

## **Prepaid water meters: The decay of the sovereign and slow death of citizenship**

The month of July 2015 witnessed one of the ceaseless attacks on citizenship when the right of each member of the population of the country was threatened by the Managing Director of the Ghana Water Company Limited who indicated plans to roll-out a “pay before consumption of water” policy. He will pay for, import and install sophisticated automatic gadgets that are able to identify households that show ability to pay for their required water and allow supply. Households that are unable to show such evidence upfront by showing proof of cash on their water cards are owed no obligations by the company and the state.

### **Severing Government-citizens ties**

Disregard for the historical and political context of the management of basic social services is dangerous for the sustenance of a healthy governor-governed relationship required in ensuring a strong, united and prosperous state. The state like other structures is composed of different parts which are held together by adhesives or fasteners without which the whole structure crumbles into an unorganized heap of parts. There is a reason why one will not find sane men prickling out the glue that holds the joints of their chairs or taking out the nails. What I have seen some men rather do is to occasionally add bits of glue here and there to reinforce the firmness of the joints.

The state like the chair is held together by certain values, principles and norms on the basis of which expectations and duties are formed for Government and citizens. The values and principles guiding the relationship between the actors within the state constitute the glue that holds the various parts together like in the case of the chair. Whereas one can see and appreciate the glue or the nail in the chair, it is impossible to see with the eyes the fasteners that hold the state together and therefore it is more likely to begin to take them for granted or in some cases to see some men chiseling the adhesives out. Many are able to observe the creaking and squeaking noise and are also able to tell when the chair is about to fall apart into an unorganized heap where the buttocks tumble onto the messy grounds. However, whether our eyes behold the adhesives that hold the state together or not, the effect of prickling them out is the same as that of the chair.

### **Upholding the social contract**

In holding the state together, knowledge about its origin (history) and founding-justifications (politics) must not be lost on both Government and citizens. The reason why citizens forgo certain rights, which are entrusted in Government, is because Government or the sovereign as Thomas Hobbes insightfully understands Government, has the ability to ensure the security and defense of the citizens. For the Leviathan of different parts to stand, Hobbes points out the necessity of a social contract between the sovereign which he depicts with the head of the Leviathan and the citizens which forms the other parts of the body of the Leviathan. It is instructive to note that it is citizens who constitute the various body parts of the Leviathan, from head (Government) to feet. What hold this huge assemblage together; is the social contract and the assurance by Government to use the entrusted rights and taxes for the security and defense of citizens. In return for the surrender of rights and taxes for the peace and progress of the state, citizens are owed rights which ensure their wellbeing and the collective security of the commonwealth.

### **The state cannot do everything... “What at all can the state do?”**

Unknowingly to some who are quick to offer excuses about the inability of Government to do everything, what they actually achieve in doing; is the undermining of the locus of Government in the social contract. On 17<sup>th</sup> August 2017, I practically shivered with fright on hearing a regional commander of police on Viasat 1 TV suggest that an armed-robbery threatened community should build for themselves a police post so that the authorities can post policemen to the community. I was frightfully amazed at how far the “Government cannot do everything” rebuttal was being pushed. An exasperated participant at a conference also once quizzed wittingly “so what at all can

Government do?” Participants at the conference were amused at the question. However, as I reflected on the question I became more scared about the unconscious challenge to the capacity and relevance of Government and the social contract. Scarier is the prospect of the disintegration and falling apart of that big monster-state Hobbes used the Leviathan to symbolize and a return to the state of nature.

### **We are Citizens not Consumers or Clients**

Changes in the identity of people from citizens to consumers within the neoliberal economic development framework is key to explaining distortions created in the social contract, rollback of Government responsibilities and erosion of the rights of citizens. For decades, multilateral development partners like the IMF and the World Bank with a focus of debt sustainability have indeed been assisting Government to undermine itself in the social contract by suspending universal rights owed citizens such as the right to safe and quality water, education and health. The right to quality healthcare requires the availability of adequate infrastructure as well as well paid and happy health workers. Same for education. The human right to water and life also require the availability of adequate safe water to all citizens. The Ghana Water Company Limited and the Ministry of Water Resources Works and Housing however tell us that they don't know about any citizens and insist on a “pay before consumption” pre paid water policy. Here we see Government ceding its responsibilities to the market and a complication of relationship with a re-categorization of citizens as consumers and heightening of the vulnerability and insecurity of citizens. With this new arrangement, people are divested of the rights which the social contract confers on citizen. Divested of their rights, people are then reclassified as consumers by the neoliberal framework who have no right to demand basic social services unless they possess purchasing power. This is exactly what the Managing Director of GWCL and the sector Ministry are doing. Tearing apart the social contract.

### **Abiding by the social contract lends more legitimacy**

JJ Rousseau's fear about the modern state's inclination to repress the freedoms and rights that people are born with is the kind of situation that robs Governments of their legitimacy and creates a distance between Governments and people. In one survey to measure the degree of patriotism among countries it was realized that countries that invested more in the social development of its citizens have a higher degree of patriotism than those that invested less. Chipping out the glue that holds our society together does not take place at a go, it happens chip after chip spread over a long period, if our society were a chair many are those who will see the signs of weariness or hear the squeaks before the collapse.

We need to stop chiseling out the glue, we need to get government to abide by the social contract, we need to stop the prepaid water meters to avoid further chipping of the glue that binds our society.

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