Divisive Democracy, Urban Trade, and Small-Small Politics in Northern Ghana

Ulrik Jennische | PhD, Researcher, Stockholm University

ABSTRACT   Political governance in Tamale, Northern Ghana, is complicated by the conflict between the two royal lineages within the traditional Dagbon state that culminated with the killing of the paramount chief in 2002. The major political parties have in turn politicized this division and thus contaminated the national government with the Dagbon political predicaments. The Ghanaian constitution amplifies this bifurcation through its winner-takes-all system that vests great power in the president. Based on ten months of ethnographic fieldwork, this article explores these entanglements by analyzing small-scale street and market traders' relation to the political parties. Although politically interested and engaged, traders often find political parties as polarizing and responsible for the conflict. While this distrust toward political parties and the government risks undermining the entire project of decentralization, it also brings traders together. This perspective thus challenges common understandings of democracy by showing how social cohesion and a sense of community can be formed in response to democratic processes and development projects rather than resulting from them. This article simultaneously shows how, alongside the conflict, there has always been a peace process beyond that initiated by the political establishment and the eminent chiefs. This peace process manifests itself in the long-term economic and social relations that underpins the moral economy of small-scale urban trade.
Keywords: Ghana, democracy, conflict, trade, citizenship

Introduction

In Dagbon, the traditional Dagbamba state in Northern Ghana, there are two royal branches (called *gates*): the Abudus and the Andanis. Both aspire to the paramount chieftaincy title, Ya Na, which has led to divisions and violence. In 2002, Ya Na Yakubu Andani II and his court was killed by a group of Abudus resulting in more violence, disorder, and divisions politicised by the dominant political parties. It was not until January 2019 that a new Ya Na could be selected and installed (or enskinned as it is called in Dagbon).

Since 1992, Ghana has gone through a fundamental democratisation process in which the country went from being an authoritarian and extremely poor country run by military regimes in the 1970s and 1980s to become a liberal democracy with a burgeoning welfare system. Ghana is often uncritically described as "a model of democratic peace in Africa" (Afolayan 2010: 117) and measures high on democratic evaluations such as Freedom House or Polity IV.[1] The democratisation has of course brought many possible developments to the Ghanaian population. Yet in Tamale, the capital of the Northern Region, and the largest

---

[1] In Freedom House's Freedom in World Scores (2017), Ghana measures 1/7 on Political Rights and 2/7 on Civil Liberties (1 is most free, and 7 least free), and has the highest aggregate score on the continent (Freedom House 2017). In the Polity IV democratic index, Ghana scores 8 on a 10 (full democracy) to -10 (autocracy) scale (Center for Systemic Peace 2011)

city in Dagbon, it also formed a deeply politicised environment, which added to the already critical and at times violent conflict within the traditional chieftaincy politics. In Tamale and in many other places around Ghana, the political parties thrive on similar divides and rely on what Comaroff and Comaroff (2016) describe as ID-ology (Identity-ology as opposed to idea-ology), which challenges the idea of a representative democracy in the Western liberal sense. The confluence of local traditional governance with democratic procedures and national party mobilisation created a context in which democracy as a political system appeared divisive and conflict-creating.

Meanwhile, the government of Ghana is in the middle of a formalisation process that among other things aims to better control and tax certain economic activities and improve urban planning. This direction rests on a politics of informality in which spaces, people, and activities first have to be defined as informal by the state in order to be formalised (Jennische 2012, 2018). Through the implementation of welfare services, the state has directed new rights to a segment of the population that was previously excluded.

This article attempts to shed new light on these processes of democratisation and formalisation by analysing how small-scale traders act and perceive these developments.[2] Small-scale everyday trade now fills the streets, gutters, pavements, traffic islands, open areas, and planned marketplaces in all Ghanaian cities. Traders have become important nodes, fulfilling essential functions in the maintenance of the city. They are everywhere, where people move and where authorities are unable or unwilling to prevent their presence. In this respect, their activities make up an indistinct and expanding marketspace. Meanwhile, the economic restructuring that Ghana undertook to become a part of the global economy also led to an increasing number of people finding their means of survival along the streets and public spaces. As Bayat (2013: 33) describes, developing countries, because of the global restructuring, have seen a "double process of, on the one hand, integration and, on the other, social exclusion and informalization."

In this article, I argue that in the context of formalisation and democratisation, traders within this expanding marketspace formed their own view on development and democracy, and positioned themselves in a moral mode of disappointment and distrust against the state's performance. They subversively stated claims to the government demanding that their ability to make a living and to progress must not be threatened by neither corruption and polarisation nor political interventions and development projects. These sentiments derive from the norms and values of the moral economy and the traders' outlook on society. I frame these responses as a small-small politics; a productive engagement with the national political discourse and projects, that enabled traders to dismiss and condemn the government while it simultaneously laid the foundation for an alternative form of citizenship that was more inclusive and trustworthy. Small-small is an emic term that I have previously allowed to frame the specific moral economy of small-scale trade in Ghana (Jennische 2018). It builds on two sets of norms on how to behave and conduct business. First, business should be about gradual progress, rather than quick profits. Small-small thus encapsulates the morally infused temporality of business expansion as well as the size of the markup. Second is the norm of letting others in, which concerns both the obligation to allow others to buy and sell goods on credits and to share selling places along the streets and marketplaces.

---

[2] This article is made up of parts from different chapters of my doctoral thesis in social anthropology (Jennische 2018).

Simultaneously enabling and restrictive, small-small generates solidarity and trust among traders. This perspective thus challenges common understandings of democracy by showing how social cohesion and a sense of community can be formed in response to democratic processes and development projects rather than resulting from them.

The study is based on an ethnographic fieldwork of participant observation and interviews between September 2012 and June 2013 among small-scale urban traders in Tamale. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from several parts of the state – politicians, tax-collectors, public officers from various departments, the regional police and security coordinator. I have also interviewed two centrally positioned Dagbon chiefs and numerous representatives of different trader associations. Although the material spans over several topics, a central theme is the relation between the state in its many forms, local traditional politics, and small-scale trade. The presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2012 and its long legal aftermath were the central political events during the fieldwork.

The Dagbon Dispute and Party Politics

The enskinment of the Ya Na Abubakari Mahama II in January 2019 that rests on an agreement between Abudu and Andani leaders, will hopefully in time end the conflict that has stifled the Dagbon state for decades. After all, the conflict derives from the power invested in the paramount chief. Much has been written about the complex entanglements of the Dagbon conflict (see Ladouceur 1972; Mahama 2009; Tonah 2012; Awedoba 2009; MacGaffey 2006b, 2013). The purpose here is to go through the most significant events in order to contextualise traders' position toward local and national politics and to explain how party politics in Tamale cannot be separated from the divisions caused by the Dagbon conflict.

Since the colonial period and the British' indirect rule, Ya Na, who resides in Yendi, controls large areas of land. The Abudus and Andanis are the two competing royal lineages, or *gates*, who aspire that power. The Dagbon chieftaincy structure is largely a patrilineal system consisting of hundreds of hierarchically ordered chiefs. MacGaffey (2013: 22) argues that before the formation of the Northern Territories, Dagbon was not very state-like at all. Hierarchies of division and subdivision were not as distinct as the colonial rule saw them to be. But through the implementation of indirect rule, the authority and power of Ya Na expanded.

The history of the conflict can be traced back to the mid-19th century, and the death of Na Yakubu in 1864. Two out of his many sons, Na Abudulai and Na Andani, were able to exclude other sons of previous Ya Nas from becoming legitimate kings. All Ya Nas since then are descendants from either Abudulai or Andani. The lineages have ever since been involved in several violent disputes over power (See MacGaffey 2013: 54-57). At first the conflict was mostly of local concern, but after independence, the conflict reached the highest political level of the young Ghanaian nation. In 1960, President Nkrumah established the Legislative Instrument 59 (LI 59) to solve the conflict between the Abudus and Andanis. It stated that the two houses would alternate holding the position of Ya Na. Although the two houses view alternation as a legitimate method of succession, it has never really been fully in play. The LI 59 maintained peace until the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966. In this process, the Abudus and Andanis had become aligned with the dominant political parties, who in

turn promised support for their votes. The Andanis lined up with Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP), later the National Alliance Liberals (NAL) and finally the National Democratic Congress (NDC). The Abudus lined up with the Progress Party and later the New Patriotic Party (NPP) (MacGaffey 2013: 62-68; also see Tonah 2012).

The conflict has turned violent in Yendi and Tamale on many occasions, but the most dreadful event took place after the elections of 2000 when NPP won and many Abudus in Yendi believed things would change in favor of their cause. In March 2002, violence broke out which culminated with the murder of Ya Na Yakubu Andani. To further aggravate the situation, Ya Na's body was dismembered and parts of it used as trophies when the perpetrators paraded through the streets of Yendi (Awedoba 2009: 206). 30 people were killed and 36 houses along the palace were burnt down.

The killing of Ya Na and his court thus peaked a long ongoing dividing process between the Abudus and Andanis and their supporters. The killing was followed by a long-term curfew and state of exception in Tamale and Yendi. Tamale's General Assembly was dissolved until the next election. Meanwhile, the metropolis was governed by a 12 member Interim Management Committee, supported by different technical departments (UN-HABITAT 2009). The Andanis received strong support and help from the NDC and its founder, former President J.J. Rawlings, while the Abudu on the other hand received promises from NPP. Since Ya Na was killed during the NPP regime, many Andanis claimed the party played a part in the murder. The lack of security and the inability to convict the perpetrators during its time in power further deepened these perceptions. The government's commission of inquiry clearly stated in its report that the police never made a proper investigation of the murder, but also blamed both parties for provocative actions. Later, two men were tried for the murder of Ya Na, but the evidence did not hold in court. A committee of Eminent Kings headed by the Asantehene (the paramount Asante chief) was appointed to mediate between the parties. In 2006, Ya Na was buried, and his son was appointed as regent but without the ability to appoint chiefs or alienate land. The committee's conclusions, a "Road Map to Peace" and later a "Final Peace Agreement" did not settle the matter. After NDC's victory in the elections of 2008, Andanis were hoping that Ya Na's murderers would be punished and a new Andani Ya Na enskinned. In April 2010, the military arrested 30 men in Yendi of which fifteen were put on trial. One of them escaped and the other 14 were acquitted. In Yendi, where a majority are Abudus, people were celebrating, while in the Andani-dominated Tamale, Andani youths attacked NDC offices, and the city was placed under another curfew (MacGaffey 2013: 65-68).

The acts of political violence were directly connected with the intermingling of Dagbon chieftaincy with national politics. This, in turn, manifests itself in a division of urban space. The city of Tamale is divided in line with political party affiliations. Neighborhoods, streets, and mosques are often associated with one of the major political parties. Some Andani informants even feared entering the NPP/Abudu stronghold of Aboabo. Palaces were also seen as either NPP or NDC. When it is time for Damba celebrations there was a perception among some that the Abudus and the Andanis gather at different palaces. According to MacGaffey (2006a, 2006b) the biggest mosques are also connected to different sides, a separation that goes back to the 1950s.

Abudu and Andani divisions interact with other forms of belongings, such as that between Dagbamba and other ethnic groups. Geschiere and Nyamnjoh (2000) argue that belonging, ethnicity, and regionalism are key features of African parties. They argue that

democratisations in Africa have led to a rather non-liberal emphasis on cultural differences, belonging, and autochthony. In many situations, a new divide between those acclaimed to be autochthons and those perceived to be allochthons (strangers or newcomers), have emerged, constituting a new form of ethnicity. Although ethnic or regional belonging were at times important when accessing a place to sell in Tamale, that behavior was then always condemned, and regarded as examples of "tribalism". Also, local and national trader organisations had mobilised against some of the foreign traders who ignored the morally regulated roles of the market networks by selling imported goods directly to the end consumers. Yet, in most cases the relation between Dagbamba and others was not politically infected and did not generate any wider form of mobilisation. Traders thus formed a community based on moral norms and shared experiences in this context of division and conflict. Those who did not conform to the norms, no matter of whichever ethnic belonging, were often morally condemned and accused of being greedy.

Democracy Increases Polarisation

The Abudu–Andani dispute is further amplified by a democratic political system that vests almost all powers in the President. Ghana is a politically divided country. NDC (in power 1993-2000 and 2009-2016) controls the north, the coast and the east. NPP (in power 2001-2008 and 2017 onward) controls the middle regions, and especially the densely populated and rich Ashanti region, with its capital Kumasi. This divide goes back to the time of independence and the days of Kwame Nkrumah. But there are also many places around Ghana that have strong political tensions within them. As in Tamale, this is often the case where there are chieftaincy disputes (see for instance, Lund 2003, Lentz 2006). In a way, the democratisation has provided a space for conflicts such as that between the Abudus and Andanis to be played out.

The local governments of the Metropolitan/Municipal/District Assemblies (MMDA) are, as stated in the Constitution,[3] designed to be "non-partisan" (Nyendu 2015), in the sense that its assemblymen must not be associated with any political party. The assemblymen are either elected as individuals representing an electoral area or appointed by the President in consultation with traditional authorities and other local interest groups. The purpose behind the nonpartisan form of local government is to allow members to act independently, rather than following the interests of the political parties that are believed to create disunity and divisions. But, the President of Ghana still has great power over MMDAs since he is allowed to appoint some of the assemblymen as well as the Metropolitan Chief Executive (MCE, often referred to as mayor). The system is widely debated, and critics have argued that because of the role of the President, the assemblies are in fact already partisan (see Nyendu 2015). In this article, the government, unless specified, refers to the local and the national government. Since the President is so deeply involved in the formation of all local governments, they better represent the President than the districts' citizens. This means that the local and national governments are often conflated, and traders rarely distinguish

---

[3] "A candidate seeking election to a District Assembly or any lower local government unit shall present himself to the electorate as an individual, and shall not use any symbol associated with any political party." (Ghana, 1992 Constitution: Article 248, p 1, in Nyendu 2015: 58). "A political party shall not endorse, sponsor, offer a platform to or in anyway [sic] campaign for or against a candidate seeking election to a District Assembly or any lower local government unit." (Ghana, 1992 Constitution: Article 248, p 2, in Nyendu 2015: 58).

between them. The politics of Tamale Metropolitan Assembly is often projected onto the national government and vice versa.

The importance of winning the presidency creates in turn a "winner-takes-all system" in the sense that the opposition will have almost no representation in the local government even if a majority of its residents have voted on them. The winner-takes-all is a frequently occurring description of Ghanaian democracy, especially among Ghanaian political scholars (see for instance Gyimah-Boadi and Prempeh 2012; Gyampo 2016; Abotsi 2013) and the news media. The Constitution Review Commission (2011) also recognised the tensions, acrimony and conflicts associated with these political mechanisms. The winner-takes-all system is further boosted by the government's ability to allocate public sector jobs, construction contracts, consultancies, and directorships. After a turnover in government, major reallocations are done based on party loyalty. Gyimah-Boadi and Prempeh (2012) describe how this polarising winner-takes-all competition becomes particularly critical in the light of Ghana's recent oil findings. They see in this regard, a "toxic politics," with political parties becoming merely campaign machines dependent on "foot soldiers" who uncritically do their party's dirty work, and in which political "control of the state provides the part in power with enormous material and political resources and advantages over its rivals" (Gyimah-Boadi and Prempeh 2012: 101).

The national government's decentralisation ambitions, which occur in large through the MMDAs (Nyendu 2015), has thus further intensified the polarisation. Buur and Kyed (2007) discern a trend starting with the numerous democratisation processes around Africa in the early nineties in which traditional authorities in various ways have regained their legitimacy and been given a new importance (see Bierschenk 2006, and Hagberg 2007 for ethnographic examples from Benin and Burkina Faso). While chiefs in Ghana are prohibited from being actively engaged in party politics (Article 276 of the Chieftaincy Act of the 1992 constitution), the Dagbon conflict and the killing of Ya Na illustrate how chieftaincy cannot be taken out of the context of political parties. The assemblies' increased power has led to local conflicts, such as the Dagbon dispute, becoming national political affairs, which may potentially undermine the decentralisation project (see Debrah 2014).

Therefore, from one point of view Ghana is a democratic role model in Africa. The leading position in African political developments is important for Ghana's self-image as the first sub-Saharan nation to become independent; marketing itself as the "Gateway to Africa", and having one of the continents highest growth rates.[4] But from another point of view, that of how democracy vernacularises (Michelutti 2007) in local understandings and practices, we see a political situation that is potentially volatile. We see a toxic winner-takes-all form of competition that in Tamale infiltrates social life and enables local chieftaincy disputes to be played out on a national political arena. The tensions within the Dagbon state work underneath other forms of politics which thus complicate politicians' ability to rule the city.

Trading Across Divisions

Trading takes place in the context of polarisation, violence, and divisions. But among traders, those divisions are harder to discern. Abudus and Andanis trade together, they claim

---

[4] In 2011 Ghana was even the second fastest growing economy in the world (in terms of % GDP growth) after Mongolia (Pasquali 2015, Nov 01).

selling places together, and assist each other in their daily work. While Dagbamba traders do see themselves as either Abudu or Andani, within small-scale trade those identities are not allowed to dominate and influence economic and social life. They are deemphasised by a moral economy of inclusion and solidarity that I frame as small-small (see Jennische 2018). Instead, Abudus and Andanis are joined in their critique against dividing mechanisms. Drawing on Fassin's (2009) understanding of moral economy, small-small refers to the norms, values, and obligations that are produced, circulated, and used by actors in the marketspace. Hence it defines what is good and bad. It sets up standards, procedures, and rules. It is a relational code of conduct, and a prescriptive, normative outlook on the world that guides behaviour, forms politics, and legitimises critique and resentment.

The small-small builds on two sets of norms, it is about gradual progress rather than quick profits, and it is about the inclusive norms of sharing, giving credit and enabling further trade on the commodity. These norms along with traders' obligations and dependencies to one another through the many layers of credit relations and the sharing of space, help to generate trust and solidarity that bind traders together in shared social and relational conditions despite their different economic possibilities. This community furthermore thrives on the disappointment against a corrupt state. In relation to this, I thus see small-small politics evolving. It is a form of local politics, injected with disappointment against a polarising, obstructive and unreliable government. The moral economy thus necessitates and exists in a relation to the state.

When traders and security personnel talked about the years of violence, they described the marketplaces as the only institutions in town working as intended. The conflict did not affect the loyalties and trust within the supply chains of the market networks to the same extent as it did outside of the market. Few changed who they traded with. In fact, some traders thought the years following the killing of Ya Na were quite successful. For instance, Hajia Fati, an experienced vegetable seller with a stall along a major street in the city, argued that the conflict and the curfew did not affect her business in any way, people from both sides still came to buy her carrots, cabbage, and onions. But traders were mindful in reaching their home before the curfew which during its strictest hours demanded that everybody were home before 6 pm.

The Tamale Central Market had since democratisation become a practically independent part of the city, a self-taxed place with its own regulations and moral rules, which among other things allowed for traders to rebuild and extend their shops against the regulations of the local government. As the city's political governance were practically non-existent during the years following the murder of Ya Na, this also reinforced the "independence" of the Central Market. However, the conflict deeply affected the work and organisation of the trader associations in Tamale, since they were often aligned with the political parties. The surviving associations were in 2013 merely remnants of what they used to be in terms of organising power, influence, and attractiveness (see Jennische 2018).

In the following section, we will see how traders maintained their business during these political difficulties. Relying on good terms with customers and fellow traders, and on the small-small moral economy that values gradual progress and inclusivity, traders criticised the government for letting politics obstruct their ability to trade. Traders believed the incumbent and previous governments had polarised the town and country and blamed the disruptive political parties and the bickering political climate for hampering the development. We will see how this relation to the government and the political parties was expressed during the

2012 presidential and parliamentary elections and in relation to the corruption and greed that traders argue, characterise the political establishment. As argued, these shared sentiments emerge out of the moral economy of small-scale trade. I see this productive engagement with the regular political levels as a small-small politics, which lays the foundation for a more inclusive form of citizenship.

Electoral Disappointment and Economic Standstill

Before the elections of 2012, party campaigns inundated the marketspace. The elections were planned for Friday the 7th of December. But, due to malfunctioning verification machines, the elections had to continue on the following Saturday as well. However, on Friday, results were already coming in that leaned toward a victory for National Democratic Congress (NDC, the government party). Yet, representatives from the opposition, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), held a press conference on Saturday afternoon claiming that reports they received from their polling agents all over the country predicted their much-wanted victory. On Sunday, the Electoral Commission (EC), declared NDC the winner. In the parliamentary election, the NDC won a majority of the 275 seats (148 seats as opposed to 123 for NPP, 1 for PNC and 3 independent candidates). In the presidential election, John Mahama obtained 50.7 % of the votes against Akufo-Addo's 47.7 %. Speculations were rife. Were the reports given to NPP false, or had NDC been able to defy the new biometric verification machines and somehow added NDC votes to the ballot boxes? Or had NPP early on realised the outcome of the voting, and hence spread suspicions of irregularities, hoping for a second chance?

NPP representatives boycotted the inauguration ceremony which took place as planned on the 7th of January 2013. Earlier, on December 28, the party declared they would file a petition with the Supreme Court, after having reviewed presidential votes from the 26,000 polling stations. NPP disputed more than 1.3 million votes. They claimed the elections were rigged through over-voting, and a malfunctioning biometric fingerprint system. The recently installed biometric machines that were to confirm the fingerprint of every voter broke down in 19 % of the polling stations (Pryce and Oidtman 2014; Brierley and Ofosu 2014). It took the Supreme Court eight months, until August 2013, to declare the NDC candidate and John Mahama as validly re-elected president.

Both television and radio broadcasted the court proceedings live. In the beginning of the case, the frustration and irritation were palpable. Although rumors and allegations aimed primarily at the politicians of the other side spread across town and the country was torn over who should be in power, most traders were upset over how this caused disunity and they were angry over the political elite's incompetence to maintain stability. They were of course concerned about the allegations of rigged elections, but a general position was nevertheless that it should not lead to the political and economic standstill that the preparation and execution of the trial had led to. It was bad for business, and the politicians should have already solved the matter. The traders thus directed their accusations against the elite, against both parties, and against the political system as such, rather than against a perceived other side.

In May 2013, Saibu was disappointed with his business. He had not been selling any shoes for a whole week and had sold only one pair the week before. To Saibu, the obvious reason for this was the live broadcast of the court proceedings that was to air from Monday to Thursday every week, until it was all finished. Saibu was convinced his customers were

home watching TV, rather than coming to town. Maybe he was right. Nevertheless, this annoyed him and his trading friends on the street corner. Their view was that they had already voted, they had done their part. It was now up to the politicians to follow their votes.

The people in town were also following the broadcasts. I saw the Central Market chairman bending over the speaker of his wooden colored radio, and a bit further inside, Selina was turning the wheel frantically on her small green radio, but the reception was crackly. Perhaps the radio wave was lost in the narrow lanes of the market before reaching her store. Hussein had left his pile of trousers at the street with his small boy to follow the TV broadcast from the mobile phone shop close by. He had voted for NDC. But since he was frequently sent away from the streets because of the recently formed task force that had been given mandate to evict traders occupying streets, pavements, and open spaces in the city, he hoped the court case would give NPP the victory. This eviction process framed by the government as a "decongestion" had severely affected his business and he believed a change of government would make the authorities leave his pile of trousers alone. Seidu was listening via the hands-free utility of his mobile phone's FM unit. I often borrowed one of his earphones. We sat tight listening together until there were customers.

While trying to evaluate, traders complained about the effect the court case had on their business, and what influence the expenses of a re-election would have on the economy. A general claim was that they should all just let it go, accept the loss, like the loser in a football game. In Ghana, politics is often metaphorically described through football.

Ghana has a reputation for organising free and fair elections, but the events and aftermath of the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections demonstrates how the small-small politics developed in relation to the divisive democracy, and how it was grounded on disappointments and narratives of injustice. Elections are central features of any democratic citizen-making project, and the way they are held shape opinions about the political system and establishment. For Comaroff and Comaroff (2016: 31), democracy in the so-called Global South is today a fetish, "widely regarded as an enchanted force, one that, if only it could be fully domesticated, not hijacked by those who seek to empower and enrich themselves, might solve real problems in the world." While elections are designed to let citizens peacefully express their political views through the ballot, democratisation has, as we have seen in the context of Tamale, also contributed to the deeply polarised environment and the conflict within the traditional chieftainship. The electoral process designed to peacefully manage and offset stratifications in the society, and to bring unity around how to make decisions, thus nourished factions and divisions. Incidents that in the larger picture of Ghanaian democracy would be small and insignificant, were magnified to characterise the entire democracy, breeding disappointment and distrust. From the perspective and voice of traders we see how there are simultaneously processes, especially in the marketspace, that work against this. The idea of democracy is thus challenged in a different way than by the politics of belonging, in that actors in opposition to divisions partly caused by democratization and party politics can form an alternative community based on cohesion, unity and solidarity.

Corruption, Greed, and the Mobility of Money

The polarised political climate of Ghana and Tamale has not only lead to divisions of people and geography, but the "winner-takes-all" form of politics has also led to a corrupt system of government contracts that forces contractors to align themselves with the political parties.

Large government contracts in construction projects, goods supply, or in the operation of public utilities are according to Osei-Tutu, et al. (2010: 247) often "targeted by corrupt public officials and politicians in partnership with unscrupulous business corporations or their agents". Bierschenk argues that government contracts in Benin are a major cause for the increasing corruption affecting the country. This is due to the "feedback mechanism" (Bierschenk 2006: 549), in which parties need sponsorship from businesspeople, who in turn rely on government contracts. Similarly, in Ghana, government contracts are subjected to favoritism and financial irregularities, which may even risk the government's chances of securing loan packages from the IMF (PRS Group 2015: 12).

By the end of the term and during the court case, several traders argued that the NDC government did not bother to pay their contractors. The common phrase "there is no money in the system" frames the general view of how corruption and greed caused the government to fail in letting money trickle down to the traders in the markets. Instead, the money entered the pockets of the politicians and officeholders. This was the fault of the government, they claimed; it was their responsibility to make the money move accordingly. For young Fuseini, a mattress and pillow trader in central Tamale, this was one reason why his business was going slow. He believed the corrupt system of government contracts hampered the flow of money.

> You know, the contractors, those building the schools, the roads and everything. They sign contracts with the [national] government through the local government. And the state has been late in paying them. Not even their heads, the top ones, have received the money. So, they haven't paid their workers and the contractors are the ones distributing the money in Ghana. […] I know many contractors, and they have been telling me. The only way they can get their money is through seeing someone at the local government, paying him some money for him to call the minister in Accra, and then pay him small so that the money will be distributed. […] You have to pay to get paid. In Africa here, and in Ghana especially, it is common.

The lack of "money in the system" was seen to be due to the government failing in two conflicting regards: spending too much and spending too little. During the spring of 2013, Linda claimed that there was "no money in the system" because the government had spent it all. "But if they have spent it all, would it not have reached the market?", I asked. "It's because they are holding the money, and not letting it out," she then explained. Yakubu in turn expressed something similar, when I pressured him on why the market was not moving.

> There is no money in the system, didn't you hear about the former MPs [Member of Parliament] getting two billion each [referring to the old currency, 200 000 in GH¢]? That's the problem. The government and the ministers chop [spend] money too much. […] They should put money into the system. Now contractors are working for one or two years without receiving any money. They should pay them faster, so the market can move.

The spending of money did not generate movement. Instead, the money stayed within the community of government officials. As Stephen asserted:

> The politicians only care about themselves. Take the MMDCE [Metropolitan, Municipal, District, Chief Executives] who have salaries of 7,200 Ghana cedi per month. Not even during my whole life I will be able to make that kind of money. During the campaigning, they can ask us to do anything; "Sleep there" they say [he points at the pavement to his right],

and we sleep there, but then they don't mind us until the next four years. It's the same for all parties. Before the elections of 2000, which was the first election I was allowed to vote in, I thought it would be better with the NPP in power, but it turned out they were just as greedy.

The comment "there is no money in the system" was especially common to hear during the spring of 2013, the time of political liminality when everybody awaited the outcome of the petition. The trope was a way for traders to understand large macroeconomic processes, and their role within it. Through it, they realised their inability to produce incomes and growth themselves, having to rely on the flow of money generated primarily by government contracts. As traders made business on the margins, with small-small profits on every transaction, they saw the importance of money moving between individuals, and through institutions and companies. Hence, "no money in the system" was an accusation against the state and government for not taking the financial and moral responsibility to make money move. In the context of polarisation, these shared accusations against the government brought traders together. They could share a position of moral superiority by claiming that the government and the political elite of both sides were driven by immoral motives like greed and therefore failing to take the necessary steps to increase the flow of money.

Small-Small Politics and Citizenship

The shared view of the government and political parties as polarising, corrupt, greedy, and obstructive, is essential for the small-small politics. That said, there were those who tried to benefit as much as possible from the political parties, and the politicised situation in general. They joined a party and, by following its orders, they received benefits and resources. On the other end of the continuum, there were those who withdrew from any form of engagement with national or local politics, refused to join a political party or even vote. But such withdrawal was rarely motivated by a non-interest in the politics or development in Ghana; it was rather the ultimate critique of what they saw as a corrupt and unresponsive state. As such it was a political statement.

But most traders' political engagement was somewhere in the middle. They voted but did not campaign for any party. They often engaged in political discussions but not in a polarising way. They blended a pride of being Ghanaian and of the Ghanaian progress with complaints and critique of the political establishment and could thus easily gain support and consensus with others, no matter their party preference. In contrast to a polarising and corrupt political elite, they emphasised dignity, honesty, community, and trust.

The political parties represented opportunities. But for traders, these opportunities came with the cost of having to represent that which caused the divisions and violence in town. A common gift by the parties were fuel coupons. But for more engaged activists, the parties also financed their Hajj journeys. Many actors' only chance to travel to Mecca was through joining a party. For instance, Hajia Mariam and her son, were able to travel to Mecca thanks to their involvement in the NDC. Before the conflict turned violent in Tamale, Hajia used to be a strong NDC supporter. However, she did it silently, so it would not affect the business too much. When the violence in 2002 intensified between the Abudus and Andanis, Hajia withdrew from politics. When I tried to talk to Hajia about party politics she was very reluctant to discuss it. Maybe she was still silently working in support of the NDC, but my impression was that she no longer wanted to be involved in it.

Joining a party could thus be very important for climbing the social ladder; however, it could also backfire against the business if one did not take care. It could be difficult to combine with the moral economy of street and market trading, which required making and maintaining relations. Mohammed, a young shoe and slipper trader, argued that joining a party would make his friends disassociate themselves from him. The parties were simply too associated with violence and morally condemned behavior. Both Dagbambas and non-Dagbambas shared this view. Paul, a man of Asante ethnicity, was about 30 and sold mobile phones and computer accessories such as flash memories and headphones. While his two-year-old daughter was playing around on the street together with the neighboring trader's children, he explained that here in the north there was too much "tribalism," and that this was due the influence of the political parties.

> That tribalism is big here, and in the rest of Africa, is because of our corrupt leaders, who only care about themselves. They are not like you the white who give food to those who have nothing. Our leaders keep everything themselves, no matter how rich they are.

At the same time, he did believe Ghana was slowly improving. The last elections were peaceful, and it was not like before, when the rich politicians armed their supporters and told them to fight.

> Small-small, things improve. But both parties are equally bad. There is a song, 'Our money, chop chop, fast fast something' that describes how politicians absorb all the money for themselves. 'You have to become a member before you chop,' they sing.

Becoming a member of a party is the quickest way to become rich, Paul argued. "The money will come to you, and soon you have both a house and a car." But joining a party means risking your life.

> You'll be the first to die. Everything is politicised and a while ago, someone died over here. All the politicians were involved, trying to free the accused. We on the street, we suffer. They use us for campaigning, but then not mind us until the next election.

The death that Paul refers to was a tragic event of political violence that took place shortly after the results of the 2008 elections were announced and that gave NDC the victory. A young butcher and NDC activist was killed outside the butcher house next to the Central Market. Four young Abudu-men were accused and caught with the "help" of some NDC youth groups who by force took one of them to the police on their motorcycles. There are different versions of the story. But the death of the butcher was interpreted by all in the light of the Abudu–Andani dispute. It took until 2013 for the men to be convicted. The long time in custody without trial was seen from both sides as yet another example of the injustice against them.

While the elections were a major part of the construction of the Ghanaian liberal democracy and its citizens, the politicised conflict and the inability of the government to solve the issue increased the demand for another kind of community. The marketspace formed such a community. There the conflict was not as present; it did not obstruct the everyday life and trade to the same extent. It encourages us think about small-scale trading in this way as an enactment of an alternative citizenship that can be described as a parallel form to what Holston has described as an "insurgent citizenship" (Holston 2008). In Tamale, this citizenship was based on the perception of a neglectful and corrupt state

that was nonresponsive to the needs of the traders. It was thus not so much grounded on resistance and insurgency, as Holston describes, but on the right to make a living. It manifested its appearance through the right to do trade, to support oneself and one's family in urban space. Often it rested on actors claiming a specific place designed for something else, a gutter, part of a walkway, or traffic island. I have elsewhere described (Jennische 2018) how the local and national governments through its ambiguous eviction processes, poorly implemented infrastructural developments and market renovations appear spatially unreliable and a risk to the traders' activities. This contrasts the reliability and permanence that characterise traders' own relation to urban space. The enactment of this citizenship connected the political disappointment directed against the government to the perceived moral righteousness of doing business.

Other actors involved in the marketspace besides small-scale traders also sanctioned and acknowledged this right to do business. Larger store owners blamed the government for not creating enough jobs and complained about the unfair treatment of street vendors. Owners of supermarkets, larger department stores, and petrol stations allowed for some traders to set up businesses outside their entrances, even though they might be selling the same thing. Customers understood the importance of loyalty in the market and rarely changed sellers even though prices were lower with someone else.

For Saibu, the Andani shoe seller who also was an adopted son of late Ya Na, politicians and public officers were the ones to blame for the conflict and polarisation. He shared a street corner, bench, and umbrella with the Abudu brothers Yakubu and Habib. They were close friends, helping each other unpacking goods, covering for each other. They talked, laughed, and prayed together. I asked Saibu one day if them being Abudu created a problem. "No, it's not like that," he answered. "They know who I am and who my father was, and I know who they are. There is no problem. We can even argue about it. But as they know my father, they won't speak about Ya Na. Instead we argue about politics." Through the moral economy of the marketspace, Saibu and his friends were able to produce a different way of living and being without being suffocated by identity politics.

Habib's political engagement illustrates the role of small-small politics in making a community. The purpose of the association Namba Yiŋa (Come Together as One), that he formed together with other young Dagbamba traders along the streets was to allow for conversations about business and life in general. They had about 50 members. Every member had to pay one cedi every meeting. For this, they could get financial help to pay for weddings, *outdooring* ceremonies for the newborns, or assistance for a ruined business. Habib had been the leader of the organisation for the last two years, but some did not appreciate him. His critics wanted to disallow members who could not afford the fee of one cedi per meeting from the association, while Habib thought they should be able to pay back later. They did not talk about politics within the association, but they encouraged everyone to go and vote, and from there to go directly home, without causing any disturbances in town. Namba Yiŋa was a response against the dividing mechanisms of the national politics and the Dagbon state, and a space where Abudus and Andanis could meet and form a community. While Habib was important in the production of this space, he simultaneously approached NPP to set up a deal with them, that if he would get the association to vote for NPP, they would "arrange things" in favor of Namba Yiŋa members. He could not define "things" concretely but referred to some fuzzy contracts that were to be drawn up if the

NPP came to power. While working toward cohesion, he still saw the opportunities arising from the political tensions and tried to make them work in his favor. But he was not able to convince Namba Yiŋa to take his path, and his attempt instead strengthened his critics who valued the nonpartisan aspect of the association.

Traders' memories of the history of violence, the killing of Ya Na, the curfew and the tensions remained. They still made people cautious and inhibited their voting. This also affected the non-Dagbamba. Ibrahim, a Nigerien fabric trader who by naturalisation had become a Ghanaian citizen, explained before the elections that he was not going to vote. "In Tamale, it is too polarised. The town is divided, when they should be one." If Ibrahim had lived in another city, like Kumasi or Accra, he would have voted. But in Tamale it was still too sensitive. Ibrahim's unwillingness to vote was based on his critique against the government for not solving the dispute, and the fear that any voting would further intensify the divisions in Tamale. He also argued it was common that the political parties tried to buy votes. Although most people took the money and voted the way they wanted anyway, it rendered the elections pointless. Seidu also refused to vote in the elections of 2012. He said, "I don't feel it in my heart to vote this time." It was difficult for him to explain further, but he said he did not feel the NDC was performing well and he did not appreciate NPP enough either. Party advocates buying mobile phone credits from Seidu while attending the adjacent bar often urged him to join their party. Yet, he always tried to distance himself from them and explained he was not interested in taking part. It is important to see these actors' reluctance to engage in party politics and voting not as a depoliticised position, but as a conscious non-participatory political act (Ahmad 2014), as a critical stance against corruption, political violence, and disunity. Ahmad argues that the Karachi residents, after the Pakistani elections in 2007, retreated indoors out of moral decency and out of indignation at the political violence taking place on the streets. For her, that withdrawal and denunciation was not due to disengagement but articulated "the possibility of conjuring and addressing an alternative, emergent public by recuperating the highly contingent righteousness of the ordinary" (p 411-412). The Tamale marketspace enabled a political position of non-participation. Here, it was possible for traders to formulate a political alternative of peace, righteousness, and unity, together with other traders and customers by taking a morally superior position against the capricious and provisional politics of the state.

Conclusions

The enskinment of the new Ya Na and the fact that both houses were involved in the reconciliation process preceding it, is a welcoming progress. This article simultaneously shows how, alongside the conflict, there has always been a peace process beyond that initiated by the political establishment and the eminent chiefs. This peace process manifests itself in the long-term economic and social relations that underpins the moral economy of small-scale urban trade.

Based on the moral economy, and the experiences of a polarised political climate, traders enacted a small-small politics by dismissing, condemning, and disregarding the state, while simultaneously being proud of the Ghanaian achievements. In Tamale, the successful Ghanaian democracy appeared divisive and conflict-creating. But traders united and showed solidarity to one another as a response to this effect of democracy. The distrust directed toward the political establishment contrasted with the confidence and trust that traders

often exhibited when entering into relationships within the marketspace. In addition, the distrust negatively affected the view of the entire formalisation project, which was thus perceived as unreliable and unpredictable. Sharing these sentiments, traders were able to form an alternative citizenship that combined the moral economy, the necessary right to trade, and the views of a polarising state and that allowed them to share space with a sense of peace and community.

References

Abotsi, E.K. 2013. Re-thinking the Winner-Takes-All System. *Governance: A Publication of the Institute of Economic Affairs.* 19(4): 1-8.

Afolayan, G.E. 2010. The Democratization Process in Ghana: Key Issues and Challenges. In *Democracy in the South: Participation, the State and the People* (eds) M. Notaras, V. Popovski and B. M. Howe. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.

Ahmad, T. 2014. Socialities of Indignation: Denouncing Party Politics in Karachi. *Cultural Anthropology*, 29(2): 411–432.

Awedoba, A.K. 2009. *An Ethnographic Study of Northern Ghanaian Conflicts: Towards a Sustainable Peace.* Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers

Bayat, A. 2013. *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Second Edition). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bierschenk, T. 2006. The Local Appropriation of Democracy: An Analysis of the Municipal Elections in Parakou, Republic of Benin, 2002-03. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 44(4): 543–571.

Brierley, S. and G. Ofosu. 2014. The Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Ghana, December 2012. *Electoral Studies* 35: 362–405.

Buur, L. and H.M. Kyed. 2007. Introduction: Traditional Authority and Democratization in Africa. In *State Recognition and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa: A New Dawn for Traditional Authorities?* (eds) L. Buur and H.M. Kyed. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Center for Systemic Peace 2011. *Polity IV Country Report 2010: Ghana.* Vienna: CSP. http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/Ghana2010.pdf (accessed 2018-07-10).

Constitution Review Commission 2011. *Report of the Constitution Review Commission: From a Political to a Developmental Constitution.* Accra.

Comaroff, J. and J.L. Comaroff. 2016. *Theory from the South: Or, how Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa.* Abingdon: Routledge

Debrah, E. 2014. The Politics of Decentralization in Ghana's Fourth Republic. *African Studies Review* 57(01) : 49–69.

Fassin, D. 2009. Les économies morales revisitée. *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 6: 1237–1266. Unpaginated English translation: Moral economies revisited. Available at: https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_ANNA_646_1237--moral-economies-revisited.htm (accessed 26 April 2018).

Freedom House. 2017. *Freedom in the World 2017: Ghana Profile.* Freedomhouse.org. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/ghana (accessed 2018-07-10)

Geschiere, P. and F. Nyamnjoh. 2000. Capitalism and Autochthony: The Seesaw of Mobility and Belonging. *Public Culture* 12(2): 423–452.

Gyampo, R. 2016. Dealing with Winner-Takes-All Politics in Ghana: The Case for National Development Planning. *Governance: A Publication of the Institute of Economic Affairs* 20(1): 1-12.

Gyimah-Boadi, E. and H.K. Prempeh. 2012. Oil, Politics, and Ghana's Democracy. *Journal of Democracy* 23(3): 94–108.

Hagberg, S. 2007. Traditional Chieftaincy, Party Politics, and Political Violence in Burkina Faso. In. *State Recognition and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa: A New Dawn for Traditional Authorities?* (eds) L. Buur and H.M. Kyed. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Holston, J. 2008. *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Jennische, U. 2012. Traders, Drivers and the National Health Insurance Scheme in Small Town Ghana. *Urban Forum* 23(4): 467–481.

—. 2018. *Small-Small: Moral Economy and the Marketspace in Northern Ghana.* Doctoral Thesis in Social Anthropology. Stockholm: Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University.

Ladouceur, P. 1972. The Yendi Chieftaincy Dispute and Ghanaian politics. *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 6(1): 97–115.

Lund, C. 2003. 'Bawku Is Still Volatile': Ethno-Political Conflict and State Recognition in Northern Ghana. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 41(4): 587-610.

Lentz, C. 2006. *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

MacGaffey, W. 2006a. A History of Tamale, 1907-1957 and Beyond. *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, New Series* (10): 109–124.

—. 2006b. Death of a King, Death of a Kingdom? Social Pluralism and Succession to High Office in Dagbon, Northern Ghana. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 44(01): 79-99.

—. 2013. *Chiefs, Priests, and Praise-Singers: History, Politics and Lands Ownership in Northern Ghana.* Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press.

Mahama, I. 2009. *Murder of an African King: Ya-Na Yakubu II*. New York: Vantage Press.

Michelutti, L. 2007. The Vernacularization of Democracy: Political Participation and Popular Politics in North India. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13(3): 639–656.

Nyendu, M. 2015. Confronting the Problem of Increasing Partisan Politics in the District Assemblies System in Ghana. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 50(1): 58–68.

Osei-Tutu, E., E. Badu and D. Owusu-Manu. 2010. Exploring Corruption Practices in Public Procurement of Infrastructural Projects in Ghana. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business* 3(2): 236–256.

Pasquali, V. 2015. Countries with Highest GDP Growth 2015. *Global Finance*. Nov 01. https://www.gfmag.com/global-data/economic-data/countries-highest-gdp-growth (accessed 2017-06-14).

Pryce, P. and R. Oidtmann. 2014. The 2012 General Election in Ghana. *Electoral Studies* 34: 330–334.

PRS Group. 2015. *Ghana: Country Report*. Political Risk Services. East Syracuse, NY.

Tonah, S. 2012. The Politicisation of a Chieftaincy Conflict: The Case of Dagbon, Northern Ghana. *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 21(1): 1–20.

UN-HABITAT 2009. *Ghana: Tamale City Profile*. Nairobi : UN-HABITAT