), when their faith expects them to love their neighbors as themselves and to “give unto Caesar what is Caesar’s” (Matthew 22:21). Pastors and their congregations provide the most ridiculous explanations to justify the ubiquitous nuisance that their activities cause. They invoke the primacy of their God above all else, expect everyone to kowtow to their forms of religious expression, rain curses and invectives, and vilify those who only ask for the levels of peace and quiet to which they are entitled in a democratic society where the rule of law is expected to hold sway (The Guardian, 2019).

## Civic Responsibility and Responsible Citizenship

Because of the tendency to look to politicians or others for answers to all our social ills, very few compatriots put the gaze on ourselves, to find out the extent to which our own acts of commission or omission enable good or bad governance. We tend to conveniently forget about the fact that rights of citizenship come with duties and responsibilities, among which are responsibilities to act in a manner that sustains and promotes the common good. That includes obeying our laws and exhibiting attitudes that are not inimical to the collective interest.

A candid assessment of the behaviours and attitudes of many Ghanaians shows that a significant majority of the population demonstrates characteristics that undermine that collective good,

what will qualify as civic irresponsibility or irresponsible citizenship. These behaviors and attitudes manifest themselves in the routine activities of our daily lives - from what we do with our garbage, what we do at a traffic light, how we approach work for which we are paid, to how we treat others. While structural constraints are partly to blame for some of these behaviors (e.g., inadequate infrastructure, bureaucratic incapacity), there is no denying that many of these attitudes and behaviors are the outcomes of human agency for which we, as citizens, are responsible. These attitudes and behaviours partly explain some of “the eyesores of filth constantly dotted over cities” (The Ghana Report, 2019). Where the issues are structural, one would expect residents to subordinate partisan interests to common cause by galvanizing themselves, across party lines, in a concerted and collaborative manner to hold governments accountable, particularly in some of the deprived communities where this eyesore is most prominent. Surprisingly, however, many prefer to subordinate shared, common interest to the power-seeking projects of politicians and political parties, sometimes resulting in injuries or worse.

It is easy to point to reified institutions as the cause of our problems, but we should remind ourselves that these institutions are made up of citizens who make intentional choices, the outcomes of which we all have to live with. When the Auditor-General “indicted the board of the Ghana Cylinder Manufacturing Company (GCMC) for the astronomical and illegal increase [400%] in the monthly fees and sitting allowances for the chair and members between 2016 and 2017” (ABCNewsGh, 2019b), he is referring to persons with a duty to the public purse. When the CEO of that company arbitrarily increases staff salaries by between 30%-50% without recourse to proper procedure, the blame cannot be put on some abstract reified institution. When we implicitly or explicitly acquiesce to these goings on, because of political loyalty or personal benefit that harms the collective good, we deal ourselves a vicious cycle of impunity in the management of institutions and resources by those entrusted with the honorable privilege of public service.

These detrimental acts are not exclusive to senior officials. While Ghanaians are full of self-righteous indignation and quick to condemn others for malfeasance, especially politicians, a critical assessment will reveal that many of us are deeply complicit in perpetuating acts that are debilitating to the integrity, effectiveness, and reputation of our state institutions. As the recent judicial scandal (Tettey, 2017, p. 135) and the routine encounters with every level of our public service show, the proclivity towards personal gain at the expense of the state cuts across the full spectrum of citizens. Many of us are quick to require integrity and accountability from others, but not from ourselves. A good starting point for addressing this contradiction in expectations of self versus others is our formal educational system, albeit without neglecting informal education as a necessary complement. As Sam et al. (2019, p. 57) observe, “while there is a general lack of teaching on citizenship in African countries, the civic education curriculum ... takes a theoretical perspective, making it difficult for the students to translate theory into becoming better citizens, let alone increase students’ civic engagement.”

A state or nation is only as good as its constituent citizens. If we choose not to fully commit to our work, productivity suffers, and our economy suffers. If we raid staff coffers or divert resources that belong to the state into our private pockets, we should not expect the country to do well. If we don’t resist or choose to offer bribes, we cannot blame the appetite for bribes by the takers. If we choose to dump garbage in our water ways, we don’t have the moral authority to complain when the floods hit; if we choose to be reckless on the road and not obey traffic regulations, we cannot blame witches or wizards for the carnage on our roads. If we avoid paying taxes, illegally tap into water and electricity supplies, or collude with utility service workers to avoid paying tariffs, then we are part of the problem. Leadership is not the exclusive preserve of those who occupy political office. We can all exercise leadership and integrity in the context of our daily activities. If we all choose to do so, our country will be better off.

Most Ghanaians who pay or take bribes are not in political office, and ordinary citizens make up the bulk of officials in the bureaucracies where corruption is rampant. Indeed, according to the 2015 Afrobarometer Survey,

[in] Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Liberia and Ghana, citizens are the most negative about the scale of corruption in their country. ... 22 per cent of people that have come into contact with a public service in the past 12 months in Sub-Saharan Africa have paid a bribe, ... Across the continent, poor people are twice as likely as rich people to have paid a bribe, and in urban areas they are even more likely to pay bribes. ... People in the region are divided as to whether ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption – just over half of people think that they can (53 per cent), while 38 per cent think they cannot. Reporting incidences when they occur, or saying no when asked to pay a bribe, are seen as the most effective things people can do. However, only roughly one-in-ten people who paid a bribe actually reported it. (Pring, 2015, pp. 2-3).

If all citizens in the work force discharge their duties per the rules and regulations that they signed up for and for which they are paid, each of the same individuals would not have to suffer the challenges that come with corruption. In the words of Karreth (2018b, p. 452),

“if one believes that others will ‘do their part’ to contribute to the maintenance of a healthy, civic democracy by participating in it, they will be more likely to do the same. Moreover, scholars have theorised that trusting individuals are more likely to perceive common ‘fate’ with others in society.”

Unfortunately, greed by one incentivizes greed by all, thereby creating a perverse and pernicious moral economy and feeding the

vicious cycle that continues to inhibit access to the benefits of socio-economic development for the broad mass of compatriots.

In order to hold our leaders accountable and be the sovereigns who superintend the stewardship of our servant-leaders, we must learn about what we expect of our leaders, what our rights and duties are, and what the facts are. This education is not necessarily formal. It comes from the development of an inquiring and reflective mind that builds critical political literacy. After all, our forebears and some of our contemporary compatriots without a formal education, were/are able to ask incisive and insightful questions of our leaders because they had/have those skills. Critical thinking and literacy enable citizens to assess the extent to which ideological positions, political interests, self- or other-serving motivations, and particular assumptions shape communicative encounters and political decisions. Based on that assessment, they can determine how much stock to put into those encounters and decisions, relative to verifiable facts and credible analysis, thereby avoiding the instrumentalization of citizens' gullibility for self-serving, short-sighted political ends of particular actors.

When the Director General of the GBC was let go, in the light of the TV licence fee matter, the public reaction was a deafening silence because the action seemed to address the immediate micro-level unwillingness to pay the fee and removed the individual who was perceived as responsible for imposing it on citizens. There was no questioning of parliament, which should have been the target of any public revulsion since it passed the law in the name of the people. There was no questioning of the Chief Justice for setting up the legal structures. There appeared to be no understanding of who is responsible for proposing and enacting the law, and ultimately accountable for it, and whose role it is to legally implement it. Maybe people just did not care. But not caring is not an option. We should have meaningful discourses about these issues that are far-sighted in perspective, arrive at some consensus, direct our political

representatives to act accordingly and to stick to it, and commit to live with the outcomes of our decision. We should critically explore the role of floating signifiers in decision making and ask the NMC and the President to reconcile the "cancellation" of the fees with their acknowledgment of the GBC's dire financial situation and their recourse to tax-payer bail-out to sustain the corporation's operations (Graphic, 2019b).

Many citizens, including journalists, tend to absorb claims by politicians without asking fundamental questions about how fat campaign promises and proposals will be paid for, how success will be measured, how interventions will be sustained, etc. It is this absence of critical inquiry and deep interrogation of the government's record that led critics, not necessarily political opponents, to castigate journalists who participated in the 2018 year-end press conference with the President (Media Foundation of West Africa, 2018).

It is worrying that the overcharged partisanship of the media landscape is eroding support for media freedom in this country. This is because the critical press is drowned by the partisan press, leading to a credibility crisis for journalists and genuine fear that the media are becoming incubators for political conflict. According to the 2019 Afrobarometer survey, only 36% of Ghanaians agreed that the media should be free, with 57% saying that government should have a right to prevent publication. This is portentous for a fundamental right that many compatriots have sacrificed limb, blood, and life to ensure. We need to do everything we can to rescue our constitutional protections and freedoms from ourselves. The issue is not the freedoms and protections, as the responses to the Afrobarometer survey seem to suggest; it is us, and we have to fix ourselves, not turn our freedoms over to a paternalistic government to dish out when and how it chooses. We can start by increasing our media literacy so that we are able to separate the wheat from the chaff; the facts from the fiction; the incendiary from the sublime; the entertaining but vacuous from the substantive and critically engaging (Tettey, 2013).

The ability of many to approach media content with requisite multi-modal discernment and competence is made even more challenging in the increasingly preponderant social media environment. The progressive potential for these spaces to democratize voice via the work of citizen journalists is countered by the thin quality of gate-keeping filters for fact-checking and curating content. Many consumers have been left to their own devices without the skills to assess the veracity and credibility of information that they come across. Consequently, they have become unwitting purveyors and enablers of misinformation and disinformation as they instinctively automatize the sharing of whatever information they find on their platforms. Furthermore, the politics of uncritical demonization, denunciation, denigration, and undermining of the out-group or critics appears to hold sway and everything coming from the in-group is infallible and beyond critique. However, as Vraga and Tully (2019, p. 1) point out, “we have the power to combat misinformation by becoming more media literate, an idea supported by research that suggests that critical thinking and skepticism play a role in reception to and rejection of misinformation.” We need to give expression to that power if we are to sustain the vibrancy of a deliberative democracy that is not left vulnerable to debilitation from disillusionment and cynicism about free expression and our national discourse.

Many Ghanaians have chosen to settle for the lowest common denominator of quality with respect to the most crucial necessities. We, therefore, seem more interested in expressing moral outrage about homosexuality than we were about the real life and death implications of having a country of 29 million people share 55 ambulances, i.e., 1 ambulance for 520,000 people (Citinewsroom, 2019). The result is a country where mediocrity has been normalized, where those who seek to elicit better quality service are called “too known,” where a culture of maintenance is esoteric, where we are content with a minimalist expectation of quality, where we detest those who hold us to a higher standard of performance.

That is why there appears to be no accountability for plagiarism by government officials, for example, because integrity is not “a big deal.” We overlook or, at best grumble about, shoddy work by people who are paid from the public purse to deliver services, as long as they have the patrimonial support of political bigwigs or are untouchable because they are an economic benefactor of those in power. We seem very willing to settle for less by and in our actions or those of others, thereby normalizing mediocrity, as many of us did when parts of President Akufo-Addo’s inaugural address were plagiarized (Tettey, 2019, p. 380), when an image in the “Ghana Beyond Aid” document was plagiarized (Myjoyonline, 2019b), or when there were egregious errors galore “in the brochures that were printed for Ghana’s 59<sup>th</sup> Independence Day parade” during the presidency of John Mahama (Peacefmonline, 2016b).



## Conclusion

Many Ghanaians are keen to enjoy the benefits of citizenship, without a commensurate willingness to pay the price of citizenship. That price includes eschewing self-serving individualism; the pathology of aggrandizement and sycophancy; and apathy-induced ignorance. On the flip side, it entails embracing an ethos of critical, ethical, civic-minded, knowledge-seeking, duty-conscious, engaged and introspective citizenship. As Kymlicka and Normam (1994, p. 352) point out, “the health and stability of a modern democracy depends, not only on the justice of its ‘basic structure’ but also on the quality and attitudes of its citizens.”

A citizenry that exercises its sovereign rights and duties in a critically astute, responsible and principled manner can surmount the shenanigans of the political class and get the latter to be responsive. As Mattes (2019, pp. 2-3) points out, there is no gainsaying the

importance of citizens who are not only deeply committed to democracy but who also adopt a critical perspective toward their country’s current leaders and institutions – in other words, those citizens who demand democracy but do not think they are getting it. We describe these citizens as “dissatisfied democrats.” To the extent that citizens’ commitment to democracy matters for the survival and quality of democracy, evidence suggests that it is these dissatisfied democrats who matter most.... Perhaps our most worrying finding is that fewer than one in six Africans (15%) currently qualify as “dissatisfied democrats.”

It is worth noting that while outrage is a legitimate and sometimes necessary form of political expression, whether through strongly-worded speech or disruptive, constitutionally protected civic action (Middaugh, 2019), it should not degenerate into a tool for

denigrating, threatening, and causing physical harm to political opponents or critics (Myjoyonline, 2019c). We need to transcend affective intelligence (Marcus et al., 2000) that subordinates critical thinking to the heuristic device that is the party brand, the vicious bluster of political associates, and thoughtless solidarity with the in-group. There is evidence in this country to show that even the most notorious of our political leaders can be whipped into shape, even if reluctantly or temporarily, if enough decent and discerning people across the political spectrum stand together for what is right and do not reward bad behavior. As was recently reported:

New Patriotic Party (NPP) firebrand, Kennedy Agyapong has revealed that as part of activities to re-brand himself, he has ceased being rough and will adopt the gentility style of approach in his public discourse as done by leading members of his party... “I have resolved that since NPP is charting the path of gentility, I will also be gentle henceforth so that everyone will see that Kennedy Agyapong, the other side of him shows that he can be a gentleman”, he revealed in an interview monitored by MyNewsGh.com. Mr. Kennedy Agyapong observed that his defense for the party has earned him gross disrespect even from within urging others to also take up the mantle and continue from where he left off (Ghanaweb, 2019i).

Sustaining the pressure for decency in politics and public discourse and for servant-leadership, through mechanisms of accountability available to citizens in the press and at the ballot box (Tettey, 2006), is necessary to signal and to impose relevant sanctions that elicit attitudinal and behavioral change.

More Ghanaians, beyond the 52% identified by Mattes (2019, p. 9) need to be joining the group of “dissatisfied democrats.” It is particularly imperative that those who have the privilege of knowledge

about democratic tenets and their value subordinate their parochial interests to the common good, irrespective of their partisan political inclinations, by leading the way through their individual actions and by protecting the integrity of institutions they have been given the opportunity to protect and to hold in trust on behalf of their compatriots. As Arthur (2010, p. 202) opines, “although Ghana has made significant strides and can be described as a success story among efforts towards democratic consolidation in Africa, it still has a long way to go to ensure that a democratic political culture pervades every aspect of life of the citizens.” We need to address the dearth of constitutional literacy in the country, which is a huge impediment to the deepening and sustenance of constitutionalism. Developing that literacy is necessary if we are to give meaningful expression to the constitution as an instrument of sovereign power by the *demos*. It is for this reason that Fombad (2018, p. 493) decries the fact that

[a]part from the advantage that ... Africans can now freely create a party or join one of their choice as well as vote or be voted for in elections, there are serious questions about how much else they know about the content, values, principles and myriads of checks and balances provided for in these constitutions. ... citizens [have to be] ... vigilant, alert to any abuses, assert their rights and stand ready to defend these rights when they are threatened by the continent’s power-hungry executives.

Thus, more significant than knowing the content of the constitution is conscientization of the citizenry (Freire, 1985), which is manifested through critical and responsible engagement with its tenets and assertion of its supremacy over any parochial loyalties to party, religion, ethnicity, and other affinities and affiliations. While formal literacy is a useful foundation for conscientization, it is not the exclusive mechanism, especially in a society where many marginalized populations still struggle to avail themselves of formal

education. Furthermore, many formally educated citizens don't exhibit the requisite critical perspectives and knowledge, indicating that existing curricula and pedagogies are not sufficiently efficacious. Various actors, including citizens, as individuals; mandated stakeholders, such as the National Commission for Civic Education; civil society organizations; the media; educational institutions; and religious bodies have an integral and collective role in enabling the development of this kind of conscious citizenship, what Almond and Verba call political competence (1963; Dudley and Gitelson, 2002). They should work together to develop critically reflexive and mutually-reinforcing approaches that cultivate the kind of political competence that would lubricate and sustain an inclusive and accountable system of democratic governance. At the heart of these efforts, and a key for the work of all the other actors to yield intended outcomes, is the willingness and motivation on the part of the individual citizen to learn, to engage, and to act critically as a leader and as a follower in support of the constitution.

Citizens need to see political and constitutional literacy, as well as civic engagement, as inextricably linked to their own lives and livelihoods, and so they should be invested in these responsibilities of citizenship. They should not look at them as options to be exercised as a matter of convenience or to be left for others to pursue, but rather as existential imperatives that link the personal to the political for mutual benefit in a shared compact with other compatriots. That should be the rallying impulse for everyone in support of critical democratic citizenship, whether as leaders or as followers. We owe it to ourselves, our compatriots, generations before and generations to come, to enrich rather than squander the democratic dividend that we enjoy by asserting ourselves as sovereign; by being critically minded, politically literate, and engaged citizens; by being discerning followers; by opting for the best rather than settling for the mediocre; by holding ourselves and others to account; and by opting for those who embrace servant-leadership, not those who want us to be subjects of their political designs. I hope that we can

all genuinely commit to do so and to demonstrate that commitment through action. As Malakysan (2014, p. 16) notes:

Nearly every relationship incorporates leadership and followership directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously. Both functions are vital components of human interactions. Thus societies need effective followers no less than they need effective leaders. As Bennis puts it: “In many ways, great followership is harder than leadership. It has more dangers and fewer rewards, and it must routinely be exercised with much more subtlety. But great followership has never been more important.”

This lecture acknowledges that a significant number of Ghanaians have exhibited, and continue to invest, a profound commitment to the call for action required of us as citizens. They do so as individuals; as members of civil society organizations and faith communities; and as actors in our public and private sectors. They have helped to sustain our democracy by steadfastly defending our constitutional ideals and demanding responsive, inclusive, and accountable governance, which actions are necessary, even if sometimes uncomfortable, constestable, and contentious. They need all of us to do our part, beyond exercising our franchise through the ballot box or belonging to a political party, to steady our democracy and to encase it deeply in our daily routines and practices so that it does not go unmoored, but rather endures as a veritable embodiment of our ideals of democratic citizenship and good governance. We cannot renege on these obligations of citizenship. By paying our price as active, politically literate and critically engaged and accountable citizens in our interchangeable roles as followers and leaders, we will help to get us closer and more quickly to the prize of a democratic dividend that serves all and is equitable.

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