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A Tribute to Ghana's Electoral Democracy

by

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Yesterday, January 7, marked a significant transition in Ghana: a formal hand-over of power from former president Flt. Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings to new president John Kufuor of the NPP, who defeated Rawling's NDC party candidate and former vice-president John Atta Mills in two otherwise uneventful elections held within three weeks of each other. As a West African and African and person of the world, I feel proud for Ghana. As a Nigerian, well... let us say I feel proud too.

Interprete that "well..." whichever way you want. But envy is more like it.

As one Kwaku Sakyi-Addo writing from Accra wrote on BBC's website, "Almost exactly to the day 19 years ago, when Jerry John Rawlings overthrew an elected government on New Year's Eve, his government has been removed by unarmed folks using their thumbprint."

Yes, "...unarmed folks using their thumbprint(s)" in an election that was not rigged.

That is something that we all must celebrate. Not only has Ghana passed from a military regime to a quasi-military regime to now a fully civilian regime, it has turned over from one party to another, and from a relative self-confessed illiterate schooled in the world to an (Oxford) graduate of law.

Hear Rawlings: "Don't ask me what my ideology or economic programme is. I don't know any law and I don't understand economics, but I know it when my stomach is empty." On the other hand, Kufuor "went to Oxford University where he studied law, and earned a Masters degree in philosophy, political science and economics. He was called to the bar at Lincoln's Inn in London 40 years ago, but did not spend much time in the courtroom."

What a contrast! Now, we will have to judge what correlation there is between formal education and success in leadership, at least in Ghana, a privilege we still have to enjoy in Nigeria.

Lord, when, o when?

I have been to Accra, Ghana twice in the past two years, and came away marvelling at the civility of the capital city. GEPA works (that is not the name of its electric power authority by the way; change the G for N, and understand me), traffic lights work, and the ride from the airport to the city is without fear. I hope that these remain the same when I return under Kufuor - and that many more things will work too in the country-side.

Is Ghana out of the woods? Not at all. There is a rule of thumb that until two turn-overs from opposition to opposition, an electoral democracy is not secured.

So in Ghana, one down, one more to go!

When Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana became an independent country on March 6, 1957, it spurred Nigeria's own march to independence, leading to a May/June 1957 London Constitutional Conference, at which Independence for Nigeria was FINALLY unanimously proposed for a date unspecified in 1959, but "not later than April 2, 1960", my fifth birthday. Eventually, we got it October 1, 1960, over my objections for the change of date :-). Now, at Kufuor's inauguration, Nigeria's president Obasanjo was the special guest of honor.

We Nigerians probably have Ghana to thank, for we still might have been quibbling in Nigeria over when to receive our independence from Britain.....

Congratulations, ojare, brother Ghana! My mother/fatherland Nigeria, behold thy senior brother?

Have a good week.

Read:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_1104000/1104786.stm Ghana's new president sworn in Sunday, 7 January, 2001, 11:35 GMT

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_1104000/1104166.stm Kufuor: Ghana's gentle giant Saturday, 6 January, 2001, 20:27 GMT

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/from_our_own_correspondent/newsid_1097000/1097628.stm Rawlings: A hard act to follow Tuesday, 2 January, 2001, 16:53 GMT

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_1094000/1094360.stm Ghanaians celebrate opposition win Saturday, 30 December, 2000, 22:02 GMT

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_1065000/1065113.stm Ghana votes for change Monday, 11 December, 2000, 19:53 GMT

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_1062000/1062594.stm Ghana's opposition scents victory Saturday, 9 December, 2000, 08:57 GMT
