

Dr. Kwesiir Aggrey
"Only one, best way to liberate Africa."



Kwame Nkrumah
"The independence of Ghana is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of Africa."

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Fruitful Provocation to Part the Veil of Exclusion: A Call to Reform Ghana's Dual Citizenship Law as Progressive Political Development. Part 2

by Dr. Kwasi Sarpong Afrifa

Drivers of Ghanaian Diaspora Politics

There is a growing consensus among migration scholars that the revival of Diaspora interest in the homeland political and economic affairs came with the end of the Cold War. Scholars began to shift emphasis from state actors to sub-state and supra-state actors, such as Diaspora groups. Newly independent states in the Balkans began to harness the resources of their Diaspora such as support provided by the old Diaspora groups including the Jewish, Irish, Armenia and the Chinese. Recently, Brazil, Russia, India, and China (usually referred to as the BRIC states), have instituted mechanisms to harness the resources of their Diaspora for national development.

Four drivers, among many, can be attributed to the case of Ghanaian Diaspora heightened political consciousness: First, since the inception of the latest wave of multi-party politics in Ghana in 1992, Ghanaians abroad have developed an enhanced awareness of the political environment of their host countries and their relationship with their citizens, as stakeholders. Second, the relative political stability and the promise of economic development in Ghana have given GLAs an outlet for articulating nationalist sentiments and ethnic pride. It has also become the means of negotiating the terms upon which a sense of belonging in Ghana is based. Third, the international support and goodwill that Ghana is enjoying has also provided GLAs with a new sense of pride and pedigree as citizens of an upwardly mobile developmental state. Fourth, politics in Ghana is important for GLAs political identity in their host countries, and we are more likely to support democratic governments whose policies coincide with Western liberalism and /or foreign policy objectives of the home countries and actively oppose those which do not. GLAs have embraced Ghana in a way that is not threatening to their identity within the parameters of Western pluralism, but they must defend themselves against the charge of divided loyalty, the fight for repeal of the discriminatory provisions in the Ghanaian Constitution.

With these developments, Ghana will soon realize that the issue of transnationalism is not just a political but a social issue and therefore it can no longer stick to the commonly held view of the immigrant who simply uprooted and settled in a new land. In an increasingly globalized world, characterized in part by exponential growth in access to telecommunications, cheap fast travel and enhanced international commerce, migrants have points of reference that take them beyond the borders of the host country. They are greater or lesser degrees, symbolically, politically, economically and simply through familial ties to their places of origin, putative or real. They can now participate (where circumstances allow) in a more direct way in the internal affairs of the homeland.

The demand for political participation of GLAs including dual nationals account for the following: First, GLAs marginal political status; 2) GLAs alienation from formal political institutions; 3) discrimination and barriers to political participation; 4) the lack of political opportunity structures that actively encourages our participation in Ghanaian politics; 5) the mainstream political parties are not addressing the needs of GLAs for political participation in their ranks; 6) complex interplay between socio-political identity and the persistence and reproduction of discrimination with the fact that dual citizens left and are returning with resources as a social construct at the heart of the exclusion.

Political Mobilization and Advocacy

One of the consequences of dealing with effects of discrimination and unequal access to privileges and rights is that aggrieved groups will find avenues to engage in political activity. The recognition of the absence of political and social inclusion, coupled with the reality of overt exclusion and discrimination has prompted a reflexive or what Castells called a "defensive assertion of identity." The politics of inclusion and social cohesion cut across inter-group identity and intra-group solidarity to challenge the dominant discourse. This project identity that ent accompanies a transformative project. Ghanaians overseas are now united and are intent on reversing the past discriminated process that has truncated the exercise of full Ghanaian citizenship and its attendant rights and responsibilities. They are building a new identity of cohesiveness that would redefine their position in Ghana and would seek the transformation of overall social political structure. Anthony Giddens refers to this situation as "dialogic democracy" based on a mutual respect, a shared understanding of the effects exclusion and marginalization and the emergence of solidarity. As a politically-aware community, Ghanaians abroad are building a multicultural society and are therefore producing the conditions for the emergence of a new sense of social and political inclusion akin to which David Held calls a "cosmopolitan democracy" that argues for substantive equality and not just formal equality.

The newly minted and fledgling social and political advocacy among GLAs seeks to force the discourse beyond the realm of formal political participation and into the realm of substantive political participation where the very institutions of our democracy need to be democratized in response to the challenges to discrimination, and inequality. GLAs demands for political inclusion begin from the premise that it is democratic citizenship that is at risk when a society fails to develop the talents and capacities of all its citizens. The more social and political inclusion is eroded when our rights are not respected and accommodated and making us feel "othered". There is no contradiction between the situation facing GLAs, i.e., democratic citizenship and differentiated citizenship (where people can hold dual and even multiple loyalties). Democratic citizenship is about valued participation, valued recognition and belonging. At a minimum, it's characterized by: first, all the political rights associated with formal equality; second, a right to equality and a right to be free from discrimination; third, an intimate relationship between individuals and community; fourth, reciprocal relationship of rights and obligation; fifth, barrier free access to political parties and a sense of belonging and not being "othered" and marginalized; sixth, a commitment on the part of the political parties to ensure that all citizens have access to running for office; and, seventh, providing all members of the Ghanaian society with the resources to exercise democratic citizenship. The fact that the voices of GLAs have been muted in the public space reflects to some extent the power of both formal and popular majority Ghanaians to which GLAs have been subjected to. The general political participation strategies of GLAs will be mapped out with reference to the institutional channeling theory. It deals with the interaction between GLAs and the political establishment. Political participation strategies of GLAs have very much to do with the process of exclusion and/or inclusion policies of the political class.

An Analysis:

The key to opening up political structure space to minority groups will depend as well on the political environment in addition to elite behavior and grassroots mobilization. The Ghanaian of duality's political alienation is and has been a factor. However, it has not been yet skillfully exploited by their political leaders until now. Ghanaians of dual nationality, in spite of having a long history of origin and habitat within the present day Ghana is practically considered outsiders and have been mostly marginalized and face serious political violations and problems, that is, their true identity in their own native land is being questioned. Ghanaians overseas feel highly discriminated against and has almost lost" the sense of belongingness to Ghana."

It is clearly no accident or unintentional oversight that there has been no major marking or significant discussion, and in most cases not even a minor mention, of the discriminatory provisions in the Constitution of Ghana that effectively bar Ghanaians of dual nationality from occupying senior level positions in Ghana's political space, leaving GLAs and are of dual nationality some measure of public claim to be still doing, openly, if not altogether honestly, with its perversely persistent and structurally perpetuated problem of exclusionary injustice. However, what is even more striking and worthy of note is how this official silence and media muffling parallel and coincide with a similar silence in the Diaspora and among former Diasporans who have returned to Ghana. It is clearly a sign and tendency of the times to pretend a past of shared freedom we never had, a present of shared interests we still must agree on, and a future of shared possibilities we will not be able to pursue unless this blatant discriminatory society undergoes radical socio-political change, if not transformation.

Certainly, the established order's silence is first reflective of its traditional resistance to critical self-assessment and serious political change. Seeking cheap, political solutions for a high-cost and long-standing problem that cannot be wished away, it harbors the hardly conceived hope that just repealing the discriminatory provision of the Dual Citizenship Law of 2001 and the Constitution, will end the argument about lack of access and opportunity for GLAs in Ghana and therefore remove the need for real remedies and the struggle required to achieve them. Moreover, there is the belief that the oppressed, marginalized, and disadvantaged GLAs will seek concessions and silence as strategic necessity, not only to avoid suffering a similar savage pillorying, but also avoid messing up the chance to have a GLA elected to the Parliament of Ghana, and maybe, the Presidency. Indeed, it's been argued we must avoid at all cost upsetting and unseating our leaders who would, practicing a self-resistant discriminatory protocol, judge GLAs as arrogant, aggressive, unworthy and unwilling to face facts and current balance in Ghana. But this is a sign of how shaky and shallow the established order's self-congratulatory claim is, when GLAs find themselves begging, hopping, bending, and being busy placating and pleasing those who discriminate against them.

International Norms

There is an emerging international norm that disconnects rights from formal citizenship while at the same time grounding them more firmly in de-territorialized residence. This movement is diametrically opposed to the imperatives of ethnic nationalism and of civic republicanism, yet fully in line with liberalism. The basic principle underlying this inclusion is famously stated by the 14th Amendment of the U.S Constitution: "No State ... shall deny to any persons within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." Persons rather than citizens enjoy this protection; the protection has to be equal, i.e., the same for residents and non-residents. Stated this way, GLAs may regard this as universal human right whose obligations happen to fall upon States, in this case, Ghana.

The valued recognition of and status that rights are supposed to provide to all those who possess them has not been forthcoming for Ghanaians of dual nationality. For a socio-political agenda to be effective in the current context, - of rights expanded and exclusions entrenched, Ghana must clarify what it offers to advancing GLAs understanding of Ghanaian citizenship and human rights. If there is no simple equation between rights and recognition, then an adequate concept of political inclusion should begin with an understanding of what valued recognition entails. Jurisprudence on the nature of equality rights and an adequate theory of recognition are useful places to begin. A workable suggestion is that a political inclusion agenda in the current times must be built on a human rights strategy and could be usefully characterized as a "political inclusion as solidarity agenda," in effect, removing or parting the veil of exclusion.

Toleration and inclusion of dual nationals in national development are effects of the very principles of sovereignty in determined nationality. Toleration of dual citizenship is further supported by specific State interests. Major migrant sending countries such as Mexico and Turkey recently abandoned their hostility to dual nationality and political participation and view it as a possibility of maintaining economic and political links with their most successful emigrant groups. Since 1992, Switzerland, a major European migrant destination country, has abandoned its naturalization requirement of renouncing a previous citizenship, mainly because this has made Swiss citizenship unattractive for wealthier immigrants from the European Union. In spite of such concurring state interests, a general toleration for dual citizenship in political inclusion would send a strong signal of paradigmatic change in rules of Ghanaian citizenship acquisition and utilization for a focus on State sovereignty toward emphasis on individual rights.

I do not want to deny that expansion of citizenships creates its own problems and challenges. Among them are first, increasing tension between rights and obligations of citizenship, second, a differentiation of equal citizenship into group-related rights and special legal statuses (for multiple citizens, transient foreigners, etc.) and, third, a growing ambiguity about the collective identity of the demo of liberal democracies and the significance of citizenship as membership in a political community. Rather than restoring the simple geometry of citizenship, these developments reflects the increasingly complexity of socially and geographically mobile societies. In my opinion, this is not to be deplored. Reviving the traditional premises of sovereignty would not provide any adequate response to these challenges. Obviously, our leaders did not foresee the "can of worms" that dual citizenship law has opened up. This is a reflection of a situation where public policies are often made without much analytical thought about its speculative effects and anticipatory consequences. Here, the demand for repeal of the discriminatory provision in the law is a classic point. It also appears that the wish to comply with human rights norms was the main driving force behind the law, nor do I believe that this dynamic involves some irreversible progress. Often these norms are honored in practice rather than in principle, which means that they have rarely become constitutionally embedded. When economic and political circumstances change and electoral moods swings, most Western democracies find it relatively easy to deprive foreigners of rights previously granted to them or to constrain their access to citizenship. This is the crossroads where Ghana is now.

No matter how you dice and slice the issue, political exclusion of dual nationals is unequal access to rights, its unequal access to valued goods and services in Ghana, it's about unequal access to the labor market and it extends to all fields of Ghanaian public life. It's about incomplete citizenship, undervalued rights, undervalued recognition and undervalued participation. This under-appreciation is historically-derived, have persisted over the years and have been constantly reproduced in diverse ways. These points to the abject failure of public policy and State initiative in this area. This pattern has proved to be highly resistant to change because powerful socio-economic, political and ideological forces which maintain and reproduce the pattern. Political and electoral inequality that confronts Ghanaians of dual nationality has become structured inequality in Ghanaian political society and exclusion from political participation and electoral contests is leading to political poverty and anemic political participation of Ghanaians living abroad and are of dual nationality. This is the cancer in the Ghanaian society which must be destroyed sooner than later.

It tells you how this "consequential political differences" are structured, continually reproduced, and are used to deny others access to valued political goods and services. GLAs are denied the attribute, rewards and privileges in the Ghanaian society. In doing so, political inequality and unequal access to valued political goods are structured and continually reproduced. Advantages and disproportionate share of society's attributes are conferred on those who possess valued attributes. Where are Ghanaians of dual nationality? In the context of formal political participation, this means that significant political changes in the Ghanaian political society has not translated into "new political realities" nor has it altered the balance of power holding between "insiders" and "outsiders." Despite an increase in the pool of potential candidates among Ghanaians living abroad who are willing to help the nation-building exercise, our political leaders and political parties have been slow to mobilize, recruit, and socialize them to stand for political office. A number of barriers faced by Ghanaians abroad as they seek to enter the Ghanaian political arena include the following: first, while the political mobilization is quite open, the political recruitment and subsequent socialization process works to confer advantages on established groups. This is accomplished in two distinct ways: first) because they dominate among the gatekeepers and second, because they tend to recruit in their own image. Second, those who currently dominate the higher echelons of established political parties are "reluctant to share power, they do not yield their monopoly to new social groups. Third, the central reliance by political recruiters on established networks in the Ghanaian political communities to recruit prospective candidates.

There is a rich intellectual tradition that can contribute to the debate. Unlike the British, whose settlement patterns led colonial societies to create rigid categories of insider and outsider (note the "one drop of blood" rule), Ghana's treatment of GLAs can be traced to or discern from the colonial legacy bequeathed to Ghana by the British.

What does this anti-Diaspora backlash tell us about the conceptions of democracy and citizenship in Ghana, in particular? It again reminds us that Ghana puts a premium on those who reside in Ghana, not necessarily on those who contribute through the remittances and support to the well-being of families. It also suggests that, while the notion of who is entitled to participate has expanded over the few years, and indeed may be one of the most open processes among nations, it is not an inevitable or steady progression but one that occasionally contracts as well. The issue of Diaspora exclusion is an enduring one. It is a debate to define what the political system and culture should look like. Should it be a uniform culture-driven by Ghanaian nationality inherent in the more "monopolitical vision" is an authoritarian and exclusionary view of who is entitled or at least what it takes to be entitled to participate in the public arena.

The tenet of the debate, as of now, is one-dimensional. Everything is either/or; either you loved or hated Ghana. Any deviation from this simplistic formula left one vulnerable to accusations of treason. The undidirectional of the political discourse also has malformed our politics and our vision of ourselves. We have not been able to develop a coherent political discourse that is both critical of our political process, government or that viewed governments simply as state actors.

Conclusion

I believe that this will not be the last long line of equity-seeking efforts that would tap into the broader commitment to equality and social justice in Ghana. The greatest challenges posed by diversity are to build on tradition of equality espoused in liberalism and to move from the office policy of "nailed and blatant discrimination" to building and nurturing inclusive political processes and institutions that exemplify our national Ghanaian values. Local Ghanaian politics on dual citizenship and engagement with the Diaspora continues not to be contingent on any strategic foreign policy objective but based on hegemonic nationalisms.

Cynthia Ozceli once wrote: "for a seed to achieve its greatest expression, it must come completely undone. The shell shall crack, its inside comes out and everything changes. To someone who does not understand growth, it would look like complete destruction."

Maybe the truth is too hard to accept: GLAs are unwelcome in Ghana. From several angles of the political spectrum, we found no comfort in being accepted by our kith and kin for the sake of politics. GLAs need for acceptance has blinded us to the realization that GLAs are expendable symbolic capital. I do not know how long political structures can survive while they impede the tremendous human desire to belong, to build, to have a coherent existence, that for all GLAs in the Diaspora, Ghana is our nation, after all. I'm comforted by the thought that, no matter how hard governments may try they cannot legislate away identities; they cannot erase GLAs' history of Ghana. A collective understanding, recognition may be the way to continue searching for coherence, to begin reconciling with our "manufactured" enemies—and ourselves.

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