



# MY FIRST CIVIL PROTEST

#OccupyFlagstaffHouse – A Participant's Perspective

### ...ON DEMOCRACY

I was taught from a young age that involvement in the public discourse is a civic duty. Each of us has a right. Indeed, a responsibility, at all times, to make his or her views known to the larger community in order to better form it as a whole. While we may not always get what we want, the exchange of ideas betters the nation in the process.

-David Koch

I am hardly a social

media buff but as fate would have it, that 30<sup>th</sup> day of June 2014 visited me with lethargy and boredom, dragging my fingers to fidget with my laptop trying many times without success to recollect my user name and password to my Twitter account. Lo, alas, it turned out my memory capacity functions better than my self-effacing ego would credit it for.

“Twitter seem quite busy today” I thought, or maybe it has always been but I just hadn’t taken notice. After all I had been busy in the last couple of eons or so, trying to put together a value Chain for Metis Decisions LLC, an entrepreneurial initiative I had conceived to make the ends at all cost, or die trying.

And so it turned out that my first encounter with #OccupyFlagstaffHouse was on Twitter just a day away from D-Day. My interest in global politics had acquainted my consciousness with the word “Occupy”, but this one seem different in many respects. Firstly the names were local (which got my attention) and the righteous anger simmering on my Twitter handle seem provocative primarily because it appealed to a certain shared sense of disenchantment with the current political establishment. One barely had to pay attention to the airwaves to hear names like SUBAH, GYEEDA, SADA signifying a new age model of political Robin Hood-ing, only this time Robin Hood is stealing from the poor and giving to his...well, his family



and cronies. So as I slept throughout the night leading to the dawn of July 1, 2014, I pondered carefully what the future held for my two little children. I also pondered the business risk it might pose for my company's brand if the CEO was seen participating in a political protest against the most powerful establishment that derives authority from the will and consent of the people, commoners and elites alike. But as destiny would have it, counsel came from the Holy Scripture through 1 Corinthians 13:6-7 (NIV), *"Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres."*

Love for my children, trust in the power of solidarity, hope for a chance that President Mahama would at least, listen to the cries of these young and brave democrats asking for nothing more than integrity, leadership and common sense in our governance system. Finally, the courage to challenge inertia and persevere amidst a contrary wave of cynicism from those whose daily bread are tightly coupled with their capacity to shower generous flattery on the executive and to make the "king think he is wearing fancy clothes". Truth had come, finally, amidst boisterous chant of

patriotic hymns, and fiery speeches moderated by a heavy police presence who seem clearly determined to "crush this fly with a Caterpillar". And the rest is history; a story known to any politically engaged citizen, from Adukrom to my hometown in Ankaase Ejuratia.



*"I am not here as a public official, but as a citizen of a troubled world who finds hope in a growing consensus that the generally accepted goals of society are peace, freedom, human rights, environmental quality, the alleviation of suffering, and the rule of law."*

- Jimmy Carter



The purpose of this piece is not to re-emphasize the legitimacy nor popularity of the protest but to illuminate certain pertinent matters, mainly observations and public critique (some legitimate some worthy of polite dismissal) that in my opinion merit further analysis and a more forceful and conclusive rebuttal. I will save

typing time so as not to bore you with repetitions of what has been so ably addressed by Mr. Ace Ankomah is his rejoinder to Mr. Colin Essamuah.

### Criticisms No. 1

*“Their social media campaign was much more effective than the actual turnout”*

-Hannah Tetteh, Minister of Foreign Affairs

### My Response

First of all, every democratic governance system is sustained by the principle of representation. More than twenty-five million people in Ghana are represented by just 230 members of parliament of which honorable Hannah Tetteh I believe is one. Following her (Hannah Tetteh) own logic, it stands to reason that the development needs and priorities of Awutu-Senya West constituency may be incompetently championed in Parliament ostensibly because the MP is only one voice. Feeble argument indeed, is it not? Well so it is with that unfortunate tweet. I on the other hand, one voice among many, felt very proud on that fateful day, because I had fully represented not just the bread-and-butter concerns of my family but the disgust and struggle of friends, business acquaintances and neighbors, against corruption, moral decadence and official impunity.



## Criticisms No. 2

*“It appeared that some of the organizers had come there to exclude others from participating in the demonstration. The demonstration was meant, in their view, for a certain class of people and if you didn’t fall in, you were not entitled to participate.”*

- Kwesi Pratt Jr. (Ctrl+Click to [Read the full text](#))

## My Very Long Response

When I first heard this criticism, it suddenly hit me that hey, maybe not all those who criticize you are wrong, you know! Here, is a genuine concern persuasively articulated by one of the most respected journalists Ghana has ever known. Maybe we need to pay attention, admit shortcomings if any and correct them in the future, all in the interest of continuous improvement, after all no one is perfect, not even the bourgeoisie “middle class”. Truth be told, some of the protesters may have given credence to this bourgeoisie perception by their comments, albeit I suspect the derogatory connotation was unintended. Nonetheless, upon closer examination, Mr. Pratt’s conclusion that **“the organizers ended up sacking persons who did not fall in the middle class for which they belong to,”** is without any factual basis.

First and foremost, it’s important to appreciate that using social media as a tool to whip up civil interest in an apolitical protest is bound to reach a certain demographic segment of the population with interest in social media, who incidentally, may be politically engaged. Secondly, it would be inconceivable for any protest organizer (whose interest by the way, is high turnout) to screen or profile people at the gate of Efua Sutherland park, using whatever arbitrary criteria. If it were so then I shouldn’t have entered because I came wearing track suit and snickers with hair barely brushed in a red Lacoste shirt stained with Pepsodent from my early morning brushing while rushing. Take it from me, there were indeed “ordinary” everyday people, some of whom seem even too young to hold any influential corporate portfolios. Yes, there were CEOs, CFOs and all the important titles that end with O but there were hustlers and common folks who had harbored frustration and suffered the incompetence and “Yenti3 Obiaa”

attitude of this administration for too long. There were former Miss Ghana(s), former Miss Legon(s), current Miss Agbobloshie(s) and every other Miss anything, who would not be denied their prerogative to be recognized as such nor would they allow the political elite to perpetuate their monopoly of the policy space, simply by reason of being voted into office. July 1, 2014 at Efua Sutherland Park was like medieval England all over again; peasants against the ruling class, commoners against the nobility, justice and equity against greed and avarice.

### However...

Whilst I feel that most of the opprobrium and attempt to discredit the Occupy Flagstaff House movement are without sufficient intellectual rigor, the implied claim that the protest and issues that evolved consequently thereof are all without blemish, may be a short-sighted proposition.

I must confess my disappointment with the post-protest media reportage. With the exception of the live broadcast, I observed that the media in their bid to emphasize the “middle class” ism of the protest, focused news highlights and sound bites on known faces with celebrity status. This, to a considerable extent may have given a certain positive oomph to the protest and matters arising, but also succeeded in de-emphasizing, inadvertently albeit, the voices of many common folk that spoke to the issues on that fateful day. A pardonable shortcoming considering the fact that Concern Citizens for Responsible Governance (CGRG) has no control over editorial policy in any of the media houses. The point must be made nonetheless that a proactive media management strategy as an integral component of the protest organization could have highlighted some of these risks and consequently contrived responses to mitigate them.

Secondly, I observed again the palpable lack of a centralized CGRG-driven communication strategy to address the matters arising post-protest, particularly the barrage of baseless credibility challenge posed by



detractors and cynics. I can appreciate the dilemma here since the members of CGRG may only be just passionate democrats as oppose to career politicians with an interest in protecting their space. My counsel however would be to look at things from a project management perspective and to understand that future civic galvanization rests on institutional credibility. Proactive risk management is therefore a strategic imperative.

## Conclusion

The foundation of our rights and freedoms as citizens of Ghana is deeply rooted in the sacrifice of common folks and watered by the blood of patriots. Our progress thus far has been guided by those who had the courage to stand for what they believe in. Our history would be written by those, who, when it mattered the most, overcame their mortal fear and summoned enough courage from the distant recesses of their weary soul, to speak bitter truths to power. May #OccupyFlagstaffHouse be immortalized. God bless our homeland Ghana.



The author is the founder and CEO of Metis Decisions LLC, a professional services company and a proud participant in the historic #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest held on July 1, 2014.

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