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Kwame A. Ninsin (ed.). 2016. Issues in Ghana's Electoral Politics. Dakar: CODESRIA. 217 pp.

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many common accounts presenting the system of *ngoma* and *bungoma* as a reflex of modernity, a reaction to colonialism, or as indigenous pseudo-science. His book is a key narrative in the ongoing debate on the nature and role of so called non-Western, alternative, or traditional healing systems in the increasingly delocalised world.

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The issue of elections in Africa is frequently and variously discussed by political scientists, especially those of non-African origin who tend to apply “Western” models, theories or at least general assumptions about the elections’ *raison d’être*, their role within society and the political system, or the way in which the elections were conducted. It is very useful, though, to combine (or contrast) this kind of academic production with publications from African authors describing particular experiences from their homelands, solving commonly omitted issues, or proposing concrete recipes for improvements of the African elections’ character which is (both by “insiders” and “outsiders”) generally perceived as flawed and dubious. An anthology of essays focusing on elections in Ghana edited by Kwame A. Ninsin certainly represents that kind of publication, which is worthy of a deeper concern.

As Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the University of Ghana, Kwame A. Ninsin, now 80 years old, represents a unique juncture of the era of colonial Ghana (formerly Gold Coast), when the first political parties were established, and of current Ghana’s Fourth Republic, famous for (inter alia) three successful democratic

alternations in power through “ballots, not bullets.” Ghana’s politics, steadily concentrated around two major political parties (the New Patriotic Party – NPP, and the National Democratic Congress – NDC), is considered as exceptional in West Africa as well as in Africa south of the Sahara. Ghana has often been labelled as “a beacon of stability” in the region suffering from devastating intrastate conflicts (or civil wars, actually) and other forms of massive political violence, military regimes, as well as from weak or dysfunctional political institutions. But is this perception correct, or rather misleading? Are Ghanaian institutions strong enough to sustain a real crisis comparable to the crises in other West African states? Hasn’t Ghana just somehow been lucky during the 26 years of the Fourth Republic? These and other important questions are addressed in the anthology of texts edited by Professor Ninsin, whose venerable and experienced insights into Ghanaian politics offer interesting and usually omitted topics, evidences, and approaches to answer the questions and to raise subsequent ones.

Ninsin postulates an appealing and provocative statement in his introduction: “the 1999 Constitution ended the circus of political transitions from authoritarian regimes to constitutional/civilian regimes without resolving the problem of fragile institution. Rather it introduces another cycle of political transitions that would further subvert the newly established governance institutions” (Ninsin 2016: 4). The following essays have more or less confirmed this postulate from various angles.

Dealing with the issue of elections, it is impossible to avoid the problem of voters’ motivations to vote for a particular candidate. In the case of African elections, a leading theme is the importance of ethnic identity for voters’ decision vis-à-vis their rational choice – i.e., identity voting vs. issue voting. Ziblim Iddi, in his chapter “The Regional Balance of Presidential Tickets in Ghanaian Elections: Analysis of the 2008 General Elections,” focuses on the role of ethnic identity and clientelism in the 2008 presidential elections in the Northern Region of Ghana. He concludes that the role of ethnicity differs significantly within ethnic groups of the surveyed region, whereas ethnicity played the crucial role among the Gonja, for Mamprusi a “rational” clientelism was more substantial. His chapter offers a rather unusual view on ethnic vs. issue voting, for example by making an important

differentiation between ethnicity and clientelism, which are frequently perceived as interchangeable. Moreover, he also closely describes various strategies and decisions of political parties how to play the ethnic card in various conditions.

A more traditional point of view on the rationality of voters is offered in the chapter “Manifestos and Agenda Setting and Elections in Ghanaian Elections” by Joseph R. A. Ayee. On the basis of a deep and insightful analysis, Ayee assumes that manifestos are important for electoral campaigns. However, the politicians are mostly reluctant to fulfil them as is interestingly portrayed by a comparison of manifestos from 1992 to 2012 showing that the vast majority of the objectives remained the same. Ayee’s analysis is concluded by quite qualified suggestions, which could in turn cultivate the policies, and also a “quality” of voters’ decision making, for example, to translate the manifestos into local languages or to improve awareness of the parties’ manifestos among their grassroots members and activists.

The focus on intraparty politics is further unfolded in the chapter “In Search of ‘Honorable’ Membership: Parliamentary Primaries and Candidate Selection in Ghana” by Cyril K. Daddieh and George M. Bob-Milliar, who focus on the “heart and soul of the party”¹ candidate selection in parliamentary primaries. According to them, despite the formal rules, primaries are far from being democratic because a crucial role is played by the unregulated use of money which undermines their democratic conduct. It would be useful to compare their analysis with a previous one, concerning both presidential and parliamentary elections written by the author of the present review (Prouza 2010) or to adopt a coherent methodological approach designed, for example, by Gideon Rahat and Reuven Y. Hazan (2001) who are mentioned by the authors after all. Regardless of these suggestions, their text provides very interesting insights into this vital role of each political party.

The dangerous two-way relation between resources and political power mentioned above does not, however, end in the primaries. According to Ninsin’s chapter, “Elections and Representation in Ghana’s Democracy,” it continues to both the parliamentary and

1 This quite fitting term was used in the title of Magnus Öhman’s book about candidate selection in Ghana and Africa (Öhman 2004).

the presidential elections, and to the subsequently established government (or to political representation in general) since holding political power offers amazing opportunities for private enrichment. As Ninsin adds interestingly, the same benefit-oriented logic is the reason for a high voters' turnout because the voters expect gains from their support within the logic of patron-client relations.

Ninsin further evolves the notion of state-capture for the politicians' benefits in another chapter, "Political Transitions, Electoral Mobilization, and State Institutions," –in which he focuses on highlighted alternations in power during the 2000 and 2008 elections. According to him, the transfer of power is perceived as a zero-sum game, in which the victorious party gains everything at the expense of its defeated counterpart. To gain power therefore means to deny any, even purposeful and useful, dialogue with the losing party, and also to deny any possibility of being controlled by the political opposition or by the impartial institutions. Missing or malfunctioning institutions dealing with power transitions therefore create acrimony, instability, and an environment suitable for corruption and the abuse of power. Moreover, political transitions have direct negative effects on the country's economy, as Kwabena Asomanin Anaman points out in his chapter "Impact of Democratic Political Transition on the Economy of Ghana."

Whereas Anaman focuses mostly on the negative impact of macroeconomic mismanagement on socioeconomic development during transitional times, Maxwell Owusu deals with long-term and more general relations between development and institutions. In his chapter "Democracy without Development: The Perils of Plutocracy in Ghana," Owusu notes that the existence of anti-corruption laws is certainly important but not sufficient if the institutions concerned are weak or purposely malfunctioning. Owusu ends with the rather unrealistic claim that the political elite should strengthen the rule of institution and "... replace the politics of self-service in pursuit of self-interest that is currently predominant with the politics of public service and the pursuit of the public good" (Owusu 2016: 182). How this can be done, and why the political elite should dispense with immense wealth resulting from political power remains unclear.

A suggested answer may be found in the chapter “Ghana’s 2008 Elections, the Constitution and the Unexpected: Lessons for the Future” by Kofi Quashigah. The author accuses the 1992 Constitution of insufficient framework that had not allowed institutions to function properly, as well as subsequent political representations that had not corrected the deficiencies and, quite to the contrary, abused them for their private interests. Quashiagah therefore suggests concrete improvements of the institutional framework (especially in terms of re-engineering the timetable for elections, and the regulation of the transition process after the fashion of U.S. provisions), although he is aware of the fact that rules and laws must be complemented with a proper “political attitude” (i.e., human agency) in order to function.

The importance of human agency is also discussed by Maame Adwoa A. Gyeke-Jandoh in her chapter “Civic Election Observation and General Elections in Ghana under the Fourth Republic: Enhancing Government Legitimacy and the Democratization Process.” Gyeke-Jandoh perceives civil society as a crucial champion of Ghana’s democracy. As an example, she employs the Coalition of Domestic Election Observation (CODEO), a civil society organisation observing Ghanaian elections since 1996 which has achieved to avoid any major pre- or post-election violence and substantially increased the credibility of the results of the elections.

Although the anthology under review was published in 2016, its content deals at the most with a situation shortly after the 2012 elections. Moreover, five of the nine chapters have not even reached the 2012 elections because they “froze up” in the previous elections of 2008. The time frame is therefore partly out-of-date, what is quite detrimental, especially with regard to the results of the 2016 elections which brought the third alternation in power, from the former ruling party NDC to the former opposition and presently ruling NPP. The issue of alternation in power is, at the same time, one of the very important topics of the anthology and the example of the 2016 elections could substantially broaden our understanding of the phenomenon, especially in the chapters “Political Transitions, Electoral Mobilization, and State Institutions” by Kwame Ninsin and “Impact of Democratic Political Transition on the Economy of Ghana” by Kwabena Asomanin Anaman. Dealing with the topic of a weak institutional framework, it would also be useful to focus more profoundly on the Supreme Court

trial concerning the “Election Petition” from the NPP in 2013 which, according to me, showed a promising example of a functioning and trustful institutional process, as well as of the peaceful and democratic attitudes of the political leaders and almost the entire society.

Together with the slightly belated and disparate time frame of the texts, it is possible to question their structure and cohesion with the editors’ introduction, especially concerning the frequent repeating of basic facts about Ghana’s history in all chapters. Giving the historical context this can be useful if a reader wants to read one or two chapters, but if she or he tends to read the whole book, then it is rather redundant. To sum up, the anthology *Issues in Ghana’s Electoral Politics* is definitely worthy to read, especially for those interested in Ghanaian politics and/or electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa in general.

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