

21 *Transformative leadership in unconventional terrain: Examining the personality, values, and vision of Jerry John Rawlings of Ghana*

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Overview

Ghana's post-independence political history includes both successful and failed civilian and military leaders. Jerry Rawlings served as head of state in both a democratic and a military regime. He entered politics in a gap created by previous leaders who had prioritised corruption over the national interest. Rawlings presented a new leadership dimension, focusing on the poor and exploited. Although Rawlings' personality, values, and vision represented a unique approach to Ghana's development agenda and, generally, to the conception of transformative political leadership in West Africa, the subject has barely received scholarly attention. This chapter is concerned with responding to the questions 'What are the core leadership values and qualities exhibited by Rawlings?' and 'To what extent have these contributed to Ghana's transformation?' Leveraging document analysis, the chapter argues that transformative leadership is characterised by ideal values, precepts, visions, choices, beliefs, and actions that leaders often fail to achieve in practice.

Introduction

Ghana's political history and governance structure have undergone several changes since independence. These have revolved around political turbulence in some instances and a relatively stable political climate at other times. The multifarious political experiences of Ghana have been shaped by the leadership style of the country's past and present political leaders. Three leadership styles can be identified among political leaders in Ghana. The first is the military leaders, who have often destabilised the country's democracy in a bid to purge Ghana of its socioeconomic woes. The second is a group of quasi-democratic leaders who profess to be democratic, but often adopt anti-democratic practices such as stifling political opposition. Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, can be characterised as such. The third category of political leaders is the democrats. The first two leadership styles were predominant in Ghana's first, second, and third republics between 1957 and 1992. The political history of the fourth republic (1992 to date) has, however, been different. Leaders during the fourth republic have been mostly democratic and have advanced the common

good, albeit in varying degrees. This new phenomenon of political stability is often traced to Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings.

Rawlings emerged on Ghana's political scene first as a military leader and later as a legitimately elected president. This makes him the only head of state to have served in both a democratic and an authoritarian regime in Ghana. At the time of his emergence in politics, a gap had been created by past leaders who had prioritised corruption and embezzlement of state funds to the detriment of the collective national interest. Rawlings represented a new dimension to leadership in Ghana, with his focus on the poor and exploited in society.

Although Rawlings' personality, values, and vision represented a new approach to Ghana's development agenda, the subject has barely received scholarly attention. This chapter sets out to illuminate Rawlings' leadership, and is primarily concerned with the questions of what the core leadership values and qualities exhibited by Rawlings are, and the extent to which these have contributed to Ghana's transformation. In addition, the chapter will shed light on Rawlings' legacy. Using a qualitative approach, the chapter argues that transformative leadership is characterised by ideal values, precepts, visions, choices, beliefs, and actions that leaders often fail to achieve in practice.

Data collected for the chapter were sourced from books, journal articles, online sources, documentaries, and speeches delivered by Rawlings. The literature review was limited to scholarship on transformative leadership, Rawlings, political leadership, Ghana's political history, and human rights. The information collected was evaluated to ascertain its authenticity and relevance to the chapter using document analysis (Bowen, 2009). This methodology is limited in that it relies on secondary data only.

Conceptualising transformative leadership in politics

Political leaders are often the architects of national development, security, vision, and interests. Regardless of the system of government adopted by a country – democracy, monarchy, or theocracy – the agency of political leaders cannot be underestimated. Rotberg (2014, p. 242) conceives of political leadership as a 'multidimensional activation that is a peculiar mixture of contingent situation and personal intervention, and the impact of individual style and creativity on political challenges and opportunities'. Political leaders therefore set the rules of the political game – including economic, social, and international – and determine how the game is played (Rotberg, 2014). Their actions and inactions shape the realities and future of a nation while determining which external influences are acceptable and which are not.

Transformative political leadership involves systemic change that culminates in the modification of existing political and/or economic systems (Brown, 2014). To

this end, transformative leaders are primarily guided by the quest to reconstruct the sociopolitical system of a country (Burns, 1978). The process of political and economic reconstruction is geared towards a qualitative improvement in the living conditions of the populace. In realising this, transformative leaders embrace notions of liberation, empowerment, risk, courage, and revolution (Shields, 2010). Systemic change in this regard commences with efforts by transformative leaders to contend with the ill-suited exertion of power and privilege that sustains an unjust and inequitable social system (Weiner, 2003). The changes introduced by transformative leaders sometimes survive the test of time, whereas in other cases, the gains from political and economic restructuring may be eroded over time. Also, the degree of transformation may vary, depending on the context and limitations of national and international politics.

At the heart of political transformation is the leader's ability to foster the common good of society, implement futuristic policies (even if these have temporary repercussions), adopt a bottom-up approach to transformation, and present a vision of the future that is compelling. Transformative political leaders are not always conventional. Their unconventionality sets them apart in their leadership journey. Conformity and tradition often undermine the capacity of political leaders to conceptualise and implement context-specific and people-oriented policies, especially in the developing world. Transformative political leaders therefore need to understand the societal context within which they operate as well as the historical trajectories of their countries. By so doing, transformative leaders can shun 'one-size-fits-all' strategies and rather embrace contextually relevant policies. Furthermore, transformative leadership is underpinned by the pursuit of socially just policies, emanating from a moral obligation to correct past leadership failures while presenting an enthralling vision of a shared future (Caldwell et al., 2012). It is also undergirded by creativity in leadership, premised on a deliberate attempt by leaders to amalgamate their leadership drive with the aspirations, interests, beliefs and vision of the citizenry (Montuori & Donnelly, 2018). This style of leadership is not, however, synonymous with flawless governance. Transformative political leaders do not always realise all their aspirations, given the ever-changing dynamics of national and global politics.

A brief political history of Ghana

Rawlings' advancement in political leadership and governance was a microcosm of a broader phenomenon of military takeovers across the African continent. Africa's political honeymoon in the 1960s was short-lived, as most countries on the continent experienced some form of political instability soon after independence. Overall, 84 per cent of countries in the region experienced military intervention between 1960 and 1980 (Jackman, O'Kane, Johnson, McGowan, & Slater, 1984). Ghana was no exception.

A few years after Ghana's independence, the country's political architecture was overhauled by the military (Biney, 2009). The incident set a sour precedent that led to Ghana's post-independence history being replete with episodes of unconstitutional changes of government (Dartey-Baah, 2015). Ghana had four military leaders between 1966 and 1978, but its fortunes did not improve with the military takeovers. By the mid-1970s, the country had been confronted with socioeconomic challenges emanating from the oil crisis of 1973, a shortage of goods, and a drop in cocoa prices, as well as corruption and patronage among members of the governing regime (Osam, 2008). As noted by Shillington (1992, p. 22):

It was soon clear that the government had lost control of the economy. As the economy fell apart, those military officers in positions of power began to help themselves to the country's dwindling coffers. Senior military officers, now in charge of ministries and state corporations, used their positions to look after their own interests.

The internal dynamics within the military culminated in a palace coup in 1978. However, this did not substantially contribute towards resolving the corruption canker that the military regime faced.

It is against this background that Rawlings led an unsuccessful mutiny on 15 May 1979. Prior to the coup, the erstwhile regime had scheduled elections for 18 June 1979. Although Rawlings' Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) agreed with holding elections as scheduled, they opined that the handing over of power should be delayed for three months, to allow the junta to complete its task of 'house cleaning' (Kraus, 1987). Under Rawlings' leadership, these elections were conducted as planned, leading to a swift handing over of power to Dr Hilla Limann's government in September 1979. The handing over was, however, contingent on Rawlings' conviction that there would be continuity in the house-cleaning exercise by the new civilian administration. This culminated in the shortest political transition from military to civilian rule in Ghana's history.

The Limann administration did not last: Rawlings staged another coup d'état, overthrowing the government on 31 December 1981. Rawlings' new government, under the auspices of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), governed the country from December 1981 until 1992. In 1992, a new constitution was adopted and the PNDC metamorphosed into the National Democratic Congress. Rawlings contested and won the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections. The 1996 election marked a milestone in Ghana's political history, since it was the first time an elected government had completed its tenure of office and secured a second mandate to govern through elections (Adedeji, 2001). With the 1992 constitution limiting the tenure of presidents to two terms, Rawlings handed over political power to his rival, John Agyekum

Kuffour of the opposition New Patriotic Party, in 2000. Ghana's democracy has since been stable with no military interventions.

The leadership of Rawlings

Understanding Rawlings' leadership requires a consideration of multiple aspects of his life. This section considers his personality and key influences, how or to what extent he was held accountable for his actions, and the vision and values that characterised his leadership style and actions.

Personality

Leadership style almost always depends on the personality of the individual leader. This assertion is supported by Phipps and Prieto (2011), who contend that differences in individual personalities influence transformational leadership. The individuality of leaders can therefore not be ignored in the study of transformative leadership. Systemic change is normally instituted and sustained by individuals who embrace and commit themselves to advancing change. To ignore personality in the quest for transformation is to sideline the drivers of change.

Rawlings' childhood experiences contributed to his determination to root out social injustice. Born to a Scottish father and a Ghanaian mother, Rawlings grew up in Accra. As a boy, he learned the values of honesty, integrity, dignity, discipline, and hard work (Engmann, 2020). He also developed the mindset that leaders ought to exhibit the highest standards of integrity (Brenya et al., 2015). Even at a young age, Rawlings emerged as a source of defence for the defenceless and those he regarded as vulnerable and mistreated (Engmann, 2020). Rawlings' childhood traits and experiences are essential in understanding the factors that might have predisposed him towards pursuing political and economic transformation.

Although political and social change is driven by both international and national factors, a key determinant of whether or not these drivers will culminate in tangible change is the personality, beliefs, motivation, and leadership style of the leader. Thus, systemic transformation in every society is almost always driven by individuals. It is seemingly impossible then to divorce the transformation of a society from the architects and orchestrators of the change. As such, the agency, creativity, and interventions of leaders cannot be underrated in the conceptualisation of political transformation. For instance, although Paul Biya (president of Cameroon) and Rawlings assumed political power at around the same time (1982 for the former and 1981 for the latter), Ghana's democracy appears to be far more advanced, entrenched, and consolidated compared with that of Cameroon. The difference between the two countries, however, is that, whereas Rawlings relinquished power after his tenure ended in 2001, Biya

(90 years old at the time of writing) continues to consolidate his power 40 years after becoming Cameroon's president. The evidence suggests that a leader's personality and motivation make a big difference in the pursuit of transformation.

Rawlings' charisma influenced his leadership style and policy choices. His charismatic nature created a strong relationship between him and his followers, who were predominantly ordinary Ghanaians. Charisma is 'a distinct social relationship between the leader and follower, in which the leader presents a revolutionary idea...which goes beyond the immediate' (Lussier & Achua, 2009, p. 335). Charismatic leaders articulate a compelling vision of the future that inspires a high level of commitment from followers. For many Ghanaians, Rawlings' revolution signified hope for a better future. This hope ignited patriotism in the masses, especially students, who forfeited their studies to support the government's efforts to transport cocoa from the hinterland to the ports. Transformative leaders possess the charismatic leader's ability to 'touch hearts, inspire great sacrifice, and demonstrate courage' (Caldwell et al., 2012, p. 178).

Interestingly, whereas Rawlings' political intervention was geared towards redressing the economic challenges confronting Ghanaians, his oratory was primarily moral rather than economic. Rawlings believed that 'rediscovering and reasserting national morality was the only productive way forward' (Hart, 2019, para. 4). As a transformative leader, moreover, Rawlings was driven by his quest for moral justice, emanating from his strong emotions and convictions, most of which can be traced to his childhood. Rawlings' accomplishments as a leader can be attributed to his 'tenacity, honesty, clear objectives and sense of direction' (Adedeji, 2001, p. 16). He demonstrated that he possessed not only the charisma, but also the will to redress societal ills.

Accountability: The spirit of the June 4th Revolution

A repercussion of the May 1979 mutiny was the arrest and prosecution of Rawlings and six of his colleagues before a general court-martial. Rawlings' motivation for embarking on the coup was captured in the following statement:

I am not an expert in Economics and I am not an expert in Law but I am an expert in working on an empty stomach while wondering when and where the next meal will come from. I am going to prove to you today that it is no longer a question of the Akan against the Ewe, the Ga against the Northerner, but a question of THOSE WHO HAVE against those who HAVE NOT – a question of the vast majority of hungry people against a very tiny minority of greedy, inhuman, selfish senior officers, politicians, businessmen. (Rawlings, quoted in Yankah, 1992, cited in Nugent, 2010, p. 49, original emphasis)

Rawlings' rhetoric highlighted the discontentment of the masses and the emergence of a new style of leadership that was bottom-up rather than top-down. It was this new leadership characteristic that birthed the June 4th revolution. On 4 June 1979, some junior members of the armed forces toppled General Akuffo's regime, released Rawlings from custody, and established the AFRC. The AFRC's short tenure was preoccupied with redressing corruption and graft in the armed forces and Ghanaian society at large. The regime also sought to reinforce the principles of probity and accountability in public life.

During this period, the regime carried out extrajudicial executions of three former heads of state and senior government officials. These actions sent out a clear message that the AFRC was unlike previous military governments. Another distinction between the AFRC and previous military regimes was that, whereas the past military administrations conceived a cardinal role for the army in Ghana's body politic, Rawlings' AFRC emphasised the need for the devolution of power to the governed (Colton, 2020).

In fact, the AFRC had no political programme. With the sole preoccupation of being the guarantor of public morality and standing up for the oppressed, the junta was not very concerned with economic niceties (Nugent, 2010). The AFRC's obsession with morality inadvertently resulted in a period of hyper-politics, where everything was interpreted through a crude zero-sum lens.

The use of force by the regime in redressing the economic and political decadence of the time raises questions about the approaches of transformative leaders when advancing social justice. Unfortunately, the quest for social justice comes at a cost. It often demands an alteration of existing, and sometimes accepted, community norms and practices, some of which profit privileged sections of society. For instance, during the Rawlings era, street vendors and market women who profited from the status quo were publicly beaten as a deterrent to others who might have intended to breach the regime's price control policies.

Although the policies potentially made bread-and-butter items more accessible, their implementation had dire implications for some sections of society. This evinces the complexity, tension, and sometimes contradictions in the practice of transformative leadership. Whereas Rawlings' vision was noble, the means through which it was pursued was sometimes questionable. Transformative leaders ought to find the right balance between upholding ethical principles and advancing social justice. The cost of social justice ought not to outweigh or undermine fundamental human rights in the pursuit of social and economic transformation.

By toppling the military regime, Rawlings and the junior officers sought to ensure that senior military officials were held accountable for their corruption,

bribery, nepotism, and maladministration (Engmann, 2020). Rawlings' quest for leadership was therefore underpinned by his efforts to uphold the principles of accountability within societal institutions, including government, the judiciary, and security agencies.

A lack of accountability has been a major challenge in Ghanaian politics. This phenomenon is, however, not peculiar to the post-independence state, because governance during the colonial era was equally predicated on a culture of impunity, unaccountability, and corruption (Cooper, 2002). This notwithstanding, the occurrence of the phenomenon in the post-independence epoch can be ascribed to the nonexistence of formal institutional mechanisms to ensure that political actors adhere to their part of the social contract. The tradition of non-accountability is exacerbated during military regimes by the absence of a constitution.

Contrary to the preponderance of non-accountability during military regimes, democratic states leverage elections as an accountability mechanism to either impose sanctions on poor governance or reward good governance. In view of this, Rawlings resorted to the logic of removal as a punitive measure for General Akuffo's regime and as a deterrent to future civilian administrations (Paller, 2019). Through the putsch, Rawlings conveyed the need for accountability and a sense of responsibility among the political class. The concept of political accountability in Ghana has been described as 'an active behavioural relationship between leaders and followers, a relationship of stewardship by which leaders "owe an account" of their actions' (Paller, 2019, p. 91). This drive for accountability in Ghanaian society has often culminated in support for military coups, for example in the instances of Rawlings (1979 and 1981 coups) and Lieutenant-General Joseph Arthur Ankrah (1966 coup).

Vision and values

Rawlings' motivation for the 1979 coup was no different from his stance during the 31 December 1981 military takeover. His second coming to power was premised on his condemnation of the democratically elected government as 'a pack of criminals who bled Ghana to the bone' (Hart, 2019). Thus, his new mandate was to 'organize this country in such a way that nothing will be done, whether by God or the devil, without the consent and the authority of the people' (Gupte, 1982, cited in Hart, 2019, para. 2).

Rawlings' 1981 coup was not merely aimed at overthrowing Limann's government, but also directed at overhauling Ghana's decadent political, economic, and social order. Rawlings' accusations of corruption, misappropriation, social injustice, ill-gotten wealth, and mismanagement resonated well with many Ghanaians (Osam, 2008). His revolution thus sought to establish a new social order that reflected

the collective interests and aspirations of the Ghanaian people. He stated his vision for Ghana as follows:

We are asking for nothing more than the power to organize this country in such a way that nothing will be done from the Castle without the consent and authority of the people. In other words, the people, the farmers, the police, the soldiers, the workers you – the guardians – rich or poor, should be part of the decision-making process of this country. (Rawlings, 1981, cited in Adedeji, 2001, p. 3).

The excerpt above reflects Rawlings' conceptualisation of the ideal state and how governance ought to be carried out, as well as the responsibility of political leaders. The governance process he sought to establish was a participatory system of governance where citizens were actively involved in the day-to-day administration of the state. This system of governance makes it imperative for leaders to be responsive to the needs of citizens and deliberately involve them in the governance process.

In the quest to advance this vision, Rawlings established the People's Defence Committees and Workers' Defence Committees. The prerogative of these organisations was to advance inclusivity in the governance process. However, shortly after their creation, the People's Defence Committees and Workers' Defence Committees emerged as an exclusive instrument through unprovoked attacks on individuals considered 'enemies of the revolution' (Gyimah-Boadi & Rothchild, 1982). Recognising the threat to democracy posed by the People's Defence Committees and Workers' Defence Committees, Rawlings replaced these institutions in 1984 with the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, with membership opened to all Ghanaians (Owusu, 1996). Importantly, the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution were regulated by guidelines that clearly set out the parameters within which they were expected to operate, in a bid to curtail abuse of power. Rawlings' willingness to overhaul the People's Defence Committees and Workers' Defence Committees exemplifies the ability of transformative leaders to recognise when they err in the governance process and make efforts toward redressing policy failures.

The implementation of transformative policies does not always yield the intended outcome. Oftentimes, unanticipated hurdles undermine the effective execution of policies that have been implemented. For instance, although Mikhail Gorbachev's policies were targeted at transforming the Soviet Union (the system) through political liberalisation, his policies inadvertently resulted in the dissolution of the Soviet state (Brown, 2014). Transformative political leadership is therefore not linear, and neither is it without impediments. Despite the many controversies surrounding their establishment and operation, the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution formed the basis for

Ghana's current local governance system, aimed at bringing governance to the 'doorsteps' of the populace and ensuring an equitable distribution of national wealth and development.

Rawlings demonstrated not only his need for power, but his potential to provide the much-needed political direction required to redress Ghana's socioeconomic problems (Kumah-Abiwu, 2016). His often heavy-handed approach to redressing corruption and abuse of power received widespread appreciation from the populace, and his approach to dealing with injustice contributed to alleviating the plight of many Ghanaians. Consumer goods that had been hoarded became available in the stores, while price controls and compulsory sales implemented by the military reduced prices in 1982 (Owusu, 1996).

Interestingly, although Rawlings favoured the participation of citizens in the democratic process, he was opposed to Western democracy. He believed the limitations of formal democracy merely 'created an optical illusion' (Nugent, 2010, p. 52). This illusion was premised on the grounds that democracy only afforded the wealthy the opportunity to contest elections, after which these elites used their election to recuperate their expenditure. The belief was that like the electoral system, democracy exacerbated a corrupt judiciary, where justice was dispensed to the highest bidder (Nugent, 2010). Rawlings therefore favoured the adoption of a direct democratic system, where popular committees at the grassroots would choose leaders at the next level of governance and upwards. This concept of democracy was reminiscent of a neotraditional system of governance, rooted in Ghanaian culture. He also envisioned a judicial system where ordinary citizens would operate the public tribunals. Rawlings was not very concerned about who controlled the means of production; he believed that if Ghanaians worked hard, the economy would thrive. It was therefore not surprising that he was praised for demanding rectitude, accountability, and hard work, in both private and public life.

Paradoxically, although Rawlings abhorred Western democracy, he presided, albeit grudgingly, over Ghana's adoption of the system of governance he had problematised. Rawlings' scepticism about the efficacy of liberal democracy in Ghana was premised on the failures of previous democratic regimes. He believed that Ghana needed a system of governance that was tailor-made for the realities of the Ghanaian society. This notwithstanding, he recognised the symbiosis between his leadership and the citizenry. The symbiosis between leaders and followers always brings to the fore the critical question of on whose behalf power is to be exercised. Rawlings' understanding of power belonging to the people compelled him to agree to the adoption of the 1992 constitution, the establishment of political parties, and the 'building of a rural political base in Ghana' (Adedeji, 2001, p. 1). Thus, he did not allow his beliefs and conceptions of governance to stand in the way of change. Rawlings' approach to Ghana's political transition fits into the conception of power by transformative leaders.

Transformative leadership is considered a special form of power: 'not power over but power to the people' (Burns, 1978, cited in Quantz, Rogers, & Dantley, 1991, p. 97). Importantly, Rawlings committed to adopting a constitution that imposed term limits on the tenure of presidents, contrary to the 'president for life' policy adopted by most of his contemporaries.

Rawlings also took the opportunity to refine the democracy Ghana would adopt in order to minimise the risk of repeating the governance failures of the past. Nonetheless, Ghana's current fourth republic is confronted with the same challenges Rawlings sought to prevent. Ghana's democracy, and particularly its electoral system, has been excessively monetised. The cost of politics in Ghana has risen to unaffordable levels for most, making the country's politics the domain of the wealthy. A study by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2020, p. 5) concludes that the 'ability to spend the most money is, by and large, a critical factor in successfully winning a seat in elected office in Ghana.' The excessive monetisation of Ghana's elections is the creation of the 1992 constitution, which makes no provision for state funding of political parties. With Rawlings' concern about elections being the preserve of elites, it would have been logical for him to make efforts to reduce this phenomenon in the fourth republic. One of the major failures in reintroducing multiparty politics was that no effort was made by the PNDC or the National Democratic Congress governments to reduce corruption among elected public officials.

Leadership in crisis

Rawlings' associates were convinced that Ghana's economic challenges and mass impoverishment were the consequence of the dependent nature of the country's economy. The broader implication of this was that, whereas Western imperialists were the ultimate beneficiaries of the neocolonial order, the system was sustained by a local comprador class. It was on this basis that Rawlings indicted the civilian regime he toppled in 1981 for being collusive in sustaining a subservient and exploitative relationship (Nugent, 2010, p. 51). As such, Rawlings' leadership began with a strong inclination toward economic and social justice. Refocusing politics on social justice, equity, and democracy was not only essential in redressing Ghana's myriad structural challenges, but also crucial in securing a desirable future for the country.

Rawlings inherited an economy that was on the verge of collapse. The country's already dire circumstances were exacerbated by a severe drought between 1981 and 1983 and the expulsion of Ghanaians from Nigeria. By 1983, there was little food in the stores and the transport industry was severely affected by fuel shortages and a lack of spare parts (Nugent, 2010). The civilian left resented approaches made to the Bretton Woods institutions (mainly the International Monetary Fund and World Bank) for a bailout (Rimmer, 1992, cited in Dartey-

Baah, 2015). Faced with reality, the government had to take a pragmatic approach to salvaging the economy. By all indications, the PNDC was a prosocialist government that shunned Western capitalism. Resorting to Western institutions for assistance was perceived as a compromise. This notwithstanding, Rawlings adopted a Western-styled economic stabilisation programme by 1983, despite the tendency for such policies to weaken support for the government (Kraus, 1991). Thus, Rawlings compromised his ideological position in a bid to revive the ailing Ghanaian economy. He did not hesitate to realign the revolution to fit the changing realities of domestic and international politics.

In transforming Ghana's economy, Rawlings adopted a multidimensional approach to leadership that embodied power, legitimacy, and discretion (Adedeji, 2001). Rawlings' leadership during Ghana's rebirth was characterised by his influence on as well as his sense of accountability to the people. The regime achieved modest success with its economic policies, earning Rawlings and Ghana praise from the international community. The PNDC government's policies contributed to Ghana's economic recovery from 'years of deep recession, hyperinflation, and disinvestment', culminating in the country's longest period of sustained economic growth since independence (Kraus, 1991, p. 19). Chazan (1983) argues that it would have been impossible for Ghana to survive the economic recovery programmes without the strength of character and steady determination of Rawlings.

Moreover, the pursuit of social justice and socioeconomic rights during Rawlings' leadership resulted in rural development (water, electrification, and roads) and 'higher producer prices paid to cocoa farmers, a primary health care programme, and reforms in the educational sector' (Oquaye, 1995, p. 562). These policies primarily benefitted poor and marginalised communities. Furthermore, the PNDC government adopted the Intestate Succession Law (PNDC Law 111) in 1985. This law was geared towards 'providing adequate protection and security for the surviving spouse and children' of a deceased person (Gedzi, 2014, p. 18). Similarly, the Head of Family Law (PNDC Law 114) sought to ensure that family heads were accountable and could not deprive members of their family property rights. Such laws sought to correct the grave injustices experienced by the vulnerable in society.

Despite the gains, these policies had dire consequences for urban dwellers and other sections of society (Kraus, 1991) and resulted in retrenchments in the public sector. Privatisation of state enterprises between 1982 and 1991 resulted in the loss of over 150 000 jobs (Thomson, Kentikelenis, & Stubbs, 2017). This resulted in opposition from students, intellectuals, and workers, among others (Krause, 1991). However, in compliance with International Monetary Fund conditions, the government had to keep up with its commitments (Jonah, 1989). This was not surprising, considering that political and economic transformation

is shaped by both domestic and external factors, making the outcomes of a country's leadership mixed and contestable in most instances.

Moreover, many associates of the regime benefitted tremendously from the privatisation of state assets and the awarding of government contracts. Some of these politicians 'behaved just as Rawlings had predicted Ghanaian politicians would' (Nugent, 2010, p. 55). Despite this, Rawlings never accepted that officials in his government had been involved in money-making at a level that previous military leaders could only have dreamed of. Although public opinion generally asserts that Rawlings was not corrupt, he was surrounded by associates who epitomised everything the revolution sought to correct (Kraus, 1987). Rawlings' inability to tolerate divergent views or opposition is perhaps his greatest weakness as a leader. Whereas these criticisms shed light on Rawlings' shortcomings, they do not necessarily imply that his leadership was not transformative. What these criticisms suggest, though, is that the processes and outcomes of Rawlings' leadership were varied. These shortcomings notwithstanding, the economic policies implemented during his regime were future-oriented and formed the basis for Ghana's economic growth and political transformation.

Human rights and the Rawlings era

Although Rawlings exhibited the ethos and traits of transformative leadership during various periods of his regime, he fell short in some attributes. Critics of his regime have often taken an extremely negative stance on the outcomes of his leadership without recognising his strengths as a leader or the context within which he governed. Such an approach is misleading, as it sidelines the multifaceted nature of his regime. These critics have often focused on the human rights abuses during his military regime without recognising his contribution to democracy, social justice, and development. His supporters have equally glorified his accomplishments and justified the more disagreeable aspects of his leadership. This approach is equally deleterious, as it does not recognise the excesses of his administration, especially after his second term.

Rawlings' human rights record during his first and second terms was particularly controversial (Colton, 2020). His resorting to retributive justice in the quest to realise a just society can be explained in three ways. First, the PNDC's 'persecution' of supposed enemies of the state was driven by Rawlings' desire to rapidly transform the political, social, and economic architecture of Ghana, in his efforts to appease the masses for previous years of maladministration. Ultimately, this was geared towards igniting a sense of trust between the political class and the citizenry on the one hand, and consolidating Rawlings' authority on the other. The ruthlessness with which this was realised in some instances was, however, excessive, considering the generosity of the Ghanaian people in rewarding good governance with favourable electoral outcomes.

Second, prior to Rawlings' emergence into power, Ghana's human rights record was not outstanding. Kwame Nkrumah (prime minister of Ghana, 1957–1966) silenced political opposition and dissent through arbitrary arrest and detention, and successive governments, both military and civilian, adopted authoritarian tactics, aimed at muzzling political opposition. The National Liberation Council, the successor to Nkrumah's Convention People's Party, and Dr Kofi Abrefa Busia's Progress Party were equally criticised for the same reasons. As such, Rawlings' lack of political will to ensure accountability among military personnel and members of the PNDC was the culmination of a culture of impunity in Ghana. Interestingly, the extent to which some military officials continue to operate with *carte blanche* in the fourth republic casts doubt on the ability of Rawlings' successors to hold military officials accountable. The killing of two civilians by members of the armed forces at a collation centre in Techiman South during Ghana's 2020 elections evinces the extent to which military personnel continue to perpetrate criminal acts with impunity and the backing of the political class.

Rawlings' poor human rights record may have also been influenced by his disinterest in Western democracy, which is underpinned by respect for human rights and the rule of law. Advocates for the respect of human rights during Rawlings' regime did so by resorting to Western beliefs and conceptions of human rights. The PNDC's conceptualisation of human rights, however, differed in many ways from the understanding of these rights among the regime's critics. PNDC Law 42 (Section 1) sheds light on the thinking of Rawlings and his comrades on the basis for realising human rights. Inter alia, the section postulates that 'respect for fundamental human rights and the dignity of the human person [are to be cultivated] among all sections of the community as part of *the basis of social justice*' (Oquaye, 1995, p. 562, emphasis added). This approach to human rights, unfortunately, establishes a hierarchy of rights, with collective rights and socioeconomic rights taking precedence over civil and political liberties. Such an understanding of human rights is problematic, given that human rights are inherently individual rights. Also, political and civil rights cannot be separated from socioeconomic rights, as the adoption and implementation of rights must be holistic. The PNDC's hierarchical conception of rights provided a basis for the harsh treatment meted out to individuals and groups perceived to be opposing the regime. Rawlings' contradictory claim of representing the interests of the citizenry, while undermining dialogue with political dissidents, rendered aspects of his regime capricious and authoritarian.

The question Rawlings was confronted with – whether or not political and civil rights should trump economic development – continues to linger in the corridors of other transformative political leaders in Africa. Paul Kagame of Rwanda has been condemned for undermining basic human rights, despite his tremendous contribution to economic development in post-genocide Rwanda.

Furthermore, the PNDC's human rights record is indefensible, even within the framework of the neotraditional political system Rawlings envisioned. In general, Ghanaian culture upholds the need for a fair trial in all disputes. These disputes, whether interpersonal, intracommunal, or intercommunal are resolved using placatory means at the behest of the council of elders. Per traditional norms, accused persons are subjected to public trial in the presence of witnesses, prior to the meting out of punishment – in the interest of justice (Oquaye, 1995). Similarly, within the traditional system of governance, freedom of expression is guaranteed, with the chief perpetually consulting with representatives of his constituents – the council of elders. Rawlings' actions cannot withstand this litmus test, even when applied against non-Western norms of human rights. Similarly, these abuses cannot be rationalised, even if they were perpetrated in the interests of social justice. At the barest minimum, perpetrators of political violence during his regime ought not to have been shielded from prosecution by the 1992 constitution.

The foregoing does not imply that Rawlings made no efforts at redressing arbitrary punishment by military personnel. The regime exerted heavy punishments on members of the armed forces who were convicted of crimes. Upon the recommendation of the Special Investigations Board – a committee established to probe the 1982 murder of three judges and a retired military officer – 10 individuals, three of whom were affiliated to the PNDC, were slated for prosecution. Although two PNDC members were executed after a guilty verdict, a third PNDC member, the head of national security at the time and the mastermind of the atrocious crimes, escaped trial. By mid-1983, the arrest and punishment of civilians by members of the armed forces had largely been contained by the government (Haynes, 1991).

Does this make Rawlings any less of a transformative leader? Individual leaders may not always embody all the tenets of transformative leadership, as explained above. Transformative leaders pursue these values, albeit in varying degrees and at various junctures of their leadership. For instance, although Rawlings' human rights record was controversial during his military regime, he performed much better as a civilian leader. During the latter period, basic human rights were enshrined in the constitution and guaranteed through the establishment of institutions such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice. Press freedom also improved, paving the way for the establishment of independent private media outlets. Thus, the tenets of transformative leadership ought to be conceptualised as being mutually inclusive and not exclusive. To this end, transformative leaders ought to exhibit all or most of the core attributes of the term, even if in varying degrees. A shortfall in any of these attributes ought to be made up for by a preponderance of the others. African leaders who have been idolised nationally and internationally, like Nelson Mandela, have often

been confronted with fierce criticism from their opponents. Mandela has been chastised by some critics for prioritising tranquillity and reconciliation over advancing economic equality. To date, South Africa remains the most unequal society in the world, with the majority of the Black population living in poverty. Despite this, Mandela's contribution to the transformation of post-Apartheid South Africa cannot be over-emphasised. The story of Mandela, like that of Rawlings and many other transformative political leaders, is characterised by seemingly ineludible twists and turns. Thus, although transformative leaders may have flaws that might undermine aspects of their leadership, these shortfalls should not obscure their contribution to the socioeconomic transformation of the countries they lead.

Conclusion

Transformative leaders embody key tenets and attributes, all of which have immense implications for human and societal well-being. In practice, however, the pursuit of transformation can be saddled with many complexities and challenges. As such, transformative leadership is aspirational. It will be almost impossible to find any particular leader who embodies all the tenets, character traits, values, and principles of transformative leadership in the most holistic sense. Various personal, domestic, and external factors account for this. Regardless of the limitations and constraints inherent in the practice of transformative leadership, what is unambiguous about these leaders is the systemic and sustainable policies and programmes they implement. In this regard, Rawlings' leadership transformed the Ghanaian economy while institutionalising democracy.

Despite the gloom that characterised some aspects of his leadership, Rawlings is generally regarded as one of the most transformative leaders to have governed Ghana. Rawlings' transformative leadership is encompassed in his charisma, vision, and social justice pursuits. His leadership has had an overarching impact on Ghana's democracy and development. While some of his policies contradicted his short-term promises of a revolution, he nonetheless contributed immensely to Ghana's economic recovery, democracy, and infrastructural development. Although the institutions his regime established to promote the direct participation of the masses in political processes did not last, his initiatives provided a viable basis for active engagement of the citizenry in Ghana's political and development discourse while igniting a sense of accountability among politicians. A survey of popular opinion concluded that despite disagreements with his policies, many Ghanaians believed Rawlings was not acting out of parochial interest but in the national interest. The study further revealed that a larger proportion of the 1992 electorate admired Rawlings' 'integrity, truthfulness, common touch and hard work in the service of the nation' (Jeffries & Thomas, 1993, p. 361).

Rawlings' legacy as a transformative leader is and will continue to be contentious and complicated. To some sections of Ghanaian society, he was the spearhead of the country's economic and political transformation. To others, he was the founder of Ghana's fourth republic and the reason behind Ghana's stable and coveted democracy and political institutions. Yet, for his critics, the authoritarianism and human rights abuses that accompanied aspects of his regime cannot be forgotten. Notwithstanding these views, 'Rawlings represented, and still represents, a paragon of probity, honesty, and principled commitment to the well-being of the Ghanaian people' (Colton, 2020 , para. 1).

#RawlingsJudgedByHistory

Jerry Rawlings, former president of Ghana, was driven by a quest for moral and social justice, but fell short in retributive justice and contravening human rights in his attempts to transform Ghana. How should history judge him?

Questions for discussion

1. What, in your opinion, are the indicators of transformative leadership, and how should they be measured?
2. Would a hierarchical classification of transformative leaders be useful? What are the critical elements, and which are less important?
3. How should history judge political leaders who start well but end poorly, or who have a mixed record in terms of leadership?

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