

From Resistance to Acquiescence? Neoliberal Reform, Student Activism and Political Change in Ghana

Lord C. Mawuko-Yevugah

International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Introduction

This article highlights the dialectics of neoliberal policy reform and local resistance and the implications of this dialectics for local political change. It captures the role of youth as key actors in the political change and democratization processes unfolding in contemporary Africa. Since the early 1980s, a neoliberal agenda of market-led reform policies has established itself as a hegemonic project within the global political economy. In Africa and other regions of the global South, this agenda has taken the form of the implementation of wide-ranging policies under the auspices of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In particular, structural adjustment policies (SAPs) emphasizing trade liberalisation, privatisation of state agencies and full cost recovery in the provision of social services became the basis for concessional loans from multilateral and bilateral donors.¹ Even though these structural adjustment policies have undergone a considerable makeover since the late 1990s with a shift in focus to social development and poverty reduction measures, there remains a continuity of neoliberal policies that emphasize macro-economic stability and trade liberalization while failing to address issues relating to the inequities in the global economy, including fair trade, commodity prices, and the removal of rich-country protectionist policies (Mawuko-Yevugah 163-4).

Meanwhile, as this neoliberal agenda persists and becomes dominant across the world, there has been a growing discontent and opposition in the form of the rise of resistance movements and popular groups, both at the global and local levels. At the global level, the resistance to the neoliberal agenda culminated in the anti-globalization protests of 1999 during the spring meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle, the United States. Other forms of resistance have also emerged, movements such as the World Social Forum for example, which not only aim to oppose and contest the neoliberal agenda but also offer alternative or competing approaches for social and economic change. But the challenge and opposition to the neoliberal agenda is not confined to the international or global level. As noted by Osei Kwadwo Prempeh, the vigorous implementation of the neoliberal agenda in Africa and other regions of the

global South is “provoking the emergence of new grassroots-based social movements, which are engaged in counter-hegemonic struggles that represent both a challenge and alternative to this new form of colonialism” (85). While critical globalization and neo-Gramscian scholars such as J.H. Mittelman, Robert W. Cox, Mark Rupert, and Stephen Gill have analyzed the rise of social forces as a response to the neoliberal agenda, there is very little focus on the interaction between neoliberal reforms, social movements, and political transformation, particularly within the context of so-called emerging democracies.

The article draws on the case of Ghana, a country widely considered the epitome of the neoliberal agenda in the African region, to explore interactions between the implementation of neoliberal policies, youth activism, and domestic politics. Despite the massive literature on Ghana’s neoliberal development policies, there is very little scholarly work on how ordinary people, especially youth—actors excluded from the “bliss of the free market”—struggle to redefine the political limits of the possible and to advocate for a more human-centred model of development. Having successfully implemented a series of neoliberal policies since the early 1980s, Ghana has in recent times witnessed a growing public anger and discontent with aspects of the neoliberal agenda. Citizens exploited the space offered by the country’s new multi-party democratic environment to vent this anger and protestation. In particular, the article draws on the Ghanaian case to explore the implementation of a policy of cost-sharing at the tertiary education sector and the reaction of students and its implications for domestic politics. The introduction of the cost-sharing policy provides the framework to analyze the dialectics between neoliberal reform and local resistance and, perhaps more importantly, how these policies have given the youth the impetus to oppose these policies and become active actors in the domestic political process.

The story of young people’s resistance to cost-sharing in higher education in Ghana will be explored in the following way: I start by explaining the implementation of the neoliberal policy framework within which the debate over cost-sharing in Ghana’s higher education sector must be understood. The analysis is presented in three parts. The first part outlines the process of introduction of the policy of cost-sharing, highlighting the policy’s key elements. Part Two begins with the actual implementation or enforcement of the policy by the various public universities, highlighting the reaction of students both to the introduction of the policy by the government and its implementation by university administrators. In concluding, I explain what this study of tertiary education reform tells us about the impacts of neoliberal policy prescriptions on local social movements, including the youth and their active participation in the public discourse. Also, the final part of the article highlights what is seen as the increasing acquiescence of the present-day student leaders to the same neoliberal policies that their counterparts in the 1990s had contested and resisted. What accounts for the seeming dormancy of student activism in contemporary Ghanaian

political economy, and what are the implications of this situation for the persistence of neoliberalism in Ghana and the country's broader political economy? Information for the study is based on interviews and documents collected for a bigger research project on political economy of multilateral aid reform in Ghana² and from the author's own eye-witness account on the frontlines of the student movement and the resistance to the policy of cost-sharing between 1997 and 1999.

Ghana and the Neoliberal Reform Agenda

In 1983, Ghana's Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) military government of Flt. Lt. Jerry Rawlings introduced an Economic Recovery Program (ERP) under the auspices of the World Bank and the IMF to kick-start what would become an enduring relationship between the country and the Bretton Woods Institutions. The introduction of these reform policies marked a significant policy shift from the state-led policy framework that had been laid after the attainment of political independence in 1957. The reasons for the shift could be understood within the context of a wider crisis in the postcolonial African political economy, one that resulted in the publication of the World Bank's Berg Report, which effectively marked the introduction of the neoliberal restructuring agenda in Africa's postcolonies.³ Ghana's reform policies were drafted in two major phases, each addressing a particular ailment identified in the economy. Phase One of the recovery program, dubbed "The Stabilization Phase," lasted between 1983 and 1986. This aspect of the recovery was aimed at halting economic decline, especially in the industrial and export-commodity production sector. It involved macroeconomic stabilization measures comprising fiscal, monetary and exchange rate policies; the liberalization of prices; and the restructuring of the public and financial sectors. The second phase, marking the period between 1987 and 1989, was the structural adjustment and development phase. This phase focused mainly on growth and development, but with a special emphasis on social services. The key elements of the strategy for implementing the ERP have been: a) a realignment of relative prices to encourage productive activities and exports through the strengthening of economic incentives; b) a progressive shift away from direct controls and intervention toward greater reliance on market forces; c) the early restoration of monetary and fiscal discipline; d) the rehabilitation of social and economic infrastructure; and e) the undertaking of structural and institutional reforms to enhance the efficiency of the economy and encourage the expansion of private savings and investment (Boafo-Arther 46-7).⁴

The implementation of SAPs resulted in a major turnaround in Ghana's overall financial and economic performance, at least during the early years. In the first decade after the start of the reform policies, growth

in real GDP recovered, allowing gains in per capita incomes; inflation declined, and the general position regarding balance of payments switched from deficits to surpluses, facilitating external payments and a build-up of exchange reserves. The recovery in output growth, combined with the gradual liberalization of exchange restrictions, boosted the expansion in the volume of imports to an average of 10% a year. The rising external financing requirements have been covered in part by modestly growing inflows of private capital, including direct investment, and by an increase in the inflows of official external assistance. The inflows of official grants and concessional loans rose from the equivalent of less than 1% of GDP in 1983 to about 10% of GDP by 1990 (Barwa 4). During the ensuing decade, the country earned much praise from the World Bank and the IMF, as well as from Western donors, for being a good reformer and great economic performer.⁵ In its 1994 *Adjustment in Africa* report, the World Bank argued that the structural adjustment policies made a huge impact in terms of bringing countries such as Ghana from near economic collapse to a semblance of stability and modest growth (40). In terms of micro-economic stability, the recovery efforts proved to be successful in terms of short-term growth. GDP in real terms increased by 5.3% in 1986. Per capita real income grew by 2.6%; agricultural output increased by 4.6%, and services expanded by 5.4%.⁶

The country's infrastructure, which was almost non-existent at the onset of the adjustment program in 1983, also witnessed an appreciable level of repair and development. In the view of Donald Rothschild, the implementation of the SAPs in Ghana "reversed the decline of recent years" (10-11). For his part, Peter Gibbon rated Ghana as being among Africa's most successful countries, a thesis to which the appreciable macroeconomic outrun as a result of the implementation of SAPs lends credence. Notwithstanding the above initial successes in the implementation of SAPs across Africa, Ghana being a case in point, by the end of the 1990s and the start of the millennium Ghana and many other African countries had very little to show for years of economic reform and the promise of better development outcomes. By the end of the 1990s, the real impacts of the adjustment policies had begun to unfold. For instance, despite the improvements on the economic and financial fronts, the country continued to operate within a number of structural, institutional and financial constraints. These included a high inflation rate, a small though developing private sector, and low levels of domestic savings and investment, preventing a self-sustained growth in output and increasing pressure on the public sector's management and implementation capacity.⁷ Also, the gains in macroeconomic stability have not translated into improved living conditions for the majority of the Ghanaian population. In the mid-1990s, Ghana was ranked 133 on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI); in 2006 Ghana dropped to 136 after a marginal rise that occurred between 2002 and 2004 (Sachs 572).⁸

One disturbing outcome of the implementation of neoliberal restructuring policies in Ghana, as has been the case elsewhere in Africa,

was the social cost of these policies. For instance, the introduction of full cost recovery in the form of user fees for education and health services and retrenchment measures to the public employment sector resulted in a net decrease in household real incomes and an increase in the number of poor households. By virtue of their low purchasing capacity, these households decreased the demand for urban informal sector products. Apart from job layoffs suffered by the people, it is also shown that as a result of subjecting privatized utilities rates to market forces, they become inaccessible to many, particularly the poor. Thus, several years of adjustment in Ghana have not resulted in any appreciable improvements in nutrition, especially for women and children. This view is supported by other studies, including that of Eboe Hutchful's *Ghana's Adjustment Experience: The Paradox of Reform*.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that the implementation of the World Bank and IMF-guided structural adjustment reform policies could not be said to have yielded results sufficient to impact positively on poverty reduction and long-term development. While the economic recovery programs had a positive impact on the macroeconomic position, they failed to invigorate the productive sectors of the economy. As neoliberalism has established itself as a hegemonic force in Ghana, one might ask how popular forces, including those driven by youth, have challenged and continue to challenge the hegemonic force which a neoliberal policy agenda represents. Compared to the anti-globalization movement and other forms of global resistance, such as the World Social Forum, what is the nature of local opposition and resistance to specific policies being implemented at the country-level and where the impacts of these policies are severely felt on a daily basis? In other words, is there an African counter-hegemonic response to neoliberalism? In order to answer these questions, the empirical segment of this article draws on the case of the introduction of a policy of cost-sharing in higher education as part of the neoliberal reform agenda. As per the neo-Gramscian framework alluded to earlier, there is a dialectical relationship between power and resistance, or hegemony and counter-hegemony, hence the need to explore the nature and types of opposition to neoliberal reforms in a country in which these reforms have become dominant and hegemonic.

The Push for Cost-Sharing in Higher Education

Cost-sharing in higher education, as noted by D. Bruce Johnstone, refers to "a shift in the burden of higher education costs from being borne exclusively or predominantly by government or taxpayers to being shared with parents and students" (351). And as he explains, cost-sharing could encompass the introduction or increase of tuition fees, residential user fees, and academic materials such as books, computers and other expenses previously covered mainly by the state. A shift of the cost burden from the

state to students and parents may also take the form of a reduction, or even a complete overhaul, of student grants, subsidies, and scholarships. It may also take the form of charging market-rate interests on student loans.⁹ Within the context of the neoliberal policy agenda, cost-sharing in higher education could be seen as part of the move to place an economic value and cost on services such as higher education, which is a valuable commodity and one with high returns. In particular, it is assumed that cost-sharing by students and parents will ensure efficient delivery of higher education and make providers such as university administrators more cost-conscious and financially prudent. Thus, overall, cost-sharing in the form of the introduction of tuition fees, facility user fees, and the removal of subsidies could be understood within the context of overall neoliberal economic orthodoxy whereby the virtues of the market—efficiency, individual responsibility, and cost-consciousness in the production and delivery of goods and services are privileged above all else.¹⁰

In the case of Ghana, higher education before 1998 had been largely “free”; that is, students paid nothing for tuition, boarding, and lodging while receiving allowances for incidental expenses at the state’s or taxpayers’ expense. However, the upgrade of polytechnics and technical institutions in 1993 from secondary level to tertiary status as part of the broader educational reform programs saw an astronomical increase in overall tertiary enrollment from 14,500 in 1992 to 30,000 in 1994 and 40,000 during the 1997-1998 academic year.¹¹ These developments provided the setting and the tone for the government’s appeal to other stakeholders to share the cost of higher education. A series of debates, workshops, and symposia culminated in a fairly broad national consensus on the adoption of the policy of cost-sharing as a key to financing higher education in Ghana despite student resistance (there were those within the student movement who felt betrayed by the leadership of the National Union of Ghana Students, which they felt had entered into negotiations without consultation with the broad membership.) This consensus, which became known as the “Akomsombo Accord,” was adopted in 1997. Under the Accord, the government was to bear 70% of the costs; the remaining 30% was to be distributed equally among other stakeholders, including philanthropists, students and higher education institutions, in the form of internally generated funds.¹² Consequently, Academic Facilities User Fees (AUF) and Residential Facilities User Fees (RFUF) were introduced in 1998 to signal the end of the fee-free regime in Ghana’s higher education sector. The cumulative effect of this new policy was a drastic drop in government funding for university students, which saw a decrease from USD 1,100 in 1996-1997 to USD 580 in 2000-2001 (Manuh, Gariba, and Budu 100).

The Rise of New Student Activism and Resistance to Cost-Sharing

Student activism has always been part of the political history of Ghana, from the anti-colonial struggle through the nation-building era of Kwame Nkrumah to the opposition to military dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s.¹³ Throughout Ghana's history, youth in general, and the student movement in particular, has been active, playing a leading role in the key debates of the day. It is no wonder, then, that from the era of Kwame Nkrumah to the present, the student movement has become a training ground for future national leaders. Knowing what a potent force a united and vibrant student movement presents in challenging unpopular government actions and policies, successive governments, both military and civilian, have sought to infiltrate the student movement with political appointments, scholarships, and other tempting offers aimed at weakening it.¹⁴

Nonetheless, the student movement has stood the test of time and remained resolute over the years, even during periods of prolonged military dictatorship and clamp-down on opposition activities, such as occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. Through street protests and demonstrations under the auspices of the National Union of Ghana Students (or NUGS), the student movement, together with other social forces and civil society organizations, resisted attempts by the Kutu Acheampong-led Supreme Military Council to impose a Union Government on the country after a rigged national referendum in 1978. This resulted in a palace coup and the replacement of Acheampong with General Fred Akuffo. But as noted by Michael Kpessa, "the musical chairs that occurred in the SMC from Acheampong to Akuffo did nothing to change the very hostile relationship between students and the military government; rather it made fertile the ground for the emergence of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)," which was led by Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings. Also, throughout the 1980s, when Rawlings' second military regime, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) presided over national affairs, the student movement emerged as one of the few critical voices challenging various government policies and actions. Student resistance resulted in either confrontations with the military or the arrest and torture of student leaders and the closure of the universities.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the evolution of Ghana's political history is intrinsically linked with a very effective student activism in national affairs. It is against the backdrop of this history that we must understand student opposition and resistance to the introduction of cost-sharing in higher education and the role of Ghanaian youth in the country's recent political transformation as a budding democracy. The introduction of cost-sharing in the form of user fees marked a turning point in the student movement and represents a move towards what one

could call a new type of student activism. It was new because it relied on a combination of militant measures, including street protests, boycotts, and negotiations with university authorities and government officials. More importantly, however, the new student activism manifested in the form of the mainstreaming of students' grievances and concerns in the national discourse through the print and broadcast media. As noted earlier, during the discussions leading to the Akomsombo Accord, which ushered in the cost-sharing policy, elements within the student movement felt betrayed by the NUGS leadership whom they accused of entering those negotiations without a broad consultation. In particular, the NUGS president at the time, Haruna Iddrisu—currently a member of parliament and a senior minister in the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government—was singled out for vilification. As one former student leader put it, Haruna “spelt the doom of students by committing them to a cost-sharing in principle without knowing what exactly went into calculating the cost.”¹⁵ With the policy now firmly in place, the student movement needed to regroup and find ways of making their case. First, the new leadership made it clear that students were not necessarily against paying fees for their education and that their main concern was the failure of the government and the university authorities to involve them in calculating the cost. They accused both parties of colluding and conniving to rush through a policy that would impose undue cost on students and parents already burdened with the costs of maintenance, transportation, textbooks, and printing. The NUGS Annual Congress resolved that students and university authorities should share residential accommodation costs on condition that hostels are built for students at reasonable cost “to be determined by a committee involving students.”¹⁶

On the strength of these arguments, which were largely broadcast in the national media, the students started organizing mini rallies and protests on various campuses under the auspices of their local Students Representative Councils (SRCs). In the meantime, the national executives of NUGS worked behind the scenes to convince the government and the university administrators to back down or delay the full implementation of the new policy to allow for further consultations among all stakeholders. The NUGS also embarked upon a huge publicity campaign across the country, organizing rallies in various cities to educate the public on the new policy proposal and to elicit public support and sympathy. With the perceived intransigence on the part of the government and the universities to push ahead with the implementation of the policy, and with the students having exhausted all peaceful means at resolving the impasse, the stage was set for a more radical action and confrontation between the students and the authorities during the start of the new academic year, in September 1999. A series of student protests and demonstrations simultaneously erupted on all university and polytechnic campuses country-wide and in major cities such as Accra, Kumasi, Cape Coast, and Takoradi. An emergency Central Committee meeting of NUGS was convened, during which the student leadership resolved to march to the seat of government

in Accra to present their petitions to the President of the Republic, Jerry Rawlings.

The protests and demonstrations that followed saw hundreds of thousands from across the country congregating in downtown Accra by 6:00 a.m. Before midday there was a massive army of students wearing the symbolic national attire of red, carrying placards, and marching towards the seat of government at the Osu Castle. This was unprecedented under the new democratic dispensation, which had been in place since 1993. After waiting for hours to present their petitions to the President, the students were getting impatient and frustrated. At the Osu crossroads, where three ex-servicemen were shot dead in 1948 by the colonialists, marking a watershed in the country's anti-colonial struggle, the students began to burn the effigies of President Rawlings. This symbolic action was all it took to invoke the ghosts of the brutalities of the past. The police who had all along remained civil and professional responded with brute force, firing warning shots and beginning to beat up and chase out the protesting students. This police action by all intents and purposes now set the stage for a much bigger confrontation between students and authorities and, even more significantly, with political ramifications for the ruling NDC government.

All public universities were closed immediately after the confrontations and amidst continued student agitation and refusal to back down on demands for suspension of the user fees. However, after months of disruption of the academic calendar and with no signs of compromise on the part of the students, the NDC government suddenly announced a 30% rebate on the fees being charged that year. There were further victories for the students in the form of securing agreement to maintain the rebates on user fees and for a freeze on fees for the next five years.¹⁷ These gestures helped to restore peace on the university campuses and were celebrated by the student movement as another victory in their long history of activism and struggle for justice.

In terms of the ramifications of these events for the country's evolving democracy, it is clear that both the government and the students are mindful of the youth as a potent force in the country's political history. As indicated earlier, throughout the country's history the student movement had been proactive in standing up to the government of the day. The confrontations over the cost-sharing policy only further demonstrated the persistence of the movement even in the face of brute force. But what made the new student activism unique is the fact that the policies being contested were seen as externally imposed by agents of neoliberalism, such as the World Bank and the IMF. With the mixed results of the implementation of earlier policies under the structural adjustment programs, it was imperative for the students to fiercely resist what they saw as an increased privatization of education. Given the country's new democratic dispensation and the four-year electoral cycle, the students were not oblivious of their ability to make this an election issue.

One of the issues not adequately explored in the literature on opposition to neoliberal hegemony in Africa in the form of structural adjustment is how these policies could only be successfully implemented during the period of hard-handed military dictatorship and where there was largely no form of meaningful public debate and political responsiveness and accountability to the electorate.¹⁸ In the case of Ghana, where these policies were universally deemed to be a success, there was very limited room for dissent and public discussion around specific policies. By the time the cost-sharing was introduced, however, Ghana had held two largely successful elections and the electorate was becoming aware of the issues of the day. The student movement exploited this to their advantage and succeeded in courting public sympathy and support. A vibrant media environment ensured that the issues were debated and distilled, and that they would play a role in the softening-up of the government's hard position on the full implementation of the cost-sharing policy.

The opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) also took advantage of student grievances and incorporated the issues of equity and access to tertiary education into its broad narrative of the failures of the Rawlings-led regimes in the campaign for the 2000 general elections. These elections, in a way, could be interpreted as a referendum on the Rawlings-led National Democratic Congress (NDC) administration, which had been in power since the return to constitutional rule in 1993. Rawlings ruled the country for eleven years after taking over power in a military coup in 1981 and had overseen the launch and implementation of the Economic Recovery Program (ERP) from 1983 onwards. In the 2000 general elections, Rawlings was not a candidate because of the constitutional limit of two terms. His handpicked successor and former vice president, John Atta Mills, was the ruling party's candidate and campaigned on the platform of continuity and stability while the main opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP), led by John Agyekum Kufuor, campaigned on the platform of "Positive Change."¹⁹ For many observers and political commentators, the fact that the Rawlings-led regimes from 1981 to 2001 had presided over the country's economy for almost two decades of structural adjustment, and that John Atta Mills as a vice president from 1997 to 2001 was head of the government's economic management team with an overall supervisory role over economic policy, meant that the 2000 elections were, in part, an opportunity for the Ghanaian people to pass a verdict on the ruling party and its candidate's handling of the national economy. In the end, the NPP's John Agyekum Kufuor prevailed in a run-off, defeating NDC's John Atta Mills. While NPP's victory could largely be explained in terms of the general national mood for change, a closer look at the results and the voting pattern also shows that the opposition party won in all the major university/tertiary education cities such as Accra, Kumasi, Cape Coast, and Takoradi. As noted earlier, these cities were also the hot beds for the student resistance movement against cost-sharing. That the youth vote was critical in the 2000 elections is

underscored by Paul Nugent, a long time observer on contemporary Ghanaian political economy:

the NPP made a calculated pitch for the youth vote, which was always going to be decisive, given the demographic profile of contemporary Ghana. Rawlings and his associates had once appealed to the youth themselves, but the Young Turks had become middle-aged embodiments of the establishment by 2000. The growing body of young voters had no memory of the revolution, to which Rawlings kept harking back, but they were conscious of the fact that they had limited prospects of gaining formal employment or a decent living in the informal sector. The NPP traditionally projected a rather stuffy image, but on this occasion it worked hard to convince young voters that it was committed to addressing their needs. The alienation of the youth from the ruling party was tangible in the run-up to the elections. In Hohoe, almost any conversation about politics with people in their twenties elicited assertions that the “the NDC does not pay attention to the youth.” In Likpe-Mate, the NPP was largely an organization of young men who regarded themselves as the principal casualties of the Rawlings years and the only reliable agent of change . . . (Nugent 419-20)

From Resistance to Acquiescence? Party Politics and Decline of Student Activism

The foregoing analysis would suggest that youth have become a critical, if not a key, equation and constituency in Ghana’s contemporary politics, not only in terms of influencing policy debates but also in terms of their role in effecting political change. While there could be some truth in such a claim, particularly given the history of student activism enumerated above, it is equally important to query what could be described as the increasing disinterest of the current crop of university students and youth in general in national affairs. Since the historic opposition electoral victory in 2000, which effectively marked a true transition to multi-party democratic rule after almost twenty years in power by Jerry John Rawlings, there have been concerns about the politicization of the student movement and student issues. A key feature of contemporary party politics in Ghana is the proliferation of youth wings of all political parties. The main political parties also have tertiary education networks, which have become avenues for mobilizing youth and students’ votes and support for the various political parties. Notably, leaders of these networks have gone on to hold executive positions within their political parties at the national level, while others have been appointed as ministers and deputy ministers. A recent phenomenon is the appointment of some of these young activists and recent university graduates as members of the communication teams of the various political parties. As members of such teams they are charged with the responsibility of jumping from one radio station and television network to another, defending their political parties or denigrating their political opponents. In addition, many of the young appointees in the immediate past-NPP government or the current NDC government had held leadership positions within the student movement. While there have always been attempts by successive governments to

infiltrate student ranks through political appointments and other inducements, the present partisanship and fanaticism of students in relation to the two main national parties that have implemented harsh neoliberal policies raises a number of questions: Why are the university students of today not resisting the crude commercialization of university education in the country's public universities? Why have Ghanaian youth in general, and university students in particular, failed to emulate the resistance of their counterparts in the 1990s in opposing the implementation of neoliberal policies? The remainder of the article draws on neo-Gramscian perspectives to offer an understanding of the changing nature of student activism and the support of the youth for the same political parties and governments that students in the past opposed and resisted.

While Antonio Gramsci's work was primarily concerned with class and national political processes in his native Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century, the framework that he developed has recently been revised and applied to the study of the international political economy.²⁰ In particular, Gramsci's conceptions of power and hegemony are useful in understanding the current trends in youth and student activism in Ghana and other emerging democratic societies. In Gramsci's theoretical framework, ideas, culture, politics, and economics overlap and are reciprocally related. This, as Rita Abrahamsen argues, is especially important to an understanding of hegemony, the unifying concept of his political thought (147). Gramsci conceived of power as a necessary combination of consent and coercion. Hegemony, in his terminology, refers to the consensual aspects of political domination: the people's assent to the "intellectual and moral leadership" of the dominant social group (Gramsci 57). It signifies the success of the dominant classes in persuading others to accept and internalize their views, values, and norms. Their conception of reality becomes all-pervasive in its ability to direct and inform the behavior and thought of all groups in society. The hegemonic order is constructed and reinforced by the state, as well as by various institutions in civil society, such as the church, the educational system, the media, and so on. Hegemony erases the conventional distinctions between "state" and "civil society"; structure and superstructure come together to form an organic unity, or a historic bloc, the unification of material forces, institutions, and ideologies (Gramsci 366). Another aspect of hegemony is its disciplining potentials, which are complemented by the mechanisms of consent-building. This is part of Gramsci's concept of *transformismo*, or the process of co-optation of opposition forces by bourgeoisie or dominant forces to offset the possibility of mass, direct democracy and to limit the potential for genuine opposition.

The Gramscian analytical framework outlined above may explain the seeming disinterest of Ghanaian youth and their inability to replicate the activism of their counterparts of the 1990s in resisting the implementation of neoliberal policies. The youth might have acquiesced to the hegemony

of the dominant class, not by force but by co-optation through party politics. Liberal democracy and party politics might have opened two contradictory/dialectical political spaces in Ghana: a counter space for counter-hegemonic resistance from “below” to neoliberalism, and a space for the political elites to co-opt recalcitrant youth through party-recruitment mechanisms and distribution of political patronage in the form of political party leadership positions, ministerial appointments, and other enticements.

Concluding Remarks

There is no gainsaying the fact that neoliberalism has established itself as a hegemonic force in Africa’s postcolonial spaces. This has mainly taken the form of the implementation of specific market-led policies, ranging from the privatization of state-owned enterprises to full cost recovery in the provision of social services. With time, the dominance of neoliberalism across the continent has generated a good measure of response in the form of the rise of popular forces to contest and resist specific policies; more significantly, however, the ruthless implementation of these policies have had implications for domestic politics in the form of the reconfiguration of power. As shown by the analysis of the Ghanaian case, the perceived failure of the postcolonial state to serve the interests and needs of the people instead of global capital could result in the emergence of new forms of social movements or the empowerment of old ones that are becoming sophisticated in their strategies. They are doing so by taking advantage of new platforms provided by information and communication technologies and in seizing upon new democratic spaces to demand accountability from leaders. At the same time, these social forces are at risk of being co-opted by dominant forces such as political elites, particularly with the advent of competitive and increasingly patronage party politics.

Notes

1. See Mohan.
2. See Mawuko-Yevugah.
3. See Grosh; Green; Kim; and Smith.
4. See Hutchful.
5. See Tsikata.
6. See Government of Ghana.

7. See Dzorgbo; and Hutchful.
8. See also Hutchful.
9. See also Johnstone.
10. See also Johnstone; and Gill.
11. See Chambers.
12. See Manuh et al.
13. See Finlay.
14. See Finlay; and Oquaye.
15. See Kpessa.
16. Cited in Fatunde.
17. See Kpessa.
18. See Ake.
19. See *An Agenda for Positive Change: Manifesto of the New Patriotic Party*.
20. See Cox; Gill; Rupert; and Abrahamsen.

Works Cited

- Abrahamsen, Rita. "The Victory of Popular Forces or Passive Revolution? A Neo-Gramscian Perspective on Democratization." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 35.1 (1997): 129-152. Print.
- Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action* (Berg report), Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1981. Print.
- An Agenda for Positive Change: Manifesto of the New Patriotic Party*. Accra, Ghana: New Patriotic Party, 2000. Print.
- Ake, Claude. *Democracy and Development in Africa*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1996. Print.
- Barwa, S.D. "Structural Adjustment Programmes and the Urban Informal Sector in Ghana." *Issues in Development Discussion Paper 3*. Geneva: International Labour Organization, 1995. Print.
- Boafo-Arthur, Kwame. "Ghana: Structural Adjustment, Democratization and the Politics of Continuity." *African Studies Review* 42.2 (1999): 41-72. Print.

- Chambas, Mohamed Ibn. "Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action." Vol. 5: Plenary. World Conference on Higher Education. 5-9 Oct. 1998, Paris. UNESCO.
- Cox, Robert W. "Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium: Prospects for an Alternative World Order." *Review of International Studies* 25.1 (1999): 3-28. Print.
- . "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory." Ed. Robert O. Keohane. *Neorealism and Its Critics*. New York: Columbia UP, 1986. 204-54. Print.
- Dzorgbo, Dan-Bright. *Ghana in Search of Development: The Challenge of Governance, Economic Management and Institution Building*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001. Print.
- Fatunde, Tunde. "Ghana Fears Student Fees Fight." *Times Higher Education (United Kingdom)* 10 Oct. 1997.
<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/104089.article> [accessed on August 01, 2013].
- Finlay, David Jay. "Students and Politics in Ghana." *Daedalus* 97.1 (1968): 51-69. Print.
- Gibbon, Peter. "Structural Adjustment and Pressures toward Multipartyism in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Authoritarianism, Democracy and Adjustment: The Politics of Economy Reform in Africa*. Ed. Peter Giggon, Yusef Bangura, and Arve Ofstad. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1992. 127-68. Scandinavian Institute of African Studies Seminar Proceedings No. 26. Print.
- Gill, Stephen. *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1990. Cambridge Studies in International Relations. Print.
- . "Globalization, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 24.3 (1995): 399-423. Print.
- . *Power and Resistance in the New World Order*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Print.
- Gould, Jeremy. *The New Conditionality: The Politics of Poverty Reduction Strategies*. London: Zed, 2005. Print.
- Government of Ghana. *Budget Statement*. Tema: State Publishing Corporation, 1987. Print.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International, 1971. Print.
- Green, Reginald Herbold. "A Cloth Untrue: The Evolution of Structural Adjustment in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Journal of International Affairs* 52.1 (1998): 207-34. Print.
- Grosh, Barbara. "Through the Structural Adjustment Minefield: Politics in an Era of Economic Liberalization." *Economic Change and Political Liberalization in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Ed. Jennifer A. Widner. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1994. 29-46. Print.

- Hutchful, Eboe. *Ghana's Adjustment Experience: The Paradox of Reform*. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2002. Print.
- Johnstone, D. Bruce. "Cost Sharing in Higher Education Tuition, Financial Assistance, and Accessibility in a Comparative Perspective." *Czech Sociological Review* 39.3 (2003): 351-74. Print.
- . "The Economics and Politics of Cost Sharing in Higher Education: Comparative Perspective." *Economics of Education Review* 23 (2004): 403-10. Print.
- . "Higher Education Finance and Accessibility: Tuition Fees and Student Loans in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* 2.2 (2004): 11-36. Print.
- Kim, Kwan S. 2005. "Development Crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa: Globalization, Adjustment and the Roles of International Institutions." *Global Development and Poverty Reduction*. Ed. Johnren Chen and David Sapsford. Cheltenham, Glos. (UK): Edward Elgar, 2005. 294-320. International Institutions and Global Governance. Print.
- Kpessa, Michael Whyte. "Students Activism and Ghanaian Politics in Retrospect." *GhanaWeb*. 4 Mar. 2007.
<http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/artikel.php?ID=120199> [accessed August 01, 2013].
- Kwadwo Prempeh, Edward Osei. "The Anti-Capitalism Movement and African Resistance to Neoliberal Globalization." *Studies in Political Economy* 77 (2006): 85-104. Print.
- Manuh, Takyiwaa, Sulley Gariba, and Joseph Budu. *Change and Transformation in Ghana's Public Funded Universities: A Study of Experiences, Lessons and Opportunities*. Oxford: James Currey, 2007. Print.
- Mawuko-Yevugah, Lord. "Governing through Developmentality: The Politics of International Aid Reform and the (Re)Production of Power, Neoliberalism and Neocolonial Interventions in Ghana." PhD Diss. University of Alberta, Canada, 2010. Print.
- Mittelman, James H. *The Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000. Print.
- Mohan, Giles. *Structural Adjustment: Theory, Practice and Impacts*. London: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Nugent, Paul. "Winners, Losers and also Rans. Money, Moral Authority and Voting Patterns in the Ghana 2000 Election." *African Affairs* 100 (2001): 405-28. Print.
- Oquaye, Mike. *Politics in Ghana: 1972-1979*. Accra: Tornado, 1980. Print.
- Rothchild, Donald S. *Ghana: The Political Economy of Recovery*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1991. Print.
- Rupert, Mark, and M. Scott Solomon. *Globalization and International Political Economy: The Politics of Alternative Futures*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. Print.

- . *Producing Hegemony: The Politics of Mass Production and American Global Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. Print.
- Sachs, Jeffrey. *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*. New York: Penguin, 2005. Print.
- Smith, Malinda S. *Beyond the "African Tragedy": Discourses on Development and the Global Economy*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006. Print.
- Structural Adjustment: The SAPRI Report: The Policy Roots of Economic Crisis, Poverty and Inequality*. Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network (SAPRIN). London: Zed, 2004. Print.
- Tsikata, Yvonne. "Aid and Reform in Ghana." *Aid and Reform in Africa*. Ed. Shantayanan Devarajan, David R. Dollar, and Torgny Holmgren. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2001. Print.
- World Bank. *Adjustment in Africa: Reforms, Results, and the Road Ahead*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994. Print.