Written by Cosanna Preston

'Military rule meant strong government, while the one-party state bred corruption.' Discuss with Reference to the Period 1965-1990

Between 1956 and 1965 the political climate of African countries experienced rapid change. Within just nine years 29 of the 53 African states had declared independence and two prevailing regime forms dominated the continent: the one-party state and military rule. Acknowledging this division, this essay will discuss the assertion that the one-party state bred corruption while military rule meant strong government (African Studies MSc, p. 6). The statement seems quite obvious on the outset. Armies are known to be "'the most efficient type of organization for combining maximum rates of modernization with maximum levels of stability and control'" (Decalo 1973, p. 115-116). In contrast, one-party states, lacking this strict organization characteristic or an alternative check of opposition competition to retain efficiency, are thought to revert to basic forms of appeal both public and personal, e.g. promise of services and cash or government placements (Allen 1995, p. 304). However, this essay will challenge the above assumption and argue that the regime types do not produce mutually exclusive outcomes but that corruption and 'strong government' are possible and prevalent in both forms of governance; that one needs to historically situate these regimes within specific countries to understand their subsequent manifestations.

I will frame my argument with reference to the period of 1965-1990 and the examples of Cote D'Ivoire, as a one-party state and Ghana, as a military regime, as the two represent rather isolated cases of each form of rule. The argument will proceed with an examination of the one-party state versus military rule, followed by an exploration of the concepts: 'corruption' and 'strong government' and concluding with an analysis of historical factors to illustrate the cross-over of these concepts in the histories of each country. The scope is necessarily limited to two case studies. Thus this essay makes no attempt to generalize about the essential nature of one-party regime or military regimes. Rather it will demonstrate that by examining just two cases it is apparent that the consequences of 'strong government' and corruption are not mutually exclusive.

The Regime Divide

One-Party State

Emerging in the nationalist context of decolonization, one-party states rose with popular support serving as an "indisputable" centralizing and stabilizing role for the country (Carter 1964, p. 4). As for opposition politics, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, president of Cote D'Ivoire (1960-1993), argued that they were an "unnecessary luxury" (Thompson 1964, p. 275). The argument followed that national development was the commonly agreed goal of the country; any differences that did emerge could be freely discussed "as democracy and human rights would be practiced" (Anyang' Nyong'o 1992, p. 2). Anyone disputing such a claim only had to look as far as Sudan and Pakistan to see that multiparty elections lead to divisions not unity (Carter 1964).

Yet already by the 1960s this justification was wearing thin as the one-party state was increasingly "associated not only with dictatorial but also with quasi- or wholly totalitarian rule" (Carter 1964, p. 4). This was emphasised by state

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controlled patronage and a blurring of private and public business spheres, which were only buttressed by the lack of any institutionalized critique mechanism (Fauré, 1989, p. 69). By 1992 Anyang' Nyong'o could proclaim the failure of the one-party state, specifically in promoting healthy democracy, human rights and national development, precisely the elements Houphouët-Boigny and other regime supporters had promised.

Military Rule

With much the same fanfare of the one-party state, military rule barged into the political scene claiming to be acting in the best interest of the people. Military leaders were known for their abrupt changes to the political leadership removing institutional leaders to stem corruption and inefficiency and as Decalo (1973) argues, "Army officers [were] viewed as puritanical, nationalist, and dedicated to rapid socio-economic change" (p. 115).

However, also like the one-party state, military rule has suffered many of the same criticisms of state decay. As Decalo (1973) argues, they failed to institutionalize or create a stable political order and paraded around with superficial legitimization by appropriating civilian structures and garments while their modernization and development tactics were largely dysfunctional (p. 115 – 117). Additionally, much like the one-party state, the military regime structures were by no way immune to corruption as what political mobility did exist within these regimes was heavily based on patronage (Gutteridge 1975). Indeed the type of ruler has not seemed to matter. As Decalo notes, "whenever an elite (civil or military) captures political power, its own corporate interests are among the first to be promoted" (p. 115).

Political Outcomes of Regime Choice

Thus it is becoming apparent that the experienced outcomes of 'strong government' and corruption are not exclusive to regime types. To fully understand this overlap, however, clear definitions of the outcomes are required. The following discussion purports to do just that and in doing so will examine their prevalence in each case study strictly within the period of 1965 – 1990 covered in this essay.

'Strong government'

This author sees two ways to define the term 'strong government'. Firstly, we can see 'strong government' as rule for (if not also by) the people and minority rights—a form of inclusive government that provides for its citizenry. Secondly, we can see 'strong government' to mean heavy-handed centralization of state power with or without the intention of transfer to civilian power in order to lead to the first definition. Ultimately, within the period of study, the first definition of 'strong government' does not apply to either case study. As this discussion will demonstrate, however, the second definition applies to both Ghana and Cote D'Ivoire in the contemporary period thus proving that 'strong government' is not limited to military rule[1].

In Ghana the first military regime took power in 1966 overthrowing the leader since independence, Kwame Nkrumah. As is much the trend with military coups, the new administration claimed legitimacy on a list of grievances many of which were directly related to the resilience of the military. However, the critical public justification of the coup was the increasingly personalized rule by Nkrumah, most evidenced by the change of the state to a one-party system in 1964. Nevertheless, upon assuming power, the first military regime and those which followed continuously took up the same infrastructure and institutions used by their civilian predecessors and largely remnant from the colonial rule of oppression (Gutteridge 1975, p. 66-72). Thus it is no surprise that Boafo-Arthur argues that all four military regimes which ruled during Ghana between 1965 and 1990 "trampled and subverted the fundamental rights of the citizenry" (2005 p. 111). With no institutionalization of good governance and state power heavily restricted to the head of state, any likelihood of any inclusive government was wholly dependent on would-be benevolent dictators (which never emerged). Boafo-Arthur's further accuses the military regimes of illegal confiscation of property, purposeful exclusion of the citizenry from the governance process and of the 1979 extrajudicial killings of three former heads of state and five high-ranking generals. These killings, ordered by then president Jerry Rawlings, have been justified as a compromise to those within the ranks who wanted a bloodbath during the coup (Jeffries 1989, p. 95). That such an action could be justified on the grounds of compromise speaks volumes to the brute strength of the

military regime in its governance tactics.

That said, Cote D'Ivoire as a one-party state is certainly no less immune from 'strong government'. On the most basic level, Houphouët-Boigny just like the military leaders of Ghana, essentially retained the administrative structures of the heavy-handed colonial government, only replacing the people (Campbell 1987, p. 118) One area where he did reorganize government structures was to form ethnic committees of representation, a "mask of participation" whereby he could claim people were given a space to air grievances (Ibid p. 111). However, when true societal discontent festered in a popular desire to organize along more class-based formations, he quashed civil society arguing that the ethnic committees were the ideal form of citizen participation. Practically speaking, this allowed him to deny power to unions without refusing their existence outright and thus retain power in his established patrimonial system. (Campbell 1987, p. 111 – 113). As such, it is this system where we see the heart of 'strong government' in Cote D'Ivoire. Though popularly known for fostering corruption as will be discussed below, patromonialism cannot be discounted for its inherent design as a system of power centralization between feeder clients and recipient patrons. The very fact that Fauré (1989) suggests "that patromonialism is found in an almost ideal state" (p. 70) in Cote D'Ivoire only cements the argument that the country experienced 'strong government'.

Such is the trappings of either the OnePartyState or the Military rule. With no institutionalization of popular participation that is allowed to evolve as popular concerns evolve, and where there is no institutionalized competition or critique, both practically become defined and ruled by the characters at the top and influenced by those who help to entrench the rulers' power.

Corruption

In discussing corruption then, the use of a position of trust and/or authority for gain in a manner that contravenes the stated structure and processes of the state[2] (Transparency International 2007). The prevalence of it in the case of Cote D'Ivoire is likely quite obvious as it was entrenched in the power structures of the state as a pyramid-style clientalist structure controlled by Houphouët-Boigny's (Fauré 1989, p. 69). Advancing through the period of 1965 – 1990 corruption leaked horizontally blurring the lines between private and public ownership; many members of the government either ran state corporations or owned companies that retained a monopoly relationship with the state and also ensured autonomous sub-sets of clients directed state to the appropriate minister. The result was consistent accumulation of wealth in a very small portion of the national community and amongst international interests, as the bulk of the Ivorian economy was based on exports (Ibid, p. 68-70). Such occurrences caused Campbell to remark in 1987, "one does not succeed in business in Africa if one belongs to the opposition or if one opposes the existing order or even if one is simply outside the control of those in power" (p. 110).

The Ghanaian case study appears no different with the exception perhaps of a claimed motivation for more institutionalized regimes. Notably, however, the actual implementation promised by sequential coup leaders was sorely lacking. What was consistent, however, was a diversion of public funds to expanding military interests and redistributing political and economic power amongst military elites (Decalo 1973, p. 117). In turn, Jefferies characterizes Ghana as "a highly personalist (or neo-patrimonial) machine, seeking to benefit individual favourites or networks of clients with varying degrees of concern for larger social aggregates" (1989, p. 75). While it should be noted that in Ghana under military rule business men, academics and the press did gain more freedom, with regards to corruption a best case scenario suggested that petty bribery and corruption remained endemic (Gutteridge 1975, p. 77). Meanwhile Decalo argues that the scope of nepotism, corruption and smuggling all seemed to broaden with military take-over (1973, p. 119). Furthermore, the military regimes consistently felt threats of counter-coups and indeed Rawlings enacted one because of the immense economic stagnation (Gutteridge 1975, p. 76). In ultimate, though not necessarily unworthy, pessimism Decalo asserts that the little socio-political development did occur during the Ghanaian military regimes was dependent upon the simultaneous increase of personal benefit to those at the top. In other words, the more elites could accrue, the more the state would be pushed along its development track, giving further pause to the motivations behind good governance even considering Ghana's current position.

Historical Situation and External Factors

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In this context of weak performance by both states to achieve the independence goals of national development, there is resonance to Bayart's (1993) claim that the state is nothing more than a historical consolidation of elites. Indeed, this final section argues that historical elements which occurred in both countries must also be considered in terms of the outcomes of corruption and 'strong government'. These elements are initial post-independence alliance formations, structural organization and economic strife.

Dealing first with post-independence allegiances, Allen (1995) suggests there were two major and not necessarily exclusive strategies for party building and electoral support. The first was a reliance on individuals who already had considerable local followings. The second was the use of clientelist ('patronage') politics to bind local notables to the party and local voters to the candidates, whereby voters were offered collective material benefits (roads, schools, clinics, water etc) for their votes, and candidates and notables offered individual benefits (cash, access to licenses, credit or land etc). This combination produced a set of locally-based MPs and deputies, responsive to local demands, and loosely organised into parties whose leaders had access to private or public resources. This initial mode however flung states into 'crises of clientilism': a rapid growth of politicized communities vying for political control. To combat this, the state went two ways: it either centralized patromonialism, as in the case of Cote D'Ivore or the military intervened as in Ghana (p. 304 – 306).

However, despite the regime split in name, as has been noted above and Gutteridge (1975) argues military governments ran essentially like one-party states. This is most apparent in the first military take-over in Ghana. Replacing Nkrumah's single-party regime military officials supplanted a dozen or so top positions and left the majority of the remaining civic officials. If need be bureaucratic Nkrumah supporters were replaced but with internal promotions. The end result was essentially a change in the top leadership with little structural change. Therefore the patrimonial systems were left to flourish regardless of the head of state (p. 77).

Finally, in both states economic growth has been dependent on export crops therefore leaving political and economic power in the hands of a few elites and foreign influence, left to play the markets to their own benefits (Campbell 1987, p. 114). In Cote D'Ivoire we can see this process during the economic crisis from 1978 – 1982, spawned by failing cocoa and coffee prices. In a classic case of overinvestment into resources, the economic crash was compounded by greedy spending during the preceding period of high international market prices when elites expected high returns on their investments. This was followed by a lack of cuts to agricultural spending in the first two years of the crash while the elites held on hoping for market turn-around, likely in disbelief of their economic misfortune (Fauré 1989, p. 68).

Ghana presents a slightly different picture. Their main economic crisis, again due to a drop in international crop prices, occurred during 1959 – 1964 under Nkrumah's rule. While cocoa prices slumped, $550 million USD was transferred into state glamour projects and political expedients (Gutteridge 1975, p. 73). Perhaps out of denial or perhaps to compensate elites for their lost income in the cocoa market. Whatever the reason, the key to this situation is that the military overthrew Nkrumah's government largely citing economic concerns such as this and in taking up the reins did very little but increase spending and benefits for the military, i.e. the new elite (Gutteridge 1975, p. 73). That is to say these economic crashes encouraged reactionary elite behaviour to protect their accumulation scheme, be it through centralization of power or misappropriation of funds (corruption) again regardless of regime type.

Conclusion

This essay has explored the relationship between military rule as it relates to 'strong government' and the one-party state as it relates to corruption and has demonstrated through the case studies of Ghana and Cote D'Ivoire that the relationships are not mutually exclusive. Both outcomes have strong manifestations in each regime type. As such, one is forced to question if there isn't something else that provokes corruption and heavy-handed centralization of power, if there aren't other variables to consider. It is this author's argument, advanced through the last section of this essay, (Gutteridge, 1975) that the provocation for corruption and 'strong government' stems from historical alliances, the essential structural similarities of the regimes and the influences of international economy. Such an argument is critical as it forces us to look more closely at the nuances of any one state and recognize the importance of individual actors and variables as they contribute to the overall action of the state.

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[1] This discussion and definition of 'strong government' is intentionally limited to the period of study and is not meant to comment on the current situations of either state; Ghana as a golden child of Africa and Cote D'Ivoire floating in and out of civil war. While tempting to link these situations I would argue that this is due to the ambiguous term 'strong government' and would caution against attempts to present the current position of the states today as solely attributable to regime type. Much can be said of the individual leaders, the international influences on the two countries, their different colonial histories and their different populations—to name only a few variables.

[2] This is an extremely specific and limited definition. However, defining corruption itself could consume this entire essay and many more. As such I've chosen the version which informs much of today's policy on corruption.

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